AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROCESSES OF DEVELOPING POSITIVE
LONG-TERM CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

By

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Dedication

This is dedicated to all of the teachers who have put forth the time and energy, and embraced their co-teaching partnerships in order to create inclusive learning environments that support the needs of diverse student populations.
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First, I have to thank my parents, John and Maureen Bafaro, who from a very young age instilled in me the mindset to never give up and the value of what comes with hard work. In addition, I have to thank my husband, Charles Cuevas, who provided me with endless support that can only come from one’s spouse when taking on such a commitment. My family’s continuous encouragement and unwavering confidence were vital in my ability to complete this journey.

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List of Abbreviations

Annual Yearly Progress ................................................................. AYP
Department of Education .............................................................. DOE
Education of the Handicapped Act .............................................. EHA
Education for All Handicapped Children Act .............................. EAHCA
Elementary and Secondary Education Act .................................. ESEA
English Leaners .............................................................................. EL
Emotional Disability ........................................................................ ED
English as a Second Language ...................................................... ESL
Free Appropriate Public Education .............................................. FAPE
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ............................... IDEA
Individualized Education Program ............................................... IEP
Learning Disability ......................................................................... LD
Least Restrictive Environment ...................................................... LRE
No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 ............................................... NCLB
Office of Special Education ......................................................... OSEP
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services .......... OSERS
Professional Development ............................................................ PD
Teacher Preparation Programs ..................................................... TPP
Special Education .......................................................................... SPED
Abstract

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE PROCESSES OF DEVELOPING POSITIVE LONG-TERM CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

Elaina R. Bafaro, Ph.D.

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Dissertation Director: Dr. Gary R. Galluzzo

This study used a qualitative research design in the form of the semi-structured interview process to investigate the shared processes that long-term middle school co-teaching teams identify going through and continuing to go through as a means of developing, sustaining and advancing their co-teaching professional partnerships. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine co-teachers on an individual basis, separate of their co-teaching partners. The results of the interviews were analyzed in order to determine if there were any significant features, characteristics, skills, or procedures that these co-teachers developed as a result of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. The major findings of this study are: (1) the features that facilitate a strong co-teaching foundation; (2) the role of special education teachers in the co-teaching partnership; (3) the shared professional values of co-teachers; (4) feelings of preparedness for co-teaching; (5) perceptions of co-teaching; (6) the features that developed from long-term co-teaching partnerships; and (7) shared professional benefits. This study revealed that when teachers
are prepared for their roles and responsibilities as co-teachers they embrace their co-
teaching partnerships with the drive to make it work. Additionally, long-term co-teaching
partnerships resulted with the development of effective co-teaching practices that were
inclusive of both teachers’ professional expertise.
Chapter One: Introduction

Collaboration and communication are essential professional skills necessary to facilitate the growth of ideas and knowledge within organizations (Friend & Cook, 2000; Suter, Arndt, Arthur, Parboosingh, Taylor, & Deutschlander, 2009). The ability to collaborate and communicate successfully in a professional organization requires not only a specific skills, but also a workplace atmosphere that encourages, promotes and empowers professionals with the time and space necessary for meaningful and effective collaboration, and communication (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007; Friend & Cook, 2000). Today’s P-12 schools not only require, but thrive on the success of their faculty’s ability to collaborate and communicate in this professional manner (Arthaud et al. 2007; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2000; Jang, 2006). A series of laws, advocating for improvements and advances in the education for children identified as disabled has resulted in schools utilizing the instructional practice of cooperative teaching. Cooperative teaching requires general educators and special educators to work together in order to instruct both disabled and non-disabled students in a single classroom environment. Beginning in 1975, with the passage of The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA), also known as Public Law 94-142, and the current law, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, also known as Public Law 108-446, P-12 schools are required to instruct students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE).
According to Gartner and Lipsky (1987) the LRE, “is the one that allows for maximum integration with their peers” (p. 376). The law aims to ensure that disabled students receive adequate and necessary academic and behavioral supports to guarantee that each individual student receives access to the most effective learning environment and the accommodations to support learning in this environment based on the student’s individual needs. In addition, with the passage of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), schools were now mandated to ensure that all students reach required educational benchmarks, including students with disabilities. This law required the public school system to hold students with disabilities to the same proficiency levels as their non-disabled peers.

In order to provide adequate and necessary academic supports for students identified under the special education label, classroom teachers, special educators, guidance counselors, school psychologists, and school specialists such as speech pathologists and reading specialists, work together to create an educational plan to meet the needs of the individual student. Therefore, school personnel must be able to communicate and collaborate with one another if they are to ensure that all students’ academic needs are being met in the mainstream classroom. These plans are referred to as a student’s individualized educational program (IEP). The IEP was the centerpiece of the EHA. The IEP is made up of the goals and objectives of a student's education program. It determines the educational placement, the length of the school year, and evaluation and measurement criteria for determining the accommodations and support services for the student. An IEP must be developed for each student in special education and it serves as a
legal contract to guarantee that a student’s academic and behavioral needs are being met with necessary and accurate supports in the classroom (Smith, 1990; Yell, Rogers, Lodge-Rodgers, 1998). The degree of focus that comes from this form of collaboration between educators and school personnel might be compared to the intricacies and responsibilities that surgical teams have working together to ensure the safety and well-being of a patient.

Teachers, counselors, administrators and support staff are regularly challenged to work together to meet the learning and developmental needs of all students. These types of collaboration and communication primarily take place in meetings and conferences outside the activity and the liveliness of the academic classroom (Lytle & Bordin, 2001; Martin, Marshall & Sale, 2004). Yet, cooperative teaching, also referred to as co-teaching, is an increasingly common classroom-based instructional approach for meeting the academic, developmental and emotional needs of students identified under the special education label. Cooperative teaching has become an instructional practice that schools utilize to address the requirements of both IDEA 2004 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Co-teaching requires that two teachers, commonly a special educator and a general educator, instruct students together in the same classroom. The general education teacher and special education teacher combine their expertise to ensure that the required course content and accommodations of students’ IEPs are being met. Teachers working in co-taught environments are presented with the opportunity to learn from one another as they face the challenges and successes that come with working together as an instructional team.
with the goal of meeting the numerous and various needs of all students. Legal requirements made it the responsibility of public schools to adjust their instructional arrangements and practices to be inclusive of all students.

**Cooperative Teaching**

Cooperative teaching as an instructional practice has been utilized in schools as a means of ensuring that all students are receiving appropriate instructional supports in the appropriate classroom setting. Friend (2008), defined co-teaching as a partnership between a general education teacher, a special education teacher, or other specialist who jointly delivers instruction to a diverse group of students, including students with special needs and learning disabilities in a general education setting. The practice of co-teaching is a complex and multifaceted instructional approach (Friend et al., 2010).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was the first federal law mandating that public schools provide an appropriate education for children with disabilities. The law set in place procedures for determining a student’s placement under the special education label. It also mandated that schools create IEPs for disabled students, to ensure that students were receiving the appropriate accommodations and necessary learning supports to access the classroom curriculum. PL 94-142 (1975), also required that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education in the LRE, on a continuum of services (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Yell et al., 1998). The law required that schools adjust the academic system to meet the needs of these students, rather than excluding students that did not fit into the traditional education system. With the passage of The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), schools were now mandated to ensure
that all students reach required educational benchmarks, including students with
disabilities. This law required the public school system to hold students with disabilities
to the same proficiency levels as their non-disabled peers, and the current law upholding
the idea of the least restrictive environment. P.L. 108-446 (2004), placed the
responsibility on schools to determine the best and most effective methods of instruction
to ensure that all students are educated in the LRE. Schools that fail to comply with the
LRE could face significant legal action. Therefore, schools have had to determine how to
provide students with access to the appropriate academic setting, while simultaneously
ensuring all students are making appropriate academic gains.

Though the self-contained classroom, an academic setting where students with
disabilities are removed from the general education setting to receive specialized
instruction and pull-out instruction, an academic setting where students with disabilities
receive instruction in both the general education classroom and special education
classroom are still major methods employed by schools in order to serve disabled
students (Murawski, 2009). These settings are still the predominating methods employed
by school leaders in order to serve disabled students, the most popular method of
inclusion employed in schools is the practice of cooperative teaching, commonly referred
to as “co-teaching” (Friend et al., 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). Regardless of the
form co-teaching takes, researchers have explored the concept and reported both
challenges teachers need to overcome, and benefits that accrue from working in a co-
teaching arrangement.
**Challenges.** Researchers have identified six recognized approaches to co-teaching: (1) one teach, one observe; (2) station teaching; (3) parallel teaching; (4) alternative teaching; (5) teaming or team teaching; and (6) one teach, one assist (Friend & Cook, 2007; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). The most popular model employed by co-teachers is the one teach, one assist method in which one teacher is predominately responsible for leading class instruction as the other teacher assists in the class as needed (Friend, 2008). Yet, research indicates that teaming or team teaching may be more rewarding, professionally (Cook & Friend 1995). Many researchers found that teachers reported they learn from one another and that both the special education teacher and general education teacher take on the role of teacher rather than one serving as a teaching assistant (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

To complicate matters, Friend et al. (2010) has noted a significant lack of co-teaching preparation outside the field of special education. Both traditional and alternative teacher preparation programs prepare general education teachers to work alone in a single-instructed classroom. However, there is some evidence that preservice teachers are not adequately prepared for the challenges and dynamics that come with teaching in a co-taught classroom. According to Friend et al. (2010), “Co-teaching coverage is sporadic in elementary education programs and just beginning to emerge in middle and high school teacher preparation” (p. 20). In addition, they further noted that the problem of teacher education goes far beyond initial teacher preparation when they write, “Much of the current teaching workforce has had little preparation for co-teaching roles. The implication is that high-quality professional development related to co-
teaching is urgently needed” (p. 20). The skills needed to construct positive and successful co-teaching practices are left to the dyad to determine while doing the job of attending to student learning.

As a result of a lack of training, co-teaching partnerships face many professional challenges. Researchers have indicated that the most reported challenges are in regard to: (1) subject area content knowledge; (2) knowledge of learning disabilities; (3) teaching styles and philosophies; (4) collaboration; (5) designated roles and responsibilities within the classroom; (6) classroom management techniques; (7) planning time; (8) administrative support; and (9) turf issues (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Scruggs, et al., 2007). As a result of these common challenges, co-teaching partnerships can produce negative feelings in many teachers, especially at the secondary level (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004). Keefe and Moore (2004) found that secondary teachers were particularly hesitant to embrace cooperative teaching partnerships and Dieker and Murawski (2003) report teachers experience feelings of frustration when working in co-taught classroom environments. These frustrations reflect the very structure of secondary education in the United States with regard to demanding content areas, high-stakes testing and the time constraints associated with class periods (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004). As Scruggs et al. (2007) reported, co-teachers overwhelmingly recognize the need for increased professional development opportunities as a means for helping them improve their practice. In addition, co-teachers
also suggested that teacher preparation programs increase their focus on collaboration and inclusive teaching practices.

**Benefits.** However, some research also indicates that co-teachers experience increased professional benefits. It has been found that teachers learn and develop professionally from their co-teaching partnerships, gaining deeper levels of knowledge in regard to instructional practices (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Snyder, Garriott, & Aylor, 2001; Walter-Thomas, 1997). Rice and Zigmond found that teachers indicated feelings of increased professional knowledge and growth. A general education teacher in their study was quoted as saying, “‘We enhanced each other,’” and another added, “‘We learn from each other, and that helps us grow and develop as teachers’” (p. 193). Jang (2006) averred that to encourage a positive mindset towards co-teaching, teachers need to be aware of the potential benefits and improved working conditions that can result from having a healthy co-teaching partnership. These benefits not only impact the learning environment of the classroom, but they also have the potential to impact the overall culture of schools and attitudes about inclusive education.

In order for teachers and administrators to embrace co-teaching, and the value of the benefits that develop from it, they must know how to develop and sustain positive and effective co-teaching relationships. Wood (1998) found that co-teaching with the same partner over time becomes easier and reduces the reported barriers to co-teaching. In order for this type of co-teaching partnership to develop, both teachers must be open and willing to embrace the knowledge and skills that the other brings to the classroom.
Caprara, Barbaranelli, Steca, and Malone, (2006) argued that teachers who have these beliefs also have the potential of creating more positive learning environments that promote higher levels of academic achievement for all students.

The professional bonds that develop from co-teaching partnerships also have the potential of producing strong feelings of camaraderie, trust and respect between teachers, resulting in increased levels of professional satisfaction (Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997). As a result of these potential benefits, research attention still needs to be directed to long-term and successful co-teachers who have had the opportunity to develop co-teaching relationships over a period of years of working together. The insights we might glean from such research can have the potential to help all co-teachers better understand the process of developing positive and effective co-teaching relationships.

**Learning from Successful Practitioners**

Co-teaching as an instructional practice is not simply placing a general education and special education teacher in the same classroom where they perform their traditional instructional roles. The power and effectiveness of co-teaching comes from teachers’ ability to merge and combine their areas of expertise to create inclusive learning environments. Yet, knowing how to combine these expertise in a manner that results in the development of effective co-teaching classrooms and co-teaching partnerships is a complicated and complex process. Professional collaboration is a specific relationship requiring knowledge of a specific skills. Friend and Cook (2007), described this form of collaboration as, “a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work towards a common goal” (p.
7). If teachers are expected to develop effective co-teaching environments, they must be provided with insights and a deep understanding of the skills needed to successfully collaborate. Successful and effective co-teaching classrooms thrive on the ability of the general and the special education teachers’ collaboration and cooperation in planning and implementing all aspects of the co-taught classroom. These include academic instruction, modifications to academic instruction, assignments, activities, behavior management, student expectations, student accommodations, rules and procedures, and grading and assessment. Yet, research indicates that this type of planning and cooperation is not taking place in the majority of co-taught classrooms (Austin, 2001; Murawski, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997). In addition, research also indicates that special education teachers often serve as an assistant to the general education teacher, thereby taking on a secondary role in comparison. This suggests that special education teachers are not being recognized as teachers with specialized expertise and professional skills (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007). As a result of these findings, Austin (2001), Murawski (2009), and Scruggs et al. (2007) all argue that co-teaching environments and co-teaching partnerships are not being developed or implemented to their fullest potential.

In order to gain an in-depth understanding of the development of effective and successful cooperative teaching classrooms, and cooperative teaching partnerships, research into long-term co-teaching teams at the secondary level is needed. It is essential to understand and gain insights into how positive and successful co-teaching partnerships are formed from the perspective and experience of long-term co-teachers. The
significance of this study is to gain a deep understanding into the development of the relationship between long-term co-teaching partners and their inclusive instructional practices. The understanding that is gained from this study could serve as recommendations to assist future co-teachers, current co-teachers, administrators, designers of professional development programs and teacher preparation programs in better preparing and guiding co-teachers in forming successful, effective and professional co-teaching relationships.

Previous studies on co-teaching have focused on identifying the best instructional strategies and needed supports for implementing effective and successful cooperative teaching environments (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs, et al., 2007). Studies have also examined teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and perceptions of co-teaching as a way of gauging its success, as well as gaining insights into ways of improving co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005). Yet, the results of these studies indicate that the majority of co-teaching teams are not implementing inclusive instructional practices (Austin, 2001; Murawski, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007). In addition, the majority of participants in these studies were not involved in long-term co-teaching partnerships and many were not considered long-term co-teachers. Therefore, a gap in the literature exists when we turn our attention to what long-term co-teaching teams can share and provide in regard to the processes needed for developing positive and effective co-teaching partnerships.
The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of and insights into the processes that long-term middle school co-teaching partners identify going through and continuing to go through as a means of developing, sustaining and advancing their co-teaching partnerships.

**Justification**

The current research base on co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice has predominantly focused on co-teaching at the elementary school level in comparison to the secondary level (Friend et al., 2010). The goal of co-teaching as an instructional practice is to provide and inclusive learning environment to ensure the well-being of both special education and regular education students in an academic placement that is based on students’ abilities rather than on their exceptional needs (Friend et al., 2010; Kavale & Forness, 2000). In addition, research into the instructional practice of co-teaching at the middle school level has found significant differences in regard to instructional approaches compared to co-teaching at the elementary level (Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997). Research indicates that these differences stem from older student populations, more demanding content areas, complex instructional approaches, the structure of class scheduling, high-stakes testing, and the availability of school resources (Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997), all of which exert influences unique to the middle school setting.

Furthermore, extant research on co-teaching at the secondary level has found that secondary co-teachers tend to hold negative perspectives and attitudes towards the practice of co-teaching in general, and especially in comparison to their elementary
counterparts (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Additionally, Scruggs et al. (2007) found that the subordinate role of the special education teacher was more prominent at the secondary level in comparison to the elementary level. Research indicates that this is related to middle school curricula that provide for more demanding content areas in comparison to elementary school curricula and that middle school teachers tend to be content specialists (Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997).

Therefore, the relationship between co-teachers at the elementary and middle school level differ in that co-teaching at the middle school level requires a more complex and intimate professional relationship. Unlike the role of special education teachers at the elementary school level, middle school co-teachers are responsible for all of the dynamics that come with preparing for the design and implementation of instruction. In addition, at the middle school level this means the entire class period, not just a part of the school day. At the middle school level, both the special education teacher and the general education teacher are responsible of ensuring the well-being of all students in the co-taught class. This includes students with and without disabilities that have been placed in the same classroom environment. Therefore, the co-planning, co-instructing and co-assessing that comes with co-teaching at the middle school level demands higher levels of collaboration and cooperation in the co-teaching dyad. Co-teaching at the middle school level requires teachers to work with one another to design a classroom environment that effectively delivers more challenging and specialized subject area content while also meeting the provisions of students’ IEPs through adaptations and modifications, and simultaneously meets the academic needs of regular education
students in a single classroom setting. As a result of the complex nature of co-teaching at the middle school level, more research is needed to gain insights into the inclusive instructional practices of middle school co-teaching partners.

**Research Questions**

Two research questions guide this study:

1. What skills, procedures, knowledge, and shared goals do teachers report as significant to the successful development of their long-term co-teaching professional partnerships?

2. What are the unique features or characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their successful professional partnerships?
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

This chapter will begin by addressing the legal background and history concerning the inclusive movement in education. The chapter will first address the major legal acts, court cases, and revisions to the law that eventually ended the exclusion of disabled children from attending public school and the practice of segregating disabled students from their non-disabled peers. The chapter will then address the legal requirements of P-12 public schools in regard to providing disabled students with a free and appropriate public education and the legal safe guards that have been put in place to ensure that disabled students are receiving an education that aligns to their academic abilities and the necessary supports that disabled students need in order to accesses the curriculum. The chapter will then address the history of co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice and the six recognized co-teaching models according to research. The chapter will then review previous research findings in regard to the nuances that come with co-teaching at the secondary level. Lastly, this chapter will address previous research findings with regard to co-teachers’ beliefs, perspectives and opinions toward co-teaching as an effective inclusive instructional practice.

Prior to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, also known as P.L. 94-142, only 20% of the children with disabilities were educated in a U.S. public school. At the time, the future of individuals with disabilities was bleak;
many resided in state institutions designed for people with mental retardation or mental illness. Beginning in the late 1950s, progress was being made in regard to supporting educators with the preparation needed for instructing disabled children. Key federal legislation, such as the Training of Professional Personnel Act of 1959, aimed to provide instructional preparation for educating children with mental retardation; and the Teachers of the Deaf Act of 1961, provided instructional preparation for educating children who were deaf and hard of hearing. Even so, by 1967, these state institutions were still home to approximately 200,000 people diagnosed as disabled, providing care for basic needs rather than education and life skills (USED, 2010). Furthermore, many states still had laws that excluded students from attending school based on being deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed or mentally retarded (USED, 2000).

Federal programs offering financial incentives were implemented as a way to support and encourage the development of exemplary educational programs for disabled children. The Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, and the State Schools Act of 1965, offered grant assistance as a means of supporting states in creating programs that focused on the education of children with disabilities. Attention was also focused on early interventions. The Handicapped Children’s Early Education Assistance Act of 1968, provided economic support for early childhood programs aimed at the education of young children with disabilities (USED, 2000). Gradual improvements in the education of disabled students continued, and by 1968, the federal government endorsed the preparation for 30,000 special educators and specialty teachers, and supported the growth
of programs designed to educate disabled children in preschools, elementary schools and secondary schools throughout the United States (USED, 2000).

**The Movement Toward Inclusion**

Throughout the 1960s, parents and advocates of students with disabilities continued to challenge the unequal practices taking place within the American public school system by turning to the court system (Yell et al., 1998). Subsequently, the passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA, P.L. 89-10) was the first federal law to specifically address the education of disabled students (Friend, 2008). The Act not only provided monetary aid to states to improve the education of disabled students, but also led to the formation of the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, which is currently titled the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Following on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, and the passage of P.L. 89-10 (1965), attention turned to the segregation that existed within the public school system in regard to academic curriculum, instruction and physical placement of disabled students requiring special needs (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The placement of separate learning environments that segregated students identified as needing special education was called into question by L.M. Dunn’s 1968 article, “Special Education for the Mildly Retarded-Is Much of It Justifiable?” In 1968, Dunn questioned the legitimacy of educating disabled children in separate academic classes. The focus of his article was twofold, “…a large proportion of this so called special education in its present form is obsolete and unjustifiable from the point of view of the pupils so placed; and second, to outline a blueprint for changing this major segment of education …” (p.
6). Dunn’s article served as the catalyst for educating students in what is currently referred to as the least restrictive environment:

…it is suggested that we do away with many existing disability labels and the present practice of grouping children homogenously by these labels in special classes.

Instead, we should try keeping slow learning children more in the mainstream of education, with special educators serving as diagnostic, clinical, remedial, resource room, itinerant and/or team teachers, consultants, and developers of instructional materials and prescriptions for effective teaching. (p. 11)

Dunn’s article not only encouraged schools to think about alternative approaches in regard to the segregated learning environments for students, but also how schools were utilizing their resources as a means for educating disabled students.

In addition to the Dunn article, two landmark court decisions further advanced the educational opportunities for disabled students. *The Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth* (1972) was a class action suit brought against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in Federal District Court (Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens [PARC] v. Pennsylvania, 1972). The lawsuit named the state’s secretaries of education and public welfare, board of education, and 13 school districts. The litigants argued that the state was delaying or ignoring its constitutional obligations to provide a publicly supported education for these students, thus violating state statutes and the students’ rights under the Equal Protection of the Law clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Yell et al., 1998). Advocates for disabled students argued that: (1) children with intellectual disabilities benefited from educational
programs; (2) public education cannot solely be defined as academic experiences and outcomes for children; (3) the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania could not deny students with intellectual disabilities access to free public education; and (4) the earlier students with intellectual disabilities received an education, the greater the amount of learning that could take place (Yell et al., 1998). The case resulted in the decision that all children with intellectual disabilities from ages 6 to 21 must be provided a free public education and that it was most desirable to educate children with intellectual disabilities in a program appropriate for the child's intellectual capacity and in programs most like those provided for their nondisabled peers (PARC v. Pennsylvania, 1972). This case laid the groundwork for continued progress in regard to the educational rights of intellectually disabled students.

Not long after PARC v. Pennsylvania’s 1972 decision, a class action suit was filed in the Federal District Court for the District of Columbia. Mills v. Board of Education 1972 was filed against the local board of education on behalf of all students with disabilities who were denied access to the public school system (Yell et al., 1998). The lawsuit was brought by the parents and guardians of seven children who presented a variety of disabilities ranging from behavior problems, hyperactivity, epilepsy, intellectual disabilities, and physical disabilities. These seven children represented more than 18,000 students who were denied access to a public education in the District of Columbia. The suit, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, charged that the students were excluded from school without due process of law (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972). The lawsuit mandated that the school board provide all children with disabilities access to...
a free and public education. The decision in this case established the responsibility of states and localities to educate children with disabilities and to provide due process safeguards, outlining procedures for labeling, placing, and exclusion of students with disabilities (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972).

Seven years after the Dunn article, and three years following the rulings in PARC v. Pennsylvania’s 1972 and Mills v. Board of Education, 1972, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EHA, P.L. 94-142), reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1990, was passed. This Act mandated that students identified as disabled be provided access to the appropriate learning environment based on their individual learning needs in the least restrictive environment. IDEA launched a movement within education that mandated that all students should have access to the mainstream curriculum if they qualified academically. The two major components of this Act were that all students, regardless of their identified disability, would have access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and therefore, must be placed in the LRE based on a students’ academic abilities rather than on their identified disabilities (Kavale, 2002). The law aimed to ensure four major principles: (1) children identified as disabled had access to an education that emphasized special education services to meet unique student needs; (2) to protect the rights of children with disabilities and their families; (3) to assist states and local governments in providing children with disabilities an appropriate education; and (4) to assess and ensure the effectiveness of programs aimed at educating children with disabilities (Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act, 1975). To encourage these efforts, financial incentives were provided to aid states and
local governments with compliance (Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act, 1975).

The law also aimed to protect two specific groups of children: those children who were excluded from the public education system all together; and those children who only had limited access to the public education system (USED, 2000). In the early 1970s, the latter group comprised more than half of all children with disabilities living in the U.S. These issues surrounding the need for improved access to education became the guiding principles for the advances made in the education of children with disabilities during the latter half of the 20th century (USED, 2000). These court decisions of the 1970s, also affirmed the right that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education and that the right to an education, regardless of disability, was upheld by the equal protection clause of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972; USED, 2000; Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act, 1975). As a result of the movement to inclusive education in the United States, beginning in the mid-1970s, cooperative teaching as classroom-based instructional practice began to develop.

Individualized education program. At the center of P.L. 94-142 (1975) was the implementation of students’ individualized education program (IEP). According to Smith (1990), “For special education there is no document more significant to districts, agencies, administrators, teachers, parent and educational advocates and students” (p. 6). Smith further explains that, “…the IEP was designed to carry into implementation the law’s intent of an appropriate education” (p. 6). The IEP was established by Congress in
1975, to make sure that each student, especially those with severe disabilities, would receive services based on their individual needs rather than being based on preexisting categories or service offerings (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). The IEP contains the goals and objectives of a student's education program, determining both the accommodations and supports that a student receives based on their identified disability, but also the educational placement of the student in LRE based on the student’s identified abilities (Smith, 1990; Yell et al., 1998). A student’s IEP is designed through a multidisciplinary and teamed approach. Special educators, general education teachers, school specialists and parents all have input into the design and creation of a student’s IEP (Smith, 1990). Regardless of what setting a child attends class in, the self-contained special education classroom or the mainstream general education classroom, the provisions in a student’s IEP must be implemented as it serves as a legal contract between the school and the student. If a student’s IEP determines that the LRE is a cooperative teaching setting, then it is expected that the student will receive the support of both a special educator and general educator. In co-taught classrooms, teachers address the IEP goals and objectives of students with disabilities as they simultaneously also meet the learning needs of other students (Friend et al., 2010; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley, 2012). Due to the expertise of special education teachers, special education teachers are regularly identified as being mostly responsible for carrying out and fulfilling the requirements of the IEP into the mainstream classroom (Friend, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). Throughout a student’s academic career, the IEP serves as an exceptionally important document as it also
requires that public school personnel plan for a student’s future once they age out of the public school system.

**Least restrictive environment.** EHA (Pub. L. 94-142) mandated that public schools provide students with disabilities access to an appropriate education in the LRE on a continuum of services. The goal was to provide disabled students access to an education that most reflected the education of their general education peers (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Yell et al., 1998). The LRE originated from the constitutional doctrine “least restrictive alternative,” meaning that the government is required to achieve its goals through non-restrictive and non-oppressive means (Thomas & Rapport, 1998). The law served as the impetus for change in how schools were required to approach the instruction and education of learning disabled students. As a result, the American public school system had to reevaluate what it was doing and drastically change the approach to education and the academic instruction of its disabled students. Furthermore, the act required that disabled students be educated alongside their non-disabled peers (Kavale, 2002; Osborne & Dimattia, 1994; Thomas & Rapport, 1998). In turn, school districts had to design a continuum of alternative placement options to meet the needs of all students. As a result of the LRE mandate, structural changes to special education were made, making the resource model the primary placement option on the continuum of services. Within this option, students were still considered to be in a mainstream placement if they spent at least half of the school day in the general education setting (Kavale & Forness, 2000). As a result of continued calls for more inclusive placements, parents, teachers and
advocates of students with disabilities pushed for inclusive practices to move beyond the traditional resource model (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987).

**The regular education initiative.** The Regular Education Initiative (REI) was a movement that took place during the 1980s that intended to advance the inclusion of disabled students in the general education setting. The REI aimed to create an education system that would include all students with or without disabilities into one unified academic setting (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Those advocating for the REI believed that general and special education should be one integrated system. According to Kavale and Forness (2000), the REI was based on the belief that, “Students are more alike than different, so truly ‘special’ instruction is not required; good teachers can teach all students” (p. 281). Therefore, proponents of the REI did not see the need for a dual system of education that segregated students based on needs or disability (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). In addition, proponents argued that all students were in need of and deserving of individualized instruction. Instructional practices like differentiation was a beneficial strategy for all students not only those identified as disabled. “…the instructional needs of students would support the merger of the two systems into a comprehensive, unified system designed to meet the unique needs of every student” (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p. 104). Advocates of the REI believed that a unified approach would also encourage cooperation and collaboration between general educators and special educators rather than foster segregation and completion. “Educators should share their expertise and pool their resources in order to get maximal ‘mileage’ from their instructional efforts” (Stainback & Stainback, 1984, p. 104). The
REI movement advocated for an approach to education in which all teachers were responsible for the education of all students. The REI attempted to further the inclusion movement for students with disabilities by advocating for permanent placement in the general education classroom and an end to separate learning environments for disabled students all together.

Counter to these attempts, the REI movement did not garner the support it needed to create a unified approach to the education of all children (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Opponents of the movement did not believe that all students would benefit from a single unified approach to inclusion (Kauffman, 1989). A unified approach they argued neglected that some children have exceptionalities and differences that required more specialized instruction that could not be met in general education and mainstream settings (Kauffman, 1989; Lieberman, 1985). Strong opinions surrounded both sides of the debate in regard to the REI as a special education initiative (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Though the REI initiative did not have a substantial impact on the education of disabled students and did not result in one unified education system, inclusion in the general education setting is still a placement option based on the LRE.

The law did not specifically define what was meant by the LRE or mainstreaming as academic placements. Therefore, regardless of the goal of providing children with disabilities access to a FAPE, there was no unified definition. As a result of Congress’s decision not to define the concept of the LRE, and mainstreaming, the courts were left to determine and shape the definitions (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). The LRE is not a specific or specified setting, but it is determined based on the individual learning needs of
the child. Therefore, the LRE setting for one child may be the general education classroom, but for another child it may be a self-contained classroom (Thomas & Rapport, 1998).

Multiple court decisions have shaped what is meant by the LRE, mainstreaming and inclusion. According to Douvanis and Hulsey (2002) LRE refers to IDEA’s mandate that children with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with their nondisabled peers. Inclusion is the placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with nondisabled students as an absolute right; and lastly, mainstreaming is when children with disabilities and those without disabilities are educated in the same environment, when appropriate. Recent court cases, however, have upheld the meaning of the LRE based on the appropriateness of the educational setting, rather than defining placement as an absolute right. Court cases such as Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills (1997), Doe v. Arlington County (1999) and Hartmann v. Loudoun (1997) illustrate the courts’ decisions. Hartmann v. Loudoun (1997) was especially significant in that the court ruled that: mainstreaming is not a requirement when the student is not receiving any educational benefit; the marginal benefits from mainstreaming do not outweigh the benefits provided in a separate education setting; the extent that a student is disruptive to the classroom is a legitimate issue in determining placement; and lastly, the social benefits of mainstreaming is subordinate to the educational benefits in determining the IDEA preference for mainstreaming (Douvanis & Hulsey, 2002). The trend appears to indicate the LRE to inclusion in a general education classroom. According to the United States Department of Education (2012), the
percentage of students identified as disabled who receive 80% or more of their education in a general education classroom has increased from 33.1% in 1990 to 58.5% in 2010. The largest increase in the percentage of students educated in the general education setting began in 2001, coinciding with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

NCLB (Pub. L. 107-110) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), dating from 1965. The intended goal of the law was to ensure the increased academic achievement of students including students identified under the special education label. To achieve this goal, NCLB required that all schools make adequate yearly progress (AYP). In order to make AYP, schools must demonstrate that at least 95% of all students participated in the state assessment at each grade level. This requirement must be met for all students and for subgroups of those students defined by: race/ethnicity, poverty level, disability, and English language proficiency (USDE, 2004). This means that all schools need students’ standardized assessments scores to increase from academic year to academic year. To ensure that America’s public schools were making AYP, all students except those with severe disabilities were required to obtain proficiency scores in the subject areas of math, science, reading and language arts by the year 2014 (NCLB, 2001). Severe disability applies only when the nature or severity of the student’s need is such that education in general education classes with or without the use of supplementary aids, supports and services cannot be achieved at a satisfactory level (P.L. 94-142). Therefore, administrators, teachers and students were being held to rigorously high standards with regard to all students achieving grade level benchmarks.
through standardized assessments. Recent years have seen an increase in the number of students being taught in inclusive, general education settings through the instructional practice of cooperative teaching (Cook, 2001; Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

The history of inclusion is complex, and as expected many debatable and relevant issues still pervade the subject of inclusion. The questions and concerns that have surrounded the integration of students with disabilities into the general education classroom are still relevant today and are based on the experiences of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and educational specialists. As a result of the inclusion movement, and the goal of providing students with disabilities access to the LRE and the accountably measures of NCLB, the practice of co-teaching has become part of the educational landscape. According to Cook and Friend, (1995) co-teaching consists of, “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” (p. 2) and reflects the relationship that must take place between special and general educators when instruction is provided to students with and without disabilities in a single classroom setting (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991).

**A Classroom-Based Instructional Approach**

Co-teaching is a classroom-based instructional practice used by schools to support and promote an appropriate learning environment for students with intellectual, emotional and physical disabilities that qualify academically for mainstream placement in a general education classroom. Supporters of inclusion believe that students with disabilities are best served when placed in educational settings with their nondisabled peers (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). As an instructional practice, co-teaching provides
students with a greater teacher to student ratio and reduces the feelings of stigma for students identified under the special education label (Cook & Friend, 1995). In order to provide such support, co-teaching utilizes the expertise of a general education teacher, and a special education teacher, or specialist in a single academic setting. More recently, Friend (2008) re-defined co-teaching as a partnership between a general education teacher, a special education teacher, or other specialist who jointly delivers instruction to a diverse group of students, including students with special needs and identified learning disabilities in a general education setting.

Though co-teaching has become a common instructional practice for supporting inclusive classrooms (Murawski, 2009), the practice of co-teaching itself and the dynamics of the co-taught classroom has not been embraced by all educators and classroom teachers (Cook, 2001; Dieker & Murawski 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Keefe et al., 2004). Major attention and interest has been devoted to the practice of co-teaching. Yet, regardless of the literature, research, resources and professional development devoted to co-teaching, discrepancies still exist in the best methods for achieving a positive and successful co-teaching environment. Co-teaching as an instructional practice can vary drastically from one school to another, and from one classroom to another. This is understandable as there are many different methods of co-teaching.

**Variations on Co-Teaching**

Research has indicated six recognized practice for implementing cooperative teaching in inclusive classroom environments. The methods implemented by co-teaching partners have been found to reflect not only the academic needs and supports of the
students in the classroom, but also the professional abilities and co-teaching preparation and experience of the participating teachers. Research has indicated that issues such as planning time, level of course content knowledge, knowledge of disabilities and learning strategies, scheduling issues, administrative supports, and professional compatibility influence co-teaching practices and co-teaching professional partnerships (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Scruggs, et al., 2007). In addition, research also indicates that the academic ability level of the students, the students’ IEPs, and the identified disabilities of students are also decisive factors that impact the co-teaching practices teachers choose to implement within their co-taught classroom environment (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010).

**Foundation.** Friend and Reising (1993) provided a foundational understanding of co-teaching as an instructional practice. The authors explain that co-teaching as a special education service delivery option was rooted in the instructional practice of team teaching which originally emerged during the 1950s, becoming a wide spread practice during the 1970s. Team teaching, according to Friend and Reising, was an instructional practice that was often used in general education classrooms at the middle and sometimes high school setting. The goal of team teaching was, “(a) to provide students with a more individualized and diversified learning experience and (b) to enable teachers to complement each other’s expertise while providing a mutual professional support system” (p. 6). Team teaching like the instructional practice of co-teaching took on many variations making it difficult to understand its impact on student achievement:
…because most reports on team teaching were simply descriptions of situation-specific programs, it is difficult to analyze whether team teaching was successful in terms of improving educational opportunities for students. What was apparent was that teachers found in team teaching an approach to their craft that was both challenging and rewarding. (p. 6)

Team teaching as an instructional strategy used in general education classrooms became a method used in the field of special education to help facilitate the mainstreaming of learning disabled students into the general education classroom by focusing on the ability of both teachers to integrate their professional knowledge and expertise into the design and instruction of a single class environment.

**Recognized co-teaching practices.** Currently, research has identified six co-teaching approaches: (1) one teach, one observe; (2) station teaching; (3) parallel teaching; (4) alternative teaching; (5) teaming or team teaching; and (6) one teach, one assist (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). According to Cook and Friend (1995), co-teaching practices vary depending on such factors as academic subject matter, the age and maturity of the students, and resourcefulness of the co-teaching partners. The authors further explain that no one approach is necessarily better than another, but that each practice has its place in a co-taught classroom environment. Friend (2008), Cook and Friend (1995), and Friend et al., (2010) identify and elaborate on the six recognized approaches to co-teaching.

**One teach, one observe.** The one teach, one observe practice, the most simplistic model, requires that one teacher is responsible for leading large-group
instruction, as the other teacher gathers data on specific students in regard to academic, behavioral, or social factors on specific students or on the class as a whole. This model should be utilized when teachers are gathering information and data on specific students and trying to compare the progress of targeted students in the co-taught class to the progress made by other students in the class. The types of data being collected and the focus of the observation should be mutually planned by both co-teachers. This method of co-teaching requires little planning in comparison to the other methods, but the analysis of the data from the class session should be analyzed and discussed among the co-teaching partners as a team (Cook & Friend, 1995). Overall, this method should be utilized to gain insights into student achievement in a specific area academic or behavioral.

**Station teaching.** Station teaching occurs when instruction is divided into three non-sequential parts and students are divided into corresponding groups as they rotate from station to station. At two of the three stations, the students are instructed by the teachers and at one station the students work independently. This approach requires that both teachers share professional responsibilities in order to plan for classes that adequately divides the instructional content (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). Each teacher has separate and specific responsibilities in regard to delivering class content and instruction. According to Cook and Friend (1995), the benefits include increased comfort level of inexperienced co-teachers, lower teacher-pupil ratio, and students with disabilities are integrated into all the groups reducing feelings of stigma. Additionally, the authors also note that equal teacher status occurs because both teachers participate in the
instruction of the class and take on active teaching roles. The potential drawbacks to station teaching are: increased classroom noise levels, high activity level, and the pacing of each station so students are able to transition from one station to another at arranged times. Station teaching must also be organized so the order of material presented is not an essential learning factor (Cook & Friend, 1995).

**Parallel teaching.** Parallel teaching takes place when the students in the class are divided into two groups and both teachers simultaneously instruct the same material. This method allows for a greater focus on instructional differentiation and increasing student participation (Friend 2008; Friend et al, 2010). Cook and Friend (1995) explain that parallel teaching, like station teaching also lowers the student-teacher ratio. Therefore, it is often used to increase student participation so that all students have opportunity to respond out loud, to engage in hands-on activities, and to interact with one another. In parallel teaching the teachers co-plan, and instruct jointly, but each teacher delivers instruction to a heterogeneous group of students, usually dividing the class in half. In order to be successful, teachers have to coordinate their efforts so the students receive basically the same instruction in about the same amount of time. According to Cook and Friend, “This type of co-teaching lends itself to drill-and-practice activities, projects requiring close teacher supervision, and discussion of activities” (Parallel Teaching section, para. 1). Similar to station teaching, noise and activity levels are sometimes are problematic. Parallel teaching is especially useful when teaching students different viewpoints on a particular topic, and allowing for students to participate in cooperative learning activities (Cook & Friend, 1995).
Alternative teaching. Alternative teaching is a co-teaching practice in which one teacher instructs the majority of the class and the other teacher focuses on a smaller group of students that need remediation, enrichment, assessment or preteaching (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). In the mainstream classroom environment students with disabilities or other learning needs may benefit at times from small group instruction that is similar to a self-contained setting and station or parallel teaching practices. In alternative teaching, one teacher works with a small group of 3 to 8 students, ideally, as the other teacher instructs the rest of the class. Cook and Friend (1995) explain that this approach can also ensure that all students receive opportunities to interact with a teacher in a smaller learning environment, provide increased opportunities for enrichment, such as allowing students the opportunity to pursue a specific interest. Cook and Friend (1995), also note that alternative teaching creates occasions for focused assessment in order to check the development of student skills. Yet, they do caution that this approach does have the potential of stigmatizing students with disabilities by grouping them for the purpose of remediation. To mitigate these effects, the authors suggest varying groups and making sure that all students participate in small groups periodically. This may help to reduce feelings of stigma among identified students.

Team teaching or teaming. Team teaching or Teaming is when both teachers lead the class as partners, both lecturing, representing alternative views and illustrating alternative ways to complete a problem, task or assignment (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). Teachers utilizing this model take turns leading class discussions; one teacher may instruct and explain as the other teacher demonstrates a concept, or models note taking. In
this model, teachers’ role play and model appropriate ways to ask questions and appropriate classroom behavior. According to Cook and Friend (1995), this approach requires a high level of mutual trust and commitment to the co-teaching partnership. The authors further explain that this approach may never be a comfortable practice for some co-teachers. Yet, many veteran co-teachers report that they find this type of co-teaching rewarding. Cook and Friend (1995) explain, “…it gives them a renewed energy in their teaching and prompts them to try new ideas for reaching their students” (Team Teaching section, para. 1).

One teach, one assist. And lastly, the one teach, one assist model also known as one teach, one drift model is when one teacher leads the class as the other teacher circulates the classroom assisting individual students. According to Friend and Cook (1995), this method is simplistic requiring minimal planning time. It provides basic support to students making a class that has the challenge of meeting diverse learning needs a success. Yet, the authors also caution that, “When one teacher only observes or assists, especially if this role is assigned to the special educator, he or she may feel like a glorified teaching assistant (One teaching, One Assisting section, para. 1). In addition, students may not feel secure in the role of the special education teacher if they are perceived as an assistant rather than a fully participating teacher. To avoid these potential challenges, Cook and Friend (1995) recommend that the teachers alternate taking on lead and supportive roles.

The co-teaching practices teachers utilize should be selected based on the needs and characteristics of students. Yet, teachers’ familiarity, comfort level with the different
co-teaching models as well as their co-teaching partner, curricular and subject area demands, and the dynamics of the teaching environment all impact the co-teaching methods teachers choose to implement in their classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995). Furthermore, research indicates that regardless of the different methods and the benefits of each individual model the majority of co-teaching teams utilize the one teach, one assist approach (Scruggs et al., 2007).

**Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level**

Co-teaching at the secondary level presents unique challenges. Research indicates that these challenges stem from the very structure of secondary education such as: more demanding content areas; high-stake testing; fast paced curriculums; class size; instruction of large numbers of students; time constraints of class periods (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001) and lack of academic skills and learning strategies by students with disabilities (Cole & McLeskey, 1997). As a result of these challenges, research indicates that secondary teachers have negative perspectives and attitudes in regard to co-teaching as an instructional practice especially compared to their elementary counterparts (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). A major area of concern for secondary cooperative teaching teams is knowing how to establish clear and appropriate roles for each teacher, in order to contribute to the co-taught classroom environment (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

**Research on Co-teaching in Secondary Schools**

Keefe and Moore (2004) examined the perspectives and thoughts of eight co-teaching teams, four special education teachers and four general education teachers who
worked in the same suburban high school located in the southwestern part of the United States. The school served 2,700 students in grades 9-12. At the time of the study, approximately 600 students were classified as receiving special education services, this also included gifted education. The eight teachers who participated in the study were either currently co-teaching or had co-taught in previous years, their years of teaching experience ranged from 2 to 20 years. The school originally implemented the practice of cooperative teaching in the late 1980s (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Keefe and Moore (2004) investigated teachers’ perspectives on teaching in inclusive settings using 8 semi-structured interview questions: (1) What is your teaching background?; (2) Describe an inclusive classroom.; (3) Tell me about a typical day in your classroom?; (4) What are the roles and responsibilities of special and general education teachers in this classroom?; (5) How did you decide on these roles and responsibilities?; (6) Do you feel you were well prepared for these roles and responsibilities?; (7) What advice would you give to a teacher who wants to teach in an inclusive setting?; (8) Do you have any other comments? The interviews lasted between 40-60 minutes during the spring semester of the 2000-2001 school year. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis was performed on the interview data and the responses were coded and analyzed to determine patterns and themes that emerged. Member checking was utilized by sharing the themes with a small group of the interview participants in order to get feedback on the credibility of the themes that emerged as well as any other concerns in regard to the analysis of the interview data (Keefe & Moore, 2004). The authors reported that three major themes emerged from their
analysis: (1) the nature of collaboration; (2) roles of the teachers; and (3) outcomes for students and teachers. The information gained provided insights into the reality of co-teaching at the secondary level from the perspective of the teachers.

Nature of Collaboration

The nature of collaboration emerged as a major theme; two subthemes that emerged were in regard to co-teacher compatibility and the logistics of co-teaching at the secondary level. In regard to compatibility, the authors found that two issues were of particular importance to the teachers: having a say in their co-teaching partnerships and their ability to communicate with one another effectively.

Choosing a partner. Keefe and Moore’s (2004) findings indicated that there was no universal or standardized method for assigning co-teaching partners at the high school. As one general education teacher explained, “‘… She came in new and they paired her with me. I had never met her before’” (p. 81). Another general education teacher stated, “‘…and now when they bring new people in it’s just here, you’re working with so-and-so, and they don’t have a clue what their job is’” (p. 81). A special education teacher illustrated why teachers need to know who they are working with and the challenges that come with co-taught classrooms, “‘You know what? Teachers are funny critters, they’re very territorial. I couldn’t imagine me going in and, you know, playing by someone else’s rules. And that’s the one thing I really had a problem with’” (p. 81). The complexity of co-teaching relationships and the challenges of co-taught classrooms were recognized as another reason compatibility and communication were seen as essential to the success of co-teaching partnerships.
**Communication and compatibility.** Keefe and Moore (2004) found that the complex nature of co-teaching partnerships warrants the need for open and constant communication. The teachers’ responses indicated the importance that both communication and compatibility have on the formation and development of positive co-teaching partnerships. A special education teacher shared, “‘… the most important thing for an inclusion program to work is how well the teachers get along. The most important thing and the most difficult thing is to predict how well the teachers get along’” (p. 82). A general education teacher further explained, “‘It’s almost more important than what you teach, it’s how you get along. And also because you’re modeling in front of the classroom. You’re modeling that behavior. This is how colleagues work’” (p. 82). Honest and constant communication is an essential component of co-teaching partnerships. One teacher referred to it as, “‘…totally open communication’” and a special education teacher elaborated “‘If you’re having some type of conflict, but something made you uncomfortable or you didn’t agree, you have to discuss it right away. You know it’s like a marriage’” (p. 82). The teachers recommended that co-teaching partners have frank discussions from the very beginning.

**Logistics.** Keefe and Moore (2004) found that the logistics of the school day in terms of numbers and time emerged as a sub-theme related to the nature of collaboration. The first logistical concern was class size. A special education teacher noted, “‘If you can keep your numbers to 35, around in there, then two teachers in a room is not cumbersome. But we used to put in 45…45 kids and two teachers, it became a nightmare’” (p. 82). The second logistical challenge that teachers indicated was finding
the time to communicate and plan together. A general education teacher admitted, “‘…we were planning on the fly most of the time. We talked after school. A lot of times of we talked at lunch.’” (p. 82). A special education teacher further illustrated, “‘…all of this is so hard, trying to get in the time because even with us, with our team meetings, we did not really have much time to work on curriculum’” (p. 82). The authors found that large class sizes and not having a designated time to plan together built into the teachers’ workday resulted in being a major disincentive for teachers to co-teach at the secondary level.

**Roles of the Teachers**

The roles and responsibilities of co-teachers at the secondary level emerged as another major theme. It appeared that there was great variability across co-teaching teams with regard to the roles and responsibilities each teacher took on within the co-taught classroom environment. In the Keefe and Moore (2004) study, it was clear that the teachers at this school were left to figure out how to co-teach on their own with no supports. A special education teacher explained, “‘…no, there was never any discussion about who’s, or what my role or their role would be,’” a general education teacher further highlighted, “‘it’s just here, you’re working with so-and-so, and they don’t have a clue what their job is, either party really’” (p. 83). Co-teaching teams that did settle into specific roles indicated that the general education teacher took responsibility for the curriculum and the special education teacher took responsibly for modifications to the curriculum for students with special needs. Yet, another co-teaching team reported, “‘There was no, I didn’t have to say, well I want to do this, we just went in and taught. 40
You know, based on the material. We were both engaged in the material and went from there. I know it worked”” (p. 83).

**Limited role of the special educator.** A subtheme that emerged from Keefe and Moore’s (2004) teacher interviews was the limited role of the special education teacher in the co-taught classroom. The teachers indicated that the general education teachers were primarily responsible for: curriculum, planning, and large group instruction, and the special education teachers were responsible for assisting individual students and designing modifications. The limited role of the special education teachers was a major challenge for co-teaching teams. A general education teacher described her co-teaching partner, “‘I don’t even know why she’s here, quite frankly. She’s a nice person, the kids like her, but I don’t understand the point of having her in my classroom’” (p. 83). A special education teacher echoed, “‘I focus a lot on my kids, but no one in the classroom knows who I am really…every once in a while I might teach a lesson but for the most part I just help the teacher with whatever is going on’” (p. 83). Not being viewed a full-teacher within the classroom was clearly illustrated when one special education teacher explained how her co-teaching partner treated her like an assistant, “‘… it can be as insulting as, ‘I need some coffee’” (p. 83). The authors’ findings indicated that the division of roles within the co-taught class were heavily influenced by three factors: (1) content knowledge; (2) modifications; and (3) grading.

**Content knowledge.** Content knowledge was also a major factor that emerged from the Keefe and Moore’s (2004) teacher interviews. The limited role of special education teachers in co-taught classrooms was directly related the teachers’ knowledge
of course content. The authors found that the limited role of the special education teacher was not predetermined or planned, but was a result of a lack of subject area content knowledge. A general education teacher explained, “‘…well, if they do not know the curriculum, I think it does lower them to just a supervisor and discipline you know’” (p. 83). Another general teacher added of her co-teaching partner, “‘…was more of a hindrance than a help in the room because it was another person who didn’t know her material’” (p. 83). The special education teachers also acknowledged the significant role content knowledge had on the instruction of the co-taught classroom. One special education teacher explained, “‘You have to know the curriculum. You have to know the subject area. Because if you don’t, they don’t trust you, you can’t help them as much, it just doesn’t work out’” (p. 84). As a result of the significance of content knowledge, Keefe and Moore (2004) recommended that special educators specialize in one or two subject areas and these content areas should be the classes in which they are assigned to co-teach.

**Modifications.** Keefe and Moore (2004) reported that providing modifications and academic supports for disabled students was seen to be the primary role and responsibility of the special education teacher. The interviews revealed the importance of explaining the purpose and reasoning for students’ individual accommodations and modifications. A special educator indicated this importance suggesting, “‘…explain totally what a learning disability is and what kind of modifications are reasonable’” (p. 84). General education teachers recognized the importance of this and indicated appreciating the support. A general educator explained:
…it’s just real practical stuff like what do we do for a kid, for example, is dyslexic and we’re reading huge novels and we’re reading Shakespeare. What can I do to help this kid understand rather than get frustrated. And usually they’re simple solutions. (p. 84)

The modifications were seen as a benefit of co-teaching because they could be provided to any student that was struggling.

Grading. The most difficult area to address for the co-teachers concerned grading. The interviews indicated that this was a major challenge for co-teaching teams and there was no universal method among the teams in how to grade. Keefe and Moore (2004) found that grading occurred in a variety of ways based on each individual team. On some teams, one teacher graded all work according to the same set of standards and expectations for all students; and some teams graded assignments based on students’ abilities. In some cases the special educator was responsible for grading the disabled students’ work. Yet, in other cases grading was a negotiated process between the co-teachers. A special education teacher explained that she had to negotiate with her co-teaching partner to convince her to give partial credit on problems that were partially correct. Though the general education teacher resisted at first, she eventually gave in based on the special educator’s reasoning that it would help motivate students, “…she gave in and let me give partial credit and she let me grade it” (p. 84).

Outcomes

The third major theme that emerged from the teacher interviews was the outcomes for both students and teachers. Outcomes varied based on the individual co-teaching
teams. Teachers indicated both positive and negative outcomes of co-teaching based on their personal experiences.

**Teacher outcomes.** The outcomes for teachers varied considerably based on each teacher’s experience with co-teaching (Keefe & Moore, 2004). The teachers either had very positive or very negative attitudes in regard to co-teaching based on their individual experiences. A general education teacher described co-teaching as a, “…it was just very pleasant, happy and great experience. For me as a teacher and for those students” (p. 85). In contrast, a special education teacher shared, “this sounds terrible, but don’t do it (co-teach) unless you’re absolutely sure what you’re getting into” (p. 85). Keefe and Moore concluded, “The outcomes for teachers depended on the relationship which they had with their co-teaching partner independent of their philosophy toward inclusive education or even the outcomes for students” (p. 85).

**Student outcomes.** Keefe and Moore (2004) found that outcomes for students also indicated varied results. Overall, co-teaching was seen as a positive placement for students by both general and special education teachers. The benefits that teachers reported for students were: (1) elimination of special education stigma; (2) individualized help and modifications for all students; and (3) increased awareness of responsibility. One general education teacher confirmed that she was, “… a firm believer in inclusion classes” (p. 85). She further explained, “I think that for the kids, this is an incredible opportunity for them to realize, especially at the junior/senior level, when they can take on responsibilities, get things completed…” (p. 85). A special educator described similar results, “I had two classes of 11th graders…, and I really saw a big difference in the way
those kids in the inclusion class functioned. They learned a lot more. What they produced was lot higher level” (p. 85). Keefe and Moore found that the support and modification that came from the collaboration among general and special education teachers benefited students.

However, special educators also reported negative outcomes of the inclusive co-taught environment for disabled students. Concern stemmed from the belief that special education students are best served when they are receiving individualized attention. “…for some kids inclusion is appropriate, for some kids it’s not” (Keefe & Moore, 2004, p. 85). Special education teachers reported that the general education environment did not provide the support some students need, “they really, most of them, wanted to learn the stuff, but the classes, they were too big” (p. 85). An interesting finding worth noting is that the general education teachers did not report any negative outcomes for students in inclusive, co-taught classroom environments. The concerns about students receiving individualized attention and modifications came solely from the special educators.

Keefe and Moore (2004) concluded that the overall results of this study indicated that teachers need to be better prepared to meet the demands of co-teaching at the secondary level. Keefe and Moore suggested that it is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs, school districts and professional development programs to address the gaps in teacher knowledge regarding co-teaching and to prepare teachers to work in co-teaching partnerships. In addition, they recommended that special education teachers who plan to teach at the secondary level actively seek out and gain in-depth content
knowledge in specific subject areas. They further recommended that special educators only co-teach in the subject areas they are prepared in. In regard to general education teachers, the authors recommended that they gain in-depth knowledge about learning disabilities and appropriate modifications for specific disabilities. Furthermore, Keefe and Moore concluded that preparation in skills related to professional strategies for communication and collaboration are essential attributes of co-teaching success, especially in terms of teachers’ roles and responsibilities. Establishing set and clear roles and responsibilities within the co-taught classroom may help to balance input from both teachers. Lastly, the teachers strongly indicated the need to have input into their own decision to co-teach, as well as having a say in whom they are assigned to co-teach with. Teachers reported the relationship between themselves and their co-teaching partners to be the most important factor in the success or failure of co-teaching partnerships, more so than content knowledge and beliefs about inclusion. Keefe and Moore’s study indicated that schools need to take teachers’ thoughts and experiences about co-teaching seriously in order to develop positive and successful co-taught classroom environments.

Rice and Zigmond (2000) investigated cooperative teaching approaches at the secondary level in public schools in Queensland, Australia and Pennsylvania. The authors examined the co-teaching approaches to provide instructional and academic support to disabled students in inclusive environments. The focus on co-teaching in both Queensland and Pennsylvania allowed for a comparison of teachers’ roles and responsibilities under two different education systems that both embrace inclusive classroom settings and the instructional practice of co-teaching. The authors used
qualitative research methods in the form of interviews and classroom observations to collect data.

For the purpose of their study, Rice and Zigmond (2000) only selected an inclusive classroom environment if: (a) two qualified teachers shared the same classroom and students, with one teacher being the content specialist and the other being a special educator; (b) both teachers had shared responsibility of planning and instructing a class of both disabled and non-disabled students; and (c) both teachers actively delivered substantive instruction. Ten public secondary schools were used in the study. Two schools were located in a large urban school district in southwestern Pennsylvania and eight schools were located in an urban area in southeast Queensland. The Queensland teachers’ years of teaching experience was $M = 13.1$ with a range of 6 to 17 years and the teachers’ years of co-teaching experience was $M = 6.1$ with a range of 2 to 10 years. The Pennsylvania teachers all taught in schools where co-teaching was adopted as a support option for students. The Pennsylvania teachers had $M = 11.0$ years of teaching experience with a range of 1-20 years and $M = 2.6$ years of co-teaching experience with range of 1 to 5 years. All teachers volunteered to participate in the study.

In order to collect data on the current practices of co-teachers, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were performed with all participants (Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes. All interviews were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviews sought to elicit insights regarding the negotiation of co-teaching roles, the rationale for co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of co-
teaching models. The interviews were associated with the classroom observations and were used to clarify incidents and processes. The interviews and observations were conducted by the authors or by a trained and experienced interviewer; all followed the same interview protocol. Observations lasted the entire class period averaging 40 to 45 minutes and observers recorded narrative observation notes of class activities and the interactions of the co-teachers. The data were read and analyzed by both authors independently and the themes that emerged from each data set were discussed, compared and agreed upon. The findings were then referred back to the participating teachers for comment and verification, where necessary revisions were negotiated.

Rice and Zigmond (2000) reported several themes that emerged from the data sets: (1) teachers recognized that the successes or failure of co-teaching was based on a school’s commitment in regard to administrative and collegial support of inclusion; (2) the benefits of co-teaching for general and special education teachers as well as disabled and non-disabled students; (3) personal and professional compatibility of co-teaching partners; (4) concerned the need for special education teachers to prove themselves as competent instructors to their general education co-teaching partner; (5) equity of teaching roles in the co-taught partnership; and lastly (6) the obstacles and barriers that must be overcome to establish and maintain successful co-teaching partnerships.

Additionally, research into students benefiting from their placement in co-taught classes has produced varied results. Advocates of inclusive classrooms, believe that disabled students will benefit as a result of having increased access to higher expectations, examples of appropriate peer behavior, and increased opportunity to further
academic and social skills (Walter-Thomas et al., 2000). Yet, a lack of empirical evidence impacts these claims and furthers disagreements on the benefits of inclusive classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Walter-Thomas et al., 2000). Though findings are varied, some studies have found positive trends in regard to student placement in inclusive classrooms such as attendance, academic achievement and behavior (Baker & Zigmond, 1990; Carlberg & Kavale, 1980; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walter-Thomas, 2002; Walter-Thomas, 1997).

In addition, research has focused on special education students’ perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about their experiences in co-taught classes versus pull out or self-contained classes. More specifically, research has investigated students’ experiences interacting with both general education and special education teachers, feelings of stigma related to social outcomes, self-concept, alienation, and peer acceptance (Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Miller, Garriott, & Mershon, 2005; Soho, Katims, & Wilks, 1997; Stanovich, Jordan, & Perot, 1998; Vaughn, Elbaum, Schumm, & Hughes, 1998; Vaughn & Klinger, 1998; Wilson & Michaels, 2006). For example, research indicates that learning disabled students prefer the pull-out resource room in comparison to the inclusive setting of the co-taught classroom (Klingner et al., 1998; Leafstedt et al., 2007; Vaughn & Klingner, 1998). Leafstedt et al. (2007) found that students in co-taught classrooms did not have adequate access to the special education teacher and that special education teachers provided more specialized instruction, in the pull-out and self-contained settings in comparison to the co-taught setting. Yet, Miller et al. (2005) found that special education students preferred
the general education classroom as their learning environment. Wilson and Michaels (2006) also found that special education students preferred the general education setting and had positive feelings in regard to their co-taught classes, indicating that they were receiving necessary learning supports. Yet, Scruggs et al. (2007) found that an increase in student achievement in co-taught classes was a result of better student to teacher ratios, not necessarily the instructional practice of co-teaching. Furthermore, Mastropieri et al. (2005) found that when co-teachers worked well together, disabled students were more likely to be successful; but when teachers did not work well together, the experiences for disabled students were found to be less positive.

Research focused on the social acceptance of students identified as disabled has found that learning disabled high school seniors in general education settings reported less feelings of alienation compared to peers in pull-out services and self-contained settings (Soho et al., 1997). Yet, Vaughn et al. (1998) found that the special education students in co-taught classes maintained friendships with their learning disabled peers in comparison to non-disabled peers. But, Vaughn et al. also found increased cooperation and compassion among students. Co-teaching at the secondary level presents many challenges. A major challenging has been assessing the effectiveness of co-teaching on student achievement in regard to academic and social gains. This complexity is evident based on the varied results research has produced.

**Support for inclusion.** The first theme in Rice and Zigmond’s (2000) study indicated that teachers believed that for co-teaching classrooms to be successful there needed to be school-wide commitment and acceptance of inclusive education and co-
teaching supports. A Queensland teacher described, “a shared vision of inclusion” (p. 192). This refers not only to the teachers in the co-teaching partnerships, but also administrators and colleagues in the school. The reasoning for this school-wide support was that the teachers recognized that co-teaching requires a reorganization of specialist resources and complex scheduling of teachers. The teachers identified scheduling that allowed for common planning time as essential to their success and increased professional satisfaction within co-teaching partnerships. A Pennsylvania teacher explained, “The person I do environmental science and biology with has the same planning period I do. We meet and review what we will be doing” (p. 193). However, when common planning time was not built into the teachers’ work schedule, special education teachers in particular indicated not being as well prepared. A Pennsylvania special education teacher elaborated, “We never talk about it (lesson planning). I just come in and do it. Usually I just ask, ‘Hey what are we doing today?’ as I walk in the door” (p. 193). Overall, Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that teachers believed that isolated efforts to support co-teaching could not be sustained in the long run. In addition, the teachers also reported that co-teaching partners need to have similar philosophies in regard to the education of disabled students and a positive and committed attitude about the co-teaching partnership. A teacher from Queensland explained it as “a determination to go in there with the attitude of making it work” (p. 193).

**Benefits.** The second theme that emerged from the Rice and Zigmond (2000) study was the benefits of co-teaching for both teachers and students. The teachers reported that they believed they improved professionally as teachers and learned a
tremendous amount from working with one another. An English teacher from Queensland explained, “we enhanced each other” (p. 193). Another teacher from Queensland elaborated, “We learn from each other, and that helps us grow and develop as teachers” (p. 193). As the teachers worked together and learned from teaching with one another they were able to identify how they developed as teachers. A Pennsylvania special education teacher described her experience working with her English partner for the first time, “The English teacher was initially very resistant. By the end of the year, she said it was the best thing that ever happened to her. She believed she had become a much more flexible teacher” (p. 193). Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that teachers recognized the professional benefits of collaborating in regard to planning for class, but also as a means for critiquing and reflecting on one’s practice as well as having a partner, “to bounce ideas off” (p. 193).

In addition, Rice and Zigmond (2000) also found that co-teaching environments benefited all students in regard to academic instruction and modifications as well as classroom management and discipline. A Pennsylvania teacher shared, “there was a student who was misbehaving, so I took her down to the vice-principal. The teacher could keep on teaching and didn’t have to stop” (p. 193). The very presence of two teachers in the room diminished the impact that misbehaved students had on academic instruction. Teachers also recognized how academic and instructional modifications helped all students in the class. A Pennsylvania special education teacher explained that the non-disabled students that needed more time to complete a test or performed better in smaller environments during tests were afforded that opportunity in the co-taught setting. “Many
of them will be mainstream kids who just need more time or a quieter place. In many ways, we are serving many kids who do not have labels” (p. 193). A teacher from Queensland indicated similar benefits, “All the kids really like it because it means they help when they need it instead of having to swing form the fans and do all sorts of things before they get attention” (p. 193). Rice and Zigmond also found that modifications benefitted all students. “Testing accommodations designed for students with special needs also tended to benefit many other at-risk-students…allowing extra time, explaining instructions more explicitly, and reading instructions to students” (p. 193).

Compatibility. The third major theme that emerged was the professional and personal compatibility of co-teaching partners. Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that teachers rated personal compatibility as the most critical factor in the success of co-teaching partners. The authors also found that the teachers from Queensland, Australia and Pennsylvania strongly recognized the importance of: volunteerism, mutual respect, shared teaching philosophies, willingness to communicate, objectivity, equivalent content knowledge and knowledge of students, self-confidence and the ability to take professional risks as essential personal and professional attributes of co-teachers. Teachers from Queensland and Pennsylvania recognized the need for volunteerism among co-teaching partners. A Pennsylvania teacher stated, “No one should be forced to do inclusion or co-teaching” (p. 194). The teachers recognized that in order to successfully co-teach, teachers need to possess such qualities as, “mutual respect, tolerance, and a capacity to persevere in overcoming difficulties” (p. 194). A teacher from Queensland further explained that co-teaching is not a desirable practice if, “one
person acts like a prima donna or if one other of us were to regard ourselves as either better or worse than the other” (p. 194). The teachers recognized the extreme levels of cooperation and closeness that co-teaching demands. A teacher from Queensland described co-teaching as a “‘professional marriage’” (p. 194). The teachers pointed out that co-teaching requires adjustments in regard to new roles and responsibilities and that these adjustments demand ongoing negotiations that result in intense relationships.

Rice and Zigmond (2000) also reported that in order to achieve successful co-teaching partnerships and the ability to work together within an intense professional relationship, the teachers indicated the need for specific personality traits. These traits include a shared view of academic and behavioral expectations of students, explaining without these, “students become confused and frustrated” (p. 194). The need for open and honest communication. Teachers warned that, “…small problems and annoyances could escalate if not dealt with expeditiously” (p. 194). One’s ability to be objective in regard to separating the personal from the professional. A Queensland teacher elaborated “‘it helps if you are a visionary, creative person, with an ability to see the big picture’” (p. 194). Teachers indicated wanting an equal in the classroom, meaning a partner with equivalent “pedagogical knowledge and instructional skill” (p. 194), as well as a partner who was self-confident, possessed self-esteem and a willingness to try new things. However, two of the Queensland teachers also emphasized the importance of professionalism. One teacher stated, “‘Personalities should not be that much of an issue if a professional approach is taken’” (p. 194). And another added, “‘You don’t have to be friends to work with people; it might help, but it isn’t necessary’” (p. 194).
Instructional roles. The fourth theme that emerged was the role of the special education teacher. Rice and Zigmond (2000) reported that in both Pennsylvania and Queensland the special education teachers were rarely seen leading whole class instruction:

In Pennsylvania, special education teachers were seldom observed actively teaching whole classes or even small groups. In Queensland there was more evidence of the special education teacher in a teach role, but even here, the role was usually a subordinate one. (p. 195)

Special education teachers in both countries were observed performing clerical duties like taking attendance, recording homework completion and grading multiple choice tests. At times, they were observed circulating the classroom to check on and to redirect students when needed, and to model appropriate classroom behavior as the general education teacher instructed the class. A Pennsylvania special education teacher explained, “‘The first year I was a model for the students. Often, if [the subject teacher] is lecturing, I would do the notes on the overhead to model note-taking’” (p. 195). The special education teachers were also found to be responsible for ensuring the use of necessary student modifications. “Special education teachers also located supplemental materials for use by the subject teacher, designed instructional materials for individuals or groups, and adapted tests” (p. 194). Rice and Zigmond concluded that the disparity in roles was necessary because of the lack of content knowledge on the part of the special education teacher.
As a result of a lack of content knowledge on the part of special education teachers, the fifth theme that emerged was in regard to special education teachers having to prove themselves as capable teachers to their co-teaching partners. Content knowledge served as a major barrier and challenge to establishing equal co-teaching partnerships. A Pennsylvania special education teacher admitted, “‘It is difficult to teach what you were not trained to teach’” (p. 195). A lack of trust and confidence exists within the co-teaching partnerships as a result. This was illustrated when the co-teachers negotiated their roles, “‘He checks the multiple choice and the matching items. I [the English teacher] check all the essays and bigger projects’” (p. 195). The emphasis on content mastery at the secondary level has resulted in special educators having to prove themselves as capable and equal teaching partners.

**Challenges and barriers.** The last major theme that emerged was the challenges and barriers that exist in regard to teachers’ and administrators’ attitudes of inclusion and co-teaching at the secondary level. Specifically, Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that the participants expressed concerns about the, “…entrenched negative views about inclusion, were jealous of their professional autonomy, and were scornful of suggestion that they or their students would benefit from in-class support provided by a special educator” (p. 195). However, both the Pennsylvania and Queensland teachers indicated that less experienced teachers and those who taught the social sciences were less territorial and more open and receptive to negotiations compared to their more experienced colleagues. It was also noted, “Only where strong leadership was demonstrated by principals and vice principals on the value of collaborative support for students with disabilities was there
softening of these positions, especially among senior teachers” (p. 195). The participants also acknowledged that the lack of preparation and professional development in the area of collaboration and communication skills added to secondary teachers’ tendency to be hesitant of entering into co-teaching partnerships.

Rice and Zigmond (2000) concluded that implementing co-teaching at the secondary level is a, “complex, sensitive, and professionally demanding exercise” (p. 196). Many challenges come with professional collaboration. The authors found that collaborating effectively, involves, “…careful thought; detailed planning, a sympathetic work environment; and perseverance often in the face of open resistance, entrenched attitudes, and criticism” (p. 196). In addition, Rice and Zigmond anticipated finding differences in the characteristics and teachers’ experiences of co-teaching based on location, Queensland and Pennsylvania. Yet, no major differences emerged between the two sets. Rather, the similarities across the two data sets were prominent when it came to a, “…descriptions of roles and responsibilities generally assigned to special education teachers, obstacles to implementing co-teaching in secondary schools, and the tendency to externalize responsibility for making co-teaching work” (p. 196). The authors also found that regardless of the support and commitment of the administration, special educators found themselves in subordinate roles compared to their general education partner. Therefore, the authors noted that in this study there was not a single co-teaching team that utilized a co-teaching model that fully met the criteria set in this study: “…a shared teaching space with a diverse student group, shared responsibilities for planning and for instruction, and substantive teaching by both co-teaching partners” (p. 196).
Dieker (2001) examined the characteristics of effective co-teaching teams at the middle and high school level. The focus of her study was on the changing role of special education teachers in light of the increase in co-taught classroom environments. Cooperative teaching requires the special education teacher to instruct and provide special education services in nontraditional settings. Therefore, the purpose of Dieker’s study was to examine cooperative teaching teams that were perceived as effective in order to identify specific variables and characteristics that enhance the effectiveness and success of co-teaching environments. The goal of her study was to provide recommendations for implementing effective and successful co-teaching models that other secondary co-teaching teams could utilize. Her investigation focused on two questions related to co-teaching: (1) how are these teams structured?; and (2) what practices do they implement?

For the purpose of his study, Dieker (2001) selected participants who were nominated by three or more sources that identified the co-teaching teams as outstanding. The participants all taught in a Midwestern urban school district and were nominated by university professors, special education supervisors, administrators, and inclusion facilitators. In total, 15 co-teaching teams were identified, nine of the 15 teams were used in the study. The nine teams included nine general education teachers and seven special education teachers. Two of the special education teachers involved in the study co-taught with two or more general education teachers and were part of more than one co-teaching team. Seven of the teams co-taught at the middle school level and two of the teams co-taught at the high school level. A total of seven different schools participated in the study.
The average teaching experience of the general education teachers was 7.6 years, with a range of 3 to 12 years. The average teaching experience of the special education teachers was 7.4 years, with a range of 2 to 11 years. All teams had been teaching together between one and three years. The teams served students that were identified as: learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, mild-to-moderate cognitive disabilities, and autistic (Dieker, 2001).

Dieker (2001) employed a variety of qualitative research methods to address her research questions. A combination of observations, documentation, field notes and interviews were employed to collect data. The nine teams were observed four times over the course of a 16 week semester. Each team was observed on average once a month. The observations were videotaped-recorded when possible for more in-depth data collection. Both field notes taken during the observations and a review of the videotaped recordings were performed and themes for each team were identified using a content analysis procedure. Themes that were derived from the observations of each team were combined across the nine teams to determine characteristics and concerns. In order to collect data in regard to planning time, the nine teams documented the amount of time spent in planning for co-taught lessons during six predetermined weeks within the first 16 weeks of the school year. For each of the six weeks across the 16 week time period, each team recorded the amount of time they spent planning and as well as recording how much time they wished they had for planning. The teams were verbally reminded to submit their planning forms during the targeted weeks.
Dieker (2001) conducted interviews with both the co-teaching teachers and students in the co-taught classes. Students were interviewed to determine what instructional practices they perceived as successful and effective in the co-taught classroom environment. Each team of teachers guided the selection process. Each team identified two students within the class that were identified as having a disability, two students were identified as at risk of failing, and two students were considered academically strong. The students’ interviews followed a structured protocol to gain insights in regard to their thoughts about having two teachers in the classroom, the benefits of co-teaching environments for the teachers and students, and issues concerning achievement and learning. The teachers were also interviewed at the conclusion of the study. All but one general education teacher and one special education teacher participated in the interviews. The two that did not participate indicated they did not have time for the interviews. The interviews followed a structured protocol to gain insights into how the teachers developed a co-teaching relationship, the types of co-teaching practices used during instruction, the benefits and barriers to this process, methods used to overcome barriers, and the methods used to evaluate students and the co-teaching process. The interviews also were used to validate the researcher’s findings from the observation data.

Dieker (2001) used content analysis procedures to code the videotapes, the field notes, and interview data. Using this methodology, themes and categories of thoughts were identified, classified and verified to determine the reliability of the categories developed. An independent rater coded the data and his categories were compared with
the researcher’s categories. A point-by-point comparison was made of themes that emerged to determine if the categories that developed represented the overall themes of the data collected. A level of 80% or greater was the minimum for themes to be included in the final discussion of the data. The co-planning documentation was calculated and the average amount of planning time and the amount of planning time desired by the teachers was reported using simple descriptive statistics.

**Co-teaching models.** Dieker (2001) analyzed the videotaped classroom observations and field notes and found that co-teaching teams used a variety of co-teaching structures. These structures ranged from methods and practices identified in previous research: (1) Lead and Support (one teach, one assist); (2) Station Teaching; (3) Parallel teaching; (4) Alternative Teaching; and (5) Team Teaching. Dieker also found co-teaching structures that appeared to be unique to her study. Dieker reported five new co-teaching structures: (1) the Shared Support Model; (2) Alternating Support Model; (3) Equal support Model; (4) Cross Family Support Model; and (5) the Limited Support Model. The nine teams used a variety of the above methods and these methods varied according to each co-teaching team. Yet, Dieker reported that there were no notable differences in the effectiveness of one co-teaching structure compared to another. Four of the teams primarily used the one lead, one assist model. In these cases, all but one had the general education teacher leading the class with the special education teacher serving as the support teacher. In the one case where the special education teacher was the lead teacher, the role reversal was explained in that the special education teacher was the more experienced of the two teachers. Four of the co-teaching teams predominantly used the
team taught method for co-teaching and it appeared that both the general education and special education teachers using this model invested equal time in the development, presentation, delivery and evaluation of class lessons and activities. One team often used a variety of co-teaching models, such as: parallel teaching, alternative teaching, stations teaching and team teaching and would move in and out of these models based on the needs and behavioral challenges of the students.

The teams also employed co-teaching practices not recognized in previous literature. Two of the teams functioned by having the general education teacher move into the special education teachers’ classroom on designated days of the week to focus on interdisciplinary hands on activities. The reasons for this appeared to be that accommodations could be more easily made in special educators’ classrooms and that the special education teachers were in their classrooms if a student from another class needed their assistance. Dieker (2001) found that in this structure, “The special educator had the ability to immediately remedy the situation because she was co-teaching with a general education peer in her classroom” (p. 19). In addition, the follow-up interviews with teachers and students, “…indicated that they perceived this type of structure as an effective way to meet all students’ needs” (p. 19).

**Positive classroom climate.** Dieker (2001) found that creating a positive co-taught classroom atmosphere emerged as a major theme. Creating this environment was essential to the effectiveness and success of co-teaching. In all nine teams, the students were accepted and treated as full members of the class by both teachers and students. Dieker explained, “Perhaps the fact that all of the teams observed chose to co-teach leads
to a positive climate between the teachers, and that also may have affected how they embraced their students” (p. 19). In addition, Dieker identified three other factors affecting the development and climate of co-taught classrooms at the middle and high school level. The first were “…natural peer supports… all classrooms used either peer tutoring or cooperative learning” (p. 19). Second, the teachers’ actions, words and interactions with all of their students indicated that the teachers had high expectations for all students. Third, a continuum of special education services were available in seven of the nine classrooms. Dieker described that the continuum of services provided students with an alternative classroom location, a focused space in the classroom or a paraprofessional if needed. “Having a continuum of services delivery options available allowed the teachers to move students to a more restrictive environment when absolutely necessary to ensure that the learning climate remained positive…” (p. 19).

Positive perception of co-teaching. A theme that emerged from both the teacher and student interviews was in regard to how students and teachers perceived the co-taught environment. Dieker (2001) interviewed six students from each of the nine co-taught teams. A total of 54 students were interviewed: two from each class were identified as disabled; two were identified as at risk of failing; and two were identified as high achieving. All but one student reported benefiting from the co-taught classroom. The one student who indicated that he did not benefit was labeled as emotionally disturbed and explained, “‘you can’t get away with anything’” (p. 19). Forty-six of the students reported that they believed their teachers benefitted from the co-taught environment and eight reported that they did not know if their teachers were benefitting from the
environment. In addition, only ten students recognized that the second teacher in the classroom was a special educator with the remaining 44 students indicating that they did not know why there were two teachers in the room. Regardless of the students understanding of why there were two teachers in the classroom, 47 students indicated that having two teachers provided them with either more academic support or resulted with less problematic behavior. The teachers’ interviews reflected the same positive tone of the students. “The overall theme of the teacher interviews focused on the positive outcomes for their professional growth as well as the growth of the students in the classroom” (p. 19).

**High expectations.** Dieker (2001) also found that teachers maintained high expectations for all students in regard to academic achievement and appropriate classroom behavior. “In seven of the nine teams daily academic as well as behavioral goals were presented” (p. 19). It was noted that when these goals were not met by all students the expectations did not change, but the support provided by the special educator changed. In one of the follow-up interviews, a student commented, “We’re learning more. We’re learning more about science and about how these students [referring to students who were autistic who were included in the class] can function and be a part of society and they are just regular people” (p. 20).

**Planning.** Dieker (2001) recognized planning time as another theme. The observations, documentation and interviews indicated that nine teams had some form of structure in place for co-planning. Yet, simultaneously the teachers indicated that they did not have adequate planning time for the demands of the co-taught classroom.
environment. The average amount of time reported by the teachers for co-planning was 45.5 minutes per week with a range from 18.5 minutes to 87.5 minutes. The average amount of time teachers reported wanting and needing for planning per week was 128.5 minutes with a range of 90 to 217.5 minutes a week. Four of the nine teams had a common planning time, but these teams noted that many factors often interrupted this set time.

Essential components. Dieker (2001) found that these nine co-teaching teams shared characteristics that appeared to help bridge the gap between special education and general education teachers at the secondary level. In order to meet the needs of all students in the co-taught classes, Dieker found that secondary co-teaching teams designed their own co-teaching structures in addition to utilizing the co-teaching models identified in previous literature. In addition, Dieker found specific practices that indicated successful co-teaching: (1) creating a positive learning environment and positive perceptions in regard to co-teaching; (2) classroom environments that focused on the needs of active learning; (3) setting and maintaining high classroom expectations; (4) allocating time to purposefully co-plan; and (5) finding creative methods for assessing student work. As a result of these findings, Dieker recommended that co-teaching teams facilitate plans to ensure the above practices are integral components of co-taught classroom environments at the secondary level.

Recommendations. Overall, Dieker (2001) made several recommendations based on the above practices that co-teachers can utilize in order to develop successful and effective co-teaching partnerships. Dieker recommended that all co-teachers setup a
preplanning co-teaching session. Prior to actually co-teaching, Dieker recommended that both teachers should spend time identifying the roles and responsibilities each teacher will play in the classroom, curriculum expectations, going over and discussing students’ needs and each teachers’ philosophy in regard to meeting the needs of all students.

Secondly, in order to create a positive co-teaching climate, Dieker recommended preparing all students for the expectations of a co-taught classroom. For example, Dieker suggested that specific issues like classrooms rules, learning strategies, daily materials, test preparation, note taking as well as any additional daily issues that may be different than students past classroom experiences, be addressed in a specific and deliberate manner. Dieker also recommended that co-teachers discuss how students’ academic and behavioral needs will impact the classroom environment as well as the best methods for serving all students in the co-taught environment. In order to accomplish this, Dieker suggested that both teachers and students have a clear understanding of the curricula and instructional goals that all students are expected to achieve. In addition, Dieker recommended that co-teachers set up a secure planning time each day that focuses specifically on the lessons and activities of the class and the expectations for each class. Dieker also found that having a continuum of service options for identified students in the co-taught class allowed for a more positive classroom environment. Therefore, Dieker recommended that special education teachers and administrators work together to develop alternative placement for students when their behavior requires it. Lastly, Dieker recommended that co-teaching teams develop an ongoing evaluation plan of their co-
teaching so that teachers could constantly evaluate, reflect, discuss and improve their co-teaching practices.

Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study examined whether there was an ‘additive effect’ of the special education teacher on the instructional experiences of students with disabilities in co-taught classroom environments in comparison to the experiences of the same set of students taught by only the general education teacher under ordinary and routine conditions. Magiera and Zigmond define ordinary and routine conditions as “…limited teacher training and limited or no co-planning time for teachers” (p. 180). The authors’ research aimed to extend the existing literature base on cooperative teaching through comparing the instructional experiences of special education students in co-taught and solo-taught classes at the middle school level. They reason that student performance should increase because cooperative teaching reduces the student to teacher ratio and therefore, more intense and individualized instructional experiences are provided to students.

The participants in Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study were students and teachers from four Western New York middle schools located in three school districts. School district A was a rural district with one middle school. School district B was a small urban district with two middles schools participating in the study. Lastly, school district C was a suburb of school district B that had only one middle school. The class sizes across the four middle schools ranged from 18 to 27 students per class. The number of students with disabilities per class ranged from 5 to 15 students. Of the 35 students identified as having a disability, 18 of the students were granted permission by their
parents to participate in the study. Fifteen of the students were classified as having a learning disability (LD) and they were labeled as having other health impairments (OHI). The targeted students had been receiving special education services for an average of 5.4 years with a range of 1 to 11 years. The mean age of the targeted students was 14.4 years with a range of 12.1 to 15 years. Sixteen of the students were functioning below grade level in reading by two or more years. Seven of the targeted students were similarly below grade level in mathematics.

Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) teacher participants, were co-teaching pairs from each of the middle schools that participate in the study. Eight co-teaching pairs volunteered for the study. Out of the eight pairs, four were co-teaching for the first time and four had been co-teaching together for a maximum of two years. None of the teachers participating in this study had received co-teaching training in the last three years. Teachers from Districts B and C had received no training, but the teachers from District A had received some form of co-teacher training in past years. In addition, out of the eight co-teaching pairs only two had common planning time built into their work schedule. Six of the eight general education teachers had a minimum of five years teaching experience and two of the general education teachers were first year teachers. All six special education teachers had a minimum of five years teaching experience. One of the general education teachers was dually certified in both general and special education. A total of 11 classes were yielded from the eight co-teaching pairs. Each of the 11 classes were observed under two conditions: the special education teacher being
present in the classroom and the special education teacher being absent from the classroom.

Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) rationale for observing the co-taught classrooms based on the presence and absence of the special education teacher was to control for all other variables including: students’ ability, continuity of the lessons, and teachers’ instructional abilities under both the co-teaching and solo teaching conditions. Each of the 11 middle school classes were observed eight times, four of the observations took place during the instructional practice of co-teaching and four of the observations took place when only the general education teacher was instructing the classes. The observations took place for each class in a two to three week time span. Observations were only conducted during active instruction; no observations took place during testing. All of the participating co-teaching teams that participated had limited or no co-teaching training and limited or no scheduled co-planning time. The researchers tried to observe the solo taught classes when the special education teacher was already scheduled to be absent from class to attended to other professional responsibilities. Yet, in all cases this could not be achieved, so the special education teachers were asked to be absent from classes as needed. The researchers designed an observation protocol in order to collect in-depth information on the instructional experiences of students with disabilities under routine conditions in co-taught and solo-taught classes through measuring grouping patterns, on task behavior, and teacher-student interactions. Thirteen variables were selected for this study: (1) students working alone; (2) students working in small groups; (3) students working as part of a whole class; (4) students on-task behavior; (5) no
teacher interaction; (6) general education teacher interaction with students; (7) special education teacher interaction with students; (8) interaction with other students; (9) content related group instruction; (10) content related individual instruction; (11) group directions; (12) individual directions; and (13) student participation.

Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study required observers to be trained in the observation protocol. The protocol required that the three observers collect systematic time-sample data in 10-second intervals for each student with up to four observations under the co-taught condition and in the solo-taught condition during each 45 minute class period. Paired $t$-tests were used to contrast the solo and co-taught interactions, with significance set at the 0.01 level. The protocol was used to observe up to six students with disabilities in co-taught and solo-taught conditions. For each 10 second interval, five codes were entered at the end of the interval for each targeted student: (1) co-teaching or no co-teaching; (2) grouping size; (3) on/off task student behavior; (4) interaction with a general education teacher, special education teacher, other adult or student; and (5) nature of the interaction, instruction or management. Each targeted student was observed for 10 seconds every 3 minutes during the 45 minute class period. Observers practiced coding middle school classrooms until 80% reliability was achieved in two consecutive observations prior to collecting data for the study.

Magiera and Zigmond (2005), conducted a total of 84 observations across 11 classrooms. For 20% of all the observations, two observers coded student behaviors independently. Reliability was calculated for each observer by determining the percentage of agreement of the two observers code by code. The unit for analysis for this
study was the class because students with disabilities in general education settings learn as members of the class. Reliability was calculated separately for co-teaching, grouping, on-task behavior, interaction, and type of interaction codes as well for the entire observation protocol. Overall, Interrater reliability was 98%.

Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study was designed to determine whether the instructional experiences of students with disabilities in co-taught and solo-taught classes differed under routine conditions. The authors found that two of the thirteen variables were statistically significant. These two variables were based on one-to-one instructional interactions between targeted students and teachers. In co-taught classrooms, targeted students received more individual instruction in comparison to solo-taught classes where only a general education teacher was present. In co-taught classrooms students received more individual instructional interactions from the general education teacher when the special education teacher was not present.

**Instructional interactions.** Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study found that there were significant differences for one-to-one instructional interactions. Targeted students in co-taught classes received individual instructional interactions 2.2 percent of the time. In solo-taught environments when only the general education teacher was present, the targeted students received individual instruction less than one percent of the time. In more than half of the solo-taught classes, 6 of the 11 one-to-one instructional interactions were coded. The second significant difference found was in relation to general education teachers’ interactions with targeted students. In co-taught classes, the general education teachers interacted with the targeted students 45% of the time. Yet, in the solo-taught
classroom environment, the general education teacher interacted with the targeted students 62% of the time. This difference indicated that general education teachers had more interaction with students with disabilities when the special education teachers were absent from the class.

**Limited benefits.** Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study found that there were no significant differences for: total teacher (general and special education) interaction, students working alone, grouping of students, on-task behavior, students’ interaction with other students, whole class content instruction, directions provided to the whole class, directions provided to the individual student, or student participation.

The goal of Magiera and Zigmond’s (2005) study, was to examine routine practices of co-teachers in middle schools to determine if there was an instructional advantage for students with disabilities when a special education teacher and general education teacher instructed together. Four of the eight teams were co-teaching for the first time which provided an opportunity to observe co-teaching under common conditions found in school districts. Limited instructional benefits were found for students with disabilities in co-taught classes. Students with disabilities did receive more one-on-one instructional interaction in the co-taught setting. These interactions took place when the general educator was providing a whole class lecture and the special educator maneuvered throughout the classroom to provide and offer additional support to students with disabilities. In addition, the general education teachers interacted with students with disabilities less when the special educator was present, indicating that special education students did not receive more student/teacher attention when two teachers were present.
Weiss and Lloyd’s (2002) study examined the roles and instructional actions of secondary special educators in co-taught classroom environments and special education classroom environments, self-contained and the general education classroom. The researchers’ purpose was to compare the roles and instructional actions that special education teachers take on in the two different instructional environments. In order to examine these roles, the researchers aimed to answer two basic research questions: (a) what are the roles of special educators in co-taught classrooms at the secondary level?; and (b) how do the instructional actions of special educators differ in co-taught and special education self-contained classrooms?

The principles of symbolic interactionism were used to guide the authors’ study and form their methods of inquiry. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) explained that the principles of symbolic interactionism have three main premises. The first main premise is how people act toward things based on the meanings that things have for people. In this study, this meant the students, co-teachers, schedules, classrooms and content area. The second main premise is based on the meaning that comes from the social interaction that one has with others in the particular environment. The third premise is associated with how people interpret and make meaning of their environment based on things that one encounters. Based on the principles of interactionism the authors used qualitative methods: Interviews, observations and reviewed documents to gain insights into the teachers’ interpretation of the co-taught environment and the actions and meanings that the teachers brought to the co-teaching environment.
The participants in Weiss and Lloyd (2002) study consisted of six special education teachers, three taught at the high school level and three taught at the middle school level. All six participants taught in both a co-taught setting and a solo-taught special education setting. Five of the six co-teachers held master’s degrees in special education and all were experienced teachers. The participants all taught at a local education agency (LEA) located in the mid-Atlantic region. The LEA served approximately 1,500 students in grades P-12, 17% of which received special education services. The special education teachers all taught English, math and study skills. In the self-contained special education setting the teachers on average had seven students per class. In the co-taught environment there were on average 4 students identified as disabled and 17 nondisabled students. According to Weiss and Lloyd (2002), these participants were chosen because they all taught within in one LEA, meaning the teachers received the same administrative supports, the LEA received no university support in implementing co-teaching, all teachers who co-taught at the LEA could participate in the study and the LEA had implemented co-teaching as an instructional practice for the past three years. All teachers received training on the instructional practice of co-teaching.

Weiss and Lloyd (2002) used qualitative methods in the form of observations, interviews and document review. The data collection took place from October through February of the academic school year. All data were transcribed and entered in the text-based manager program FolioViews for analysis. Fifty-four observations took place among the six teachers. Each observation lasted on average, 30 minutes. Each special education teacher was observed in an English or math class in the co-taught environment.
and in the corresponding single taught special education environment. Two of the teachers did not teach a corresponding content in the co-taught environment; therefore, the researchers observed them in all of their co-taught classes. During each observation the actions of the special educator was recorded in narrative form. Interviews were also conducted with each participant. Each teacher was interviewed on three occasions. The first interview focused on gathering information in regard to the teachers’ teaching experiences in general, co-teaching experiences, and the classroom observations. The second interview focused on obtaining clarification about the actions of the special education teacher during the observations. The final interviews focused on verification of previous interview information and observation protocols and validation of the descriptions that had been developed. The goal of the interview questions was to gain an understanding of the teachers’ roles and the definition and meaning of co-teaching and special education. The researchers also interviewed the special education administrator as a means of better understanding the context in which these teachers worked. All interviews were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Lastly, the teachers kept a journal which they wrote in after each classroom observation. The journal entries included information and comments about the class and lesson materials. The journals served as a means of communication for the teachers and researchers.

In order to gain an understanding, and interpret the meanings, roles and actions of special educators in co-taught and single taught special education classrooms using the principles of symbolic interactionism. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) study used the grounded theory approach to analyze the data. Data analysis occurred as data were collected. The
researchers began with open coding by reading through observations, interviews and journal entries, line by line, highlighting information that indicated teacher and student action. The highlighted information served as preliminary concepts. Axial coding revealed causal conditions, contexts intervening conditions and consequences for each role of the special education teacher. The researchers applied selective coding to integrate all of the data by choosing a core category and linking each category developed during axial coding to the core category. The participants were asked to review a sample of the researchers’ interpretations of the observation data and interview data to ensure that it accurately represented their roles and actions in the classrooms.

Roles of special educators. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that all special education teachers spent some part of his or her day in both the general education co-taught classroom environment and in the single taught self-contained special education environment. Though all special educators identified themselves as being part of a co-teaching environment, this had different meanings based on each co-taught environment. “All teachers defined their participation in the classrooms as co-teaching even though their roles varied by classroom, not instructional need within a classroom” (p. 64). The roles and instructional actions that the special educators took on in the co-taught classroom varied by classroom, rather than the instructional need within each classroom.

Weiss and Lloyd’s (2002) study, found that a major role of the special educators in co-taught classrooms was that of providing support, which they labelled Role 1. All of the high school special teachers that were observed were co-teaching in classes where they did not participate in the actual instruction of the class. Two of the three participants
only participated in the class in a support role and never participated in an instructional role. One teacher explained:

‘What I do is just go in and help out with whatever they are doing and do stuff I can. You know, I help out…and make sure they are doing what they are supposed to be doing and [help] them when you can. Those teachers are the experts, you know. I ‘m working with math, but they are responsible the [state-mandated curriculum] and everything.’ (p. 64)

Within the co-taught classroom, special educators primarily served in the role of support in which they monitored student behavior and not in the role of being responsible for the instructional delivery or assessment of the students. The second role of the special educators was identified as teaching the same content to a select group of students in a separate classroom Role 2. In this second role, the special educator was responsible for instructional delivery, monitoring student behavior and assessment of student knowledge and understanding. The participants indicated that this role was necessary because the students with special needs required greater academic supports and modifications than was provided in the co-taught setting. One middle school teacher explained, “‘There were too many disruptive behaviors going on, and none of the students [was] benefiting from it. And the easiest fix I could come with was to split them, and we did.’” (p. 65). The third role of the special educators was to teach a different part of the content in the co-taught classroom. In this third role, the special educator did instruct a segment of the class content to the entire class of students through whole group instruction. Only two of the participating teachers took on this role in their co-taught classes. The fourth role
identified by the researchers was that of team teaching, Role 4. Only one special
education teacher participated in this form of co-teaching. This fourth role required the
special educator and the general educator to take turns providing instruction and
monitoring student behavior in the general education classroom. The special educator
explained, “‘My personal philosophy or viewpoint on collaborative [teaching] is two
teachers sitting down, planning the lessons together, deciding who is going to do what,
assisting in the classroom, grading papers, all that sort of stuff together…” (p. 65).

Co-teaching influences. Weiss and Lloyd’s (2002) study, indicated that the
special education teachers’ roles within co-taught classrooms were influenced by internal
and external pressures within the school community. External pressures originated at the
elementary school level where co-taught environments were already an established
instructional practice. “…community pressures to participate in co-teaching came from
parents who had students in co-taught classes at the elementary level and wanted those to
continue at the secondary level” (p. 65). In addition, the participants indicated high stake
testing and state-mandated diploma requirements as another pressure. One special
educator explained, “‘If we write an IEP that has a great deal of special education in it,
then they are not going to be eligible for a general education diploma. And I’ll give them
as much chance to get a general education diploma as possible’” (p. 65). As a result of
these pressures, the special education teachers reported that they felt they had to
participate in co-teaching environments.

According to Weiss and Lloyd’s (2002), the special education participants
identified four variables that affected their roles in the co-taught classroom: (1)
scheduling pressures; (2) content understanding; (3) acceptance by general educators; and (4) the skills of the special needs students. Scheduling requirements placed some of the participants in two co-taught classrooms during the same class period. As a result, the teachers would spend half the class period, 45 minutes in one classroom and then move to another classroom for the second 45 minutes of the 90 minute class period. Content knowledge was another variable that shaped the special educators participation. The understanding and lack of understanding of specific content areas dictated the role the special educators were able to take on in their co-taught environments. One teacher explained, “I don’t feel confident in some classes to be a team” and another noted, “Do you think I would have the audacity to go in the geometry class and say I was a collaborative teacher?” (p. 65). The researchers also found that the middle school special education teachers reported feeling more accepted by their general education counterparts, where the high school special education teachers indicated not feeling accepted by their general education partner. Lastly, the needs of the special education students themselves influenced the roles the special education teachers took on in the co-taught classroom environment. If students were at grade level then they only provide a small amount of support in the classroom: “[The students] are reading on grade level, and the main problem with them is they don’t pass” (p. 65). Yet, in other situations, the special education teachers felt that some of their students would be best served in the self-contained special education setting and did not belong in the co-taught environment. In these circumstances the special education teachers indicated providing more support
within the classroom. These four variables combined influenced the roles the special education teachers took on in the co-taught classroom.

**Instructional actions.** Weiss and Lloyd’s (2002) study indicated that special education teachers take on different instructional roles in co-taught classrooms versus self-contained classrooms. The researchers compared the instructional actions of: explaining, questioning, providing help to students, and providing feedback. These instructional actions were selected because they represented the majority of the teachers’ actions during observations. In regard to *explaining*, the researchers found that in both the co-taught and self-contained setting special educators who took on Roles 2-4: teaching the same content to a selection of students in a separate setting, teaching a segment of class content through whole class instruction, and team teaching special educators engaged in similar instructional actions in both classroom settings. These actions consisted of explaining: class activities, games, rules, new academic concepts, assessments, responding to student questions, review of class content and directions. Yet, in the co-taught environment when the special educators took on Role 1, providing support, *explaining* consisted of assisting students with one-on-one instruction at their desks and explaining assignments made by the general educator to all students. In the self-contained setting, explaining took on a much more in-depth role. The teachers were observed instructing students on what to look for within in their readings, answers to assignments, how to complete a task correctly, clarification of confusing concepts, what to read, assessing for understating, repeating concepts that were already presented, and answering questions about instruction.
In regard to *questioning*, Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that when special education teachers took on Roles 2-4, the teachers asked students to give answers to completed assignments, questioned students during instruction to check for understanding, and questioned student about a topic to begin instruction in both classroom settings. Special educators that took on Role 1 in the co-taught setting were observed checking for understanding and asking if the student needed help. In the self-contained setting, the teachers reviewed concepts that were not related to the content area, guided the class to give feedback to specific students, and questioned students about information that was just covered in class.

In regard to *providing help*, Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found few similar instances of providing help in both the self-contained and co-taught settings. In both settings, teachers helped students gather materials, corrected incorrect student responses, and gave answers to completed assignments. In Role 1, special educators helped students complete assignments. In Role 2, help consisted of reviewing answers to assignments that were already completed. In Role 4, help consisted of the special education teacher assisting in forming groups and turning in assignments. In the self-contained setting, the special education teachers were also observed providing help by: giving answers as students worked through assignments, sounding out words, reviewing directions, variety of options for student responses, reminders of due dates, indicating where students were in class readings, and providing words as they read aloud.

In regard to *feedback*, the only similarities Weiss and Lloyd (2002) reported across the co-taught and self-contained settings were that teachers gave feedback about
student responses to questions during instruction. In Role 1, the special education teacher provided feedback through reinforcing behavior, compliance and participation during instruction. During team teaching, Role 4, the special education teacher provided feedback about assignment completion and student responses during review. In the self-contained setting, special educators also provided feedback by correcting students as they read aloud, complimenting students for correct performances, and praise during presentations.

Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that the special education teachers implemented co-teaching through a variety of methods based on their definition of co-teaching and as a result of external and internal influences on the classroom. The special educators were recognized as taking on four different roles within the co-taught environment. In three of the roles, the special educators participated in some aspect of instruction. When providing support, the teachers did not participate in providing instruction. There were some similarities in terms of instructional action across the co-taught and self-contained settings; yet, in the self-contained settings the special education teachers’ instructional actions included more specific explanations, questions, help and feedback.

The authors concluded that co-teaching should not be viewed as a blanket remedy for all schools, teachers and students, especially at the secondary level. Prior to implementing co-teaching, administrators, general education teachers and special education teachers need to determine if co-teaching is a viable service delivery option in relation to meeting the specialized needs of all students in classes that have a large content base. In addition, the authors also expressed concern in how to accurately
measure student outcomes in co-taught classes and how to assess if students’ needs are actually being met. Lastly, the authors also indicated concern for overall job satisfaction of special education teachers. More specifically, the authors questioned feelings of job satisfaction for teachers with master’s degrees who were performing tasks more suited for teaching assistants and paraprofessionals. Therefore, the authors suggested additional specialized training for co-teaching at the secondary level as well as of providing alternatives to the co-taught classroom that may better meet the needs of some students.

**Team teaching.** Jang (2006) investigated the effects of team teaching on two eighth grade teachers in the field of mathematics in Taoyuan County, Taiwan. Team teaching serves as the origin to the co-teaching models that are currently being utilized in the field of special education (Friend & Reising, 1993). The conceptualization of team teaching provided a model that required educators to collaborate and divide teaching responsibilities (Friend et al., 2010). The specific research questions focused on student performance and teacher perceptions concerning team teaching. Jang was most interested in the students’ responses to his research questions and the mutual interactions of the teachers in the teamed taught classes. To investigate team teaching at the secondary level, Jang used a mixed-methods design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. Quantitative analyses were used to investigate the hypothesized relationship between team teaching and student performance. Qualitative data were comprised of documentary interpretation and qualitative analysis. The data were interpreted based on students’ scores, questionnaires, teachers’ self-reflection, videotaped recordings of teacher performances and the researcher’s interviews with the teachers.
The participants for Jang’s (2006) study consisted of two eighth grade mathematics teachers and four eighth grade math classes totaling 124 students. One of the teachers had one year teaching experience and the second teacher had a total of five years teaching experience. A quasi-experimental method was utilized by Jang. One of each of the teachers’ two classes were selected to be in the experimental group (E1, E2); and the two remaining classes were selected for the control group (C1, C2). The experimental group was taught using the instructional practice of team teaching and the control groups was taught using the traditional instructional practice of a single teacher instructing the class. Jang utilized a non-random sample as the students were assigned to their classes by the school according to a normal ‘S’ distribution. In order to ensure that the math grades of the experimental group were consistent with those students in the control group Jang performed a *t*-test of the two groups’ grades using the eight graders’ first midterm exam scores as the pre-test. The average scores of each of the four classes were E1 (70.68), E2 (70.34), C1 (70.10) and C2 (71.16). These scores did not indicate a significant difference (*t* = 0.25, *p* > 0.05). Jang further grouped the students into two groups: higher-achieving and lower-achieving based on their first mid-term exam scores using 70% as the cut-off score.

Jang (2006) incorporated a model of team teaching that reflected Cook and Friends’ (1995) cooperative teaching model of station teaching. Station teaching occurs when both teachers instruct in the same classroom at the same time dividing up the day’s lessons and the students. The students move from one station to the next after completing part of the lesson with one teacher. Yet, the researcher chose to adapt this model to better
fit the needs of teachers who agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, Jang regrouped
the students in E1 and E2 based on ability. The higher-achieving students from E1 and E2
were grouped into one class and the lower ability students from E1 and E2 were grouped
into a second class. In this model the two teachers worked together in the planning of the
course syllabus, class preparation and instruction, and after-class discussion and
reflection. The experiment lasted a total of 12 weeks. For the first three weeks of the
experiment, Mary the teacher that had one year of teaching experience taught the higher-
achieving group of students and Amy the teacher with five years teaching experience
taught the lower-achieving group of students. In the following three weeks, the teachers
switched the ability group they were teaching. During the second six weeks of the
experiment the students were returned to their original class placement and the ability of
the classes were mixed. The two teachers continued to team teach but now rotated
teaching each class daily. One day Mary would teach E1 and Amy would teach E2 and
the next day Mary would teach E2 and Amy would teach E1. Both teachers continued to
plan, design and reflect on their classes as team teachers. Throughout the 12 weeks data
were collected and analyzed.

Jang (2006) collected both quantitative and qualitative data for analysis. Jang used
the school’s midterm exam as his pre-test and the school’s final exam as the post-test.
Both the midterm and the final exam were designed by the school’s math teachers and
administered to all the eighth grade students. The math teachers felt confident that the
exams satisfactorily covered the content and teaching objectives required in eighth grade.
The teachers kept a journal recording their thoughts, concerns and reflections in regard to
their team teaching experience. On average the teachers wrote entries twice a week during the 12 weeks. Jang also used videotaped-recordings of the team teaching performances. The purpose was to capture the details of their interaction between the teachers and students. The researcher also administered questionnaires to the students to gain an understanding into the students’ experience in team taught classroom environment. The questions were designed to be open ended. An example of the questions asked are as follows: (1) Do you think team teaching was superior to traditional teaching in this semester? Why? Please give some reasons or examples. (2) Do you think team teaching would affect your performance in the final examination? Why? Please give some reasons or examples. And (3) how did you feel about team teachers being in charge of your classroom management? Lastly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both the team teachers at the end of the 12 weeks. Jang asked an array of questions including: (1) what did you expect from team teaching prior to implanting it?; and (2) what was the main problem you had when implementing team teaching?

Achievement. Jang (2006) used a $t$-test to analyze the quantifiable data gathered through the use of the pre and post-tests. The purpose was to ascertain if the team teaching had any impact on students’ final exam scores and to also determine if the difference in scores of the students in the teamed setting and traditional setting reached levels of significance. Jang found that the average final exam scores of students in the teamed setting were higher than those of the students in the traditional instructional setting. Both experimental groups E1 and E2 post-tests mean scores were higher than the pre-tests scores; yet the post-test means scores were lower than the pre-test mean scores.
for the control groups. Jang performed a *t*-test to compare the pre and post-test scores in order to determine if teaching methods were significant in regard to the scores of the experimental group and the control group. The *t*-test indicated significant differences (E1: $t = 3.87, p \leq 0.01$; E2: $t = 7.43, p \leq 0.01$). A *t*-test comparing pre-test and post-tests scores of the control groups indicated no significant differences (C1: $t = 0.576, p > 0.05$; C2: $t = 1.408, p > 0.05$). Jang also performed a *t*-test to determine if there was a significant difference between teaching methods and the post-test scores of the higher and lower achieving students. The findings indicated a significant difference (higher achieving: $t = 2.917, p \leq 0.01$; lower achieving: $t = 4.393, p \leq 0.01$). It was observed that team teaching had a positive impact on the final exam scores of the experimental groups.

**Students’ perceptions.** The student questionnaires indicated mixed results in regard to the students’ perceptions of team teaching. Jang (2006) found that more than half of the students from the experimental group considered team teaching favorable (E1: 55%, E2 52%). Students indicated that being taught by two math teachers allowed them to learn different ways of solving math problems providing the students with the opportunity to think about solving math from different perspectives. “‘They approached the materials from different angles, and taught us different ways to solve problems. I had a chance to think in multiple ways. That should help me in my final exam’” (p. 186). Yet, students also indicated that being taught by two different teachers could lead to confusion. “‘We were leaning inequalities for the first time, however, we were confused by the different approaches adopted by the teachers. We were not sure we understood the math concepts being taught’” (p. 186). In addition, more than half of the students also
indicated that they believed that team teaching was superior to traditional teaching methods (E1: 62%, E2: 65%). A student explained, “‘Mary’s teaching pace was slower than Amy’s. So the former teacher’s teaching was easier to understand than the latter’s’” (p. 187). Another student noted, “‘I was so interested in two teachers teaching together that I seldom dozed off like I did. Besides, I could learn two different methods of solving the same question’” (p. 187). The students also made comparisons between their two teachers. The videotaped-recordings revealed students catching the teachers making small mistakes. As Mary was instructing the class and asking the students to repeat the equation back to her the students brought to Mary’s attention that Amy taught the same equation in a different way. “‘Yes, you’re right. I’m sorry about that. You are great. You still remembered the differences between signs’” (p. 188).

**Teachers’ perceptions.** According to Jang (2006), the journal entries and interviews indicated that the teachers found team teaching to be challenging and difficult, as well as conducive to the learning environment of the students and themselves. Both teachers indicated that implementing team teaching was more difficult than they thought it would be. Mary explained, “‘The implementation of team teaching was not as easy as I had previously thought because we faced many problems that needed to be solved when implementing team teaching’” (p. 188). The author concluded that the difficulties surrounding the implementation of the team teaching were due to differences in the teachers’ personalities and style of instruction. In the interview, Mary described the challenges:
‘Well, we had different ways of instruction. I emphasized textbook concepts, so I spent a lot of time on explanation. Amy believed that apart from the concepts of the textbooks, problem-solving was important. She took time to do the exercises in the supplemental materials.’ (p. 189)

**Communication.** Jang (2006) also found that both teachers recognized the importance of constant and honest communication and the willingness and effort of being considerate of one another and the differences in their teaching styles and strategies. Amy noted in her journal, “‘I think that teachers have to reach agreement on teaching content, strategies, and so on. They need to make efforts to communicate with one another’” (p. 189). Mary’s journal indicated similar sentiments, “‘I would keep silent before we reached an agreement for certain things. One of us would always resolve the stalemate. It should be that both of us had the same desire to achieve team teaching’” (p. 189). Amy also noted that communication was difficult because team teaching lacked the support of the school’s administration. “‘…we usually met together to discuss the issues related to team teaching, when both of us didn’t have classes. Sometimes we had to meet at the weekends or even during our vacations’” (p. 190).

**Exchange.** Lastly, both teachers also indicated that they learned from one another’s difference in regard to classroom management and student behavior. Jang (2006) noted that team teaching highlighted the teachers’ different approaches to classroom management. The students identified Mary as the kinder teacher. According to one student’s questionnaire, “‘I felt that Mary was better than Amy. Mary was more
understanding and less demanding in her class management”’ (p. 190). Amy questioned her classroom management techniques as a result of working with Mary:

‘I doubt my definition of a good teacher… I am scared that the students are going to dislike me! I should demand discipline from students, shouldn’t I? And, didn’t I use to think I could achieve both of these two goals at the same time? Why am I like this now?’ (p. 190)

The instructional practice of team teaching resulted with both teachers reflecting on their abilities with instruction and classroom management.

Overall, Jang (2006) found that team teaching did impact the learning environment of the students and the instructional and classroom management techniques of the teachers. More than half the students reported preferring team teaching in comparison to the traditional method of teaching. Jang ascertained that team teaching indicated a statically significant difference in comparison to traditional teaching in terms of improving student performance on the final exam (post-test). The student questionnaire revealed that the reasoning for this may be that the students appreciated having the perspective and style of two teachers that taught the same math concepts in different ways. The students indicated that having the opportunity to think differently about the same concept helped to boost their final exam performance. In addition, Jang also found that the teachers were held more accountable as the students compared Mary and Amy’s methods of instruction and classroom management techniques against one another. This provided both teachers the opportunity to learn from one another and to widen their knowledge base of teaching strategies and classroom management
techniques. It also provided the teachers with greater access to classroom materials and activities. The teachers have accesses to each other’s professional resources. The teachers did reveal the challenges that come with team teaching and the importance of honest and open communication. Part of the challenge they reported was that team teaching would have been easier to implement if they had received the support of the administration. They did not have a set time to co-plan and therefore, Mary and Amy planned on their own time outside the hours of their work day.

Jang (2006) concluded that teachers should be open and willing to try new and alternative methods in teaching practices. Outdated methods that discourage collaboration prevent teachers from learning from one another and prevent students from being exposed to different instructional strategies that may help to improve the way in which students learn. It is the teachers that have to take an active role and embrace new methods of instruction to further new reforms in education.

**Summary**

These studies indicate that co-teaching as an instructional practice is both complex and multifaceted. There is no unified approach to co-teaching. Teachers chose co-teaching models based on their experience and comfort with co-teaching, the strengths of their professional partnership, and the needs of the students. In addition, the majority of teachers report a lack of preparation for instructing in the co-taught classroom. Therefore, teachers with co-teaching experience believe that it is imperative to have open, honest, and frank communication from the beginning of the co-teaching relationship. It is not enough for both teachers to have a shared belief in support of inclusive classrooms.
Co-teaching requires teachers to listen to one another and to embrace the opportunity to learn from the expertise each brings to the classroom. There needs to be a clear set of rules, expectations, and roles and responsibilities in order to co-teach successfully. Teachers need to enter into the partnership with a willingness to work in a professional manner that promotes a mutual respect for one another. Teachers indicate that above all else, the compatibility and relationship that is formed between teachers is imperative in developing a successful and effective co-teaching classroom. This relationship has the power to influence one’s attitude and perception in regard to co-teaching.

These studies also indicate that special educators in co-taught classrooms tend to take on the role of an assistant. This role in many cases is not intentional, but reflects the knowledge base for the subject area being taught. It would benefit co-taught classes if special educators were assigned to teach in a subject area that they are prepared for. In addition, teachers also indicate a vital need for a common planning time built into their work day. This also reflects the need for school wide support for co-teaching, including leadership from the administration to ensure that teachers are assigned to familiar subject areas and receive a common planning time that is built into the work day. Skillful co-teachers are able to utilize a variety of co-teaching models and are able to make adaptations to the models to meet the learning needs of their students. Co-teachers that do this maximize the effectiveness of the learning environment. Co-teaching at the secondary level presents teachers working in professional partnerships with many challenges and benefits. These studies indicate that challenges stem from such factors as: professional compatibility, collaboration, acceptance, school logistics, administrative
supports, and honest and frequent communication. Professional benefits come in the form of: increased learning opportunities, leaning from one another, increased access to a variety of leaning activities, methods and styles and increases in positive classroom environments for both teaches and students. In addition, research does indicate that in co-teaching environments it is common for special educators to take on a support role in the classroom rather than a full instructional partner. When special educators serve as an aid, rather than a teacher with a specific set of skills and long-term, the full potential of the cooperative teaching environment will not be attained. The goal of cooperative teaching is for both teachers to combine their knowledge in all aspects of the class. This includes: planning, instructing, creating lessons and activities and assessment of student work. It is the professional partnerships that embraces and promotes collaboration and cooperation that sets co-teaching environments apart from the traditional single taught classroom.

**Educators’ Beliefs, Perspectives, and Opinions about Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching, as an instructional practice, is an effective approach for providing support to students and teachers in inclusive settings (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2009; Rice & Zigmond, 1999). However, co-teaching requires teachers to drastically shift the approach they take to their professional classroom responsibilities. Co-teaching does not fit into the traditional methods of instruction that teachers have been prepared for, because with co-teaching there is not one classroom teacher. Therefore, teachers have to adjust their instructional practices to reflect the fact that they are no longer the sole instructor and leader of the classroom (Friend et al., 2010). As a result of this shift, teachers have to move away from
the viewpoint and perception that classrooms are autonomous learning environments in which one teacher serves as the sole instructor making all decisions in regard to academic planning, delivery of content and materials, behavior management, student expectations, student assessment and grading (Friend, 2008; Wood, 1998). Co-teaching requires teachers to share these and other classroom responsibilities. As a result, collaborative teaching can present many challenges and difficulties for teachers who were prepared to teach in autonomous environments.

Yet, research also indicates that teachers benefit professionally from their co-teaching partnerships (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997). In order to gain more in-depth insights into the practice of co-teaching, and how teachers with little preparation for co-teaching assignments negotiate their roles and responsibilities within the co-taught classroom, researchers have turned to the key players themselves, the collaborating teachers. Researchers recognize the importance of investigating teachers’ perceptions, beliefs and attitudes toward their co-teaching experiences and co-teaching partnerships as a means of gaining insights into the effectiveness and satisfaction of inclusive settings. The focus on the experience of co-teachers provides relevant insights into how teachers view, face, and deal with the challenges, difficulties and benefits of their co-teaching partnerships. These insights have the potential of informing and guiding inexperienced and experienced co-teachers with valuable methods and strategies for developing positive co-teaching partnerships and implementing effective classroom practices. These insights can also serve as a warning of the types of behaviors and approaches to avoid in a co-taught classroom setting.
Austin’s (2001) study aimed to investigate the essential elements needed for collaborative teachers to provide quality instruction to all students placed in cooperative teaching classrooms. In order to gain relevant information into the current practice of co-teaching, Austin focused on gaining insights about the practice of co-teaching from the perspective of the essential stakeholders, the collaborating teachers. In order to gain relevant insights from the perspective of practicing co-teachers, Austin focused primarily on the following three factors: (1) effective strategies that were valued and utilized by co-teachers; (2) teacher preparation for co-teaching; and (3) valued co-teaching supports.

Austin (2001) utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods to examine the dynamics between general education teachers’ perspectives and special education teachers’ perspectives concerning the value of co-teaching and its effect on the inclusion process. His study was designed to gain insights to the following questions: (1) how do teachers perceive their current experiences in the classroom?; (2) what teaching practices do collaborative educators find effective?; (3) what kind of teacher preparation do co-teachers recommend?; (4) according to collaborative practitioners, what school-based supports facilitate collaborative teaching?; (5) are students in inclusive classrooms being adequately prepared both academically and socially, and do they like learning in such an environment? How is this determined?; and (6) who does more in collaborative partnerships: the special educator or the general educator? What does this say about the model of collaboration used and the need for curricular changes in teacher preparation programs?
To gain information, Austin (2001) developed The Perception of Co-teaching Survey (PCTS). The survey consisted of two parts: Part I collected demographic information about the participating teachers and Part II collected information according to four specific categories: (1) Co-teacher Perception of Current Experience; (2) Recommended Collaborative Practices; (3) Teacher Preparation for Collaborative Teaching; and (4) School Based Supports that Facilitate Collaborative Teaching. The survey results were analyzed using SPSS 9.0 (SPSS 1999). The significance level was set at .05 and each survey item response was assigned a number ranging from 1 to 5. All unqualified responses were assigned a value of 0 so that it did not affect scoring. Analysis of Part I of the survey determined the frequency of responses from collaborative general education teachers and collaborative special education teachers across specific demographic data, such as novice teachers versus veteran teachers. Demographic data that produced nominal data were examined using cross-tabulations, and t-tests of paired samples were conducted on demographic categories that produced ordered or interval data. In order to determine the frequency of responses of the special education co-teachers and the general education co-teachers, cross-tabulations were conducted on the data from each survey item in Part II of the survey. Comparisons of responses of special education co-teachers and general education co-teachers for each survey item and between the ‘value’ and ‘employ’ categories were accomplished using a Wilcoxon’s matched-pairs signed-ranks test, as a means for accounting for the pairing of each co-teacher team.
In addition, 12 of Austin’s (2001) participants were chosen at random to participate in a semi-structured interview Austin titled, the Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching. The interview was designed so that the questions were categorized into specific sets and each set examined a particular issue of relevance to the collaborative teaching experience. The interview responses were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed. Interview responses were analyzed and coded to facilitate the identification of trends as a means of enhancing the interpretation of survey data.

The participants in Austin’s (2001) study consisted of 139 collaborative teachers from nine school districts in northern New Jersey in grades K-12. These districts were chosen because inclusion models had been previously established and the teachers had been co-teaching for at least one semester. Participants were obtained through contact with superintendents, directors of special services, and pupil personal. Of the 46 special education teachers that participated, 40 specialized in high-incidence disabilities, specifically learning disabilities, four indicated working with emotional and behavioral disorders, and two reported working with students with severe and multiple disabilities. The majority of both special education teachers (73.8%) and general education teachers (70.2%) instructed at the secondary level. The majority of both general education teachers (65.8%) and special education teachers (58.2%) held a master’s degree or higher. The general educators’ years of teaching experience was $M = 18.7$ and special educators’ years of teaching experience was $M = 15.5$, this represented a level of significance between general and special education teachers $p = .017$. The minority of both general educators (28%) and special educators (26.7%) volunteered for their co-
teaching assignments. All 139 participants completed the Perception of Co-Teaching Survey. Additionally, six general education teachers and six special education teachers were selected at random from the survey responses to participate in the follow-up semi-structured interview. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and all were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed.

**Survey Results**

Austin’s (2001) results from Part I of the survey (PCTS) indicated that most of the participants surveyed co-taught in the social sciences, the sciences, English and math at the secondary level. In addition, there was a significant correlation for the total years teaching between paired special education and general education co-teachers. The survey indicated that special education teachers co-taught more classes than their general education partners ($p = .001$). Lastly, only 37 of the 135 participants indicated that they had volunteered for their co-teaching assignment.

Austin’s (2001) results from Part II of the survey made comparisons between the perceptions of general education teachers and special education teachers. Therefore, only data from participants with an identified co-teaching partner were used, $N = 92$. Each survey item was analyzed using cross-tabulations to record the frequencies of responses for both general and special education co-teachers. The Wilcoxon’s matched-pairs singled ranks tests was used to compare the responses of matched participants, identified co-teaching teams.

**Current experiences.** Austin’s (2001) first survey category titled: Co-Teacher Perceptions of Current Experiences, indicated that a significant percentage ($p = .001$) of
general education and special education teachers believed that the general education teacher did the most work in co-taught classrooms. Overall, general and special educators reported that they benefited professionally from their co-teaching experiences. Participants indicated that they worked well together, inviting each other’s feedback and agreed that co-teaching was an experience that contributed to the improvement of their teaching practices.

**Collaborative practices.** Austin’s (2001) second survey category titled: Recommended Collaborative Practices, revealed that though the majority of participants reported that co-teachers should meet daily to co-plan, the participants that reported that they did meet daily to co-plan disagreed about its effectiveness. In addition, participants reported valuing shared classroom management and instructional duties, but in-practice participants indicated they did not share these responsibilities equitably. The majority of participants also indicated the importance of establishing and maintaining clear roles and responsibilities for general and special education teachers within the co-taught classroom, but again the majority of participant indicated that they did not do this in-practice.

**Preparation.** Austin’s (2001) third survey category titled: Teacher Preparation for Collaborative Teaching, indicated that all student teachers should be provided co-teaching experience through their teacher preparation programs. A significantly larger percentage of special educators (91.3%) indicated co-teaching placement to be very useful compared to (70.5%) of general education teachers. This difference between special and general educators was found to be statically significant ($p = .024$). A greater number of special educators (46.7%) than general educators (29.5%) identified preservice
courses in collaborative teaching as being very useful and the difference between special and general educators was also found to be statically significant \( p = .034 \). In addition, a larger number of special educators (65.2\%) than general educators (37.8\%) reported believing that general education teachers would benefit from courses in special education as a means of preparation for teaching in co-taught environments.

**School based support.** The findings from Austin’s (2001) fourth survey category titled: School-Based Supports That Facilitate Collaborative Teaching, indicated that both special and general educators value mutual planning time and administrative supports in facilitating effective co-teaching environments. The majority of both general educators and special educators rated these factors as being very important. Yet, teachers who were provided mutual co-planning time within their work day reported that they did not believe it was an essential factor for successful co-teaching.

**Semi-Structured Interview Results**

Austin (2001) grouped the questions in his interview titled, the Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching in specific sets, so that each set of questions examined a particular issue relevant to the co-teaching experience. The first question in each set of questions could be answered by the 12 participants with either a “yes” or “no” response. The following questions in each set were designed to elicit deeper information from the participant based on his or her response to the first question asked in each set of questions.

**Benefits.** According to Austin (2001), the semi-structured interviews indicated that participants found co-teaching to be a positive and worthwhile experience. Both
general and special educators reported that the co-teaching experience itself improved their teaching practices. “Special education co-teachers cited an increase in continent knowledge, and general education co-teachers noted the benefits to their skill in classroom management and curriculum adaptation” (p. 250). Yet, co-teachers also indicated that though they were satisfied with their co-teaching assignments, they were not satisfied in the amount of support being provided by the school’s administration. Both general and special education teachers believed that their co-taught classes were beneficial to all students. Benefits according to the perspective of the teachers were in regard to, “… a reduced student-teacher ratio, the benefit of another teacher’s expertise and viewpoint, the value of remedial strategies and review for all students…” (p. 251). In addition, the teachers also indicated that all students benefitted socially, “…inclusive education was socially beneficial for students with and without disabilities because it promoted a tolerance for differences and a general sense of acceptance, and it provided general education peer models for students with disabilities.” (p. 251). Co-teachers also reported that students were receptive to the co-teaching environment as supported by high levels of student participation, increased tolerance levels for differences, and increased levels of cooperation among both students and teachers.

Concerns. Austin (2001) found that teachers expressed concern in regard to student placement within the co-taught class. The major concern was about the inclusion of some students expressly for socialization regardless of evident lack of academic achievement. Participants also expressed concern into the classroom disruptions from
some students with disabilities and its impact on the academic performance of peers without disabilities.

**Conclusions.** Austin (2001) made several recommendations in an attempt to improve co-teaching practices. According to the survey data, teachers indicated many factors as valuable to the success of their co-teaching classes, yet teachers also indicated that they did not feel as if they had enough access to these factors. Therefore, Austin recommended that administrators need to be responsive to the needs of their teachers and ensure the necessary allocation of human and material resources to increase the opportunities for successful co-teaching. In addition, he suggested that administrators actively develop and promote within the school effective co-teaching models that are supported by research. Furthermore, he suggested that schools, school districts, and colleges and universities work together in order to develop effective in-service and professional development training programs. He suggested that professional development and in-service training reflect the factors teachers identified as important and positive to the effectiveness of their co-taught environments: (1) offering partners’ feedback; (2) sharing classroom management responsibilities; (3) mutual planning time; and (4) employing cooperative learning techniques.

Austin (2001) further recommended that state education departments need to review the curricula of teacher preparation programs to ensure their effectiveness. Based on the teachers’ responses he recommended that both general and special education teachers receive quality preparation in collaborative teaching. He also recommended that based on the finding that the majority of co-teachers had not volunteered for their co-
teaching assignments, yet many found their assignments worthwhile, further studies into volunteerism and co-teaching would be valuable.

Walter-Thomas (1997) examined the perceived benefits and persistent challenges of co-teaching from the perspective of teachers and administrators at both the elementary and middle school level. The study took place over a three-year time period in order to record changes and adaptations made to the co-teaching models teachers and schools were implementing. A total of 18 elementary schools, 7 middle schools, 119 teachers and 24 administrators participated in the study for at least one or more years of data collection.

A total of eight Virginia school districts participated in Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study. In order to study co-teaching from the perspective of educators, principals, assistant principals, and general and special education teachers were selected as participants. Walter-Thomas (1997) organized the participants into a total of 23 teams that each had approximately 5 members. Each team consisted of one principal or assistant principal who oversaw the school’s special education program, one or more general education teachers, and one or more special education teachers that co-taught together at least once a day. Of the 23 teams, 18 teams were based at elementary schools and seven teams were based at middle schools. Team members were selected based on the recommendations of district-level administrators. Administrators selected teachers based on co-teaching teams that were already recognized for their innovative approach to inclusive teaching practices. All potential teams were observed prior to the start of the study to ensure that inclusive service delivery programs were in place and that co-teaching was a key and daily component.
The participants in Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study consisted of 119 teachers and 24 administrators for a total of 143 participants. The majority of the teacher participants had 12 to 18 months of co-teaching experience prior to the start of the study. As a result of staffing changes, personal family events and co-teaching conflicts, a total of one-third of the participants changed over the course of the study. Each team did participate for at least one or more years of the study.

Walter-Thomas (1997) employed qualitative methods in the form of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and school-developed documents. These data sources were also supplemented with informal conversations with participants between site visits. Each co-taught classroom was observed at least once during each school year. The observations lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Trained graduate students served as the observers and collected and recorded classroom observation data. Most of the classroom observations were carried out in pairs so that the data collectors could compare notes and discuss their observations to better ensure accuracy and completeness of their reports. In addition, observers also questioned teachers about activities, actions, and classroom procedures following all observations to ensure accuracy. During the observations data collectors kept running notes in regard to co-teachers’ use of instructional practices and the use of recognized co-teaching models and procedures. Data were also gathered concerning the demographic make-up of the students: students’ disabilities, ethnicity, gender, and class size.

Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study utilized semi-structured interviews that had mostly open-ended questions. The interviews were conducted individually with participants
during the spring as a means of reviewing the school’s inclusive service delivery progress for that school year. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Co-teaching participants were asked questions pertaining to: the co-teaching process, co-planning, scheduling, staff development, sources of supports, and student performance. Whereas, administrators were asked questions pertaining to: their roles in facilitating inclusive delivery services, and providing co-teaching supports like scheduled co-planning times. The focus of the questions was to gather information concerning the benefits and challenges participants faced throughout the co-teaching experience. Again, trained graduate students facilitated the semi-structured interviews with participants. The interviewers audiotaped-recorded the interviews and took detailed notes during the interview sessions. To ensure accuracy interviewers reviewed participants’ comments and clarified statements at the close of the interview.

According to Walter-Thomas (1997), school documents that were district generated and relevant were requested for analysis if participants mentioned the documents during the interview process or if these items were employed during classroom observations. In addition, informal interactions took place between participants in the form of phone calls, school district meetings, or at conferences. No formal data were collected during these interactions. During the last year of the study, three schools were studied in greater depth because of recognized differences in administrative leadership and support, teacher support and school-wide commitment to the on-going development to inclusive education in special education.
Walter-Thomas (1997) reported that all data were coded, reviewed and analyzed by the researcher and a number of graduate assistants that participated in the study. Interviewers and observers coded their notes and transferred discrete data units onto color-coded index cards. Each card contained additional information about the participants, such as his or her role in the study, school location, and site visit dates. The researcher met regularly with interviewers and observers to review data and to sort and categorize cards. Categories were developed as participants’ responses to the semi-structured interview questions were systematically reviewed. As that database grew, topics and subheadings were merged to form new categories and others were subdivided further into more discrete units.

The findings addressed two areas of cooperative teaching: long-term benefits and persistent challenges and problems. Walter-Thomas (1997) found that there was a high level convergence and consistency among the benefits and problems that participants reported across schools and school districts. These findings are important as they can guide and inform teachers and administrators in how to change and approach their inclusive classroom practices and service models. Walter-Thomas also noted that over the 3 year time period participants had sufficient time to reflect on their co-teaching experiences. In addition, the time frame allowed participants to watch how unique elements of co-teaching unfolded over time and the impact they had on co-taught environments.

**Perceived Benefits**

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Walter-Thomas’ (1997) findings indicated that co-teaching classrooms resulted in academic and social benefits for both disabled and non-disabled students. The benefits for students appeared to grow stronger over time.

**Benefits for students with disabilities.** According to Walter-Thomas (1997), participants across sites reported four major benefits for students with disabilities: (1) positive feelings about themselves as capable learners; (2) enhanced academic performance; (3) improved social skills; and (4) stronger peer relationships.

Walter-Thomas (1997) found, that the majority of participants reported increases in disabled students confidence and self-esteem levels. A special educator described, “‘...have greater faith in their abilities to succeed in school and they are feeling better about who they are’” (p. 399). Participants also expressed that they believed students lost their special education labels in the co-taught classroom. In addition, teachers noted many changes in their disabled students, such as developing more positive attitudes toward school and themselves, less defensiveness, increased levels of motivation, paid closer attention to their school work and physical appearance, and an increase in attendance. One participant noted the attitude change within her student, “‘Brent’s attitude about himself has changed. He now believes that he can make it in the ‘real’ word!’” (p. 399).

According to Walter-Thomas (1997), the academic performance of students with disabilities also appeared to improve over time. During the three year study participants reported that only a very few students were not able to succeed in the co-taught environment. Teachers described students as “‘blossoming,’ ‘soaring,’ and ‘taking off’” (p. 399) in the co-taught environment. A special education teacher reflected on her
student, “‘He discovered that there were many things that he could do that he didn’t think he could do—and a lot of things that some of the other kids in this class couldn’t do’” (p. 399).

Walter-Thomas’ (1997) findings also indicated an increase in disabled students social skills and abilities. Teachers reported that disabled students displayed appropriate classroom behavior as a result of learning from their peers. Teacher also indicated that disabled students displayed appropriate behavior more in the co-taught classrooms than the special education classrooms. Participants believed this was a result of many factors: good role models, direct instruction, structured practice and also the desire to fit-in with their general education peers. One observer noted that the special education teacher would use students’ attendance and participation in the co-taught classroom as motivation for appropriate behavior in the special education classroom. “Over a period of several minutes, the teacher issued several warnings, including ‘Straighten up, Brian, or you won’t go to math today!’ I was surprised that this statement helped Brian and other students calm down” (p. 400).

Additionally, Walter-Thomas’ (1997) findings indicated that the co-taught classroom improved disabled students’ peer relationships. Participants reported that students with disabilities adjusted socially to the inclusive classroom. Participants indicated that disabled students made friendships, spent time with peers outside of school and interacted with peers during free time in class and at recess. In addition, participants reported that disabled students became more involved in extra-curricular activities like student council. The data indicated that from the perspective of the educators co-taught
classes provided many positive outcomes for students with disabilities. These outcomes were in regard to academics, perception of self and peer relationships.

**Benefits for non-disabled students.** Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study also indicated that co-taught classrooms provided many benefits for non-disabled students. The five major benefits identified in the co-taught classroom were: improved academic performance, increased attention from teachers, increased emphasis on cognitive and study skills, and increased social skills and improved classroom communities.

According to Walter-Thomas (1997), many participants expressed concern for general education students who were low-achieving, but did not qualify for special education services. Participants believed that their low-achieving students performed better in the co-taught classroom and benefitted from the lower student-to-teacher ratio and increased individual teacher attention. In the co-taught classroom, one teacher would be providing instruction as the other teacher would maneuver around the classroom to provide help to individual students and to make sure students were on task. Participants also recognized increased levels of academic performance for all students as there was a greater focus on study skills and study strategies as a result of special education teachers’ expertise. Findings also indicated improved social skills for non-disabled students. Participants reported various examples of improved social skills such as: decreases in student fighting, less verbal disagreements, better problem solving, increased acts of kindness, sharing, and increased levels of student cooperation. In addition, participants described their co-taught classrooms as ‘an inclusive community’ (p. 401). Participants believed that this was a result of classroom activities like, peer tutoring, friendship circles.
and cooperative learning techniques. The inclusive nature of the co-taught class indicated benefiting all students in regard to academics and social skill development.

**Benefits for teachers.** Findings indicated that both general and special education teachers believed they benefited from their co-teaching partnerships. Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study found benefits to include: increased professional satisfaction, professional growth, personal support, and increased collaboration. The participants consistently reported experiencing increased levels of professional satisfaction as a result of the success they were undergoing in the co-taught classroom. Participants reported that their students’ academic and social progress reassured them that their co-taught practices were improving over time. In addition, participants indicated that the close working conditions served as an excellent professional growth opportunity. Though many participants reported never working harder than they did to facilitate co-teaching, they also indicated it was worth it because of their knowledge gains. They believed that learning from one another allowed them to explore new ideas and to expand their professional repertoires. Participants also indicated it was very rewarding professionally to co-teach because they experienced moral and personal support. Many participants explained that another professional in the room provided teachers someone, “‘to share the good times and the bad times’” (p. 401). One teacher compared teaching alone to being a single parent, “‘You can do this alone, but it’s a lot more fun and more rewarding if someone else is there with you…someone who cares about the students the same way you do’” (p. 401). Participants also reported that their positive experiences with co-teaching led to increased collaboration within the school community in general. Participants indicated that as a
result of their co-teaching experience they were asked to share their professional skills and knowledge with other colleagues and some were asked to conduct professional development sessions. Participants indicated increased professional and personal benefits as a result of their co-teaching experiences.

**Problems and Challenges**

In Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study, participants reported experiencing many problems and challenges over the course of the three year study. The problems and challenges that were reported were persistent and grew more serious over time. In addition, there were more consensuses among participants about the difficulties they encountered with co-teaching in comparison to the reported benefits. “…most participants noted every one of the problem themes during one or more of the interviews” (p. 402). The most persistent problems that participants reported involved scheduled co-planning time, student scheduling, caseload concerns, administrative support and staff development opportunities.

**Scheduled co-planning.** In Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study, participants reported finding the time to co-plan together as a major challenge. Scheduled co-planning time that is built into teachers’ work schedules appeared to be a problem for many schools. Overall, teachers reported a range from 0 minutes to 360 minutes spent co-planning on a weekly basis. The majority of teachers indicated that they needed at least 1 hour per week to effectively co-plan for five class periods. Participants indicated more problems surrounding the issue of co-planning during year three in comparison to year one. Walter-Thomas (1997) explained that this may have been a result that by year three special
educators were working with multiple general education teachers and that general education teachers were co-teaching with school specialists, such as reading specialists and gifted educators.

In addition, planning appeared to be most challenging for elementary teams. According to Walter-Thomas (1997), elementary level co-planning challenges reflected the elementary school schedule where planning time was divided among 20 to 25 minutes time periods. Participants indicated this was not a long enough span of time to co-plan adequately. Principals explained that it was a major challenge to coordinate the same planning time for co-teachers because of the structure of the elementary school schedule. Middle school teams reported less challenges to co-teaching than their elementary peers. Again, the structure of the school schedule had a strong impact on providing teachers with scheduled co-planning time. The middle school schedules were designed to facilitate teamwork and collaboration. Middle school participants used one of the their two planning periods to meet with their co-teaching partner for at least 45 to 60 minutes one day a week. Therefore, scheduled co-planning time was not a major challenge at the middle school level.

In addition, Walter-Thomas (1997) found that participants reported that co-teachers’ planning schedules became more complicated as their co-teaching partners increased and or changed. Yet, participants also reported that co-planning with the same partner got easier over time. The participants contributed this to three factors: (1) overtime, co-teachers established their own planning routines that facilitated the co-teaching teams to work best together; (2) as special educators became more familiar with
course content and both teachers became more familiar with each other’s expectations, planning became more efficient; and (3) as co-teaching relationships began to develop teachers felt more comfortable working together and had less anxiety over offending one another. Co-teaching teams that were not able to form positive co-teaching relationships overwhelmingly cited difference in teaching philosophies.

**Student scheduling.** Many teams reported challenges with the scheduling of disabled students into mainstream classrooms. According to Walter-Thomas’ (1997), participants reported that the role of the principal was especially critical to ensure that heterogeneity was maintained in classrooms and that adequate support was provided for both students and teachers. Participants noted that too many disabled students in one classroom could undermine the effectiveness of the co-taught classroom. To ensure effective scheduling, staff members could not rely solely on the use of computer programs to create students’ schedules at random. Therefore, these schedules had to be done by hand with the input of multiple school personnel, “Because this was a labor intensive process, it often met with resistance from staff member who were traditionally responsible for scheduling decisions” (p. 403). Participants indicated that the role of the principal was highly influential on developing ideal scheduling procedures. This importance was exemplified by two middle schools participating in the study. In one middle school, the principal recognized the importance of purposeful scheduling to provide teachers and students optimal support and therefore, overrode the computer in order to create student schedules. Participants at this middle school reported few scheduling problems. Yet, a second middle school did not have the support of the
principal in purposefully scheduling students. He claimed that it was not possible to override the computer system and it was the responsibility of the staff to adjust to the outcomes. Participants at this school indicated having continual scheduling problems for both teachers and students.

Furthermore, Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study found that participants also reported negative co-teaching experiences that were the result of poor student scheduling. Participants indicated that poorly planned classrooms that resulted in a large number of disabled students compared to non-disabled students set co-teachers and students up for failure. These negative experiences, participants explained only reinforced negative perceptions about inclusion and resulted in teachers being resistant to embracing inclusive practices. “…it does not take long before the word gets out about these bad situations and quickly gives inclusive classrooms a bad name” (p. 403).

**Special educators’ caseloads.** Participants recognized special education teachers’ caseload as another challenge, especially in determining co-teaching schedules and co-planning time. According to Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study, the size of special educators’ caseloads was recognized as a significant problem. Participants consistently reported that more specialists were needed in their schools to ensure that students and teachers were receiving necessary supports. Participants reported that many special education teachers’ caseload were so large that they interfered with co-teaching teams ability to co-plan and as a result co-instruct. Participants from several schools that indicated they were very satisfied with cooperative teaching assignments and that as a result of effective co-
teaching there were fewer student referrals, lost specialist as their caseload numbers declined. A teacher explained, “‘I’m afraid our success is going to kill us’” (p. 404).

**Administrative support.** Administrative support was recognized by the participants as a major factor in the development, sustainability and progress of inclusive service options. According to Walter-Thomas’ (1997) study, participants reported that principals took on various roles in establishing the credibility of inclusive instructional environments. The participants described the principals as “‘advocate,’ ‘promoter,’ ‘advisor,’ ‘team leader,’ and ‘official spokesperson’” (p.404). A teacher explained, “‘Her enthusiasm and commitment kept us all going. Over and over again she kept telling us ‘we can make this happen!’ Her strong belief in inclusion and her obvious support for us kept us going’” (p.404). Walter-Thomas (1997) found that participants from schools where the principals were actively involved and supportive in the development of cooperative teaching practices reported that their inclusive classrooms improved and became better over time.

**Professional development.** The participants indicated at each interview session that they were provided with few school based or district based professional development opportunities that focused on the practice of co-teaching or inclusive education. Walter-Thomas (1997) described the majority of participants as veteran teachers and based on observation data most co-teaching teams did understand the practice of co-teaching and were performing it correctly. Participants expressed the need for additional professional development in the area of inclusive instructional practices. Participants also reported that
because of their experience with co-teaching they had become known as the experts solely based on their experience:

In our district we are the experts. At our school we laugh about it. People are calling us...for advice on what they should do—and most of the time, we don’t know. We really don’t know what’s the ‘right way’ to include kids. We still have a lot of questions: How many kids with disabilities per classroom? How much time teachers should co-teach every day? How many teachers can one special ed teacher really co teach with? We don’t know. Most of the time we just do what we think sounds reasonable and it feels right we keep at it; if it doesn’t, we change it. (p. 405)

The teacher participants reported needing more opportunities to improve their co-teaching skills and repertoire especially in the areas of: scheduling students, co planning, co-instructing, writing IEPs for mainstreamed classrooms, and communication and collaboration to facilitate successful team work.

Walter-Thomas (1997) concluded, that overall, participants from all schools involved in the study reported similar benefits based on their co-teaching experiences. Participants also acknowledged that their co-teaching practices improved and became more manageable over the course of the 3 year study. Many indicated that working with the same co-teacher alleviated early obstacles in the co-planning and collaboration process. In addition, almost all participants recognized and discussed the same problems and challenges that persisted throughout the duration of the study. The difference among schools and participants that were able to overcome and address these challenges and
report higher levels of satisfaction in their co-taught classrooms were those that had the support and encouragement of their administration. “…these schools and school systems seemed to provide their teachers with more moral support, recognition, and, sometimes, resources to help them in their program development efforts” (p.405). The author also noted that it was those teachers that were committed to inclusive education that worked through the challenges and problems to develop solutions that reported being more satisfied with the success of their co-taught classrooms. As one principal explained, “…survivors who just keep going because they have the kids’ best interest at heart. They are people who have huge expectations—for their students and for themselves” (p.406). Though the study indicated a strong need for increased professional development opportunities in the area of inclusive education for improving inclusive education practices and strategies, the success of cooperative teaching teams in this study came as a result of the commitment of the school community as a whole.

Fennick and Liddy (2001) investigated teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching with a specific focus on how co-teachers perceive their reciprocal instructional responsibilities, preparation for co-teaching and the efficacy of co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice. To gain insights into these issues from the perspective of teachers the authors used quantitative research methods in the form of survey methodology.

A total of 20 school districts located in the Midwest that were identified as using co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice were invited to participate in, Fennick and Liddy’s (2001) study. Out of the 20 districts, 17 agreed to participate, the three largest districts declined. The schools were located in urban, suburban and rural
environments. The populations of the schools differed as well: eight districts had 100 to 999 students, three districts had 1000-2999 students, five districts had 3000-6999 and one district had more than 7000 students. A total of 302 questionnaires were mailed to general education teachers, special education teachers and speech pathologists. These individuals were identified by the directors of special education as participating in collaborative teaching teams. Of the 302 questionnaires, 186 were returned and a total of 168 were usable. The 168 participants consisted of: 95 general education teachers and 73 special education teachers. More than half the special education teachers \( (n = 39) \) taught at the secondary level and more than half of the general education teachers \( (n = 59) \) taught at the elementary level. Seventy-five percent of co-teachers reported that they co-taught with one or two other teachers on a daily basis. The most frequently identified subject areas for co-teaching were: math, reading and English/language arts. The participants’ level of teaching experience ranged from one to 36 years, half had more than 13 years’ experience and of the participants 98 had at least a master’s degree \( (n = 31) \) or a master’s degree plus additional credits \( (n = 67) \).

**Survey Questionnaire**

Fennick and Liddy (2001) created a 51 item survey questionnaire was created to measure how special education and general education co-teachers differed in their perceptions of: (1) responsibilities and opinions of co-teaching; and (2) the extent and usefulness of preparation for co-teaching. The authors’ defined co-teaching on the questionnaire as, “…general and special education teachers working together in a general education class. The teamed teachers plan together regularly and teach the class tougher
on a daily basis to incorporate inclusive practices” (p. 232). The survey was divided into three sections: (1) perceptions of teachers’ responsibilities; (2) preparation for collaborative teaching; and (3) opinions of collaborative teaching.

Perceptions of teachers’ responsibilities. This section of Fennick and Liddy’s (2001) survey specifically addressed 29 teacher responsibilities. The survey was structured to reflect common groups of teaching tasks. The tasks were grouped into four subscales: planning practices (8 items), instructional practices (10 items), evaluation practices (4 items) and behavior management practices (7 items). Examples of survey items included: suggesting goals and objectives for students’ IEPs, adapt lesson and materials for special education students, review concepts with the class, and lead class discussions. In this section of the survey, participants were asked to indicate whether specific tasks were mostly the responsibility of the special education teacher or the general education teacher based on their co-teaching team. Each item in the survey was rated based on a 5-point Likert scale. A 1 indicated the task was fully “special education responsibility,” a 2 indicated “mostly special education responsibility,” a 3 indicated “joint responsibility of special education and general education,” a 4 indicated mostly general ”education responsibility,” and a 5 indicated the task was fully “general education responsibility.” Reliability measures were calculated on each subscale using Cronbach’s (planning = .91, instruction = .91, behavior management = .70, evaluation = .68, all p’s < .05).

In this section of the survey, item means were calculated for each task separately for the group of 95 general educators and for the 73 special educators participating in the
study. These items are bipolar; therefore, their means represent the degree to which items were perceived as the responsibilities of special education co-teachers or general education co-teachers. The item means for both groups were correlated \( r = .70, p = .001 \). Accordingly to Fennick and Liddy (2001), this indicated that the co-teachers rated the responsibilities of the special education and general education teachers similarly. Among the highest special education teachers’ responsibilities, six of the eight tasks indicated working with special education students directly reflecting the traditional responsibilities of special education resource rooms.

In regard to the teacher responsibility subscales for class instruction and behavior management, Fennick and Liddy (2001) found that both general education and special education teachers identified themselves as doing more and being more responsible for classroom instruction and behavior management than one another. The results for class instruction differed significantly between special education teachers (\( M = 27.81, \text{SD} = 8.64 \)) and general education teachers (\( M = 30.16, \text{SD} = 5.01 \)), \( t = -2.21, p = .028 \). The results of the classroom management subscale for special education teachers’ perceptions was (\( M = 20.12, \text{SD} = 2.57 \)) and for general education teachers’ perceptions was (\( M = 21.78, \text{SD} = 3.62 \)), \( t = -3.32, p = .001 \).

**Preparation for collaborative teaching.** Fennick and Liddy (2001) explained, that the survey section measuring for preparation for collaborative teaching consisted of a series of independent items, each representing a type of teacher preparation, from preservice education, graduate level education, and professional development activities. Participants were directed to examine the list of preparations on the survey and to rate the
usefulness of each one they had experienced on a 4-point Likert scale. A score of 1 indicated “very useful” and a score of 4 indicated “not useful.”

According to Fennick and Liddy (2001), the results from the teacher preparation section of the survey indicated the special education teachers had more co-teaching preparation than their general education peers. Sixty-three percent of special education teachers reported having exposure to co-teaching during their student teaching, compared to 19% of general education teachers. In addition, both special and general education teachers reported experiencing district level preparation and professional development opportunities as a means of preparation for co-teaching more than other formal forms of preparation. Seventy-one percent of special education teachers and 57% of general education teachers reported attending school district in-services and 74% of special education teachers and 58% of general education teachers reported attending professional workshops for co-teaching preparation. The forms of preparation rated the most useful by teachers were: (1) release time to prepare; (2) mentoring by a collaborative teacher; and (3) student teaching in a collaborative class. Yet, these were not experienced by the majority of participants. Only 54% of teachers had release time to prepare for co-teaching; 42% worked with a mentor co-teacher; and 20% had co-teaching experience as a student teacher.

Included in the preparation for collaborative teaching survey were questions pertaining to the amount of mutual planning time co-teachers experienced within their workday. Fennick and Liddy (2001) used a combination of two items to solicit information about co-planning. The first question asked if the teachers had scheduled
planning time to meet with their co-teacher during the school day. If the respondents indicated that they did, they were then directed to fill in how many hours a week they spent planning with their co-teaching partner. Results found that only 48% of co-teachers had a mutual planning time on a daily basis during school hours. Twenty-two percent of participants reported that they had one or more hours of scheduled co-planning time built into their work schedule. Fifty-three percent of special education teachers reported that they had co-planning time during the school day and 51% of general education teachers reported that they had co-planning time during the school day. Sixty percent of elementary teachers indicated having scheduled co-planning whereas only 40% of secondary co-teachers reported having common planning time.

Opinions of collaborative teaching. The section of the survey on teachers’ opinions of collaborative teaching had participants rating 8 selected opinion items on a 5-point Likert scale with a 1 indicating, “strongly agree” and a 5 indicating, “strongly disagree.” Fennick and Liddy (2001) explained that the items were clustered into a cohesive opinion scale as indicated by Cronbach = .92 ($p < .037$). The opinion scale items were: (1) co-teaching is a good use of time; (2) co-teaching positively affect student progress; (3) I enjoy my co-teaching; (4) co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience; (5) mutual planning time is essential for co-teachers to coordinate efforts it the collaborative class; (6) collaborative teaching is a more efficient use of education time than self-contained special education classes; (7) my teaching has improved with collaborative teaching; and (8) special education teachers should be a resource to all students in a collaborative class.
According to Fennick and Liddy (2001), the survey results indicated that overall, the teachers reported very positive opinions toward their co-teaching environments; special education teachers indicated higher levels of satisfaction ($M = 10.79$, $SD = 4.62$) than the general education teachers ($M = 12.76$, $SD = 6.87$), $t(166) = -2.10$, $p = .037$. Both general education and special education co-teachers rated the times on the survey very highly. Ninety percent of the teacher participants provided a score of “strongly agree” to the category of scheduled co-planning time as being perceived as essential to the success of co-taught classes.

Fennick and Liddy (2001) concluded that there needs to be major changes made in how teacher preparation programs and school districts prepare and support teachers for co-teaching assignments. They also recommended changes in how teachers implement co-teaching. The participants in the study generally agreed about their respective responsibilities within the co-taught classroom, but these responsibilities reflect the teachers’ perceptions that general and special education teachers perform the same responsibilities as if they were teaching in a traditional non-inclusive setting. Co-teaching classrooms should reflect the inclusive practices into the general education environment through joint planning and instruction by both teachers. The authors recommended that co-teachers utilize each other’s areas of expertise as a means for instructing and preparing for class. The results of the survey indicated that in order to do this, co-teachers need to have more opportunities for inclusive preparation, possibly in the form of observing and modeling effective co-teaching examples. In addition, teachers also need time to co-plan so that they are better able to co-instruct to meet the expectations of the co-taught
classroom. Fennick and Liddy warned that if necessary changes are not made in the preparation and support of co-teachers, then co-taught environments may not reach appropriate levels of inclusion.

Wood’s (1998) study investigated teachers’ feelings of obligation, responsibility and commitment toward disabled students placed in mainstream classrooms; as well as teachers’ perceptions of factors that prevented and facilitated professional collaboration in the form of co-teaching. The goal of Wood’s study was to gain in-depth insights into the development of co-teachers roles and responsibilities from the perspective of practicing co-teachers.

Wood (1998) utilized qualitative research methods in the form of semi-structured interviews. Three interviews were conducted with the participating co-teachers over the course of one academic school year. Each co-teaching team participated in a total of three semi-structured interviews. The goal of the interviews was to gather information concerning teachers’ perceptions about collaboration, communication and team-building. The first two interviews took place within the first two months of the school year during the fall semester. These two interviews were scheduled approximately one week apart. The third interview was held four months later during the second semester of the school year. The intention of the third and final interview was to clarify the findings of the researcher from the first two interviews and to expand on findings from the first two interviews. The interviews were held individually with each participant and lasted approximately 60 minutes. The interviews were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Information collected after the audio recorders were turned off were
documented by the researcher through written field notes and incorporated with the transcribed recordings. The data gathered from the interviews included only the personal experiences and opinions of the participating co-teachers; no classroom observations took place. Interview data were collected over time and analyzed by the researcher. The transcriptions and field notes were analyzed and organized until regularities and patterns emerged. Once this process occurred the data were converted into systematic categories of analysis. The participants unanimously found the results as accurately representing their reported issues and concerns.

The participants in Wood’s (1998) study, consisted of three elementary co-teaching teams from a costal California school district. The three general education teachers and three special education teachers were all described as veteran teachers and were recommended by the Director of Special Education and Student Services Itinerant Support Specialists. The teachers were selected based on the three main characteristics: (1) taught in the early to mid-elementary grade level; (2) teach students with moderate to severe disabilities in the mainstream classroom; and (3) the teachers were not experiencing any significant transitional service delivery complications.

**Interview Results**

Overall, the data indicated similar findings among the three participating co-taught teams. According to Wood’s (1998) the participants reported similar findings in regard to role and responsibilities, collaboration and team decision making processes in the beginning phases of inclusion. Results also indicated that as the school year progressed, the roles and responsibilities of the co-teams became less rigid and more
cooperative. The participants further indicated that toward the end of the school year, role distinctions began to diminish as cooperation among teams developed.

**Instructional roles of teachers.** Participants’ perceptions of the role and responsibilities of special education and general education teachers reflected the traditional roles and responsibilities each teacher performs in traditional non-inclusive classrooms environments. Wood’s (1998) found, that special education teachers in co-taught classrooms were responsible for the development and implantation of individualized academic and behavior programs. According to all participants, special education teachers were responsible for: (1) providing individualized math, reading and language arts instruction for students as needed; (2) modeling effective classroom instruction techniques for general education teachers; (3) developing behavioral plans; and (4) overseeing the responsibilities of any paraprofessionals who worked with students.

In addition, Wood’s (1998) reported that special educators were identified as being accountable for the development and implementation of students’ IEPs in the mainstream classrooms. A special education teacher explained, “…I don’t think of [the general education teacher] as part of that [core educational team]. I think because of the responsibility level—that he’s not officially responsible for any in [the child’s] program…” (p. 187). Another special education teacher echoed, “‘I wanted to make sure that [general education teachers] really knew that they were not responsible for IEP objectives per se, or monitoring the progress of those goals and objectives.’” (p. 188). Subsequently, general education teachers were relieved of any IEP duties. A general
education teacher expressed feelings of relief in regard to IEP duties. “I feel that [the special educators] have the main responsibility regarding [the child] because of their expertise in that area. I’m a classroom teacher…and I’m still learning about the area…I’m leaving those kind of [programmatic] decisions to them” (p. 187).

Conversely, a general education teacher expressed feelings of hesitation, “I would like a little more… guidance… are there things I’m doing?— not doing? But I really get the sense that may be partly because [the special education teacher is] afraid of offending, too…not wanted to step in” (p. 187). Yet, one of the general education participants, in speaking about a specific student shared, “In fact, I don’t think I’ve seen her, her EIP…I don’t even know what’s on it” (p. 188).

Wood’s (1998) also found that participants indicated that it was the professional responsibility and obligation of special educators to relieve general education teachers from duties and tasks specific to the needs of disabled students in the mainstream classroom. General education teachers in the study all expressed that they were not willing to fulfill the paperwork, team decision making and requirements of disabled students’ IEPs. They did not view these responsibilities as part of their professional responsibilities in the inclusion classroom. A general education teacher shared:

‘I think that [the special education teacher] is at a disadvantage…because she has all of these legal responsibilities that I don’t have. I may have, but I’m not aware of them. Or if I am aware of them, I’m too stubborn to put up with them.’ (p. 188)

These perceptions validated the role of the special education teacher as those that document the progress and goals of disabled students and as supervisors of disabled
students’ IEP requirements. Special education teachers in these co-taught classrooms performed their conventional roles as special educators. General educators indicated that these aspects of the co-taught class were not part of their professional responsibilities. The findings indicated that the distinction between teachers’ roles and responsibilities reflected the teachers’ specialized areas of expertise that resulted in relieving the general education teachers of duties specifically related to disabled students and the requirements in their IEPs.

**Collaboration.** The findings indicated that collaboration and cooperation among co-teachers developed and strengthened over time. According to Woods (1998), during the initial two interviews, the participants reported that the expectations and responsibility of general education teachers toward the disabled students in the classroom was in regard to social goals rather than academic goals. Participants indicated that the general education teachers were responsible for presenting the general education curriculum. Curriculum adaptations were not perceived as the general education teachers’ responsibility. A special education teacher described the role of her co-teacher:

‘[The general education teacher] does what she does with the whole class and we’re either adapting it or [the child is] doing it the same…But [she] does less of the worrying about whether it is [adapted] or not…I worry about …if it is.’

(p.190)

However, the final interview indicated that over time, general education teachers were expected to fulfill academic tasks related to disabled students’ needs. A special education teacher explained, “I think they should teach the content and participate in what it is that
we together come up with for adaptations…”” (p. 190). A general education teacher further reflected this idea, “I’m not comfortable having anybody pull the kids out during academic time…I think that I should probably have a real big say as to what’s going on even though I’m not the special education teacher”” (p.190). As special education students and teachers adapted socially and academically to the inclusive classroom, the distinct roles and responsibilities of the general education and special education teachers blurred and role ambiguity increased.

The participants also indicated that challenges were associated with collaboration and the ability to embrace other’s ideas and strategies. Wood’s (1998) findings indicated that general education teachers were more easily able to accept students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom in comparison to accepting another professional into the classroom. A general education teacher described how he dealt with an idea from his special education co-teacher, “[The special education teacher] tried to tell me how she wanted the discipline to run. But, I never did it because that’s not the way the discipline in the class runs”” (p.191). Another general education teacher shared her feelings of frustration toward her partner, “It seems like one week we get a lot of input from [the special education teacher] and the next week she’s not really around at all…It’s just this constant feeling of fragmentation”” (p.191). Participants also expressed feelings of competition and territorial toward the instruction of the class and the students within the class. A general education teacher explained:

“The problem isn’t with the kids, the problem is with us…Our problem is the fact that we’re both feeling responsible and proud of what’s going on, and we
probably both want to take the credit for it. And we both want to do something to help it. But the direction we want to help in doesn’t always go in the same direction.’ (p. 192)

Over the course of the co-teaching experience the co-teacher became more involved and committed to the inclusion class, but expressed difficulties in working together to collaborate as professional partners.

Wood’s (1998) concluded that collaboration, cooperation and team work do not necessarily come naturally to teachers. Teachers need to possess specific skills such as trust-building, group communication, problem-solving and conflict resolution in order to co-teach effectively. Without these skills teachers are left to negotiate their roles and responsibilities without knowing how to combine them in the inclusive classroom environment. As a result, early on in the co-teachers’ partnerships the general education and special education teacher performed their traditional roles based on their expertise as if they were in a non-inclusive setting. Yet, as the school year progressed, data indicated that the discrete role boundaries became less rigid and co-teachers became more willing and comfortable taking on the roles and responsibilities that come with teaching in an inclusive environment. However, the teachers also indicated that collaboration, cooperation and the sharing of ideas and suggestions did not become easier over time even though role ambiguity between teachers increased as the year progressed. Therefore, Woods recommended that teacher preparation programs and professional development services provide teachers with opportunities to gain the necessary skills needed to work together as a professional team. “…it is imperative to restructure pre-
service and in-service train programs to achieve a shared language and shared philosophies among teachers regarding inclusion” (p. 193). Support needs to be provided for teachers to successfully adapt to the change that comes with teaching in an inclusive classroom.

Rice, Drame, Owens and Frattura’s (2007) study investigated a K-12 school district in order to gain insights in how the district was able to sustain an effective inclusive education program over a 12 year time period. The goal of the study was to gain insights into effective co-teaching strategies and instructional practices from the perspective of general and special education co-teachers. These findings were conducted as part of a larger study by the authors.

Rice et al. (2007) performed several case studies using qualitative methods in the form of interviews and observations to gain insights into effective co-teaching strategies and instructional practices. The participants came from a Midwest school district serving 4,500 students. A total of 38 school personnel participated in the study. The participants included 13 special education teachers, 18 general education teachers, four school counselors/school psychologists, and three administrators. The interviews took place in two formats. The authors conducted ten focus group based interviews that lasted between 30 to 45 minutes with four to six participants at a time. In addition, they also interviewed six of the participants individually. The authors also performed a total of 40 hours of classroom and school based observed co-classrooms observations. The interviews were audiotaped-recorded and transcribed. The transcriptions were categorized based on the
frequency of topics mentioned by the participants. The data utilized for this study were coded as strategies and important practices for co-teaching.

**Instructional Strengths**

According to Rice et al. (2007), the interview data indicated that general education teachers believe that their most beneficial co-teaching relationships were those with special educators who had six specific strengths: (1) professionalism; (2) ability to articulate and model instruction to meet student needs; (3) ability to accurately assess student progress; (4) ability to analyze teaching and teaching styles; (5) ability to work with a wide range of students; and (6) knowledge of, or interest in developing knowledge of course content.

**Professionalism.** Rice et al. (2007) found that general education teachers indicated that being able to co-plan and co-instruct was essential to the success and effectiveness of their co-teaching relationships. General education teachers viewed professionalism in their special education partner’s ability to share new ideas regarding curriculum, instruction, interdisciplinary connections and individual learning strategies. In addition, general education teachers reported that it was beneficial to the professional relationship when their special education partner attended class regularly and reported ahead of time if they were going to be absent from class to attend to another professional responsibility.

The case study of Tom and Ben illustrated this aspect. Ben, the general education teacher, reported that Tom, the special education teacher, used their co-taught science class to accomplish other tasks. Yet, Tom reported that Ben was less than welcoming to
him as a co-teacher and partner within the class. As a result, Rice et al. (2007) reported that “Tom began to think of the science period as his time to consult with teachers, test students and draft IEPs” (p. 13). Consequently, Tom recognized that his behavior not only hurt his reputation, but also hindered the progress of co-teaching in his school. Alternatively, Ben recognized that he needed to actively work with Tom in order to develop a role for him within the class, recognizing that Tom was not well versed in the science curriculum. Ben and Tom’s attitudes toward one another and lack of collaboration skills hampered their ability to develop a professional co-teaching partnership from the beginning.

**Meeting students’ needs.** According to Rice et al. (2007) general educators expressed a need in not only knowing that a student has a particular learning, social or emotional disability, but understanding the ramifications of the disability and what a student’s label means in regard of teaching and learning. The case studies provided effective examples of collaboration and cooperation among co-teaching partners based on special educators’ abilities to share and infuse their expertise into classroom instruction and assignments.

Rice et al. (2007) reported that the co-teaching team of Julia, the special educator, and Steve, the general educator, shared how they adapted their lesson on John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* to meet the learning needs of two disabled students. One of the students had difficulty with information that was presented auditory and the other student had difficulty with visual–motor processing. The lesson was focused on chapter analysis in which the students had to select three passages to write about from the
particular chapter. Julia suggested modifying the lesson to incorporate cooperative grouping so that the students could participate in a “think-pair-share” activity to discuss and share their ideas with other classmates before completing the actual written assignment. In addition, Julia modeled a paragraph structure that all students could follow in completing the assignment. Julia was able to provide Steve with modifications that not only allowed the two students to complete the assignment, but also allowed all students to focus on clear and salient aspects of the text without changing the goal of the assignment.

Rice et al. (2007) also found that classroom modifications also support the social skills and fostering appropriate classroom behavior. Liz, the special educator, and Ryan, the general educator, co-taught together in a ninth grade math class. A student had challenges and deficits in regard to social skills, self-regulation and self-control. The student displayed verbally disruptive behaviors in math class on a regular basis. Liz developed a behavior plan based on the antecedents of the student’s outbursts. Liz shared, explained and modeled the behavior plan for Ryan so that he was also able to use it as a means for reinforcing appropriate student behavior. The success of the behavior plan not only improved the student’s behavior and performance in class, but also led to feelings of confidence, skill and commitment for Ryan as the general education teacher to address and instruct students with these types of needs. The expertise of the special educators and the cooperation among co-teachers made these situations a success.

Assessing student progress. According to Rice et al. (2007), general education teachers indicated needing guidance and direction in grading the work of their disabled students. Special educators that understood the general education teachers’ grading
systems and were actively involved in the assessment process were able to provide useful suggestions and strategies for grading disabled students in the co-taught classroom.

The data indicated that special educators utilize a variety of approaches for assessing disabled students placed in the mainstream classroom. One method shared with Rice et al. (2007) was *mastery-level* or *criterion grading*. “…the content for the unit was divided into subcomponents. Students earned credit when their mastery of a certain skill or knowledge base reached an acceptable level” (Rice et al., 2007, p. 15). Another example, *level grading*, used subscripts to indicate the level of difficulty of an assignment in relation to the grade the student earned. “…if a student earned a B5, this indicated that the student had earned a B on material at the fifth-grade level. (Rice et al., 2007, p. 15). Another co-teaching team used *shared grading*. The co-teachers both graded the disabled students work. The general education teacher determined 60% of the students’ grade calculated in the same manner as the general education students and the special education teacher determined 40% of disabled students’ grades based on students’ IEPs. These assessment methods combined the expertise and the expectations of the general education and special education teachers to support an inclusive classroom environment.

**Teaching and teaching styles.** Rice et al. (2007) found that the participants indicated the importance of recognizing idiosyncrasies in regard to one’s teaching style and practices. Co-teachers are in the unique position where they are able to observe each other’s instructional practices in the classroom. The teachers reported the usefulness of observing these practices as a way to of improving instructional practices so that all students are better able to understand classroom routine, expectations and content.
Rice et al.’s (2007) data indicated that co-teachers can work together to identify ways of helping students organize information and master skills and learning strategies. In recognizing partners’ teaching styles and classroom routines, special educators are able to point out to students what they need to pay most attention to in a given classroom. For example, Jeff, the special education teacher, and Deb, the general education teacher, co-taught an English class together. Jeff recognized that Deb would include at least two of the weekly warm-up activities on the bi-weekly tests. Therefore, Jeff would go over the weekly warm-ups with the students prior to bi-weekly tests as review. He also directed students to keep their weekly warm-ups so that they could study them for the bi-weekly test.

Another case study revealed how Kyle, a special educator who co-taught with both a math and English teacher would direct his students’ efforts based on the general education teachers’ preferences. The math teacher did not count homework as credit, whereas the English teacher was very strict in regard to homework completion. Therefore, if the students felt overwhelmed with homework on a particular night, he would recommend that they complete their English homework in comparison to math. In addition, both general education teachers would list the weekly agenda on the board for all students. According to Rice et al. (2007), “Kyle instructed students to write these in their weekly planners and to block out time on the two evenings prior to due dates in order to schedule time to complete the tasks” (p. 16). This type of instruction helped all students better understand class expectations and how to best prepare one’s self to meet them.
**Working with all students.** According to Rice et al. (2007), participants also indicated the benefits when special education teachers work with all students in the class, not just those identified under the special education label. A general education teacher explained, “The best people that I’ve had come into my classroom have really taken a role, not just to be with their… students…they’re there for everybody, and I think that makes the special education student more comfortable too…” (p. 16). The findings indicated that special education teachers were able to provide both students and general education teachers’ information regarding study skills and individual learning styles.

According to Rice et al. (2007), Renee, a special education teacher in a co-taught history class, was able to convince her general education partner that in addition to her modeling proper note-taking methods, it would be worthwhile to teach a lesson on note-taking strategies so that students were better able to recognize important aspect of his lectures. Renee first introduced the students to the idea of multiple intelligences and then provided examples of different methods of taking notes based on students’ outcomes. For those students with strong linguistic or auditory intelligences, the process of synthesizing information and writing down key ideas helped to retain information. For those students with strong visual intelligence, she recommended taking notes with drawing and graphic organizers. Lastly, those students who had difficulty staying focused during long lectures, she recommended that they use skeletal outlines to help them keep on track during lectures. The co-teachers indicated that as a result of Renee’s lesson, students not only improved in their note taking skills, but also better recognized how they learned as individuals.
**Content knowledge.** Rice et al. (2007) found that participants identified special education teachers’ lack of content knowledge as a major challenge. General education teachers reported the importance of special education teachers who take the time to learn the content. A math teacher explained, “‘I think they work hard to learn [the material] and they can help their students so much better if they can understand the material, so I appreciate that’” (p. 17). Special education teachers reported that they have to take time outside of the classroom to learn content they are not familiar with.

Joan, a special education teacher, was assigned to co-teach in an eleventh-grade health class. The curriculum focused heavily on bodily systems, infections and diseases. Joan had no prior knowledge or experience with the content area; therefore, she took time outside of class time to learn the course content. As a result of her efforts, she was able to modify the curriculum for students with IEPs within the class. Joan also created visual aids and organizers to help students identify bodily systems. Her general education co-teaching partner approved of and recognized the value in using adaptations and modifications, like visual aids for student understanding. Participants recognized the advantages to the co-teaching partnership and the education of students when special education teachers were knowledgeable in the class’ content.

Rice et al. (2007) concluded that effective co-teaching partnerships work as an on-going process where teachers collaborate and learn from one another to ensure that all students are receiving an appropriate and effective education. They further explained that successful co-teaching relationships are beneficial for both teachers and students. The participants reported six specific characteristics of special education teachers that resulted
in effective co-teaching partnerships. These partnerships have the ability to provide teachers with more in-depth knowledge in regard to their teaching practices; special education teachers gain increased content knowledge and general education teachers gain knowledge in their ability to modify and adapt classroom lessons and activities varying instructional practices. Co-teachers have the opportunity to gain a tremendous amount of knowledge through working with one another to determine the best instructional techniques to meet the learning needs of all their students.

Scruggs et al.'s (2007) investigation intended to systematically summarize and integrate the finding of all available qualitative research reports into one integrative review. The purpose was to gain insights into the practice of co-teaching from the perspective of relevant research. The authors focused on their investigation on the five following questions: (1) how is co-teaching implemented?; (2) what are perceptions of teachers?; (3) what problems are encountered?; (4) what are the perceived benefits?; and (5) what factors are needed to ensure the success of co-teaching?

Scruggs et al. (2007) used qualitative research methods in the form of a metasynthesis on co-teaching research as a means to integrate themes and gain insights into the knowledge and understanding of co-teaching as an inclusive based instructional practice. The authors searched electronic data bases such as PsycINFO, ERIC, dissertation abstracts, and digital dissertations to collect the reports for their metasynthesis. A total of 32 studies were included in the metasynthesis. These studies were primarily qualitative, but some included quantitative methods. Once the articles were obtained, they were coded according to: geographical region, grade level, urban,
rural, and suburban settings, co-teaching model used, students, teachers, administrators, type of student disability, socioeconomic status of schools, subject taught and voluntary status of the co-teachers. A minimum of two coders agreed on all coding decisions. Free coding, using NVivo resulted in 69 original categories, then a recursive process of category analysis, contextual analysis, and relationships among categories was implemented. Through discussion, application, and revision, the researchers created four subordinate categories each with 12 of the original category codes.

According to Scruggs et al. (2007), the participants within these reports included 454 co-teachers, 42 administrators, 142 students, 26 parents, and 5 support personnel. The geographical representations included schools in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Southeast, Midwest, Southwest, and the West coast as well as Canada and Australia. Grade levels included 15 elementary and preschools and 14 middle schools and high schools.

Benefits

According to Scruggs et al. (2007), the results of the metasynthesis indicated that teachers and students benefited from the co-teaching classroom. Teachers indicated benefiting professionally in terms of subject matter content knowledge, classroom management and behavior techniques, and curriculum adaptations and modifications. Benefits of co-teaching classrooms for general and special education students were found to be both social and academic.

Benefits for teachers. Scruggs et al. (2007) found that teachers reported gaining instructional knowledge as a result of their co-teaching partnerships. Specifically, general
education teachers reported knowledge gains in the area of learning styles, disabilities, academic modifications and adaptations, and classroom management techniques. Whereas special education teachers reported increases in subject area content knowledge. Yet, these benefits seemed to result in co-teaching partnerships where teachers reported having positive professional relationships. “This perceived value, however, appeared to be predicated on the two teachers being personally compatible” (p. 401). Co-teaching partnerships provide opportunities for professional growth, but the authors caution that the relationships and compatibility of the co-teachers has a major impact on learning from one another.

**Benefits for students.** Scruggs et al.’s (2007) findings indicated that both disabled and non-disabled students benefited from placement in the co-taught classroom. A major academic and behavioral benefit reported by teachers was the increased teacher-to-student ratio. According to Scruggs et al. (2007), “One commonly expressed benefit of co-teaching was said to be the additional attention received by students with disabilities” (p. 402). In addition, teachers reported that students with disabilities benefitted from their exposure to the mainstream classroom which provided them opportunities to observe and model appropriate classroom behavior. Furthermore, teachers reported that all students, disabled and non-disabled, exhibited increased levels of compassion and cooperation toward classmates. Increases in these behaviors were related to the modeling of cooperation between co-teachers who served as a positive example of collaboration for students to learn from and emulate. Interestingly, Scruggs et al. noted the focus on social gains in comparison to academic gains for students throughout the co-teaching studies,
“Across all investigations, social benefits to students without disabilities were discussed more frequently than academic benefits” (p.401). However, the findings also indicated that teachers did not believe that the co-taught setting was appropriate or beneficial for all students. Scruggs et al., found “… the general report of the benefits to students with disabilities in co-taught classes must be tempered with teachers’ concern that students met minimum skill expectations” (p. 403). For students to benefit from the co-taught setting, they must possess appropriate academic levels and social behavior for the mainstream classroom. “…a number of participants stated strongly their concern that students included in co-taught classes have a minimum academic and behavioral skill level. This was a very common qualification, appearing in more than 20 of the 32 studies…” (p. 402). Co-teachers believed that some of their disabled students would have been better served in a special education self-contained setting.

Expressed Needs

Another major finding reported by Scruggs et al. (2007) was the expressed needs of co-teachers. Co-teachers identified administrative support, co-teaching preparation and volunteerism and compatibility between co-teachers as critical to their success.

Administrative support and preparation. In addition to the reported benefits of co-teaching, Scruggs et al. (2007) also found that teachers recognized specific needs that they believed must be met in order or for co-teaching to be successful. A primary need reported was having the support of the administration. The support of the administration was a factor found in all of the reports. “No disconfirming evidence—that administrative support was not necessary – was identified” (p. 403). Administrative support was linked
to a number of issues surrounding the successes of co-teaching, like professional
development opportunities, scheduled co-planning time, content knowledge, teachers’
voice in their co-teaching assignments, the compatibility of co-teachers and the methods
co-teaching utilized.

Planning time. Time to co-plan was reported in almost all of the studies.
According to Scruggs et al. (2007), teachers frequently reported that being provided a
common planning time as the responsibility of the administration. The studies indicated
that most teachers were able to meet for an average of 40 to 45 minutes a week, but that
they also felt this was not a sufficient amount of time to prepare for their classes. Co-
teachers at all grade levels reported that they believed common planning time built into
their school day as vital to the success of their co-taught classes. As a result of a lack of
planning time, “…teachers also felt the need to meet on an ongoing basis, at lunch time,
in the morning, at recess, or at that end of the day” (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 404).

Preparation. Scruggs, et al. (2007) found that across studies the need for
preparation for co-teaching emerged as a major theme. Opportunities for professional
development and teacher training was viewed as the responsibility of the administration.
Studies indicated that many teachers felt unprepared and apprehensive entering into their
co-teaching assignments. In addition, studies also revealed that teachers expressed the
need for preparation in order to develop collaboration skills, interpersonal skills, co-
teaching methods and strategies, knowledge of disabilities, effective communication and
flexible thinking skills. Again, the authors noted that there were few disconfirmations of
these forms of preparation. Yet, some teachers also reported that they believed the best
way to improve their co-teaching skills was commitment and devotion to working together in order to learn about one another and to figure out how to collaborate and cooperate together as co-teachers.

   **Compatibility and volunteerism.** Scruggs et al. (2007) found that teachers and administrators recognized that successful co-teaching partnerships cannot be forced. As a result, studies indicated the importance of the administration in allowing teachers to have a say in their co-teaching partnerships. Teacher compatibility and volunteerism was identified as means for providing the opportunities for amicable and effective co-teaching relationships, “Many teachers maintained that it was necessary that co-teachers volunteer to teach together” (Scruggs et al., p. 403). In addition to having a say in their co-teaching partnerships, studies also indicated the importance of teacher compatibility in relation to successful partnerships. “Teachers were generally very emphatic about the need for co-teachers to be compatible” (Scruggs et al., p. 405). Teachers recognized mutual trust, respect, and appropriate attitudes toward one another as factors essential to the success of co-teaching. Furthermore, teachers across studies compared co-teaching partnerships to personal partnerships, “Many investigations included some reference to co-teaching as a marriage, that is, requiring effort, flexibility and compromise for successes” (Scruggs et al., p. 405). Studies indicated that teachers recognize compatible personalities and a willingness to put forth the necessary effort to work together appear to be essential components for successful co-teaching partnerships.

   **Instructional Delivery**
Across studies, Scruggs et al. (2007) found that the “one teach, one assist” method was the most prominent form of co-teaching utilized by teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels. In addition, studies revealed that the special education teacher played a subordinate role in comparison to the general education teacher in the co-taught classroom.

**Methods, roles and responsibilities.** Scruggs et al. (2007) found that when utilizing “one teach, one assist” method the general education teachers were responsible for leading whole class instruction and the special education teacher assisted by helping students as needed. “The tasks of the special education teacher seemed to reflect limitations imposed on the whole-class instruction that was commonly employed in general education classrooms” (Scruggs et al., p. 410). The authors did note that in a very few cases, the lead teacher responsibility alternated between general education and special education teachers. The studies revealed that in the majority of co-teaching classes, the special educator seldom took the lead in whole class instruction.

The studies indicated that the subordinate role of the special education teacher appeared to be a result of a lack of content knowledge in the subject area being taught and classroom territorial/turf issues. Scruggs et al. (2007) explained, “In many cases, the subordinate role of the special education teacher appeared to reflect the relatively greater content knowledge of the general education teacher” (p.407). Though the subordinate role of the special education teacher was found at both the elementary and secondary level, it was found to be more prominent in secondary classes, especially those with more specialized subject area knowledge. Conversely, the authors also found that higher levels
in content knowledge resulted in greater classroom responsibility for special education teachers. “…expertise in content knowledge on the part of the special education teacher could be associated with a higher degree of shared responsibility” (p. 407). In addition to content knowledge, Scruggs et al. found that teachers throughout these studies also identified turf issues as a contributing factor to the subordinate role of the special education teacher. Special education teachers recognized the difficulty that general education teachers had in opening up their classroom and instructional practice to another professional.

Scruggs et al. (2007) concluded that teachers, administrators and students perceive co-teaching as a beneficial practice. Teachers benefited professionally, gaining knowledge outside their area of expertise and students benefit academically and socially. Teachers recognized various factors as being necessary to the development and sustainability of positive and successful co-teaching environments. These factors included: (1) scheduled planning time; (2) sufficient planning time; (3) co-teacher compatibility; (4) preparation; (5) and appropriate student skill level for mainstream classroom placement. Teachers connected these factors to administrative support. The predominant model of co-teaching, “one teach, one assist,” and the reported subordinate role of the special education teacher, indicated that most co-teaching teams are not fully utilizing the practice of co-teaching. “Examined critically, however, the practice of co-teaching as described in these investigations can hardly be said to resemble the truly collaborative models described by, for example, Cook and Friend (1995) or Walter-Thomas et al. (2000)” (Scruggs et al., 2007, p. 411).
These studies indicated that classroom instructional practices do not change substantially in relation to co-teaching. General education and special education teachers performed their traditional roles based on being the sole instructor of the class when teaching in the co-taught classroom. The consequence being that co-teaching as an instructional practice is not being used as effectively as possible. Therefore, students may not be receiving the support that comes with placement in a special education setting. If co-teaching is to achieve its purpose, both teachers must have equal roles, responsibility and input into the planning, instruction and presentation of class lessons and activities (Scruggs et al., 2007). Scruggs et al. argued that future research needs to address the ways in which schools can develop collaborative co-teaching partnerships and the gains that can be made by employing such practices. Lastly, teachers, administrators and students’ voices and perception of co-teaching and its strengths and weakness, are imperative for improving and further understanding co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice.

Gaps in the Literature

Research focused on the instructional practice of co-teaching has continued to grow in recent years. Overall, research indicates that teachers are not adequately prepared to meet the demands of co-teaching, especially at the secondary level (Austin, 2001; Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000) and a there is a lack of co-teaching preparation outside the field of special education (Friend et al., 2010). As a result, further research is needed to gain specific insights on what school districts, professional development programs and teacher preparation programs are doing to
develop effective co-teaching preparation to ensure that all teachers are prepared to instruct in the co-taught classroom. In addition, research is also needed to evaluate the success and effectiveness of these preparation programs in light of the dynamics of today’s classroom and to evaluate if co-teacher preparation programs are in fact addressing the expressed needs of co-teachers. Moreover, research strongly indicates that teachers are cognitive of the supports they need in order to co-teach successfully (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007). As a result, research is needed to determine the best methods for facilitating cohesive co-teaching preparation between teacher preparation programs and secondary schools.

In addition, research indicates that the supports and needs identified by teachers to meet the challenges of the co-taught classroom are based on their personal and first-hand experiences with co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Jang, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Two components critical to the success of co-teaching relationships are: compatibility (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007) and communication (Jang, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997). Yet, further research is needed to gain a better understanding of what it means to be professionally compatible as co-teachers and how administrators, department chairs and teachers can recognize and evaluate professional compatibility as a means for partnering co-teachers. Therefore, further research is warranted into methods that foster the skills for the type of open, honest and frank communication that research indicates is necessary for the development of effective co-teaching partnerships (Jang, 2006; Keefe &
Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997) and to develop an understanding of these methods from the perspective of the co-teachers.

In addition to recognized supports, research also indicates that there are common challenges that come with co-teaching: (1) subject area content knowledge; (2) knowledge of learning disabilities; (3) teaching styles and philosophies; (4) collaboration; (5) designated roles and responsibilities within the classroom; (6) classroom management techniques; (7) planning time; (8) administrative support; and (9) turf issues (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Scruggs, et al., 2007). A common challenge illustrated by research was the subordinate role of special education teachers in the co-taught classroom (Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Rice et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). To overcome this challenge, research into co-teaching teams who utilize inclusive instructional practices based on their professional expertise is necessary. In order for the instructional practice of co-teaching to advance, and evolve, research is needed to not only identify and illustrate examples of inclusive practices, but also how teachers create these inclusive practices.

In regards to inclusive co-teaching practices, Dieker (2001) identified five co-teaching models not recognized in previous literature: (1) the Shared Support Model; (2) Alternating Support Model; (3) Equal Support Model; (4) Cross Family Support Model; (5) and the Limited Support Model. Therefore, additional research is needed to ascertain the prevalence of new and alternative co-teaching models and how and why these models developed. Do new models reflect students’ needs, school structures, experiences of
teachers, length of co-teaching partnerships, lack of formal co-teaching knowledge and preparation? To gain a better understating of these practices, research is needed to determine the effectiveness of new and alternative models of co-teaching, and how new and alternative models relate and compare to the six formal co-teaching models recognized by research (Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010).

Lastly, co-teaching research has focused on preparing teachers to instruct in the co-taught classroom (Austin, 2001; Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997), but research is also needed in regard to preparing students for learning in co-taught classrooms. The co-taught classroom presents students with the challenge of having two instructors and a more diverse student population. These factors may produce confusion or curiosity especially for students who have been accustomed to learning in a classroom run by one teacher and a homogenous student population. In addition, there is little empirical research on the actual student benefits and learning gains made by students, disabled or non-disabled placed in co-taught classrooms (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas et al., 2000).

Summary

The results of these studies indicate that teachers across grade levels, subject areas, and geographic location have reached a level of agreement with regard to the types of challenges and barriers co-teachers experience working together in inclusive classrooms. Alternatively, these studies also indicate that co-teachers have reached a
level of consensus on the professional benefits that come from effective co-teaching partnerships.

In regard to challenges and barriers, teachers overwhelmingly indicated the need for an appropriate amount of scheduled co-planning time to be built into their official work day. Meeting before or after school or right before class to co-plan does not provide teachers with the opportunity to combine their professional expertise to best meet the needs of the inclusive classroom. Administrators need to do their best to schedule uninterrupted co-planning time for co-teachers. In addition, these studies also indicated that teachers would like to develop equal levels of responsibility in the co-taught classroom. Though teachers reported wanting an increase in shared responsibilities, the extant literature reviewed here indicates that general education teachers took on more classroom responsibilities than special educators. This division of roles could be related to the fact that the teachers reported not having the necessary time to co-plan.

Furthermore, these studies also indicate that teachers need and would benefit from professional development opportunities in the area of co-teaching and inclusive classroom practices. Teachers need guidance and skills in order to co-teach more effectively. Teacher preparation programs also must acknowledge that all teachers may be presented with the opportunity to instruct in a co-taught classroom. Therefore, all pre-service teachers, not just those in special education need to have an understanding of what it means to co-teach and how to utilize the expertise that both teachers bring to the professional partnership.
Another challenge the literature identified was a lack of attention to the scheduling of co-taught classes. Teachers across studies indicated that special education teachers’ caseloads and student scheduling strongly impacted the effectiveness of co-taught classrooms. These studies revealed that the student population of co-taught classes had a major impact on the dynamics of the co-taught classroom. The number of disabled students and non-disabled students, as well as the types of disabilities all impact the effectiveness of the co-taught environment.

The last major barrier to co-teaching addressed the issue of subject area content knowledge. Extant literature included the general finding that general education and special education teachers recognized the importance of placing special education teachers in subject areas in which they are knowledgeable. A lack of content knowledge can place special education teachers in a deficit role within the classroom.

These studies also revealed that teachers reported experiencing similar benefits from their co-teaching partnerships. Overall, both groups of teachers indicated that the major benefit of co-teaching is learning from their co-teaching partner. Learning came in various forms. Special education teachers indicated gaining increased content knowledge in the subject areas where they co-taught; whereas, general education teachers reported gaining knowledge in the area of disabilities, modifications, and behavior management techniques. In addition, both general and special education teachers recognized that they learned about themselves as instructors through feedback provided from their co-teaching partners. Additionally, the literature reports that co-teachers in positive and successful partnerships reported increased levels of professional satisfaction. The literature indicated
that teachers enjoyed having another professional in the room to share not only ideas and teaching responsibilities with, but the successes and failures that come with teaching diverse groups of students. These feelings of camaraderie between co-teachers serve as a motivating factor that helps encourage and inspire teachers to learn and expand on their instructional practices as well as take chances in trying creative and new approaches in the classroom.

Overall, these studies indicate that teachers are willing and putting forth effort in their co-taught environments, but without the necessary supports, preparation and skills co-teachers will not be able to establish and develop inclusive practices based on combining their individual expertise.
Chapter Three: Methods

The purpose of the present study is to gain a deeper understanding of the processes that long-term middle school co-teaching teams identify going through and continue to go through as a means of developing, sustaining and advancing their co-teaching professional partnerships. This study employed a qualitative research design in the form of the semi-structured interview process. This study focused on long-term middle school co-teaching teams who have been teaching together as a team for a minimum of three years and have been recognized by their administrators, special education department chairs, or county special education specialists and the co-teachers themselves as exhibiting highly-skilled inclusive teaching practices. The focus of this research is on the professional long-term relationship of co-teachers and their co-teaching abilities; as such, though students are major participants in the co-taught classroom, they are not included in this study.

Research Design

The focus on the perspective of co-teachers was to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences that lead to successful long-term co-teaching relationships. As discussed in Chapter 2, little is known about the interpersonal dimensions of these partnerships. The participants were interviewed individually, separate from their co-teaching partner, in order to gain insights into each individual teacher’s perspective and
experience independent from the influence of their co-teaching partner. The overarching questions guiding my research are:

1. What skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals do teachers report as significant to the successful development of their long-term co-teaching professional partnerships?

2. What are the unique features or characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their successful professional partnerships?

**Participants**

A total of nine middle school teachers participated in this study. The nine teachers made up a total of five co-teaching teams. One of the participants, a special education teacher, co-taught with two general education teachers. A second participant, a former special education teacher who currently works as a professor of education at a local university. These participants were purposefully selected because they taught at the middle school level and because they had taught with their co-teaching partner for a minimum of three years. In addition, each of the participants was recognized as successful co-teachers according to their school’s principal and the co-teachers themselves. The researcher personally contacted the recommended co-teaching teams to inform them of the purpose of the study and the interview method for gathering the data. Demographic information such as: teaching experience, co-teaching experience, gender, and subject area taught was collected from each of the participants. These participants all
work for the same suburban school district located in the mid-Atlantic region. Teachers from three different middle schools participated in the study.

**Co-teaching team one: Jackie and Bill.** Jackie is a female, seventh grade English special education teacher and eighth grade civics special education teacher. Jackie received her teaching license through a traditional, university-based program. She has earned a master’s degree in education and is currently enrolled in a Ph.D. program. Per NCLB requirements, Jackie is highly qualified in both of her content areas. She has taught for a total of five years, all five of these years have been at her current school, Koop Middle School. As a special educator, Jackie has co-taught her entire teaching career and has had a total of four co-teaching partners. Jackie has her own classroom, but only teaches in that classroom one period a day. Her current co-teaching partner, Bill, is a male, seventh grade English teacher. Bill has taught for a total of 18 years. He has taught all of his 18 years at Koop Middle School. He originally went to college to become a writer and toward the end of his degree decided to pursue his teaching license in the area of English. As a general educator, he has co-taught for a total of six years and over these years has had three different co-teaching partners. Jackie and Bill have co-taught together for a total of four years. As co-teachers, they have co-taught seventh grade English and an eighth grade specialized writing course.

During the 2015-2016 academic year, they co-teach two classes together. One of the co-taught classes is a team taught seventh grade English honors class and the second is a dual identified English class serving both special education students (SPED) and English learners (EL).
Co-teaching team two and three: Meagan and Jessica. Meagan is the special education teacher who has two co-teaching partners, both of whom participated in this study. Meagan is a female, seventh grade special education science teacher. She has been teaching for a total of 11 years, all at Koop Middle School. Prior to teaching full-time she worked as substitute teacher and a teacher’s aide before becoming a full-time special educator. As a special educator, she has co-taught her entire teaching career and has had a total of five co-teaching partners. Meagan received her teaching license through a career switcher program at a local university. Meagan is highly qualified in her subject area per NCLB requirements. She has her own classroom, but only teaches in it one class period per day. Jessica is a female, seventh grade science teacher. She received her teaching license in science through a traditional, university-based program. Jessica worked as a substitute at Koop Middle School prior to working there as a full-time general education science teacher. She has taught for a total of 11 years at Koop. Jessica has a total of nine co-teaching partners, four of her partners have been EL teachers and five of her partners have been SPED teachers. Meagan and Jessica have co-taught together for a total of ten years. They had previous experience working together prior to co-teaching as full-time teachers. Meagan and Jessica worked together at Koop Middle School when Meagan worked as a teacher’s aide and Jessica worked as a long-term substitute teacher.

Currently, Meagan and Jessica co-teach one class together. The class is a co-taught seventh grade science class.

Co-teaching team three: Meagan and Brianna. Meagan’s second co-teaching partner is Brianna. Brianna has been teaching for over 40 years. She has worked as a
special education teacher, EL teacher, and a general education teacher. She has taught math and science over the course of her teaching career. She has taught in public schools and has taught recruits for the United States Military. Brianna became a teacher through a traditional, university-based program and later received her master’s in special education. Brianna, currently teaches seventh grade science at Koop Middle school and has been teaching there for the past 22 years. In total, she has had seven co-teaching partners: three general educators, two EL teachers and two SPED teachers. She has co-taught for a total of ten years and has been teaching with Meagan for six years.

Currently, Meagan and Brianna teach two seventh grade science classes together. Meagan and Brianna indicated that they had a positive relationship with one another prior to their co-teaching partnership. Brianna taught two of Meagan’s children who attended Koop Middle School. In addition, Meagan substitute taught for Brianna prior to becoming a full-time teacher at Koop.

**Co-teaching team four: Rich and Courtney.** Rich is a male, seventh grade special education science teacher. Rich has been teaching for a total of 15 years and has taught at his current school, Kettleers Middle School, for the past 12 years. Rich received his teaching certificate in science through a traditional, university-based program. He is highly qualified in his content area per NCLB requirements and has National Board Certification in Early Adolescent Science. He spent three years of his career teaching in Asia. He has co-taught for 15 years, and has had a total of 11 co-teaching partners. Rich’s co-teaching partner, Courtney, is a female, seventh grade general education science teacher. Courtney received her teaching certificate in the area of science through a
Rich and Courtney have co-taught together for seven years. Currently, they co-teach two seventh grade honors science classes.

**Co-teaching team five: Laura and Jenny.** This dyad is a bit different from the foregoing. Jenny is a female, middle school math teacher who has taught for 12 years. She has co-taught for seven years and has had four co-teaching partners, all special educators. She earned her teaching license through a university-based career switcher program. Her original degree was in math and computer science with a minor in education. Laura and Jenny co-taught eighth grade math for a total of six years.

Laura is a female, who is now a professor of education at a local university. Laura taught in the P-12 public school system as a special educator for 13 years. Laura received her teaching license through a university-based career switcher program and was highly qualified in math. She taught six, seventh and eighth grade math and science. Laura co-taught for her entire P-12 teaching career, co-teaching with 14 different general education partners. In regard to her long-term co-teaching partnership, she taught seventh and eighth grade math. Their interviews were conducted in retrospect due to Laura’s recent job change.

Laura and Jenny knew one another prior to their co-teaching partnership. Laura and Jenny had children who attended the same middle school and both served on the
school’s Parent-teacher Association (PTA). They co-taught together at Kalmus Middle School, where Laura taught for seven years and Jenny taught for six years.

The participating county, teachers, and individual middle schools were provided pseudonyms to assure their anonymity.

**Participating Schools**

The three participating middle schools are all part of the same large school district located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The county has a total of 20 middle schools serving the seventh and eighth grades and a total of three middle schools serving grades six through eight. All of the participating middle schools serve only seventh and eighth grade.

**Koop Middle School.** The first participating school, Koop Middle School, is a secondary school located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The school is located in a suburb near a large metropolitan city. The middle school has a population of 1,048 students and serves only seventh and eighth grade. The student population is 12.06 percent Asian, 9.26 percent black, 38.36 percent Hispanic, 34.83 percent white, and 4.96 percent labeled as other. The school has 43.8 percent of the students receiving free and reduced lunch, and 18.8 percent of the students receiving special education services. Three of the participating co-teaching partners worked at Koop Middle School. The regulations regarding the formation of co-teaching partnerships are left to the discretion of the principal. Koop has a school wide focus on inclusive learning environments and co-teaching as an instructional practice, therefore, all teachers at Koop Middle School
receive formal professional development opportunities in preparation for their co-
teaching assignments.

**Kettleers Middle School.** The second participating school, Kettleers Middle
School, is a secondary school located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The
school is located in a suburb near a large metropolitan city. The middle school has a
population of 1,386 students and serves only seventh and eighth grade. The student
population is 26.2 percent Asian, 3.17 percent black, 8.95 percent Hispanic, 55.19
percent white, and 6.57 percent labeled as other. The school has 7.74 percent of the
students receiving free and reduced lunch, and 7.79 percent of the students receiving
special education services. The regulations regarding the formation of co-teaching
partnerships are left to the discretion of the principal. Kettleers Middle School utilizes the
team model for three of their core subject areas: English, social studies and science. Math
teachers are not assigned to a team. All students are assigned to a team, and therefore,
have the same core teachers for their core subjects. The team model provides core
teachers the opportunity to collaborate in regard to the best interest of the students on
their particular team. At Kettleers, one school team in seventh grade and one school team
in eighth grade are assigned the special education students that require the additional
support of a special education teacher while being instructed in the mainstream
classroom. Therefore, the English, social studies and science special education teachers
work with one set of teachers throughout the school year.

**Kalmus Middle School.** The third participating school, Kalmus Middle School,
is a secondary school located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The school
is located in a suburb outside a large metropolitan city. At the time that Laura and Jenny taught at the school, the middle school had a population of 844 students and served only seventh and eighth grade. The student population was 19.08 percent Asian, 8.29 percent black, 14.34 percent Hispanic, 54.27 percent white, and 4.03 percent were labeled as other. The school had 18.72 percent of the students receive free and reduced lunch, and 15.76 percent of the students received special education services. The regulations regarding the formation of co-teaching partnerships are left to the discretion of each building’s principal. At the time that Jenny and Laura taught at Kalmus Middle School, Kalmus utilized the team model for their core subject areas: English, social studies, math and science. In addition, elective teachers were also assigned to specific teams. All students were assigned to a team, and therefore, had the same team teachers for their core subjects and elective classes. This team model provided all teachers on a particular team the opportunity to collaborate in regard to the best interest of the students. At Kalmus, all teams had the possibility of having the special education students that required the additional support of a special education teacher while being instructed in the mainstream classroom. Therefore, the special education teachers at Kalmus worked with multiple teams through the school year.

**Interview settings.** The interviews took place in each teacher’s classroom. The special education teachers each had their own classrooms, yet they indicated only teaching in their classrooms one to two class periods a day. They spend the majority of the work day instructing in the general education teachers’ classrooms. In addition, one participant’s interview took place at her office at a local university. This provided a
setting that was quiet, familiar, and comfortable for each of the participants (Glesne, 2011). The interviews lasted between 45 to 65 minutes. All participants worked for the same large school district located in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States.

**Materials.** A semi-structured interview format was used with each of the participants individually. The co-teaching teams were not interviewed together as a team; rather, each co-teacher was interviewed separately of their co-teaching partner so that the participants’ responses were not influenced by their co-teaching partner(s). This allowed each participant’s perspective to be expressed and shared in her/his own voice without one partner speaking on behalf of the team. This platform provided the participants the space to speak from their personal perspectives. In addition, conducting the interviews separately provided the researcher with the data necessary to compare answers among each co-teaching dyad, as well as among the general education teachers as a group and the special education teachers as a group. The intent of this interview process was to gain in-depth insights into the consensus or divergence among co-teachers about the development of their co-teaching partnerships. The co-teachers were informed of this process prior to agreeing to participate in this study.

The researcher had pre-determined interview questions to use as a guide throughout the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The research questions were designed based on co-teaching research cited in Chapter 2, and the professional experiences of the researcher, who has been co-teaching middle school Social Studies for eight years with three co-teaching partners. The interview questions were also formed based on the reported supports needed for successful co-teaching (Dieker & Murawski, 2011).
2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs, et al., 2007), the reported challenges (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri, Scruggs, et al., 2007), benefits of co-teaching partnerships (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997) and the research based recommendations for facilitating positive and effective co-teaching partnerships and classroom practices (Austin, 2001; Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004).

The initial interview questions were piloted by a co-teaching team within the county that met the research criteria. The interview questions were then revised, rephrased and some questions were eliminated and added based on specific feedback regarding interpretation, duplicate information gathered, clarity, and focus (Creswell, 2012). This feedback helped to determine whether there were any weaknesses or limitations within the interview design prior to implementation of the study. This provided the researcher the opportunity to re-write and refine the interview questions to ensure that they were well written in relation to the focus of the research (Kvale, 2007).

The researcher and participants were provided a copy of the interview questions during the interview. The semi-structured interview process allowed the researcher to approach and conduct the interview based on the participants’ responses. In addition, this allowed the researcher to pursue unexpected responses and to probe specific areas of interest further (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, the semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to collect and gather information from the perspective of the respondents. As Glesne noted, “The intent of such interviewing is to capture…how
respondents think or felt about something; and how they explain or account for something” (p. 134). The interviews lasted between 45 to 65 minutes. After analyzing the data, the researcher contacted each participant via email to ensure that all participant descriptive data were accurate. In addition, the researcher contacted each participant via email to ensure that the interpretation of the interview data were accurate. Two of the participants, Courtney, a general education teacher and Rich, a special education teacher, were provided sections of the findings and confirmed accurate interpretation of the data. This provided the researcher the opportunity to engage in a more in-depth analysis of specific findings when needed and provided the participants an opportunity to confirm that the researcher’s interpretations of the findings were accurate and aligned with the participants’ intended responses.

All interviews were audiotaped-recorded using Audacity Software. The researcher used her smartphone as a backup recording device. To assist in the transcription process, the researcher converted the Audacity files to MP3 files. Four of the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and five of the interviews were transcribed through a professional transcribing company.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis of the interviews was used in order to categorize and develop codes to better understand the relationship making process of long-term co-teaching partners. The researcher performed her own transcribing for four of the nine interviews. The five professionally transcribed interviews were checked for accuracy by the researcher. In order to do this, the researcher read through each of the five interviews as
she listened to the MP3 recordings of the original interviews. Any discrepancies were corrected. For example, if acronyms common to the language of teachers and the County were misinterpreted by the transcriber the researcher made these corrections based on the interview recordings. In addition, the researcher eliminated all identifying information of the participants and the county from the transcriptions. This process allowed the researcher to better understand and emphasize the linguistic style of the interviews and to secure details that were relevant to the study’s specific analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Analysis began with open-coding, “the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). To do this, the researcher first listened to all of the interview recordings while taking notes and memos based on the interview responses, developing tentative ideas about categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2005). Secondly, the researcher read through each of the teacher interview transcriptions and underlined, highlighted and placed notes in the margins to develop ideas further about the categories and relationships emerging from and within the interview data (Maxwell, 2005). Coding was data-driven, based on the content of the teachers’ interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The researcher used “code-memos” to record names of different codes that developed, the characteristics and properties of each of the codes that emerged, and notes were recorded in regard to the researcher's thoughts about each of the emerging codes (Gibbs, 2008). The researcher then placed all of the identified tentative ideas about emerging categories and relationships in an Excel spread sheet by participant. The ideas and categories were
accompanied with the corresponding page number from the transcribed interviews. The Excel spread sheets were further analyzed to identify emerging codes and themes.

To ensure reliability, the primary researcher and a secondary researcher, a fellow doctorate candidate, coded the same selection of transcription independently of one another in order to develop a reliable coding scheme. Then, coding disagreements were discussed and negotiated by these two researchers. The focus of the coding discussions primarily regarded terminology. The content of the themes were at 100 percent agreement, yet the terminology to capture the content and essences of themes accurately was further discussed and negotiated. Once a coding scheme was agreed upon, it was used on the full set of transcriptions (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). Axial coding was then utilized to reconstruct the data to identify relationships among the open-codes and to make connections among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher used the constant comparative method to examine the participants’ responses, comparing them to find patterns and relationships within each of the themes and the categories that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In order to do this, the researcher analyzed each of the Excel spread sheets, comparing each participant’s results by identifying similarities and differences among their responses. The researcher color-coded individual responses on each of the Excel spread sheets according to the codes and themes that emerged. The codes were then collapsed into their corresponding theme. After the analysis of the data was completed, the themes that emerged and a summary of the findings are reported in Chapter 4.
Threats to validity. A primary threat to the validity of this study was the researcher’s involvement in the research process. As a general education teacher, who has been part of a long-term middle school co-teaching team, I had to remain aware of my own experiences and perspectives with regard to my own long-term co-teaching partnership and my thoughts and ideas on the development of successful co-teaching partnerships. Therefore, I was obligated to remain acutely cognizant of how I was reacting to the data and to discern why. As Maxwell (2005) notes, qualitative researchers need to reflect on “The influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied” (p. 108) and how I might influence my participants’ responses. It was important that I did not word the interview questions or ask the questions in a manner that led these participants to a particular response. Therefore, I also had to be aware of any biases that my co-teaching experience may have had on my research. As a result, I designed my research questions so that my interview questions were intensive, collecting rich and extensive information to capture a true and complete description (Maxwell, 2005) of the co-teaching relationship process in light of each participant’s experience. My questions sought to capture data from the viewpoint and perspective of each participant. In order to ensure that my interpretation of the participants’ responses accurately reflected their intended meaning, I reviewed sections of the interview responses with each of the participants once the interviews were complete.

In addition, I also provided one of the participating co-teaching teams with selections of the findings to ensure accuracy. In addition, respondent validation provided me the opportunity to solicit feedback from my participants in regard to the
interpretations and conclusions I made based on the interview data. Respondent validation, according to Maxwell (2005) “…is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on…, an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstandings…( p. 111).” This communication was performed via emails and telephone calls with a selection of the participants. Additionally, at the conclusion of each interview, I provided the participants the opportunity to share any concluding thoughts or feedback with regard to the interview questions.
Chapter Four: Findings

In this qualitative study of how co-teachers build and sustain their co-teaching partnerships, the following research questions were used to examine the interpersonal dimensions of five long-term, middle school cooperative teaching teams:

1. What skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals do teachers report as significant to the successful development of their long-term co-teaching professional partnerships?

2. What are the unique features or characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their successful professional partnerships?

This chapter provides the interview results significant to the skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals of the co-teaching participants that address research question 1. The unique features and characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners develop and continue to do to develop their successful partnerships research question 2, will be presented second. Both of these questions were investigated through semi-structured interviews with the general education and special education teacher participants.

Knowledge and Skills that Facilitate Effective Co-teaching Relationships
The following section addresses the research question, “What skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals do teachers report as significant to the development of their long-term co-teaching professional partnerships?” The findings to this question are presented according to the major themes that emerged and the skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals that were identified within each theme. The themes that emerged from the data are addressed in the following order: Features Facilitating Effective Co-teaching Relationships, Preparation to Co-teach, and Prior Perceptions of Co-teaching.

**Features that Facilitate Effective Co-teaching Relationships**

A major finding that emerged from this study captures the features and characteristics that helped facilitate the development of long-term effective co-teaching partnerships. The results indicate that each of the participating teams had a strong foundation from the very start of their co-teaching partnership that supported the development of a positive professional relationship and the desire of the co-teachers to continue to work together year after year. The similar characteristics and features reported as significant to the formation of their co-teaching partnerships were: prior knowledge of one another, the role of special educators, and similar professional values.

**Prior knowledge.** Each of the nine participants indicated that she/he had some form of a previous relationship or knowledge of her/his partner prior to the beginning of the co-teaching partnership. This prior knowledge was either based on a previous personal relationship outside of the co-teaching partnership, or was based on having previous professional knowledge of one another outside of the co-teaching partnership.
Prior personal relationships. Members of two of the five participating teams indicated that they knew one another and had developed a positive relationship with one another prior to working together as co-teachers. Jenny and Laura both indicated having a previous relationship based on their children attending the same middle school and as members of the school’s Parent Teacher Association (PTA). Laura explained, “I knew Jenny from the PTA. We had sons the same age, so I knew her socially… I knew her and who she was, and we had worked a little bit together on PTA things.” Based on their previous relationship, Laura described Jenny as “Extraordinarily competent,” and “open-minded.” Jenny also indicated having a positive relationship with Laura prior to co-teaching:

…I knew her as a friend and a co-worker and in the community as a volunteer, I thought a lot of her. So I trusted her probably. So I wasn’t apprehensive when we went together. And we had kind of done mini projects together successfully in other areas. So I knew we could work together.

Jenny further explained, “I think that probably made it easier and I could be more candid on the things that I had found difficult…” Based on their previous relationship, Jenny indicated having a favorable first impression of Laura, “I knew we shared work ethic and goals and whatnot, so my first impression was there was a second teacher in the room.” As a result of their prior personal relationship, Jenny and Laura both expressed a more favorable attitude toward their professional relationship.

Similarly, Meagan and Brianna also reported having a relationship prior to their co-teaching partnership. Both participants indicated that Brianna taught two of Meagan’s
children prior to Meagan working as a teacher. Meagan explained, “She’s (Brianna) been here quite a while, she taught two of my kids.” Meagan further elaborated, “She is older than I am, so I remember looking at her like someone with a lot of experience, more classroom management, she has a lot of science knowledge.” In addition to having a parent-teacher relationship, Meagan had also been a substitute teacher for Brianna prior to their co-teaching partnership. As a substitute teacher, Brianna described Meagan as “…very competent, very capable, good classroom management, somebody you’d want to have back.” Based on Brianna’s prior knowledge of Meagan, she further explained, “…she was just ahead of the game, a really good classroom educator.” As a result of their parent-teacher relationship, and their semi-professional relationship, they volunteered to co-teach. Brianna indicated wanting to co-teach with Meagan because she thought of her as, “…awesome. She’s knowledgeable, just her personality, I’m comfortable with her, and I thought we’d be a really – I think we both thought it – but I know I thought we’d be a really good match.”

As a result of their prior relationships, these participants indicated being more comfortable working with one another from the start of the co-teaching partnership. In addition, they also indicated having positive feelings toward co-teaching together based on their prior knowledge and understanding of each other’s work ethic, abilities and positive attitudes.

**Prior professional knowledge.** Three of the five co-teaching teams indicated having positive feelings toward his/her co-teaching partner based on prior professional
knowledge of one another. These participants indicated that they had the opportunity to form opinions about one another based on prior professional experiences.

Meagan and Jessica had a unique opportunity in that they worked directly with one another prior to their co-teaching partnership. Meagan was working as a full-time teacher’s aide at the same time that Jessica was working as a substitute teacher. As a result, Meagan and Jessica had the opportunity to get to know one another in these roles prior to their co-teaching partnership. Meagan explained, “I knew Jessica because when I was a teacher’s aide, she was subbing.” Jessica further elaborated, “My first impression of her actually came from when she was a (teacher’s aide) and I was subbing. …and I thought we worked well together, so I felt she was very capable and strong with what she doing and that she was someone that would be good to work with.”

Courtney and Rich also had the opportunity to work with one another prior to their co-teaching partnership. Courtney remembered working with Rich when she was in Kettleers as a substitute teacher and he was working as a full-time special educator:

…I remember seeing Rich teach when I was … an eighth grade substitute…And I know he doesn’t remember me, but I remember him. And he had it moving. Every single one of his (students) is going to sit down and participate. And he is going to call (on) them…they’re paying attention. So, I felt he definitely had it together. …he definitely knew what he was doing.

As a result of this experience, Courtney had confidence in Rich as an educator from the very start of their co-teaching partnership.
Jackie and Bill worked together at Koop Middle school as full-time teachers prior to being assigned to co-teach. Jackie and Bill had no direct working relationship prior to co-teaching, but both indicated having positive feelings toward one another based on typical work place interactions. Bill explained, “I knew that she did a good job; I can tell by her enthusiasm.” Jackie explained, “…he was very knowledgeable with the writing process. Like, I think the year before we started co-teaching, I think his eighth grade class got the highest rating, so I really respected him right off the bat.”

As a result of either having the opportunity to work directly together, or learning about one another professionally, these three teams indicated increased feelings of confidence in each other’s professional abilities and their abilities to work together as co-teachers. At least one of the teachers entered the partnership with a positive mindset about their co-teaching partners’ professional capabilities. Having prior personal or professional knowledge allowed these partners to recognize each other’s strengths, commonalities and professional approaches prior to and early on in the co-teaching partnerships.

**Role of Special Education Teachers**

The co-teaching participants reported that the professional skills and capabilities of the special education teachers were significant to the development of their co-teaching relationships. The participants’ responses indicated that special education teachers who demonstrated their instructional capabilities and course content knowledge were more likely to be treated as equals and full-teachers, rather than as teaching assistants in the co-taught partnership.
Demonstrating knowledge. A key factor reported by the participants was in regard to the special education teachers’ level of course content knowledge. Both groups of teachers recognized the importance of content knowledge in the development of the participants’ long-term co-teaching partnerships. General education teachers and special education teachers were mindful of how a lack of content knowledge impacts the dynamics of co-teaching partnerships.

General education teachers referenced past partnerships in which their special education partner did not have adequate content knowledge. Brianna, a general education teacher, described a past co-teaching partner, “She was incompetent. She’d pronounce things wrong, and she had studied science for years. She mispronounced the terms.” Brianna, her co-teacher, further explained that inclusive co-teaching can only take place if both teachers know the content. “…now it’s like we want it to look seamless. And I am like that can happen if you and your co-teacher knows the material. But if you don’t, that’s not going to happen. And that’s on them.” Jessica, a general education teacher, echoed these concerns, “I have had co-teachers in the past that they don’t know the content, and so that’s a place where I’m like, ‘Well, I’m not really sure I want you in front of the class if you’re not going to say the words correct, and you’re not going to know what you’re talking about.’” Jenny, a general education math teacher, also stressed the importance of content knowledge, “…I felt sometimes I had another student. …I was having to teach them so that they could be effective and then they were of course less likely to step in…” A lack of confidence exists in the partnership when general education
teachers feel they cannot depend on their partner because of a lack of course content knowledge.

In addition, the special education teachers also recognized the significant role content knowledge has on the co-teaching partnership. Meagan, a special education teacher, emphasized its importance, “We’ve heard specialists say the wrong things, so I get that. I felt like I had to show her (Brianna) that I can do seventh grade science.” Meagan, her co-teacher, further explained, “…I wanted to be sure that my co-teachers knew that I was sure I knew as much science as they did, if not more.” Moreover, she also explained how content knowledge impacts the development of the co-teaching partnership, “I think that makes it much easier to slip back and forth into the different roles.” Laura, a special education teacher, also addressed the importance of content knowledge, based on a previous co-teaching partnership, “…I had to prove my mettle by doing the math with her too because she was such a strong math person.” Additionally, Rich explained that as the special education teacher, and the more experienced teacher, his knowledge was instrumental in the development their co-teaching partnership, “we were both starting from very different places…, in that she wasn’t strong in her area and I was stronger…” He explained, “I was familiar with the curriculum. I knew the flow of the year. I knew how things worked. I knew what the labs were going to be and the whole thing. …I think that helped us out…” Rich also emphasized content knowledge in relation to students’ perceptions:

…if she (Courtney) is working with a student…I am keeping the class moving and I’m just stepping in and I’m making it as seamless as possible… I am going to
glance at the agenda…and be like, ‘We need to do this, this, this.’ It looks bad when you don’t (jump-in) because the students assume if you’re not leading the class, you don’t know what you are doing…You become the assistant in the room and that is how the kids view you. You don’t want that.

Positive assertiveness. In addition to course content knowledge, being assertive was seen as an essential skill of special education teachers. The participants indicated that special education teachers who were assertive in carving out a role for themselves within the co-taught class helped in developing a successful co-teaching partnership. Participants indicated that it was important for special education teachers to take ownership over their role in the co-teaching partnership. The role that special education teachers assumed in the partnership was not determined by the general education teachers. The general education teachers and the special education teachers recognized that assertiveness is a personality trait necessary for developing effective co-teaching partnerships, where both teachers view the other as an equal.

Bill, a general education teacher, explained how Jackie was different from his past co-teaching partners. “…she’s better. I’ll say it. Because she’s stepped up and taken more responsibility. …she stepped in and just took off with the role. But that hasn’t been the case with my other co-teachers.” Bill went on to explain, “…Jackie has actually said, ‘can I grade certain things?’ and she wants responsibility. I feel like her enthusiasm has been unique compared to the other teachers I’ve had.” He concluded, “When Jackie wants to do something, she’ll ask to do it.” Jessica, the general education teacher, also noted how her co-teaching partner, Meagan, asserted herself in the class, “…she might be
like, ‘Oh, I’ll take that and grade that…’” Jessica also explained that Meagan advocated for her role as a full teacher in the co-teaching partnership. Jessica reflected on an incident that occurred at Back to School Night (BSN) years earlier, “I wasn’t doing it to be spiteful…, but the brochure had my name on it, and that was it. She was like, ‘I feel like the co-teacher’s name should be on these, too.’ …and then I made them where they had her name, and then they had the ESOL co-teacher on them. So I’ve done that since.” Jenny, the general education co-teacher, described Laura’s classroom presence in a similar manner. “…she had a lot of confidence. And I think that enabled her to stand her ground… She goes in with the same idea, that I am your equal and we will teach together… So I think that’s what sets her apart.” Jenny reflected on how Laura also impacted the physical space of the classroom, “…she was always finding things on the side of the road, like bookcases and so we would have all kinds of cupboards and bookcases and bins… we would set up a reading corner. The math reading corner. …she’s just that kind of person.” The general education teachers looked positively on their special education partners for asserting themselves and taking on an active role within the classroom dynamics.

Special education teachers also indicated understanding the responsibility of inserting themselves into the co-taught partnership. Laura, a special education teacher, explained, “I think I was pushy in the beginning, because I was pushing to prove that I was a teacher too. I know I did that.” Laura further elaborated, “…I think the onus is on the special education teacher, which is unfortunate.” Meagan, a special education co-teacher, also expressed the importance of advocating for her role, “I don’t think she
(Brianna) had many co-teachers that she felt comfortable letting them run with the class. That was something that I felt I had to overcome with her and show her…” She further illustrated, “…there were times where a student would raise their hand, I would start to answer, and she’d be right there answering the question. We had some discussions about that. She got to the point where it’s like. ‘Sorry, sorry’ and she’d back off.” Jackie, the special educator, also reflected on past co-teaching experiences, and how it shaped her approach, “…I would be more upfront right away and maybe try to start off the year with right off the bat kind of starting off like this our room and stuff like that.” Special education teachers recognized the role they themselves played in shaping how they were perceived in the co-taught partnership. These special educators advocated for the role as a full-teacher and their general education partners looked upon it positively.

The co-teaching partners were able to develop a positive relationship based on both teachers being actively involved in the development of the co-teaching partnership. As a result of their assertiveness in regard to one’s capabilities, the special education teachers facilitated an environment where relationships developed around trust, confidence and communication.

**Shared Professional Values**

The third theme that emerged from the data is that having shared or similar professional values is helpful in the development of their co-teaching partnership. Shared professional values include two sub-themes: (a) working together to develop a positive and effective professional partnership, labelled “teacher centered” below, and (b)
working together to ensure that all students are receiving appropriate academic support with high expectations, labelled “student centered.”

**Teacher centered.** The participants indicated that when both teachers take ownership over running the classroom, it produces a positive and constructive professional relationship. The participants emphasized the importance of sharing the instructional responsibilities for the planning and execution of class as significant to the successful development of their co-teaching partnerships. The participants indicated that both the general education and the special education teachers voiced their opinions, concerns, ideas and instructional strategies in the planning of classes. In doing this, the teachers worked together to negotiate the dynamics of their co-taught classes.

Brianna, a general education teacher reported that she and her co-teacher, Meagan, work together to combine their areas of expertise and their classroom and curriculum knowledge in order to develop an effective classroom environment centered on student learning. Brianna explained how they meet once a week to co-plan and negotiate the execution of the class, “…we meet the second even block, we co-plan.” Brianna further described how they co-plan:

… a lot of times we just try to figure out exactly how we’re going to deliver the material for those two classes, and we don’t necessarily break it down. Okay, you’re going to do this, and you’re going to do this, but first thing we try to figure out is okay, how are we going to get them to know the material? …so the other day she said, ‘do you have a problem if I make these, and we’ll glue them into the page for tundra?’ I said, ‘I’m fine with that.’ It was something she had started
with her self-contained class, and then we kind of started adding some things. I might say, ‘Well, do you want to do the tundra, and we’ll show the PowerPoint…, and then we’ll show a little clip about the tundra.’ So then she said, ‘Well wait a minute.’ I said, ‘Well, which way do we want to do it? Do we want to show them the PowerPoint and have them write and then see the clip, or do we want them to see the clip and then (glue)?’ So she said, ‘I want all the gluing to be done at the same time.’

Brianna described their co-planning as a “lot of give and take,” and as being, “pretty flexible.” Brianna also explained how their roles change throughout the class. “I take care of attendance, and I have the agenda up, and then sometimes if Meagan wants a little different agenda…she might type it on the computer, and then she’ll put it on the Smartboard if her class with me is going to look different than the two honors (classes). …Lately, we’ve been trying to do more entrance tickets. She may take one. I’ll take one, and we will do that.” Brianna also illustrated how she and Meagan negotiate class activities:

Whatever we do for our (advanced) students, if I can scaffold it or I can take parts of it, I want to try to get other kids to do it too… And I think sometimes she probably thinks that might be just too much of a stretch… But for the most part we talk it out, and she’ll say, ‘I’m not sure.’ I’ll say, ‘Look, I’ll bring it down some, but I go to try it.’

Brianna also emphasized her need to include Meagan:
…I always want to run it by her to see what she thinks. So now that I have Meagan, and we work together, I could say, ‘Hey, I think this might do,’ … she might go ‘You’re kidding for our kids’ or she might go, ‘Well, I think we can. It’ll be a good thing, but we’re going to have to do this, this and this to scaffold it.’

Brianna reflected on her past co-teaching experiences in comparison to her partnership with Meagan, “Here is the material, and you make the modifications and accommodations, which some people are very happy if that’s all they’re asked to do, but it’s not co-teaching. It’s not co-teaching.” She goes on to say, “…then their job in the classroom becomes scaffolding.”

Meagan also felt that she and Brianna were inclusive in the planning and execution of their co-taught science class. “We plan weekly. We have a (department meeting) one day, and then a designated time for co-planning, but we are also planning on the fly all the time.” Meagan described her approach to co-planning, “With Brianna, we need to sit down and plan… Brianna is a more verbal, and not as visual with the kids. We have to plan so I know what I have to have ready for the kids, so that I can be there showing or having something on the board…” Meagan is also aware of Brianna’s desire to try more challenging labs in the co-taught classroom, “She (Brianna) would rather get into the lab book and have the kids doing stuff which I’m okay with…, but I have to have something prepared, either a study guide, or a little summary sheet, or something the kids can look at in addition to their lab book…” Meagan also described their roles as shared and flexible, “I would say I don’t have a real (role) we kind of split things up.” She went
on to explain, “I do try to bring in the warm-ups… I’ll ask her, ‘What do you want me to have for them for their warm-up? Is there something you want, or can I bring something in?’” Meagan concluded by describing her partnership with Brianna as, “‘we’re all pretty flexible.’” Meagan and Brianna recognized that they both actively participate in the design of class to ensure that the planning of their classes reflect their inclusive efforts and expertise.

Jessica, the general education teacher, and Meagan, her co-teacher, also described having an inclusive approach to their co-teaching partnership. Jessica explained, “We both take ownership in leading the whole class.” She explained further:

…we both do a lot of stuff together, so we both sign assignment notebooks, we both will take turns leading, so there are times where I’m up in front running something, but then there are times where I’m back with the kids, and she’s up front running something. If we decide that we’re going to do a read-aloud, she (Meagan) takes them most of the times, but there are times where I’ll take the read-aloud ones and read to them. We both nag them about turning stuff in and getting stuff in on time, and we both help any of them with questions that they have.

Jessica also described how she and Meagan negotiate the running of the class:

We just have to sit down and talk about it and come to some kind of agreement…, and it’s typically we try to work out something that both of us can live with. It might not be 100 percent her way, and it might not be 100 percent my way, but it’s a shared decision.
Meagan provided a similar description of how they run their co-taught class:

I come in and pretty much support. If there’s direct instruction, sometimes I do some of it…, and she circulates. I’ll just get up and run with it. Often, I will support the students as they’re working, she’ll be up front, but then I’m right up front, and we’re dual teachers.

Meagan, further explained, “Tag teaming is a good way to describe it because I will just say something… I often ask questions, like, ‘Well, I have a question.’ And I’ll do it that way.”

Jenny, the general education teacher, and her co-teacher, Laura, also described their co-teaching partnership as being inclusive, utilizing both of their professional expertise. Jenny explained, “…we really did consider each of us the teacher, we planned together.” Jenny further elaborated:

Well, Laura was unlike others in that we really, really owned all of the children.

Both of us owned all of the children, whereas prior to that it was very segmented. Like I will grade these and keep their grades. …we kept one grade book we really, really had one class, and she (Laura) kind of sometimes was the idea person, and I would be maybe the content person.

Jenny shared that they began their co-planning as a department, “she was part of the math department, and so we planned as a department, and once we learned how to do (department meetings), we were really, really very successful…” Jenny emphasized the role their specializations played on the planning and execution of class and how they intertwined these roles, “I would probably be stronger on the content… And she probably
would have been stronger on we need to provide this support, because they’re (the students) not understanding anything you’re saying to them.” Jenny described how Laura would bring attention to this during class instruction, “… if she could see that they were maybe not getting it as well as I thought, because she was out in the audience. She would sometimes be that child. ‘I don’t see where that two came from?’” Jenny concluded describing her and Laura’s partnership in regard to the execution and planning of class as, “… I think we had carved out eventually a nice share, where my first apprehension about giving up control and, but that didn’t end up being a problem, because it was kind of a shared control.”

Laura shared Jenny’s sentiments in regard to both of them acting as full-teachers within the co-taught partnership. When Laura was asked about their individual roles and responsibilities for the class she explained:

We switched off and made that decision early on. We wanted the students to see us as a pair, as two teachers instead of just one. I tried to get there (class) as soon as I could. Jenny was already checking on homework herself. Then, I would ease into the other side of the room, and we would do that together. In math, we always had a warm-up on the board or on the PowerPoint, so the kids were busy doing that… Then, we would get into the homework questions.

Laura further illustrated how she and Jenny interacted with one another and the students during class:

That communication and planning ahead of time was really important. Jenny and I were really good at think-alouds. That was one of the things we modeled
consistently for kids. Not only on math problems, but social interactions. If a child needed support in math, and I would see someone was struggling, I would say, ‘Ms. Jenny, I never thought that way. I thought you did it like this.’ She would say, ‘That’s a really good way of seeing it. Why wouldn’t you do it like that?’ Then, we would get the kids involved in the back-and-forth. The same thing with behaviors. If someone is having leaving the room issues, I would say, ‘I can’t remember. How many times are we allowed to do that again?’ Or she would say, ‘I think we said two.’

Jenny and Laura both described their co-teaching partnership as inclusive in that they utilized each other’s expertise as they interacted with one another throughout class.

Courtney and Rich, her special education co-teaching partner, also indicated that they intertwine each other’s professional expertise and negotiate with one another in order to plan for their co-taught classes. Courtney described the negotiations that take place between her and Rich when planning for class, “So, I will go, ‘I think we should try this.’ And he (Rich) will be like, ‘that’s ambitious.’ And I would be a real pain… ‘I’m like, we have to try it.’” Courtney further illustrated this process with Rich, “… (he) might be like it’s a little much for my kids or our kids. So, he’ll be like, let’s take a different attack or let’s look at this differently, or let’s chunk it differently.” In addition, Courtney explained:

So, Rich is very good at like, we can introduce that or he’ll allow me to bring something in there as even like a preview. But it will have to be sort of like a different outcome. … I mean; I know we can’t do that. And sometimes, he’ll like
throw me a bone because I like having each page like, at least looked at in the lab book, things like you could skip over. ‘Can we use it as a summary point?’ And he’ll throw me the look… ‘yeah, I guess we can do it as a summary point.’

Courtney also described how she and Rich interact with one another as a means of class instruction, “I mean honest to gosh, we just really do dialogue a lot with everything.” She provides an example of this type of instructional interaction, “I’m like, ‘Mr. Rich, what about those snails in the water? What do you think is going to happen?’ And he’d be like, ‘I don’t know. Well, let’s think about the snails in the water with the plants.’” Courtney shared that she believes this type of interaction between herself and Rich helps to pull the students into the conversation, “Rich constantly draws out the whole class.” When asked about individual classroom roles, Courtney explained:

It really changes. Rich is always the one that’s going to go around and sign these assignment books. And I’m always going to be the one that checks the homework mostly because I have the roster. …it’s silly for him to keep a homework gradebook if I am going to sit there and check the homework. … And we switch off. He’ll come up to the board and I’ll be like floating around. … I’d say a good 70 percent of the time I’m the one who’s up there. But we really don’t have a problem switching off. So, I’m very comfortable with him. Because he knows the material really well.

Rich also shared Courtney’s perspective on how they negotiate the planning and instruction of their co-taught classes. Rich shared:
We just planned today. …Thursdays, fifth period, we sit down and we know where we need to go… we know what needs to get done. When I look at planning with her, I look at the pieces. What do we need to do? It’s like, these are the pieces we need to get done. What order do we need to do them in? How are they going to fit? And (we) go from there. I’m big picture and she is small picture.

He also described their negotiating process:

There are times when I’m like, ‘I don’t know, Courtney. It’s pretty ambitious.’ Sometimes I’m right and sometimes I’m wrong. Sometimes there are times when I’m just like, ‘I don’t know if they’ll be able to do it.’ And they do it. I’m like, we should have tried that before.’ And I’ll bring it here (self-contained class).

In regard to individual roles within the class, Rich mirrored Courtney’s description:

My job is to sign the assignment books, check that the homework is written down. Her responsibility is to check that the homework goes out. I’m usually the one reminding what homework is and what the warm-up is. I’m the guy who’s making sure people are on task and doing what they need to do and pulling students who are behavioral issues and talking to them in the hallway so she can keep teaching.

In regard to shared roles, Rich explained, “Instruction. Instruction, I would say. Assessment. And I would say assessment because we keep sending it back and forth; she’d send me an assessment. I would mark it up in a way I liked it.” Rich also described the instructional dialogue he and Courtney participate in throughout their classes, “She’s (Courtney) asking, ‘Mr. Rich?’ It’s a very kind of expository thing. I’m going back with her at the same thing. It just works. It’s a conversation. I’m less bored. She’s less bored.
The kids are less bored.” Rich emphasized their shared approach to their co-taught classes, “We do co-teach. We do co-instruct. We do co-assess and we do co-plan. We do all those together.”

Lastly, Bill, the general education teacher, and Jackie, the special education teacher, also indicated having a shared process and inclusive approach to the design of their co-taught class, “We both teach probably 50/50; we share. Sometimes we break our groups up and do small groups but generally, we’re both teaching.” Jackie echoed Bill’s description, “We both share the grading. We both share the instruction. We both share the planning. So I guess it’s flexible.”

The participants indicated that a key feature in the development of their co-teaching partnerships stems from the active participation of both the general education and the special education teachers in the design of their co-taught classes. Through working together the participants negotiate how the class will run to ensure that both teachers feel ownership over the class and to ensure that all students’ needs are being met.

**Student centered.** Four of the five teams indicated that having aligned student expectations and instructional approaches as two factors that were significant to the successful development of their co-teaching partnership. Further and more specifically, they indicated that having shared goals and shared instructional approaches that centered on the well-being of all students in the class was constructive in the development of their partnerships. Overall, they indicated that having shared student goals facilitated the planning and execution of class.
Courtney, the general education teacher, believes that she and Rich, her co-teaching partner, share the same educational goals for their students. To substantiate this sub-theme, she stated, “...with the students, we want to have a really positive environment. Positive like, I want to have a really safe place that the kids really can learn. ...we want the kids to know that they can ask questions. We don’t want to be dismissive of the kids.” She explained further that she came to know Rich’s goals and values by working with him, “... his standards are high. He made that really clear from the beginning. I don’t think he ever stated (it)…” Rich mirrored Courtney’s claims, but also addressed that they come from different mindsets professionally, “I would say they’re (goals) similar. I think the execution comes off a little differently, though. I think that’s a function of me being in this classroom (self-contained) and teaching these kids during the day...” He further explains that having similar goals benefits the co-teaching partnership, “I think it makes it much easier because when we both know what we expect of the students and... we ... tailor it to each kid. But we know what needs to get done and we know that it needs to get there, and we both have high expectations.”

Meagan, a general education teacher, with two different special education co-teachers participating in this study, also expressed the significance of shared goals in the formation and continued development of her co-teaching partnerships. She indicated being on the same page as both of her co-teaching partners in regard to student expectations when she offered, “I think the three of us, really, feel that all students are capable of being successful one way or the other, and all three of us will do whatever we can to help the kids.” She also explained that they share high expectations, “We don’t
want to give you all the answers, we want you to try things, ask some questions, try to figure out some stuff.” Meagan elaborated further on the importance of having shared goals, “I think…that makes it (co-teaching) much more successful because we all want to get to the same place. We’re willing to do certain things for the students to help them get to where we want them to be, and we’ll do quite a bit to get them there.” Jessica echoed Meagan’s claims with regard to having similar student goals, “We believe they’re capable. We know some struggle a little bit more than others.” She also explained:

I think it actually allows it (class) to run smoother, and I think it’s a better environment for the kids because they’re not seeing two people … going at in in different directions, but it’s like this is the way that it needs to go and this is the way that it’s expected to go whether I’m here or I’m out, whether she’s here or she’s out, we’re both here…

As a team, Laura, the special education co-teacher, and Jenny also reported they had shared professional goals regarding the well-being of the students. Laura explained, “We both want the kids to be successful. ‘Are they getting it? If they’re not getting it, what should we do to change it? How can we do that?’” Laura further elaborated on Jenny’s involvement with all of the students, “She wanted to know their IEP goals in detail and where we were going to meet those. She was very involved in that. That didn’t always happen with any of my other co-teachers.” Jenny shared similar sentiments, “…you know, we both believe that all kids could learn.” Jenny elaborated further, “I think coincidentally…I kind of left my strict mathematician and started looking at more
on how children learn. Which I think met up with her (Laura’s) special education.” She further explained how they complimented each other’s areas of expertise:

I was probably stronger on the content… And she probably was stronger on knowing we needed to provide support… So, you know, we did work through those two aspects. … we didn’t support them (the students) too much, that they were too weak, but we didn’t let them fail, so we kind of negotiated where those were.

When asked how Jenny came to know the expectations Laura had for her students, she indicated it was by co-planning, “…in our planning and our discussions …I do think “education-wise” that we do agree.” Laura mirrored these sentiments, “The first year, we really stuck things in and I came up with a couple different ways that we could support all children. …We started out looking at where we were wasting time.” Laura further explained, “We knew it was about the kids, period. It wasn’t about egos or room space or any of that garbage. It was always about the kids.” In addition, Laura explained:

Jenny and I would say the same thing, ‘We have them. We’re going to make this 45 minute period we have them work for them. They’re going to leave this classroom with skill sets. They may not be able to solve everything we throw at them, but they’re going to start digging and looking instead of turning out and saying, ‘this is too hard.’

Lastly, Bill and Jackie also indicated that having shared student goals helped in the formation of their professional partnership. When asked about having shared goals, Jackie, the special education co-teacher, explained:
Well, I think we just – it helps us – it helps us when we’re planning. It helps us
determine what we need to do and what is really not that important. Like were not
just checking boxes… to get the kids to learn the curriculum. We’re really
thinking about okay, what is essential, what do they need to move into eight grade
and life in general, so I think that helps?

Bill echoed a similar response, “Yes, for the students we definitely have the same
educational goals. We share all the same learning targets and so yes, definitely.”

The participants indicated that having shared goals in regard to student
expectations and instructional approaches helps unite teachers as professional partners. It
makes working together easier when the direction of class instruction is universally
understood, as well as knowing that both teachers are concerned with the well-being and
achievement of all students. It also appears that it alleviates or lessens potential
disagreements because the teachers’ expectations are aligned with one another.

**Preparation for Co-teaching**

Overall, the participants indicated feelings of preparedness regarding their co-
teaching assignments. The feeling of being prepared varied in terms of how and where
these developed. Three themes concerning the formation and continuing development of
the co-teaching partnership emerged from the interview data: (a) the role of professional
development programs; (b) contributions from teacher preparation programs; and (c)
building-level administrative support. Yet, not all of the participants indicated receiving
preparation or the same level of preparation from the above categories, as is presented
below.
Professional development. In regard to professional development, most of the participants indicated receiving effective school-based preparation. When asked whether school-based professional development was beneficial, Jackie, a special education teacher, responded, “Yeah, absolutely.” She explained:

Every year, we start off with a kind of co-teaching professional development where all the co-teachers fill out a survey of expectations, and we talk and we have time to plan. So I think that just really helps to set it off – set off the year on a good note.

Jackie further elaborated:

I really like the survey that we do in the beginning of the year, kind of being like what (are) my thoughts on these (classroom management) topics? Okay, … you do it by yourself and then (discuss with your co-teaching partner) what are your thoughts on these topics? And kind of say okay, so where do we not align? How can we compromise? And a lot of it is (about) classroom management, but it also goes into teaching styles and like the little things, like the raising hands, the bathroom (policy), the water (fountain), stuff like that. And I think structures like that will help us come back together and kind of think like, okay, so how can we make this work? What is it that is really frustrating me and what is it that is really frustrating you and how can we work together to make that happen, what works?

Jessica, a general education science teacher, shared similar sentiments when asked about school-based professional development:
…at the beginning of the year before school has even started, we’re given a checklist of different (structures) like what are your philosophies about this, about this, about this, and we are supposed to do it by ourselves. Then we actually sit down with our co-teacher, and we plan it out. It’s something that’s kind of built over the years, and it’s changed a little bit.

Jessica also explained that she and her partner took a class on co-teaching offered by the school district:

It was a five-week class that met once a week and we took it together. I think it opened both of our eyes up to some things that we were doing well and also some other ways to do things and the fact that the class kept going back to the whole it’s a spectrum and how some are on one side of the spectrum or the other or anywhere in-between, and it’s okay to start off in one place and move toward and other, which is, I think, in our ten years what we’ve done is actually moved along the spectrum.

Meagan, her co-teacher, expressed receiving similar benefits from the school-based professional development:

This was becoming kind of the way we’re going, is more and more co-teaching, so we did some PD here where people were exposed to different models of co-teaching and different ways you can do it, so we did quite a bit of PD here at school. …we saw examples of, I forget the exact terms, but we were able to see good examples, things that didn’t work as well, and so that allowed me to – I think it allowed all of us to kind of pick and choose what works for us, and also to
see how it doesn’t, and it should be, always the same thing. You could switch back and forth, even within the same class period, especially with a block period like we have, you could switch back and forth between different roles and mix it up.

Brianna also indicated that receiving professional development in the area of co-teaching was helpful, but also expressed the importance of practice, “…we’ve done a lot of that stuff. … I mean I think it was good philosophical, that type of introduction, but you don’t learn to do it until the rubber hits the road.”

Lastly, some of the participants indicated receiving ineffective school-based professional development and one participant reported that she did not receive any professional development in the area of co-teaching. One of the participants, Laura, a special education teacher, reported not receiving any school-based professional development in the area of co-teaching. Two of the participants, Rich, a special educator, and his co-teacher, Courtney reported receiving school-based professional development, but indicated they did not find it to be beneficial to the development of their co-teaching partnerships. Courtney’s description of the professional development mirrored the previous descriptions, “…the in-services at the beginning of the year where you go, and you talk, and you’re supposed to exchange your way of doing things and talk to each other.” Yet, she found this to be only slightly useful, “In terms of talking to the person, sure. But I would do that anyway. I mean there was (sic) no real specifics.” Jenny, a general education teacher, shared Courtney’s sentiments, “Yes, we have had, you know, some in-service kind of things… people coming and talking to us about (co) teaching and
whatnot.” But, when asked if she found it effective she responded, “Well, no not really…I really don’t think so. It’s like telling people how you know this is the person you should marry, you know?” Interestingly, all but one of the five teachers from Kettleers Middle School indicated that the school-based professional development had a positive impact on the development of their co-teaching partnerships. When asked about receiving professional development, Bill responded, “Yes, I have. …we did have to do some training for that but it was modules through the computer.” When asked if he found it useful, Bill responded, “No.”

Some of these participants indicated that school-based professional development was beneficial to the successful development of their co-teaching partnerships. Yet, participants also indicated that the school-based professional development was not significant to the development of their co-teaching partnership.

**Co-teaching and teacher preparation programs.** In general, the five special education participants indicated receiving effective co-teaching preparation from their teacher preparation programs (TPP). As a result, each co-teaching team had one member that had some form of university based co-teaching preparation prior to the start of their co-teaching partnership.

Rich described the preparation he received through his TPP at the graduate level: …for my master’s, I had to take a class in co-teaching. … it was called Collaboration. We had to do a class in collaboration. It wasn’t just co-teaching; it was also speech language, the department chairs, PT and OT and the ELT…We had to learn to do all of that. I’m already kind of a consensus building person.
That’s is just who I am as a person, so it really helped kind of just make sure I knew what I was doing and doing it right.

Jackie also found her TPP to be effective in preparing her to co-teach. When asked if she found the courses to be effective she responded, “Yes, absolutely.” Meagan also expressed feeling prepared as a result of her teacher preparation program, “I went to (University), I was in one of the cohorts there, career switcher, and we did take co-teaching as a course, but not everybody had that. In addition, Laura described the beneficial aspects of her TPP in regard to co-teaching:

The helpful part for that was it was right in the beginning with Marilyn Friend’s work, so a lot of the co-teaching rating scales and things that I use now in my teaching were brand new. So, co-teaching was something that was coming down the line as being more of a part of our education process as we started to talk about inclusion.

Only one of the general education teachers indicated any form of co-teaching preparation as a result of their TPP. This preparation only came in the form of completing classroom observations. Courtney explained:

I was aware of that (co-teaching) because I went to observations, I did observations in team-taught classes, but it’s not the way I team-teach. I mean, it’s just not. …in the high school I was observing one guy that was there…I don’t know what the heck he did…

None of the other four general education teachers had any preparation for working in a co-teaching partnership.
The responses from the participants indicate that teacher preparation programs focus on preparing special education teachers to co-teach, but the same cannot be said of the general education teachers who participated in the present study. As a result, the special education teachers felt that these courses were beneficial in helping to develop positive collaborative relationships.

**Administrative support.** The third subtheme concerns the role that building-level school leaders play in forming and nurturing co-teaching partnerships. Overall, the participants indicated that having the support of their administration helped in the development of their co-teaching partnerships. Support came in two forms: (a) having designated common planning times; and (b) teachers feelings supported.

**Common planning time.** In general, the participants reported that they have scheduled co-planning times built into their work week. Bill, a general education teacher, shared, “… we meet together third period to plan because we share that time together.” Rich and Courtney, his co-teacher also indicated having common co-planning time. Rich explained, “Thursdays, fifth period, we sit down and we know where we need to go because we’ve done it for so long.” When asked about co-planning Brianna, a general education teacher, explained, “We have it built in, so at this point our (department) meets the first block, so we meet an hour the first block of the week, and the second even block, we co-plan. So she will usually go to Jessica first, and then we’ll co-plan, so it’s built in time.” Meagan, a special education teacher, echoed Brianna, “We plan weekly. …we have a (department meeting) one day, and then a designated time for co-planning.” Jessica, a general education teacher, shared both Brianna and Meagan’s description, “So
our department is off at the same time, and once a week there’s a time period specifically
designated for co-teachers to plan together.” “Jenny, a general education teacher, and
Laura, her co-teaching partner, shared that their co-planning came with time. In the
beginning of their partnership, Jenny explained that she and Laura planned during weekly
department meetings, “…the math 8 (teachers) all planned together.” Laura shared,
“Eventually, over time, Jenny’s department chair insisted that, especially for math, the
math special education teachers must be present. ‘This is not working. You must have
them there. We cannot plan without them.’ Eventually, we had common planning time.
That took years.”

**Teachers feeling supported.** In general, the participants indicated that their
administration values the development of positive co-teaching partnerships. When asked
about external factors affecting the co-teaching partnership Rich, a special education
teacher, explained, “…they’ve let us stay together for so many years. We do have an
administration that supports us. So I feel like we have people that support us because they
know that what we do is important and that we do it well.” When asked the same
question, Jackie, special educator, shared similar sentiments in regard to her
administration, “I think this school in general is very focused on co-teaching and
promoting good co-teaching relationships, so there’s already tons of structures in place to
help us out.” Jessica, a general education teacher, echoed Jackie’s feelings of support, “I
am in a school that truly believes in co-teaching, and that is why we’ve (Meagan and
Jessica) have been co-teaching for 11 years is because they like for the teacher to all
experience it and work together.” Lastly, Brianna, a general education teacher, explained
that support came in fulfilling her requests, “…we started asking to co-teach (together).”

In addition, Brianna shared that the administration also supported their request to combine two of their classes into a co-taught class:

Here’s how it went. I said to her (Meagan), ‘I would really like to try this.’ And she was right on board with it. I said, ‘I would like to embed your comprehensive ED (emotional disability class) into a class.’ And then I went back to her and I said, ‘I think we better embed them in an honors class, not a regular class because of behavior.’ And so we did. So we did it the first year. We did it the second year, and then some other people wanted to try it.

By in large the participants indicated feelings of support in regard to having the necessary time to co-plan with one another, having a positive commitment to establishing effective co-teaching partnerships and listening to the requests of the teachers and valuing their opinions.

**Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

Prior to the participants’ experience in their co-teaching partnerships, the participants indicated having positive feelings toward co-teaching as an instructional practice. Though the participants indicated feelings of apprehension, they also expressed a genuine willingness to embrace their co-teaching partners in order to develop a positive co-taught classroom environment.

**Positive perceptions.** The participants expressed embracing co-teaching as a worthwhile instructional practice. Laura, a special education teacher, expressed having a positive outlook toward her co-teaching assignment, “I was excited. I was curious. … I
think both of us were open to figuring it out. That was good. I knew that.” Jenny, a
general education math teacher, expressed a similar willingness to try, “I think coming
from (working in) industry I had a little bit more comfort there. Often people collaborate
on projects.” Jessica, also a general educator, shared a similar enthusiasm, “…as a first
year teacher, I probably thought, ‘Thank God there’s somebody here to help with this.’”
Jackie, a special educator, simply shared, “I thought it was a great idea.” Rich, also a
special educator, explained, “I like co-teaching. In theory, it’s very, very good. In
practice, it’s mostly good. I think there are a couple things to keep in mind. One is, are
you putting the right kids in a co-taught class? Two is, what’s the mix of the teachers?”
Courtney, a general educator, shared her support for co-teaching, “I mean, I do think it
(classrooms) needs to be integrated. I absolutely think, you, definitely need another
teacher there …to make sure that they’re focused, definitely. …you really should be as
much integrated as possible…”

These data indicate that these participants, across both groups of teachers, entered
their co-teaching partnerships with both a positive attitude and positive mindset. They
approached their co-teaching partnerships with a focus and drive to make it work.

**Feelings of apprehension.** In addition to embracing their co-taught partnerships,
the participants also shared their feelings of apprehension. Special educator Jackie
explained “… I probably had a little bit of reservations about people thinking it’s like my
classroom and somebody coming into their classroom, but the majority of my co-teaching
experiences have been very positive, and it hasn’t been like that at all.” Special educator
Laura and regular educator Jenny also expressed feelings of apprehension. Jenny shared,
“I think I probably was a little bit apprehensive. A little bit of one, the set of kids, and two, would it complicate like my classroom dynamics.” Laura admitted, “I was a little bit nervous. I knew Jenny at a different level, socially, and I was, ‘Now we’re going to be in a classroom together?’ She already said to me that she doesn’t know that much about special ed…” Interestingly, the two participants with the most years of teaching experience, Brianna and Bill, both general educators, indicated strong feelings of apprehension. Bill explained, “…so initially, like this is toward the beginning of my teaching career, when you have another person in your room it’s awkward and there’s possibilities for conflict that didn’t exist before that person was in your room. So I wasn’t too enthusiastic about it…” He further shared, “I think older teachers tended to resist this idea more. There’s a new person in your room and what are they there for? Are they checking on me?” Brianna shared Bill’s concerns, “… my first reaction would’ve been somebody’s going to be in here with me all the time? ‘What if I misspeak? What if I yell at somebody?’”

The participants’ feelings of apprehension appeared to reflect their lack of preparation in their pre-service teacher preparation programs and their inexperience with the instructional practice of co-teaching. In addition, feelings of apprehension also appeared to reflect the dynamics of working with another professional and a more diverse student population.

**Summary**

The themes found in these data indicate that knowledge and exposure to co-teaching as an instructional practice helps in facilitating the development of effective,
long-term co-teaching partnerships. They also suggest that such knowledge came primarily from school-based professional development programs, rather than from initial licensure for the general educators. Further, the themes also highlight that having knowledge of one’s co-teaching partner in regard to work ethic, instructional practices and professional values helps in establishing a strong foundation to support a long-term co-teaching partnership. This form of knowledge led to feelings of confidence and competence between dyads. In addition, themes indicate that special educators bare a unique responsibility in convincingly illustrating their instructional capabilities as teachers and as educators with in-depth knowledge of course content. These findings suggest that special educators need to prove themselves as having the knowledge and skills to plan and instruct in the co-taught classroom.

With regard to the formation of a fully-functioning co-teaching partnership, the themes that come from the interview data support the practice of both teachers sharing in all aspects that come with running a co-taught classroom. The evidence indicates these co-teachers had procedures in place to fulfill their responsibilities as full-teachers in the co-taught classroom. All participants indicated that they co-planned, co-instructed and co-assessed. They worked together, negotiating and compromising to determine how the class would be run, addressing specific elements that aligned with the well-being of all students. In order to do this successfully, findings indicate that the teachers had shared goals in terms of classroom expectations and student achievement. Shared goals aligned with having shared student expectations and ownership over the well-being and success of all students. The participants had high expectations for their students and believed that
all students in the class were capable of rising to classroom expectations. Furthermore, findings also indicate that the participants had the support of their administration. The participants were provided common planning time that was built into their work schedules. In addition, the participants expressed having support in the form of their administrations valuing their voice, requests and experiences as co-teachers.

Lastly, findings did indicate feelings of apprehension toward the practice of co-teaching. Yet, some of the findings also indicate that having a positive mindset and approaching the development of co-taught partnerships with a willingness and enthusiasm to make it a success, led to the development of positive co-teaching partnerships. A combination of shared knowledge, shared skills, shared procedures and shared goals positively impacts the development of effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships.

Features and Characteristics of Long-Term Co-Teaching Partnerships

The following section addresses the second research question, “What are the unique features or characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their successful professional partnerships?” The findings to this question are presented according to the major themes that emerged. The themes that emerged from the data are addressed in the following order: Features Developed from Long-term Co-teaching Partnerships and Shared Benefits.

Features Developed from Long-term Co-teaching Partnerships
A major finding that emerged from this study captures the unique features and characteristics that developed from the participants’ long-term co-teaching partnerships. As a result of working together over a long-period of time, the findings indicate that each of the participating teams developed inclusive instructional practices that have contributed to the ongoing development of their co-teaching partnerships. The similar characteristics and features reported as significant to the continued development of their long-term co-teaching partnerships were: genuine trust, strengths, weaknesses and knowledge, agree to disagree and inclusive co-teaching partnerships.

**Genuine trust.** The participating co-teaching teams identified their ability to develop a genuine trust between one another as significant to the ongoing development of their professional partnerships. The findings indicated that working together over a long-period of time was directly related to mutual feelings of trust between co-teachers. When asked about how she built trust in her co-teaching partnership, Jenny, a general education teacher, explained:

> So I think probably both of us observing how the other person handled themselves (professionally)…I think the trust, you learn to trust one another. …I think you give up control (in a co-teaching partnership) and you trust that they will get through what we have agreed we need to get through and we will emphasize what we’ve agreed we will emphasize…

When asked what the definition of trust meant in regard to her co-teaching partner (Laura), she responded, “You have to be in 100 percent. I trusted her content knowledge and I trusted her instructional decisions and I trusted her integrity.” Laura echoed these
sentiments, “I think it was mutual trust. She trusted me and I trusted her. We knew it was about the kids.” When asked how they came to have this type of trust Laura explained, “It’s time. Long-term relationships are key.” Furthermore, both Jenny and Laura shared the same story to illustrate the trust they had for one another. Jenny explained:

…I was already trying to get us (class) going, and she came in the door like, ‘I tried to rent a beach house last night.’ And so she was going to pay $2500 and she found the perfect house and then she put it in and then it cost more money and she couldn’t figure out why it cost more money. And the kids were like, ‘You forgot the tax.’ So it was 100 percent on the lesson.

Laura also reflected on this moment:

I’m just going, and to her credit (Jenny), she didn’t stop me. Within two minutes, she figured out where I was going. She looked around the room and saw the calculators out and the students were trying to solve the problem. …Jenny trusted me. She knew that I wasn’t going to do something to completely derail the class. If you don’t trust the person you’re in the classroom with, you can’t teach with them. It’s the basis of all relationships. I trusted her implicitly.

Courtney, a general education teacher, and her co-teaching partner, Rich, shared similar thoughts in regard to trust in their co-teaching partnership. Courtney explained, “You have to really be open and trusting. You have to really trust, he’s going to do the right thing by the kids and me.” When asked about their first year teaching together Courtney explained, “I had to trust.” Rich recognized trust as an essential component to
his and Courtney’s partnership. When asked what trust meant to their partnership, Rich explained:

She exemplifies it. I know what’s going to happen. I know where she’s going to be. I know she’s going to be working in the best interests of all of our students. So I feel like if it’s trust, it’s a matter of I know she’s going to do what needs to be done, and she knows that I’m going to do what needs to be done, and we are on the same page.

Rich further elaborated, “I trust her with the content. I trust her with the kids. …I know that if I’m not there, that nothing would change.” When asked about the benefits of co-teaching with the same partner over time, Rich answered, “Trust. If you want to put it in one word, trust.”

Brianna, a general education teacher, and her partner Meagan, also emphasized the role trust has played in their partnership. When asked how their co-teaching partnership has changed over the years Brianna explained, “It’s just grown and matured, and it’s become more trusting. It started out good, and now to me it’s just great.” She also explained the meaning of trust, “Support for each other. People must be compatible and trust each other’s competencies. If there is a problem we can just say it and resolve it.”

Meagan, a special education teacher, also indicated having these feelings toward both of her co-teaching partners:

…with both Jessica and Brianna, trust to me means that I trust them if they are doing something in class that they really think it’s going to help. I trust them to
use their judgment, whether it’s making a change, or a decision with a student that they have the student’s best interest.

She goes on to explain the importance of trust in her co-teaching partnerships, “…you can’t make every single decision together. It’s just not feasible.” And when asked how to establish trust in regard to communicating with one’s co-teaching partner, Meagan responded, “I think that developed over time, just feeling comfortable and to be able to express an opinion, and seeing that Jessica wasn’t going to totally disagree with me, or Brianna wasn’t going to disagree. …I think with time, you develop that.” She further explained, “… it’s just something that at first, I think it’s a little harder to feel comfortable communicating everything you’re thinking because you don’t know…Oh, maybe that’s not a good idea. Maybe I shouldn’t bring it up, or I don’t want to make them upset.” Jessica, a general education teacher, and Meagan’s other co-teaching partner elaborated on developing trust in their co-teaching partnership:

I think trust is very important in the relationship. It partially is believing that you both are in this for the same goals and reasons, and you’re not out to sabotage or be against your partnership. It’s definitely something you have to build on, but I think we have a very trusting relationship with each other. I have no issues leaving the classroom and knowing that she’ll do what needs to be done, and I hope she feels the same way.

In regard to how trust impacts the way Jessica and Meagan communicate, Jessica shared:

I think it’s easier for us to just be like, ‘Can I talk to you for a minute?’ and whatever, and we’re able to have those conversations faster, and we’re able today
to have them (conversations) more on the fly if we need to where we’re not having to hold something until our next appointed meeting time with each other. And when asked about the significance of trust, Jessica explained, “I think it makes it easier for us to be able to just get through everything so that we can get to what’s really important, and that’s making sure the kids are getting what they need and making sure our lessons are running smoothly…”

Bill, a general education teacher, also indicated the significance of trust in the development of his co-teaching partnership. Bill shared, “It (trust) is of the utmost importance in co-teaching because if you feel like your co-teacher…is going behind your back and talking to the administration or other teachers that can really set up a terrible situation. So trust is very important.” He further explained, “I know that she (Jackie) has the best for the kids in mind so that’s the main thing.” In regard to communicating with one another Rich shared, “… I think initially when you’re feeling each other out, like for me, I didn’t want to insult her or step on her toes. And I wanted her to feel comfortable in the classroom.” When asked to define trust in relation to her co-teaching partnership, Jackie, Rich’s co-teaching partner, answered, “High.” She elaborated further, “I trust his opinion. I trust his professional judgment. I think we both respect each other. We both trust each other, and I think that’s what makes it work. We talk. We are an alliance with one another…” In regard to communicating, Jackie also explained, “I think I was probably a little hesitant at first…, but Bill was super, super kind, super, super open.”

These data indicate that the participants recognized trust as a significant component that developed over the course of their co-teaching partnerships. They
indicate that mutual feelings of trust developed from working closely with one another and was related to having open and honest communication. In addition, trust was directly related to feelings of confidence in his/her co-teachers’ judgment in the running of the co-taught classroom and in putting the best interest of the students first.

**Strengths, weaknesses and knowledge.** The participants indicated that working with one another in long-term professional partnerships provided the opportunity to recognize each other’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result, the co-teaching partners were able to utilize each other’s strengths and weaknesses in the planning and execution of their co-taught classes and gained professional knowledge as a result of learning from one another.

Jenny, a general education teacher, and Laura, her co-teaching partner indicated that they recognized each other’s strengths and weaknesses and took these into account in the design of their co-taught classes. Jenny explained, “…you learn what the strengths and weaknesses are of one another, so you can play to those well.” She elaborates further, “I think we probably know some things each of us was more comfortable doing and less comfortable doing.” In addition, Jenny explained how recognizing each other’s strengths and weaknesses allowed them to learn from one another, “I probably learned a lot from her about doing different types of differentiation. … I think I did get better at confrontation and parent conversations that, you know, delivering news that might not be great. I think she helped me learn to do that.” Laura shared similar thoughts:

You’re constantly growing as a professional. We could rely on each other, and it was just great. We were able to blend a lot. Our strengths and weaknesses went
together. I learned so much from her, and I know she says the same about me. We pushed each other.

Laura elaborated on how they learned from one another’s strengths and weaknesses, “I grew as a teacher and learned how to work in different situations. She learned a lot more about students with disabilities. I learned about lesson planning and things I wasn’t as strong on.”

Bill, a general education teacher, and his partner, Jackie, also recognized the role strengths and weaknesses had on the development of their co-teaching partnership. Jackie explained, “… you get to know what each other’s strengths are, what each other’s weaknesses are, and they (co-teacher) get to know what your strengths and weaknesses are and you can kind of help each other out with that.” Jackie elaborated on learning from Bill’s strengths:

Professionally, I’ve gotten a lot of great ideas from him, a lot of really great structures. …but he’s definitely influenced my teaching… I guess my just like outlook on certain things like determining what is really essential and what is really not that essential. …what do they need to move into eighth grade…? He knows what works, what doesn’t. So my professional knowledge grew.

Bill shared:

Jackie’s taught me a lot. A lot about Kegan and different ways of teaching, new approaches to reach students and more interactive, like four corners. That wasn’t really my style for a while. But now, the more you can get them talking, the more they’re learning. It took me awhile to evolve to that, but that’s where I am now.
He further elaborated, “She’s helped me a lot in terms of how to read students who are struggling, especially struggling writers.”

Courtney, a general education teacher, and Rich, her co-teaching partner, also recognized learning from one another as a way to gain professional knowledge that addressed their perceived strengths and weaknesses. In regard to her perceived weaknesses, Courtney explained how she has learned from Rich:

…in terms of being more relaxed with the kids. And knowledge. Like little things like, using Venn diagrams. Sometimes, it (the content) is overwhelming for them, just a little teasing (the content) helps a little bit and just show them the format and the outline. And just by showing a small little structure, that will give them the clue. That will make the light bulb go off for some of them, not all of them but, maybe, a good number of them.

Rich also indicated strengthening his perceived professional weaknesses as a result of working with Courtney:

I think I know how to run a general education classroom better. …I think that I could handle a little bit more. It takes a lot more - I feeling like it takes a different kind of energy. There’ve been times when Courtney has to go to an IEP meeting leaving the whole class and suddenly I don’t have six kids, I have 26. It’s a lot of kids to have to monitor and just be checking all the time. I feel like I get that sense from her. I get that from her, how to be able to do that.

Jessica, a general education teacher, and Meagan’s co-teacher, explained the process of understanding one another’s strengths and weaknesses:
… it is definitely baby steps, and maybe doing something once within a month, so not just all of a sudden going, ‘Okay, I want you to teach half the lessons,’ but talking about strengths and weaknesses and where she feels comfortable doing things, where I feel comfortable doing things, where I feel comfortable letting go of things is definitely important...

Meagan, a special education teacher, and Jessica and Brianna’s co-teaching partner, elaborated on how learning from one another improved her perceived weaknesses:

… this relates to both of them (co-teaching partners), I think that I learn from things I see each of them doing, different strategies that they just naturally do, or things they’ve learned from their experiences. I can take what I want to adapt as my own, and they both do things very differently in their classes, so I think I can learn from both of them.

Meagan elaborated in regard to Jessica, “I have learned some of the strategies she’s learned for ELLs. …they are so great for special ed kids too…” In regard to Brianna, “…Brianna’s done more the (advanced academics) stuff, and so some of the strategies she’ll try to bring into our team class, I will take those too because I never take those course. I got me hand full down here.” Brianna also indicated that her co-teaching partnership strengthened her instructional practices, “… I think working with Meagan has improved my perspective on things. SPED perspective especially because when I took SPED (courses), it was fetal in development. And like she helped me with the (special education computer software) and understating all that…” Jessica indicated similar sentiments:
She’s definitely helped with behavior. She’s helped with my understanding of special ed students. …I had no clue what a special ed student was or what it meant to teach with someone else, so she’s really helped with that over the years with the understanding of how to work with special ed students. …and also modification of things like how to modify assignments I’ve gotten better at because of the way she’s done it.

These findings indicate that long-term co-teaching partnerships have allowed co-teachers the opportunity to gain an understanding of each other’s instructional strengths and weakness. As a result, the participants were able to prepare for their co-taught classes in light of one another’s strengths and weaknesses as well as learn from one another. Furthermore, the participants indicated that this was an effective way of improving their instructional practices, utilizing this knowledge not only in their co-taught classes, but also in their traditional single instructed classes.

**Agree to disagree.** The findings indicate that long-term co-teaching partners developed a mutual approach as a means for handling the challenges and disagreements that come with being in a professional partnership. The participants indicated that they learned how to agree to disagree with one another.

When asked about handling differences of opinion or uncomfortable situations in her co-taught partnership, Jenny, a general education teacher, responded, “…sometimes we would have big disagreements. So I think learning that it is okay to disagree.” Laura, Jenny’s co-teaching partner, agreed:
If I disagreed with something that was going on, I had no problem saying that to her. Same with her. She would say, ‘So-and-so is really pulling your chain. You are not seeing it.’ I’m like, ‘Really?’ She would say, ‘Yes.’ ‘You know what? You’re exactly right. The next time the kid pulls that trick, you’re going to deal with them. I’ll stay over here.’ I think we just had the philosophy of wanting the kids to be successful. We agreed on that.

Laura further explained:

It was really about a mutual respect knowing we could talk it out. Even if it got a little contentious, ‘I don’t really want to do it this way. I want to do it this way,’ we could leave it and come back to it. We would say, ‘Let’s agree to disagree.’ Nobody was right or wrong 100 percent of the time. We usually blended a lot of the things that we did. I think Jenny would say the same thing. We would compromise and make it happen.

Meagan, a special education teacher, and her co-teaching partners, Jessica and Brianna, indicated approaching professional challenges in a similar fashion:

I think with either of them, after working with them for a while and just getting confidence in myself and what I’m doing, we’ve gotten to the point where, particularly with Jessica, if she wants to do something, I will tell her my opinion…If there’s something, I feel pretty comfortable telling her that. I can’t think of a time where she just said no. It’s like, ‘Oh, okay,’ always very receptive of anything I say. With Brianna, I think, again, it was a matter of me just getting some confidence, being able to feel comfortable saying to her, ‘That’s too much,’
or, ‘We need to get the kids up and active now,’ or whatever it is. I think the first
year, I probably didn’t do that quite as much because I hadn’t taught with her
(Brianna). We didn’t have that relationship yet… Over the last couple of years,
I’ve gotten more comfortable disagreeing with her.

Meagan concluded, “…sometimes people have to agree to disagree and get through it
anyway, but we have to remember not to take it personally.” Jessica shared these
sentiments:

… there are times where we'll politely disagree about things, but we're able to sit
down and work it out and come to a decision on how things need to be, especially
as our curriculum has changed and how we're teaching it. We usually just have to
sit down and talk about it and come to just some kind of agreement of it, and it's
typically we try to work out something that both of us can live with. It might not
be 100 percent her way, and it might not be 100 percent my way, but it's a shared
decision.

Brianna, Meagan’s other co-teaching partner, explained, “… we negotiate. We talk it
out… It's evolved. I think the longer we've worked together, I think now we're just at a
good place. But I think we just worked it out as we went through it…”

Lastly, Courtney, a general education teacher, and Rich, her co-teaching partner,
have developed a similar approach in dealing with professional challenges and
disagreements. Rich explained, “We’ve had disagreements and we just had to agree to
disagree. She didn’t like it and I didn’t like it. I’m learning how to deal with that kind of
thing, so I’m getting better at it. …You have to be willing to compromise.” When asked
about professional challenges and disagreements, Courtney recommended:

Get it out there. You better because, otherwise, you’re not going to be able to
work with the person. …And then, you can move on or agree to disagree, he
(Rich) might have a different perspective than I have, but at least the perspectives
are out there. You’re not resenting your partner and he doesn’t resent you.
…Don’t make the resentments.

These findings indicate that long-term co-teaching partnerships allowed co-
teachers to develop effective processes for addressing the challenges and disagreements
that arise in co-teaching partnerships. This process was mutually inclusive in that the co-
teaching partners were able to effectively communicate, effectively compromise and
were comfortable in agreeing to disagree.

**Inclusive co-teaching partnerships.** The findings indicate that as a result of the
participants’ long-term co-teaching partnerships, the teachers were able to develop a
reliable array of inclusive instructional practices. These instructional practices centered
on the teachers’ familiarity with one another and their ability to utilize each other’s
professional expertise. As a result, the co-teachers implemented a variety of co-teaching
models, anticipated each other’s thoughts and actions, and moved seamlessly between
instructional roles.

Jenny, a general education teacher, and Laura, her co-teaching partner, reported
using a variety of co-teaching models. As Jenny explained:
It was very flexible. All of them. So kind of depending. And because we really
did consider each of us the teachers, we planned together, sometimes we would
choose which we thought we were you know, I’m stronger at this, you’re stronger
at that. And we’d pull a small group and that could be either of us. It was Laura
pulling small group, sometimes I would pull the small group. So it was extremely
fluid. …one person’s up and one is floating, but then the next day it might be
Laura teaching and I am floating. So it wasn’t like my classroom and she assisted.
It was truly inclusive.

Jenny described their partnership, “…sometimes I’d pull the small group of the students
that didn’t do their homework, and other days she would do it. …I think that that was not
planned, it just over the years became something that we just did.” Additionally, Jenny
explained that over time she and Laura were able to anticipate one another’s actions and
thoughts, “…it became more and more collaborative, almost to finishing each other’s
thoughts. And you would know where someone was going. …you know, she could
almost read my thoughts…it was like a little marriage.” Laura shared a similar account of
their co-teaching practices, “We switched off and made that decision early on. We
wanted the students to see us as a pair, as two teachers instead of just one.” She described
their co-teaching instructional practices as shared, “We were team-taught. We were
definitely team teachers. Probably one of the strongest relationships of team teaching that
I’ve had has been with her.” She further explained, “We could finish each other’s
sentences. …I think we grew into a very comfortable relationship. …it just developed
over time to be a really easy, symbiotic thing. …we started to feed off of each other, and it was fun.”

Courtney, a general education teacher, and Rich, her co-teaching partner also described their co-teaching practices as shared and inclusive. Courtney explained, “Sometimes, we split the class. We do that, sometimes, when necessary. You take this half. We did that fairly recently, I think with decimal points when kids were having a hard time with that.” Yet, Courtney emphasized, “We usually are together, though; teaching together. And a lot of times, it is in discussion, sometimes, it’s in demonstration; sometimes, it’s prompting back and forth. Sometimes, Rich will be up here and I’ll be checking to make sure that they’re following along.” Courtney illustrated how they incorporate their knowledge of one another into their instructional practices:

I remember stuff. Didn’t you go here? Do you have a picture of when you went here? Or something like that. Mr. Rich has been (Australia), I mean, that type of thing. I know, we’ll talk about where we went to, New Zealand or Iceland… We can incorporate that in (to class). We’ll joke a lot. We just are more comfortable as we have gotten on. We just know a lot more (about each other).

Rich, Courtney’s co-teaching partner, mirrored her sentiments, “We present ourselves as equals and you’re not introducing I’m a special ed teacher, I’m the science teacher. We’re the teachers for the class.” He described their co-teaching practices, “There’s a volley between us that the kids have to at least pretend to pay attention to.” Rich further shared, “There are times when Courtney’s working with a student, I am keeping the class moving and I’m making it as seamless as possible.” Lastly, Rich explained that they are able to
read one another, “… You (Courtney) know what I am thinking, I know what you’re (Courtney) thinking. I can even read what you’re thinking without you even saying it at this point.”

Meagan, a special education teacher, and her co-teaching partners, Jessica and Brianna, indicated having inclusive co-teaching practices as a result of their long-term partnerships. Meagan shared, “The relationship that I have with Brianna and Jessica, we’re equals in the class.” Meagan and Jessica indicated being able to anticipate each other’s actions in the classroom. Jessica explained:

It's funny because for the last five, six, seven years we've been saying that we're like an old married couple. We can finish each other's sentences, and we do in class, and the kids are absolutely amazed by it. I'll start a sentence, and she'll finish it, and they'll (the students) just be like, ‘Oh, my goodness.’

Jessica further illustrated this cohesiveness in her and Meagan’s partnership:

…four or five years ago we were at Back-to-School Night, and we were doing our little spiel. Parents are always coming in after it started, and I think she was the one that was talking, and she was doing a lot of the talking. We ran a PowerPoint, and we were no longer on the first screen that had our names on it, but we were talking about materials or our (science field trip) or whatever. The bells rings for them (the parents) to switch, and one of the sets of parents comes up. The dad was like, ‘I'm Mr. So-and-so. I'm So-and-so's father,’ and we introduced ourselves. He looked at us, and he said, ‘You know I came in late, and I seriously could not tell which one of you was the general ed teacher.’
In addition, Meagan shared, “I know one year, one of the poor kids, it was early in the year, looked at Jessica and looked at me and was like, ‘Which one of you is Ms. M?’”

Bill, a general education teacher, and his co-teacher, Jackie, utilize a variety of co-teaching practices, Jackie explained, “… the majority of the time it’s teamed. We have done a lot of parallel teaching, especially with our dual identified class. We don’t typically do like the alternative teaching, which I guess it’s just not something that we really do. We do one teach, one assist, but that role is, like, flexible.

They have also developed inclusive practices. Bill explained:

It’s crazy. Some days when we’re teaching together, it’s so seamless. Like I'll speak and then stop, and I can tell by her body language that she has something to add and she’ll pick up. And I think she can tell by my body language, as well. So it’s almost seamless. …Sometimes we break our groups up and do small groups but generally, we’re both teaching. We’ve done it now for a long time. It is almost seamless. One time this year, it was almost magic. The lesson worked so well and we hadn’t necessarily had enough planning time for it but the way it worked was just amazing.

Jackie echoed Bills sentiments in regard to planning:

… because we’ve both done activities together and done certain things together. We’re kind of like, ‘Oh, that,’ ‘Oh, yeah and that.’ I always laugh because I feel like if somebody were to observe us sometimes, it’s kind of like well, what did you just say? What was that because it’s so much shorthand and kind of know how each other think and know what we’ve done in the past. We’re just tweaking.
These findings indicate that long-term co-teaching partnerships provided the participants with the time and knowledge necessary to refine their co-teaching practices into instructional practices that were inclusive of each other. These dyads all indicated comfort in moving between each other’s prescribed instructional roles, utilizing different co-teaching models, and anticipating each other’s thoughts and actions.

**Shared Benefits**

The findings indicate that the participants were able to develop professional benefits that were unique to their long-term co-teaching partnerships. The benefits that emerged were the co-teachers ability to reflect and revise lessons and activities collaboratively, and to develop feelings of camaraderie specific to their co-teaching partnerships.

**Reflect and revise.** The findings indicate that the participants found it beneficial to have another teacher to collaborate with in regard to the success and effectiveness of their co-taught classes. The participants indicated the value of having another perspective when reflecting on improving class lessons and activities. In addition, the dyads indicated that working together, year after year, provided them the opportunity to collaboratively revise class lessons and activities.

Jenny, a general education teacher, and her co-teacher, Laura, both indicated the benefits of collaboration in regard to reflecting on class in general and revising class lessons and activities. Jenny explained:

…I think as you had another person with you, another adult that could be part of that reflection, it was much more effective. So, at the end of each unit, especially
when we went to this kind of (math) packet idea, then it’s really easy to go through and, (say) ‘Well, that didn’t work like we thought. Let’s look for something new. Let’s get something more engaging. Maybe there was too much sitting and listening and not enough doing.’ I think just kind of reflecting and kind of talking about what works, what didn’t work.

Laura mirrored Jenny’s sentiments:

We constantly reflected on our own practice. ‘How could I have done that better? Do you think there’s another example we could bring in?’ ‘Remember when we tried that two years ago and it fell flat? How can we change that?’ …we developed into being able to do so many good things together.

Courtney, a general education teacher, and Rich, her co-teacher, also indicated their ability to co-reflect and co-revise as significant to the ongoing development of their co-taught partnership. Courtney explained:

We have so many reference points, though, for our (classes) – because we have so many years together. That didn't work last year; or that worked with this type of kid or whatever. You could really sort of flush it out a little differently. …And we got it compressed, too. We just have a lot more depth of knowledge about what the kids will mostly be able to do.

She shared how it affects their co-planning:

Like he will say, ‘This is what we did last year. I don't like the way that happened. What do you think about this? Do you think this person will get it?’ And plus we have to tailor it. …We got to bring it down. We got to piece this, chunk it out a
little differently. Because it might have worked last year. And the kids had a bit of a better flow. But this year, it's not just going to do it. So, we'll do that. And we'll talk that out.

Rich mirrored Courtney’s sentiments in regard to planning,

...we sit down and we know where we need to go because we’ve done it for so long. And, literally, I have paper clips that show me where we were last year and we can just look and see how we did it. We don’t always do it the same way. In fact, a lot of the times we don’t.

Bill, a general education teacher, and Jackie, his co-teacher, also indicated co-reflecting as a method of revising class lessons and activities. Jackie explained:

I know for planning purposes it is so much easier to plan with a co-teacher you’ve had to a while rather than a new co-teacher. You have a point of reference. ...And you also know how you both approach the curriculum. ...You have somebody to help you out, to kind of bounce ideas of (each other). ...an extra mind and an extra set of hands…”

Bill shared Jackie’s sentiments:

It’s just so much easier to have another person in the class to help you with another set of eyes, another person’s opinion. ...as we’re deciding what to do in the lesson, we’re getting together and saying …what’s best; what do you think we should do next?

Brianna, a general education teacher, explained how she and Meagan, her co-partner, reflect based on their previous years teaching together, “Well, what we’ve done before
isn’t working. It isn’t going to work, and so like the other day she (Meagan) said, ‘Do you have a problem if we make these…’ Jessica, Meagan’s other co-teacher, explained the significance of having another teacher’s perspective during class:

… she'll (Meagan) see things that I miss sometimes, and so it's nice having that other set of eyes to even go, ‘Did you realize that –?’ and then getting things said sometimes in a different way because I might only be able to think of a couple ways to explain something. She might come up with some other idea, and for those kids that don't get it from the ways I'm trying to explain it, they might get her way, so it's like, ‘Oh, okay.’

Meagan shared their ability to co-revise:

…we know exactly what we are doing, and we bring in other things to go with it, of course, but since we have that curriculum, and if you’re with the same person, both with Jessica and Brianna, each lab and activity can be made better and better as time goes on.

These findings indicate that as a result of the participants’ long-term co-teaching partnerships, the co-teachers developed a collaborative approach in critiquing the effectiveness of their co-taught classes. The participants were able to co-reflect and co-revise class activities and lessons as a means of improvement.

**Camaraderie.** The findings indicate that as a result of the participants’ long-term co-teaching partnerships, they developed positive feelings toward the instructional practice of co-teaching. The participants indicated that co-teaching provided professional benefits, such as increased levels of satisfaction as a result of working together and
preferring to instruct in the co-taught classroom compared to the traditional single-instructed classroom.

Jenny, a general education teacher, and her co-teacher, Laura, illustrated having strong feelings of support and camaraderie toward one another, as a result of their long-term co-teaching partnership. Jenny shared:

I think we encourage each other a lot too. I probably went into the (advanced degree) program because of her. And she – I think we were each other’s biggest fan club. We are. Yeah, we are. In fact, I went last week with another person that I present with now at a nearby university. We went and spoke to her first – her Master’s – She has us come in and talked about co-teaching and (department meetings) and how it works. So she still looks, I think, for professional opportunities for us (to work together).

Jenny also indicated her preference for co-teaching, when asked if she found co-teaching to be preferable to the traditional single-instructed classroom, she responded:

Oh, my goodness, 100 percent. It would be a dream. …It would be so effective if we really had two teachers. Two real live – real, real, real teachers. Not two bodies, but two teachers. So I think it would be so rewarding for each other, for the development of the teachers and then the students would really benefit, because they would have these two different perspectives and they would have twice as much attention. It just would be wonderful.

Laura indicated having similar feelings, when asked if she preferred co-teaching to the traditional single-instructor approach, Laura replied:
Hands down. Not even an issue. I don’t know how you feel about it, but when I would come into a co-taught classroom or situation, especially a good situation; I didn’t want to go back and teach my small class. Jenny would say, ‘Can’t you stay one more period?’ I think having two qualified teachers in a room is a win-win.

When asked if there was anything else Laura would like to share in regard to her co-teaching partnership, Laura simply stated, “I love Jenny to death.”

Bill, a general education teacher, and Jackie, his co-teacher, also reported positive feelings as a result of their co-teaching partnership. Jackie explained:

I mean you have a friend in the room. …you have somebody to check in with, and I think that makes it more fun and easier. That being said, I do enjoy the self-contained classes too, but it’s nice to have a friend in the room and somebody that you can count on…

Based on his partnership with Jackie, Bill recommended:

…get to know them personally. Ask them about their personal lives; make that connection. Sort of like you make for every student. Because if your co-teacher feels like you care about them personally, it will go a lot further than if it’s just educational relationships.

Bill further shared how he felt when he learned he would be working with Jackie again this school year, “And when I learned that I was going to have Jackie again, I was so excited. I think it’s better to have these long-term co-teaching relationship.” When Bill
was asked about co-teaching in comparison to the traditional single-instructed classroom, he replied:

Initially, I felt co-teaching was kind of a pain because you had to make someone else happy and incorporate someone else. If I had my choice, I'd co-teach every period all day, all the time. I'd like to teach with Jackie that way but I'd also like to teach with other people. It’s just so much easier to have another person in the class to help you with another set of eyes, another person’s opinion. Because so many times, we’re confused or we have disillusion with what’s going on, and sometimes we’re not seeing things clearly. And with another person in the room, that really helps.

Courtney, a general education teacher, and her co-teacher, Rich, shared the positive feelings that have developed as a result of their co-teaching partnership. Courtney shared, “I joke a lot with him. I mean, we do have a lot of jokes. I talk to him about my daughter and my husband. He’d talk to me about his family. We just know a lot more about each other.” Courtney also indicated a preference for co-teaching, she explained:

I like it. The reason why I like and prefer it in some ways, I forget things. Sometimes, I'll joke and it's like, that's why I'm here; or I'll joke, I'm like, don't forget… But also – I like it because it does expand my horizons…So, I like it.

Rich also indicated a preference toward his co-teaching partnership, “Do I prefer co-teaching? I prefer co-teaching with Courtney. I think it depends on the situation. In a good situation, absolutely.” Rich further elaborated, “We co-taught for a few years
together. Then we didn’t. …I think it was when we came back together. But it was like, ‘Aaahh, I’ve been through the wilderness, I can’t do anything else. It’s always been you, Courtney.’”

Brianna, a general education teacher, and her co-teacher, Meagan, also indicated having a close relationship and positive feelings toward one another. Brianna explained, “…we’ve been together so long, and the significance, I put, ‘importance to classroom happiness.’ I mean we enjoy co-teaching together.” Brianna further shared that when she had to have a lumpectomy it was Meagan who went with her, “…when I went up to get my report about what we were going to do, the final thing, and I had it done at (Hospital). So she took the time off too. It was our work day, and we went together.”

In regard to her positive feelings for her co-teachers, Meagan shared:

One of the things with both Jessica and Brianna, since we know each other so well, there are times in class where we will joke around, and the kids will laugh. I think they get a little confused about it, like ‘what are they laughing at,’ but we do bring some fun into it, making it a little bit more easy going.

She also explained, “I don’t like when either of them are absent. I much prefer them to be there.” When asked about her preference toward co-teaching, Meagan replied:

I do like co-teaching… I think it’s good for the students and good for the teachers, I think being in a class with a co-teacher gives me time to work with some of the kids who need that extra attention, or the extra supports, whereas if it was just one big class, sometimes it’s hard to do that.
When asked about her preference for the co-taught classroom, Jessica, Meagan’s co-teaching partner, simply stated, “I do. …I definitely feel like two heads are better than one in the classroom.”

As a result of their long-term co-teaching partnerships, the participants indicated positive feelings toward working in co-taught classrooms. The participants indicated that teaching with the same partner overtime produced favorable working conditions. The reported professional benefits were in regard to increased feeling of camaraderie, more manageable classes and increased levels of happiness.

**Summary**

The themes found in these data indicate that long-term co-teaching partnerships provided co-teachers with the necessary time and space to develop inclusive co-taught practices. The ability to work together over a significant period of time provided the dyads the opportunity to develop processes that contributed to the advancement of their co-teaching partnerships. The findings suggest that inclusive co-teaching instructional practices developed as a result of having the opportunity to understand one another as full-teachers within the co-taught classroom.

The length of these partnerships provided the participants with the ability to form genuine feelings of trust. Mutual feelings of trust in the co-teaching partnerships were in regard to the ability to effectively communicate with one another and in relation to feelings of confidence in the co-teachers’ instructional capabilities and responsiveness to all students. As a result of these feelings, the dyads indicated ease in giving up control over the classroom. Furthermore, these findings indicate that long-term co-teaching
partners take advantage of the opportunity to learn from one another. They gained knowledge as a result of understanding each other’s instructional strengths and weaknesses and incorporated these into the planning and execution of their co-taught classes. In addition, findings also indicate that the participants developed effective methods of confronting challenges and disagreements that arise in co-taught classrooms. This process was mutually inclusive of both teachers and resulted in open and direct communication, compromises and an understanding and comfort in agreeing to disagree with one another. Moreover, findings indicate that long-term co-teaching partnerships provided the participants with the necessary knowledge to develop inclusive instructional practices based on their understanding and knowledge of each other. These dyads all indicated their ability to transition between each other’s prescribed instructional roles, incorporate a variety of co-teaching models, and anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions during the execution of class.

Lastly, findings did indicate increased professional benefits in relation to long-term co-teaching partnerships. The participants indicated developing a sincere appreciation for having an additional professional perspective as a means of developing collaborative approaches in critiquing the effectiveness of class lessons and activities. The participants developed the ability to co-reflect and co-revise as a means of improving the dynamics of the co-taught classroom. Furthermore, the participants indicated increased feelings of professional satisfaction in the course of their work day. These feelings stemmed from having the opportunity to utilize the expertise and advantages that come with having two full-teachers in the co-taught classroom. Specifically, the findings
indicate that these benefits increased feelings of camaraderie and happiness between co-teachers and resulted in more manageable classroom environments. These findings, the implications, and recommendations for research and practice are discussed in chapter 5.
Chapter Five: Conclusions, Discussion, and Implications

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of and insights into the processes that long-term middle school co-teaching partners identify going through and continue to go through as a means of developing, sustaining and advancing their co-teaching partnerships. This study employed a qualitative research design in the form of the semi-structured interview to gain the perspective of nine co-teachers who have been recognized by either their administrators, special education department chairs or county special education specialists and the co-teachers themselves as exhibiting highly-skilled inclusive teaching practices, and who have been together for a minimum of three years. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals do teachers report as significant to the successful development of their long-term co-teaching professional partnerships?

2. What are the unique features or characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their successful professional partnerships?

The results of this study will be organized by the findings presented in Chapter Four. The conclusions and discussions will be addressed according to the major themes
that emerged in relation to each of the guiding research questions. Research question 1 will be presented first and research question 2 will be presented second.

The overall findings of this study revealed that long-term middle school co-teaching teams were effective in developing genuine co-teaching partnerships that were inclusive of both general educators’ and special educators’ professional expertise. The findings indicated that long-term partnerships provided teachers with the necessary time and space to not only integrate each other’s expertise and strengths as a means of developing inclusive co-teaching partnerships, but also the time and space necessary to understand one another as educators and how one another approaches the dynamics that comes with being a classroom teacher at greater depths.

This study found that long-term middle school co-teaching teams had: (a) features in place that contributed to development of a strong co-teaching foundation; (b) feelings of preparedness toward their co-teaching partnerships; (c) positive perceptions of co-teaching; (d) unique features that developed from long-term co-teaching partnerships; and (e) recognized benefits that develop from long-term co-teaching partnerships.

Features that Facilitate the Development of Long-Term Co-Teaching Partnerships

A strong foundation is essential for developing successful, long-term co-teaching partnerships. The major features that facilitate the development of effective long-term co-teaching partnerships center on knowledge and exposure to co-teaching as an instructional practice. The findings indicated that school-based supports are essential in the development of effective long-term co-teaching partnerships that include professional development programs and administrative support. The evidence from this study
indicated that effective professional development encouraged and prompted partners to engage in meaningful conversations about the dynamics that come with running a successful co-taught classroom. In addition, according to the teacher participants, administrative support came from valuing teachers’ opinions, voice, experiences and requests in regard to the formation of their partnerships and by providing the necessary time for teachers to co-plan with one another. The participants also reported that they felt their administrators made co-planning a priority by providing specific times to co-plan that was built into the teachers’ work schedules.

Additionally, the themes also indicated that having prior knowledge of one’s co-teaching partner in regard to work ethic, instructional practices and professional values, helped in facilitating a strong foundation from which these long-term co-teaching partnerships were able to further develop. Having prior knowledge of one’s partner resulted in feelings of confidence between dyads. In addition, the emergent themes indicated that special educators played a pivotal role in the development of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. In comparison to their general education partners, special education teachers carry the extra burden of proving themselves as full-teachers within co-taught partnerships. Special educators had to illustrate that they were instructionally capable, having in-depth knowledge of course content, in order to establish their role in the planning and instructing of the co-taught classroom.

In order to develop a fully-functioning co-teaching partnership that incorporates the expertise of general and special educators, the results indicated that both teachers needed to participate in all of the aspects that come with running a co-taught classroom.
The findings revealed that these co-teachers had procedures in place to fulfill their professional responsibilities as full-instructors in the co-taught classroom. All participants indicated that they co-planned, co-instructed and co-assessed. In order to do this, co-teachers must be willing to establish their shared goals in terms of classroom expectations and student achievement. The findings in the study found that shared goals focused on having high classrooms expectations, and believing that all students in the class were capable of rising to classroom expectations.

Lastly, findings indicated that teachers experience feelings of apprehension toward the practice of co-teaching. Yet, having a positive mindset and approaching the development of co-taught partnerships with a willingness and enthusiasm to make it successful, helps with developing positive co-teaching partnerships. A combination of shared knowledge, shared skills, shared procedures and shared goals positively impacts the development of effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships.

**Discussion**

Each of these findings will be discussed in light of previous research.

**Strong Professional Relationships**

The findings of this study indicated that the development of these long-term, effective co-teaching partnerships began with creating a solid foundation on which to build a strong professional relationship. The participants in this study revealed that their professional relationships developed from the following components: having prior knowledge of one’s co-teaching partner; the capabilities of special education teachers; and shared professional values.
**Prior knowledge.** Having prior knowledge of one’s co-teaching partner helped most of these participants alleviate any feelings of apprehension when developing co-teaching partnerships. They indicated having decreased feelings of apprehension toward their co-teaching partnerships and increased levels of comfort as a result of having some form of previous knowledge about one another prior to their co-teaching assignments. For example, Jenny, a general education teacher, and Laura, her co-teaching partner, reported knowing one another from their PTA membership. Jenny explained how this affected their professional partnership, “I knew we shared work ethic and goals and whatnot, so my first impression (of Laura) was there was a second teacher in the room.” Based on their previous relationship, Laura described Jenny as “Extraordinarily competent,” and “open-minded.” In addition, Jessica, a general education teacher, and Meagan, her co-teaching partner, explained how having prior professional knowledge of one another influenced their co-teaching partnership. Jessica and Meagan worked together as a teacher’s aide and substitute teacher. Based on this experience Jessica explained, “… I thought we worked well together, so I felt she was very capable and strong with what she was doing and she was someone that would be good to work with.” These findings support previous research that has found compatibility among co-teachers as significant to the development of effective co-teaching relationships. Keefe and Moore (2004) reported that the relationship between co-teaching partners was the most important factor in determining the success or failure of co-teaching partnerships, more than content knowledge and teachers’ beliefs toward inclusion. In addition, Rice and Zigmond (2000) and Scruggs et al. (2007) found that personal compatibility was the most
critical factor in developing successful co-teaching partnerships. Scruggs et al. (2007) reported, “Teachers were generally very emphatic about the need for co-teachers to be compatible” (p. 405). As a result of prior knowledge, the co-teachers in this study did not experience significant feelings of apprehension toward their co-teaching partnerships. The co-teachers indicated that they were well-matched in their co-teaching assignments. Prior knowledge provides a strong foundation for the development of effective co-teaching partnerships.

**The role of special educators.** The findings of this study revealed that special educators play a significant role in the development of their co-teaching partnerships. The findings indicated that special educators who demonstrated their instructional capabilities and knowledge of course content were treated like contributing equals in their co-teaching partnerships. The special educators in this study actively pursued equal footing in the co-taught classroom through proving themselves as credible, general education teachers with in-depth content knowledge that aligned to their instructional capabilities. These teachers were active in asking for and taking on classroom responsibilities in regard to planning, instructing and assessing. For example, Bill, a general education teacher, described his co-teaching partner, “…she’s better. …Because she’s stepped up and taken more responsibility. …When Jackie wants to do something, she’ll ask to do it.”

In addition, previous research has found that when special educators lack subject-matter content knowledge their role in the co-taught classroom is one of a teaching assistant rather than a full-teacher with professional expertise and capabilities (Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Rice at al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd,
This role as assistant also reflects previous research that has found the one teach, one assist method to be the most popular co-teaching model used in co-taught classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995; Dieker, 2001; Friend, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). The special educators in this study indicated an awareness of a perception that specialty teachers lacked content knowledge and the concerns this produces for general education teachers. Meagan, a special education teacher, explained, “We’ve heard specialists say the wrong things, so I get that.” She further explained, “I wanted to be sure that my co-teachers knew that I was sure I knew as much science as they did, if not more.” Therefore, these findings suggest that special education teachers take on an additional burden in the development of their co-teaching partnerships in comparison to their general education partners. The general education teachers in this study regarded the special education teachers’ assertiveness as a positive feature of their co-teaching partnerships and instrumental in the development of their effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships. These findings support Rice and Zigmond (2002) who found that teachers indicated wanting an equal in the classroom, meaning a partner who was self-confident, possess self-esteem and a willingness to try new things. Inclusive co-teaching partnerships develop and thrive when both teachers have the necessary knowledge and skills to transition between classroom roles and responsibilities.

**Shared professional values.** Shared professional values emerged as a major theme in the formation of effective co-teaching partnerships. The findings in the study indicated that the co-teachers themselves were instrumental in the development of their inclusive, long-term co-teaching partnerships. The co-teachers each took on the role of
teacher in the co-taught classroom, and therefore, the co-teachers treated one another as equals in the co-teaching partnership. The findings from this study found that these co-teachers in longer-term relationships had shared professional values with regard to being an active instructor in the class, taking ownership over all students, and by having high expectations for all of the students. These co-teachers made co-planning and co-instructing a top priority in their co-teaching partnerships. Rich, a special education teacher explained, “Thursdays fifth period, we sit down and we know where we need to go… we know what needs to get done.” In addition, the participants in this study co-instructed throughout the classes, asking each other questions during the teaching of class to check for student understanding and to bring all students into class discussions. For example, Laura, a special educator, explained, “Jenny and I were really good at think-alouds. If a child needed support in math, and I would see someone was struggling, I would say, ‘Ms. Jenny, I never thought that way. I thought you did it like this.’” Rich, also described having an instructional volley with his co-teaching partner, Courtney, “She’s asking, ‘Mr. Rich?’ It’s a very kind of expository thing. I’m going back at her with the same thing.” Unlike findings from previous research, special education teachers in this study were not viewed as assistants during instructional time and their roles in the classroom were not limited to managing student behavior and providing modifications and adaptations (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002; Wood, 1998).

In alignment with previous research was the co-teachers’ abilities to negotiate and collaborate at a professional level. Courtney, a general education teacher, described this
process, “So I will go, ‘I think we should try this.’ And he (Rich) will be like, ‘that’s ambitious.’ …so, he’ll be like, let’s take a different attack or let’s look at this differently, or let’s chunk it differently.” This ability is an essential skill in developing inclusive co-teaching partnerships (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Wood, 1998) as well as taking ownership over all students (Rice et al., 2007) and having a shared view of student expectations (Dieker, 2001; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). These findings are consistent with those of Austin (2001), Friend (2008), and Wood (1998), who each reported that co-teachers must be able to shift their mindset away from the traditional idea of the classroom as an autonomous teaching environment and approach every aspect of the co-taught classroom from an inclusive perspective, as discussed by Fennick and Liddy (2001) and Friend et al. (2010).

Feelings of Preparedness

Overall, the findings from this study indicated that the majority of participants believed they were adequately prepared to work effectively in their long-term co-teaching partnerships. The major themes in regard to feelings of preparedness centered on teacher preparation programs and school-based supports, which came in two forms: professional development programs and building-level administration. These findings revealed that feelings of preparedness varied among the co-teachers.

School based preparation. The findings in this study indicated that school-based support in the area of co-teaching is instrumental in the development of effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships. The participants in this study, who indicated receiving effective school-based professional development, found that programs focusing on the
instructional practice of co-teaching and on the professional partnerships that come with
coteaching were particularly useful. For example, Jackie, a special education teacher,
explained:

Every year, we start off with a kind of co-teaching professional development
where all the co-teachers fill out a survey of expectations, and we talk and we
have some time to plan. So I think that just really helps to set it off – set off the
year on a good note.

These co-teachers were provided professional development in the area of co-teaching that
gave them the platform to discuss both the major and minor components of running a co-
taught classroom. These discussions took place prior to the co-teachers instructing
together in their co-teaching environments. In addition, Meagan, a special education
teacher, further described receiving effective school-based professional development:

…we saw examples of it (co-teaching)… Yeah, so we were able to see good
examples, things that didn’t work as well, and… I think it allowed all of us to
kind of pick and choose what works for us, and also to see how it doesn’t…

These findings aligned with Fennick and Liddy (2001), who reported that co-teachers
would benefit from having the opportunity to observe different co-teaching models in
action. Similar to previous research, the findings in the present study directed schools to
recognize the significance of providing co-teachers with effective professional
development opportunities as a means of preparing teachers for their co-teaching
assignments, (Austin, 2001; Dieker, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Keefe & Moore,
2004; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997) the timing of co-teaching preparation,
(Dieker, 2001) and offering ample opportunities for co-teachers to learn how to advance their co-teaching practices from year to year (Austin, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Walter-Thomas, 1997).

**Support from school administrators.** These findings also revealed that feelings of preparedness are directly linked to the support that comes from building-level leaders. These findings indicated that the successful development of these long-term co-teaching partnerships were directly related to the co-teachers’ abilities to go through the process of planning with one another. Unlike previous studies (Dieker, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000), the co-teachers in this study were provided adequate time to co-plan. For example, Brianna, a general education teacher, explained, “We have it built in, so at this point our (department) meets the first block, so we meet an hour the first block of each week, and then the second even block, we co-plan…it’s built in time.” Jessica, a general education teacher, shared, “So our department is off at the same time, and once a week there’s a time period specifically designated for co-teachers to co-plan together.” In addition, these participants believed that co-planning was essential to the positive development of co-teaching partnerships and are in agreement with Walter-Thomas’s (1997) study that co-planning becomes easier and more cohesive over the course of long-term co-teaching partnerships. Jessica further explained:

I think it’s easier for us to just be like, ‘Can I talk to you for a minute?’ …we’re able to have those conversations faster, and we’re able today to have them more on the fly if we need to where we’re not having to hold something until our next appointed meeting time…
These findings are inconsistent with Austin’s (2001) study in which co-teachers reported that co-planning was not an essential factor for successful co-teaching partnerships. As previous research suggests, it is essential to the successful development of effective co-teaching partnerships for administrators to ensure that co-teachers have scheduled co-planning time built into their work day (Dieker, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005, Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997) and furthermore, that co-teachers are prepared to co-plan and to overcome the challenges that come with co-planning (Wood, 1998).

Lastly, in regard to building-level support, this study revealed that administrators provided visible, school-wide support to the instructional practice of co-teaching, valuing the experiences, opinions, and requests of co-teachers. Unlike previous studies (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997), the majority of the participants in this study indicated having the necessary support and commitment from their school’s administration. For example, Rich, a special education teacher, stated, “… they’ve (the administration) let us stay together for so many years. We do have an administration that supports us. So I feel like we have people that support us because they know that what we do is important and that we do it well.” In addition, Jackie, a special education teacher, explained, “I think this school in general is very focused on co-teaching and promoting good co-teaching relationships, so there’s already tons of structures in place to help us out.” Jessica, a general education teacher, shared these sentiments, “I am in a school that truly believes in co-teaching, and that is why we’ve (Meagan) have been co-teaching for 11 years…” Inclusive co-teaching
partnerships develop and progress when co-teachers have building-level supports in the form of effective professional development and the responsiveness of their administration.

**Teacher preparation programs.** The findings from this study indicated that teacher preparation programs focus on preparing special education teachers to co-teach, but not general education teachers. None of the general education teachers in the study reported receiving any form of co-teaching preparation through their teacher preparation programs. Furthermore, when asked about receiving university based preparation, Jessica, a general education teacher, responded:

I saw that question, and I kind of had to laugh because no. …I didn’t know there were classes that had two teachers, so when walking in as a first-year teacher and having somebody else come in and be like, ‘Oh, and I’m going to be teaching with you or helping you,’ I was like, ‘What’s that about?’ So that was a real eye opener.

This finding, aligned with Austin (2001) and Fennick and Liddy (2001) who found that university based teacher preparation programs provide less co-teacher preparation for general education teachers compared to special education teachers. The findings from this study aligned with the findings from previous studies that reported the need for teacher preparation programs to provide all pre-service teachers with course work in the instructional practice of co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Wood, 1998).
Alternatively, each of the special education teachers reported receiving course work in the area of co-teaching. These findings in this study support the findings from Austin (2001) and Fennick and Liddy (2001) who found that special educators receive more university based co-teaching preparation in comparison to their general education partners. Meagan, a special education teacher, shared, “I went to (University), I was in one of the cohorts there, career switcher, and we did take co-teaching as a course…” Rich, a special educator, explained, “…I had to take a class in co-teaching. …it was called Collaboration…” As a result, each of the co-teaching teams had one member with some form of university based co-teaching preparation. The special education teachers reported that they felt their university-based co-teaching course work was beneficial to the development of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. Inclusive co-teaching partnerships would benefit from teacher preparation programs in preparing all teachers for the co-teaching classroom.

**Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

The findings from this study revealed that the co-teachers had positive feelings toward the instructional practice of co-teaching. Though the participants indicated minor feelings of apprehension they also expressed a sincere willingness to work with one another in order to develop an effective and successful co-taught classroom environment.

**Positive perceptions.** The participants expressed having a positive mindset in regard to their co-teaching assignments. For example, Laura, a special educator, shared, “I was excited. I was curious.” Jackie, a special educator, explained, “I thought it was a great idea.” Jessica, a general education teacher, expressed a similar enthusiasm, “…” as a
first year teacher, I probably thought, ‘Thank God there’s somebody here to help with this.’” The general education teachers and special education teachers approached their co-teaching partnerships with a positive attitude and the drive to develop successful co-teaching partnerships. These findings align with previous research; Dieker (2001) found that both general education and special education teachers had positive perceptions toward their co-teaching partnerships, especially in regard to the benefits it provided for students and teachers. In addition, Fennick and Liddy (2001) reported that general education and special education teachers expressed very positive feelings toward the practice of co-teaching and their co-teaching partnerships. Inclusive co-teaching partnerships develop when co-teachers enter into their partnerships with a positive attitude and a willingness to make it work and continue with that mindset throughout the duration of their partnerships.

**Feelings of apprehension.** The findings from this study also revealed that teachers experience feelings of apprehension toward the instructional practice of co-teaching. These feelings stemmed from a lack of co-teaching preparation, inexperience with co-teaching, and the dynamics that come with working with another professional and diverse student populations. For example, Jackie, a special education teacher, explained, “…I probably had a little bit of reservations about people thinking it’s like my classroom and somebody coming into their classroom…” In addition, Jenny, a general education teacher, shared, “I think I was probably a little bit apprehensive. A little bit of one, the set of kids, and two, would it like complicate my classroom dynamics.” These findings reflect previous research which indicated that teachers experienced feelings of
apprehension toward co-teaching partnerships. Keefe and Moore (2004) found that teachers who were apprehensive of co-teaching were so because of their relationship with their co-teaching partner, regardless of their belief toward inclusion, suggesting the importance of a well-supported match. Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that the lack of preparation and professional development in the area of collaboration and communication skills added to secondary teachers’ feelings of apprehension toward being part of a co-teaching partnership. Similarly, Scruggs et al. (2007) also found that teachers experienced feelings of apprehension toward co-teaching as a result of being unprepared to co-teach. Specifically, Scruggs et al. (2007) found a lack of preparation in regard to collaborative skills, interpersonal skills, co-teaching methods and strategies, knowledge of disabilities, effective communication and flexible thinking skills. In contrast, the findings of the present study revealed that inclusive co-teaching partnerships were able to develop when both general education teachers and special education teachers had the necessary skills and preparation for their co-teaching partnerships. In other words, good preparation and supportive building-level leadership can build well-functioning co-teaching teams.

**Features and Characteristics of Long-Term Co-Teaching Partnerships**

Providing co-teachers with the opportunity to work together in long-term partnerships allows co-teachers the necessary time and space to develop inclusive co-taught practices. The findings from this study indicated that as a result of long-term co-teaching partnerships, the dyads had the opportunity to develop processes that contributed to the advancement of their co-teaching partnerships. The findings also revealed that
inclusive co-teaching instructional practices developed from understanding one another as fully-functioning teachers within the co-taught classroom.

The duration of these partnerships provided the participants with the ability to form genuine feelings of trust and these feelings resulted in their ability to communicate with one another in an effective and efficient manner. In addition, feelings of trust were related to knowledge of the co-teachers’ instructional capabilities and willingness to embrace all students. As a result, the dyads indicated increased comfort in giving up total control over the classroom. Furthermore, these findings indicated that long-term co-teaching partners learn from one another, gaining knowledge as a result of witnessing each other in action in the classroom. Understanding one another’s professional strengths and weaknesses allowed co-teachers to incorporate these components into the planning and execution of their co-taught classes. In addition, findings also indicated that the participants developed effective methods of working through challenges and differences of opinions that arose in their co-taught partnerships. This process was mutually inclusive of both teachers and resulted in open and direct communication, compromises and an understanding and comfort in agreeing to disagree with one another. Moreover, findings indicated that long-term co-teaching partnerships provided the participants with the necessary knowledge to develop inclusive instructional practices. These dyads indicated their ability to transition between each other’s prescribed instructional roles, incorporate a variety of co-teaching models, and anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions during the execution of class.
Lastly, the findings indicated increased professional benefits as a result of being a member of a long-term co-teaching partnership. The participants indicated an appreciation for having an additional professional perspective in critiquing the effectiveness of class lessons and activities. The participants also demonstrated their ability to co-reflect and co-revise in order to improve the dynamics of the co-taught classroom. Furthermore, the participants reported increased feelings of professional satisfaction in the course of their work day. These feelings developed as a result of having the opportunity to employ the benefits and expertise that come with having two teachers in the co-taught classroom. Specifically, findings indicated that these benefits resulted in an increased feeling of camaraderie and satisfaction between co-teachers and more manageable classroom environments. Each of these findings will be discussed in light of previous research.

**Unique Features of Long-Term Co-Teaching Partnerships**

The findings from this study captured the unique features that developed as a result of the co-teachers long-term professional partnerships. The participants developed inclusive instructional practices that contributed to the advancement of their co-teaching partnerships. The features found to be significant to the ongoing development of their long-term co-teaching partnerships were: genuine trust, strengths, weaknesses and knowledge, the ability to agree to disagree, and inclusive co-teaching practices.

**Importance of trust.** The participants in this study of successful long-term co-teaching partnerships reported that genuine trust was a major feature of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. Until now, the concept of trust, how it is developed, and what it
trust, you learn to trust one another.” Laura, a special education teacher, shared, “It’s time. Long-term relationships are key.” Brianna, a general education teacher, further explained, “It’s just grown and matured, and it’s become more trusting.”

In addition, trust allowed the co-teachers to have open and honest communication with one another. For example, Meagan, a special education teacher, explained, “I think that developed over time, just feeling comfortable and to be able to express an opinion, and seeing that Jessica wasn’t going to totally disagree with me, or Brianna… I think with time, you develop that.” These findings align with Jang (2006), Keefe and Moore (2004), Rice and Zigmond (2000) and Walter-Thomas (1997) who found that honest and constant communication were essential features in the success of co-teaching partnerships. Specifically, Walter-Thomas (1997) found that over a three year period co-teachers indicated being more comfortable and efficient in having open and honest communication.

Lastly, trust translated into the co-teachers having high levels of confidence in his/her co-teaching partner with regard to judgment in the running of the co-taught classroom and ensuring the best interest of all students. For example, Rich, a special
education teacher, explained, “I trust her (Courtney) with the content. I trust her with the kids. …I know that if I’m not there, that nothing would change. “Bill, a general education teacher, shared, “I know that she (Jackie) has the best for the kids in mind so that’s the main thing.” Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide co-teachers with the necessary time to not only develop genuine feelings of trust, but also to develop a shared understanding of what trust means to their co-teaching partnerships.

**Strengths, weaknesses and knowledge.** These findings indicated that long-term co-teaching partnerships provided co-teachers the ability to understand one another’s professional strengths and weaknesses and to utilize these in the planning and execution of their co-taught classes. For example, Jenny, a general education teacher, explained, “… you learn what the strengths and weaknesses are of one another, so you can play those well.” Laura, her co-teacher, shared, “You’re constantly growing as a professional. … Our strengths and weaknesses went together.” These findings align with Rice and Zigmond (2000) who reported that a teacher from their study shared, “‘…we enhanced each other’ (p. 193) and another teacher shared, ‘We learned from each other, and that helps us grow and develop as teachers’” (p. 193). In addition, Jang (2006) found that both teachers measured their professional capabilities in light of one another. Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide co-teachers with the ability to learn about each other’s strengths and weakness and to utilize these to their benefit in their co-teaching partnerships.

In addition, the participants reported gaining professional knowledge as a result of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. For example, Jenny, a general education
teacher, explained, “I probably learned a lot from her about doing different types of
differentiation…” Bill, a general education teacher, shared, “Jackie’s taught me a lot. A
lot about Kegan and different ways of teaching, new approaches to reach students…”
These findings support previous research, Austin (2001), Dieker (2001) and Walter-
Thomas (1997) found that co-teaching was beneficial to the advancement of teachers’
professional practices. Scruggs et al. (2007) specifically reported that general education
teachers improved in the areas of learning styles, disabilities, modifications and
adaptations, and classroom management techniques. Lastly, Rice et al. (2007) reported
that teachers found that watching their co-teaching partner in action was useful for
improving their instructional practices. Co-teaching as an instructional practice provides
co-teachers with an additional avenue for improving their professional knowledge,
expanding their professional repertoires and areas of expertise.

**Agree to disagree.** The participants in this study indicated that their long-term
co-teaching partnerships provided them with the ability to develop a mutual approach for
addressing the challenges that come with working together in a co-teaching partnership.
For example, Laura, a general education teacher, shared, “If I disagreed with something
that was going on, I had no problem saying that to her. Same with her.” She further
elaborated, “It was really about mutual respect knowing we could talk it out. Even if it
got a little contentious…” In contrast to previous research, the findings from this study
indicated that the co-teachers were comfortable in addressing areas of concern with one
another. Jang (2006) found that though co-teachers recognized the importance of this
type of communication, they were hesitant to have these conversation. For example, a
teacher in Jang’s (2006) study shared, “‘I would keep silent before we reached an agreement… One of us would always resolve the stalemate.’”

Furthermore, the findings indicated that the timing of these conversations were also significant. Similar to previous research, the participants in this study reported the need for addressing conflicts in a timely manner. For example, Courtney, a general education teacher, advised, “Don’t make the resentments… Just get it out there and move on. … Get it out there. You better because, otherwise, you’re not going to be able to work with the person. … Just say it.” These findings are similar to Keefe and Moore (2004) who reported that a special education teacher shared, “‘If you’re having some type of conflict, but something made you uncomfortable or you didn’t agree, you have to discuss it right away.’” (p. 82). Lastly, these findings also indicated that the co-teachers were comfortable in agreeing to disagree with one another. Rich, a general education teacher, shared, “We’ve had disagreements and we just have to agree to disagree.” Meagan, a special education teacher, echoed these sentiments, “… sometimes people have to agree to disagree and get through it anyway, but we have to remember not to take it personally.” Jessica, Meagan’s co-teaching partner, agreed, “…there are times when we will politely disagree about things, but we’re able to sit down and work it out and come to a decision on how things need to be…” Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide co-teachers the time necessary to develop effective processes for addressing challenges and differences of opinion that arise as a result of their co-taught partnerships.

**Inclusive co-teaching partnerships.** The findings indicated that as a result of the co-teachers long-term partnerships, they were able to develop inclusive co-teaching
instructional practices. These practices developed from the teacher’s familiarity with one another in the co-taught classroom. The co-teachers were able to utilize a variety of co-teaching models, anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions, and move seamlessly between instructional roles.

Unlike previous research indicating set and separate roles for general and special education teachers, (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002; Wood, 1998) these co-teachers did not have set roles and both teachers participated in the instruction of class. For example, Jackie, a special education teacher, explained, “… the majority of the time it’s teamed. We have done a lot of parallel teaching… we do one teach, one assist, but that role is flexible.” Rich, a special education teacher, explained, “We present ourselves as equals… we’re the teachers for the class.” He went on to describe, “There’s a volley between us… There are times when Courtney’s working with a student, I am keeping the class moving and I’m making it as seamless as possible.” Bill, a general education teacher, described his partnership, “…it’s so seamless. Like I’ll speak and then stop, and I can tell by her body language that she has something to add and she’ll pick up.” Laura, a special education teacher, also explained, “We could finish each other’s sentences. …it just developed over time to be a really easy, symbiotic thing. …we started to feed off of each other…” She further shared, “We switched off and made that decision early on. We wanted the students to see us as a pair.” The long-term partnerships of these co-teachers have allowed them to develop inclusive instructional practices.
In contrast, previous research has found a lack of inclusive instructional practices in co-taught classrooms. Austin (2001) found that the co-teachers reported that general education teachers performed the majority of the work in co-taught classrooms and Keefe and Moore (2004) found that general education teachers were responsible for: curriculum, planning, and large group instruction and the special education teachers were responsible for assisting individual students and designing modifications. In addition, previous research has found that special education teachers performed clerical duties, modeled appropriate classroom behavior, (Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Wood, 1998) circulated the classroom providing support, (Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002; Wood, 1998) and developing behavioral plans (Wood, 1998) as general education teachers led whole class instruction. Yet, Wood (1998) reported that these distinct roles and responsibilities began to blur as role ambiguity increased over time. Lastly, Scruggs et al. (2007) found that special education teachers seldom participated in whole class instruction and found that the one teach, one assist method to be the most popular method employed by co-teachers. Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide teachers with the necessary time and knowledge to develop inclusive partnerships that allow co-teachers to co-instruct in a seamless manner, transitioning between instructional roles.

Shared Benefits

The findings from this study indicated that as a result of long-term co-teaching partnerships, co-teachers developed unique professional benefits. The benefits that emerged were the co-teachers ability to collaboratively reflect and revise class lessons
and activities and develop mutual feelings of camaraderie specific to their co-teaching partnerships.

**Reflect and revise.** The co-teachers from this study indicated the benefits of having another teacher to collaborate with in regard to the success and effectiveness of their co-taught classes. These co-teachers valued the opportunity of having another perspective in the co-taught classroom as a means of improving class lessons and activities. In addition, the dyads indicated that working together in long-term partnerships allowed them to revise class lessons and activities from year to year. For example, Laura, a special education teacher, explained, “We constantly reflected on our own practice. ‘How could I have done that better? Do you think there’s another example we could bring in? Remember when we tried that two years ago and it fell flat? How can we change that?’” Courtney, a general education teacher, shared, “We have so many reference points, though, for our (classes) because we have so many years together. That didn’t work last year; or that worked with this type of kid or whatever. You can really sort of flush (sic) it out…” Additionally, Jackie, a special education teacher, shared, “I know for planning purposes it is so much easier to plan with a co-teacher that you’ve had for a while rather than a new co-teacher. You have a point of reference. …You have somebody to help you out, to kind of bounce ideas off of.” Bill, a general education teacher, and Jackie’s co-partner, echoed these sentiments, “It’s just so much easier to have another person in the class to help you with and another set of eyes, another persons’ opinion. …we’re getting together and saying…what’s best; what do you think we should do next?”
These findings support previous research in regard to the benefits that come with collaborating in co-teaching partnerships; Rice and Zigmond (2000) found that teachers recognized the professional benefit of collaborating in regard to planning for class, but also as a means for critiquing and reflecting on one’s practice as well as having a partner, “‘to bounce ideas off’” (p. 193). In addition, Austin (2001) found that both general and special education teachers expressed benefiting from their co-teaching partnerships because it provided the teachers with a chance to invite feedback from their partner which they believed contributed to the improvement of their teaching practices. Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide the opportunity for teachers to work in a collaborative manner. Co-teachers have the benefit of utilizing two professional perspectives as a means of advancing their co-teaching practices.

**Camaraderie.** The findings indicated that long-term co-teaching partners developed positive feelings toward the instructional practice of co-teaching. The participants reported experiencing increased feelings of professional satisfaction in regard to working with another teacher and preferred co-teaching compared to the traditional single-instructor approach. The co-teachers in the study indicated having strong feelings of support and camaraderie toward one another. For example, Jenny, a general education teacher, shared:

> I think we encourage each other a lot too. I probably went into the (advanced degree) program because of her. …I think we were each other’s biggest fan club. …In fact, I went last week… and spoke to her first – her Master’s (students)… So she still looks, I think, for professional opportunities for us.
Jackie, a special education teacher, explained, “I mean you have a friend in the room. …you have somebody to check in with, and I think that makes it more fun and easier. …it’s nice to have a friend in the room and somebody you that can count on…” Bill, Jackie’s co-teacher, shared, “… when I learned that I was going to have Jackie again, I was so excited. I think it’s better to have these long-term co-teaching relationships.”

Rich, a special education teacher, elaborated, “We (Courtney) co-taught for a few years together. Then we didn’t. …But it was like, ‘Ahh, I’ve been through the wilderness, and I can’t do anything else. It’s always been you, Courtney.’” These findings support previous research that indicate feelings of camaraderie develop between co-teachers. Scruggs et al. (2007) and Walter-Thomas (1997) reported that the professional bonds that develop from co-teaching partnerships have the potential of producing strong feelings of camaraderie, trust and respect between teachers, resulting in increased levels of professional satisfaction. Specifically, Walter-Thomas (1997) reported that a participant explained, “‘You can do this alone, but it’s a lot more fun and more rewarding if some else is with you… someone who cares about the students the same way you do’” (p. 401).

In addition, this study revealed a finding not previously seen in the research. The participants reported preferring to co-teach with their long-term partner in comparison to teaching in the traditional single-instructed classroom. For example, when the participants were asked about their preference for co-teaching, Jenny, a general education teacher, shared, “Oh, my goodness, 100 percent. It would be a dream…” Laura, her co-teaching partner, shared, “Hands down. Not even an issue. …but when I would come into a co-taught classroom or situation, especially a good situation; I didn’t want to go back
and teach my small class. …I think having two qualified teachers in a room is a win-win.” Rich, a special education teacher, elaborated, “Do I prefer co-teaching? I prefer co-teaching with Courtney. …In a good situation absolutely.” Previous research indicates that teachers have mixed feelings toward their co-teaching partnerships. In contrast to these findings, research has indicated that teachers have negative feelings in regard to co-teaching. A special education teacher in Keefe and Moore’s (2004) study stated, “…this sounds terrible, but don’t do it (co-teach) unless you’re absolutely sure what you’re getting into” (p.85). Yet, in alignment with these findings, research has indicated positive feelings toward co-teaching partnerships. Fennick and Liddy (2001) reported that their participants indicated very favorable opinions toward their co-teaching partnerships. Long-term co-teaching partnerships provide co-teachers with the time to develop inclusive practices that result in more satisfactory working environments where the co-teachers prefer to work with their professional partner in the co-taught classroom rather than as the sole teacher in the traditional single-instructor classroom.

Summary

The overall purpose of this study was to extend previous research on co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practice. Research question one investigated the skills, procedures, knowledge and shared goals that co-teachers reported as significant to the successful development of their long-term co-teaching partnerships. In alignment with previous research, this study found that knowledge and exposure to co-teaching as an instructional practice, in the form of school-based professional development, helped to facilitate the development of effective co-teaching partnerships. The themes also revealed
that having prior knowledge of one’s co-teaching partner alleviated feelings of apprehension toward the practice of co-teaching. In addition, this research question revealed that the co-teachers had the support of their school’s administration with regard to common planning time, fostering school wide support for inclusive learning environments, and valuing the experiences and requests of the co-teachers themselves. This research question further illustrated that the co-teachers entered into their co-teaching partnerships with a positive mindset and by developing shared classroom goals in terms of classroom expectations and student achievement. Additionally, these co-teachers participated in all aspects of running a co-taught classroom: co-planning, co-instructing and co-assessing. Lastly, this research question provided evidence that special education teachers bore an additional responsibility in their co-teaching partnerships in that they felt the need to prove that they were both instructionally capable and possessed knowledge of course content.

Overall, this research question revealed that when teachers are properly prepared for their roles and responsibilities as co-teachers they embrace their co-teaching partnerships with the drive to make it work. Yet, without adequate preparation and ongoing support teachers approach their co-teaching partnerships with a more negative attitude and feelings of apprehension (Austin, 2001; Dieker, 2001; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Walter-Thomas, 1997). The co-teachers in this study were provided with adequate preparation and ongoing support allowing for the development of shared knowledge, shared skills, shared procedures and
shared goals that positively impacted the successful development of these co-teachers’ professional partnerships.

Research question two investigated the unique features and characteristics of the shared processes that long-term co-teaching partners have developed and continue to do to develop their long-term professional partnerships. The research question revealed that these nine co-teachers were provided the time and space necessary to develop and advance their inclusive co-teaching practices by developing an understanding of one another as full-teachers within the co-taught classroom. The co-teachers developed genuine feelings of trust and the ability to effectively communicate with one another. Furthermore, these co-teachers developed effective methods for confronting the challenges that come with instructing in co-taught classrooms. The research question also determined that these co-teachers learned from one another and had an understanding of each other’s instructional strengths and weaknesses which they incorporated into the design of their co-taught classes. The research question further demonstrated that these co-teachers had the ability to transition between each other’s prescribed instructional roles, utilize a variety of co-teaching models, and anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions during class. Lastly, the research questioned revealed that co-teachers experienced increased professional benefits as a result of having the opportunity to be a member of a collaborative partnership and by developing feelings of camaraderie and happiness toward working with their co-teaching partners. Long-term co-teaching partnerships provided these co-teachers with the ability to advance their inclusive
instructional co-teaching practices by providing the time necessary to develop inclusive professional partnerships.

The findings to this research question revealed that effective and successful long-term co-teaching partnerships develop in a manner analogous to that of marriage. These co-teachers had reduced feelings of apprehension toward co-teaching partnerships as a result of having knowledge of one another prior to their co-teaching assignments. These co-teachers identified having the necessary time and space to get to know one another as full-teachers within the context of co-teaching. As a result, these co-teachers worked together as professional partners to ensure a successful classroom environment and to ensure the well-being of all students. Overtime, the co-teachers developed shared values in regard to the dynamics of running a co-taught classroom and having high classroom expectations. Additionally, they developed a professional relationship based on feelings of trust, which allowed for an in-depth understanding of one another’s strengths and weaknesses and to incorporate these into the design of their co-taught classes. Furthermore, with time they took advantage of and recognized learning from one another as professionals with a distinct set of expertise. Moreover, these co-teachers developed the ability to participate in open and honest conversations with one another. These conversations allowed the co-teachers the opportunity to co-reflect and listen to one another’s ideas and perspectives as a method for advancing their inclusive instructional practices. They developed the ability to have differences of opinions with one another and to be comfortable in agreeing to disagree with one another. As a result of this ability, the co-teachers designed inclusive co-teaching environments to the extent that they could
anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions in the classroom. Lastly, the co-teachers recognized the advantages and benefits that come when two teachers are able to work as a team in one classroom setting. They developed strong feelings of camaraderie and happiness toward their long-term co-teaching partnerships, indicating their preference to working with one another in comparison to working as individuals. These findings revealed that like a healthy marriage, co-teaching partnerships require the necessary time for both teachers to develop an understanding of one another and to develop feelings of comfort in regard to sharing in all the responsibilities that come with running a classroom, especially a classroom of diverse learners.

**Implications for Practice**

The intent of co-teaching is to incorporate and intertwine both general education teachers and special education teachers’ professional expertise as a means for creating inclusive instructional practices that reflect the specialization of both teachers and meet the needs of all students (Friend & Reising, 1993; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas et al., 2000). Therefore, it is important that teachers who are assigned to co-teach not only have the knowledge and skills to develop inclusive co-teaching partnerships, but also the time necessary to develop inclusive instructional practices. The findings of this research study provide implications for the development and advancement of inclusive co-teaching partnerships and provide evidence that support the need for long-term co-teaching partnerships.

**Selection of co-teachers.** Long-term partnerships provide teachers with the necessary time and space to work together to develop mutual processes for creating
shared instructional practices that support an inclusive education for each learner. As previously discussed by Rice et al. (2007) and Walter-Thomas (1997), co-teaching partnerships are an ongoing process that become more manageable over time. To ensure the development of positive and effective co-teaching partnerships, and to lessen the chances for negative and ineffective co-teaching partnerships, co-teachers should have input regarding the identification of their co-teacher. They should be invited into planning and selecting their potential co-teachers, and they should be given the opportunity to get to know one another as professionals in order to determine whether they believe they are professionally compatible.

These findings are consistent with previous research recommending direct teacher input in regard to the pairing of co-teachers (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007). Teachers could develop this input through having the opportunity to participate in classroom observations, allowing potential co-teachers to see each other in action. In addition, potential co-teachers could be provided a professional survey to collect information on each teachers’ classroom practices in regard to behavior, classroom management techniques, academic activities and lessons, student expectations, and attitudes toward students with disabilities as a means for pairing co-teachers. Administrators could also provide potential co-teachers the time to engage in open discussions based on specific prompts that relate to the reported challenges and barriers common to co-teaching and the reported benefits common to co-teaching. For example, in regard to the benefits, the co-teachers reported having the opportunity to collaborate by co-reflecting and co-revising. Bill, a general education teacher explained, “It’s so much
easier to have another person in the class to help you with and another set of eyes, another person’s opinion.” In addition, the co-teachers indicated developing strong feelings of camaraderie in the form of having a friend in the room and having a preference toward co-teaching. Laura, a special educator indicated her preference, “Hands down. Not even an issue. …when I would come into a co-taught classroom or situation, especially a good situation; I didn’t want to go back and teach my small classes.” In regard to the challenges, the co-teachers reported addressing areas of disagreement or miscommunication in a timely manner. Brianna, a general education teacher, reflected on a time she upset her partner:

And I wasn't going to let it just fester because we rarely – I mean I can only remember that one time when we've gotten to that point. Can't even remember what it was about. But I remember catching her right at the end of the hall and just feeling that need to resolve it.

Jessica, a general education teacher, indicated approaching conflicts in a similar manner. Jessica reflected on the year she left her co-teacher, Meagan’s name off the Back-to School-Night brochure, “I wasn't doing it to be spiteful or anything, but the brochure had my name on it, and that was it. She was like, ‘I feel like the co-teacher's name should be on these, too.’ …but I did go, and I made them where they had her name…” Providing teachers with the opportunity to react to such prompts surrounding the benefits and challenges that come with co-teaching may provide insights into their ability to develop effective co-teaching partnerships. Therefore, to facilitate the efficient development of effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships, administrators and department chairs need
to provide potential co-teachers opportunities to have input in their partnerships and the
time needed to get to know their potential partners prior to actually instructing in the co-
taught classroom.

Assuring equality. The findings of this study also revealed that special education
teachers bear a unique and extra responsibility in the development of their co-teaching
partnerships in comparison to general education teachers. This study provided evidence
that in order for special education teachers to be viewed and treated as equals in their co-
teaching partnerships, they must be proactive in not only demonstrating their instructional
capabilities and knowledge of course content, but they must also be able to insert
themselves into the dynamics of co-taught classes. These findings are consistent with
Rice and Zigmond (2000), indicating that special education teachers needed to be
prepared in how to assert themselves into the role as a fully-functioning teacher in the co-
taught classroom. In addition, and as previously discussed by Keefe and Moore (2004)
and Rice and Zigmond (2000), the content specialization of special education teachers
and their ability to teach it well should be primary components when determining the
placement of special education teachers in their co-teaching partnerships. In addition to
placement, co-teachers must be able and willing to negotiate the dynamics of their co-
taught classes, taking full ownership over all aspects of class, including the well-being of
all students. In order to do this successfully, the co-teachers from this study co-planned
and compromised, breaking down lessons to decide how they were going to deliver
classroom material. For example, Rich a special education teacher shared, “There are
times when I’m like, ‘I don’t know, Courtney. It’s pretty ambitious.’ Sometimes I’m right
and sometimes I’m wrong.” In addition, Brianna, a general education teacher, described this process as, “a lot of give and take,” and as being, “pretty flexible.” Jessica, a general education teacher, shared, “We just have to sit down and talk about it and come to some kind of agreement. …It might not be 100 percent her way, and it might not be 100 percent my way, but it’s a shared decision.” In order to do this, general education teachers and special education teachers must be willing to work with one another in an inclusive manner, seeing one another as full-teaching partners and allowing each other’s professional expertise and experiences to influence the design of their co-teaching partnerships. As discussed by Dieker (2001), co-teachers must take ownership over the well-being of all students in the co-taught classroom and encourage all students to meet high classroom expectations.

Consequently, co-teachers must develop an understanding that both teachers are essential to and responsible for the planning, instructing, and assessing the class. Therefore, school-based co-teaching preparation must be both timely and effective, starting from the very beginning of these partnerships and continuing throughout the partnerships. School-based professional development must go beyond exposing teachers to the different models of co-teaching and how to implement them, and must also prepare co-teachers for the challenges that come with co-planning, co-instructing and co-assessing. Therefore, co-teachers need to be provided opportunities to reflect on the gains and setbacks that occur throughout their partnerships and to discuss the origins and results of these gains and setbacks. For example, Meagan, a special education teacher, reflected on the beginning of her partnership with Brianna:
I don’t think she had many co-teachers that she felt comfortable letting them run with the class. That was something that I felt I had to overcome with her and show her that mostly, I knew the content… I felt like I had to show her that I can do seventh grade science. …there were times where a student would raise their hand, I would start to answer, and she’d be right there answering the question. We had some discussions about that. Then she got to the point where it’s like, ‘Sorry, sorry,’ and she’d back off. Her first reaction was she had to go take care of it. Anyway, we had to work through that.

In regard to successes, Jessica, a general education teacher, shared:

… at Back-to-School Night, …Parents are always coming in after it started,

…The bell rings for them to switch, and one of the sets of parents comes up. The dad… He looked at us, and he said, ‘You know I came in late, and I seriously could not tell which one of you was the general ed teacher.’

The development of these partnerships are not based solely on the dynamics of running a co-taught classroom together, but also on the well-being and health of the teachers’ professional relationship with one another. As a result, co-teachers should be provided the time to reflect on how their co-teaching partnerships have developed over the course of their professional relationship. Co-teaching as an instructional practice demands a high level of collaboration. Yet, as previously discussed by Keefe and Moore (2004) and Wood (1998), many teachers are not prepared for the high level of collaboration that comes with being part of an inclusive co-teaching partnership. Therefore, it is essential
that co-teachers are encouraged to engage in conversations that help to foster the ability to collaborate effectively with one another.

**Active school leader participation.** Additionally, administrators play a significant role in the development of effective co-teaching partnerships. As such, administrators and building-level leaders need to recognize how they can support the development of effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships. Administrators must recognize that like the co-teachers themselves, they are also essential stakeholders in the development of successful co-teaching partnerships. Previous research overwhelmingly indicates that teachers clearly recognize the vital role administrators play in the successes and failures of co-teaching partnerships, especially when it comes to valuing the experiences and thoughts of practicing co-teachers and being responsive to co-teachers’ reported needs (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walter-Thomas, 1997; Wood, 1998). Therefore, if school leaders and administrators want to develop effective, long-term co-teaching partnerships that progress and advance over time, and are conducive to student learning, they must bear some responsibility for preparing and supporting their co-teachers. Administrators must be proactive in providing potential and practicing co-teachers with effective professional development programs, adequate common planning time, methods and structures for what it means to co-plan and fostering a school-wide commitment to inclusive learning environments. These participants indicated having school-based support. Jessica, a general education teacher, explained, “…I am in a school that truly believes in co-teaching, and so that's why we've been co-teaching for 11 years is because they like for
the teachers to all experience it and work together.” Rich, a special education teacher, shared, “One is that they’ve let us stay together for so many years. …We do have an administration that supports us. … So I feel like we have people that support us because they know that what we do is important and that we do it well.”

Lastly, Jackie, a special education teacher, elaborated, “I think this school in general is very focused on co-teaching and promoting good co-teaching relationships, so there’s already tons of structures in place to help us out.” In addition, understanding that these partnerships require time to develop the number of co-teaching partnerships teachers are assigned to work in should also be a factor when assigning teachers to co-teaching partnerships. It is unrealistic and irresponsible to believe that effective co-teaching partnerships will develop without the necessary preparation originating from building-level support. Laura, a special education teacher, explained:

In the beginning, nobody gave a rat’s ass if we had planning time together. Nobody cared if we even talked to each other. Administrators had no idea what they were doing… Eventually, over time, Jenny’s department chair insisted that, especially for math, special education teachers must be present (at department meetings). … That was only because the department chairs did it. It’s all leadership.

Building-level support is an essential component to the successful development of co-teaching partnerships.

Teacher preparation. This research study also revealed that only special education teachers received course work in co-teaching from their teacher preparation
programs. As previously discussed by Austin (2001), Fennick and Liddy (2001), Keefe and Moore (2004) and Wood (1998), all preservice teachers must be prepared to work in co-teaching environments. It is not enough to prepare only special education teachers for these complex partnerships. In fact, there appears to be a line in how the field traditionally prepares teachers that suggests that the general education teacher is fully-skilled, and the special education has to “catch up.” This is a spurious assumption. As the evidence from this study indicates, both teachers need preparation to be co-teachers. Therefore, there is a responsibility for teacher preparation programs to prepare all teachers for the instructional practices they will be professionally responsible for once they enter the classroom as full-time teachers, including co-teaching. The findings from this study are in agreement with the work of others (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Scruggs et al., 2007), lack of preparation results in feelings of apprehension, as evidenced by Jackie, as special education teacher, “…I probably had a little bit of reservations about people thinking it’s like my classroom and somebody coming into their classroom…” Jenny, a general education teacher, shared, “I think I probably was a little bit apprehensive. A little bit of one, the set of kids, and two, would it complicate like my classroom dynamics.” Bill, also a general education teacher, shared, “… towards the beginning of my teaching career, when you have another person in the room it’s awkward and there’s possibilities for conflict that didn’t exist before that person was in your room.”

Teacher preparation programs need to provide all preservice teachers with course work on co-teaching and collaboration. These courses should reflect research findings on
the experiences and concerns of practicing co-teachers and provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to observe effective co-teaching practices in action. In addition, if only special education teachers are prepared for the intense collaboration that comes with co-teaching, then they are placed in the position of educating their general education partners once the partnerships are made, placing yet another burden on special education teachers.

**The power of collaboration.** Lastly, the benefits that develop from effective long-term co-teaching partnerships provide co-teachers with an additional means of improving their professional practices and increased feelings of professional satisfaction. P-12 schools and teacher preparation programs need to address and promote the gains that come from being part of effective long-term co-teaching partnerships. Therefore, benefits such as: learning from one another, having two teachers in the classroom, gaining knowledge, camaraderie and reducing feelings of isolation should be incorporated into professional development programs and teacher preparation programs. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that co-teachers recognize the benefits that develop from effective co-teaching partnerships (Jang, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Walter-Thomas, 1997). Furthermore, co-teaching provides co-teachers with the opportunity to take part in collaborative conversations. These conversations allow co-teachers to reflect on and evaluate classroom practices at the macro and micro level. The opportunities for these types of professional discussions are limited for teachers who do not have the opportunity to work in a close and on-going professional partnership. The ability to have
these conversations develop over the course of these partnerships, as trust develops it fosters the co-teachers’ ability to engage in open and honest communication. Promoting the benefits that come with long-term co-teaching partnerships can help to develop positive mindsets toward the practice of co-teaching and alleviate negative perceptions and feelings of apprehension toward the instructional practice of co-teaching.

Effective co-teaching partnerships cannot be forced, and cannot develop overnight; teachers who are assigned to co-teach together must be provided adequate time and necessary support to develop a professional relationship with one another. As previously noted by Fennick and Liddy (2001), Rice and Zigmond (2000) and Scruggs et al. (2007), co-teaching as an inclusive instructional practices is not being used as effectively as possible. Yet, evidence from this study indicates that long-term co-teaching partnerships allow co-teachers the time to develop in-depth knowledge of one another as fully-functioning teachers and that this provides co-teachers the opportunity to develop effective processes that further the advancement of their co-teaching practices. Evidence from this study indicates that the development of these processes centered on the co-teachers’ abilities with regard to: trust, collaboration, communication, learning from one another and valuing one another. As a result of these processes, these co-teachers created inclusive co-teaching instructional practices.

In conclusion, as a result of the intense levels of cooperation and collaboration that come with developing inclusive co-teaching partnerships, further research is needed to determine methods for predicting levels of professional compatibility between co-teachers. In addition, research could also address the stages that co-teachers go through as
they work together to develop their co-teaching partnerships from year to year. Therefore, the research questions from this study could be used in a study that traces the development from year one of a novice co-teaching partnership through year three or four of the co-teaching partnership. This could provide further insights into how co-teaching partnerships develop over time and the stages co-teachers go through during the development of their partnerships. Additional research into effective and successful co-teaching partnerships is needed to further the insights into these partnerships and advice for developing these partnerships. Another aspect that research studies could address is the formation and preparation of co-teaching partnerships outside the field of special education. General education teachers are assigned to work with English as a second language teachers and other academic specialists to support the learning needs of specific student populations. In regard to English learners, general education teachers have limited or no preparation in second language acquisition or pedagogy (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008) similar to how general education teaches have limited or no preparation in working with disabled students (Austin, 2001; Cole & McLeskey, 1997); therefore, research is also needed to gain an understating of developing the close collaboration needed to develop effective professional partnerships between ESL teachers and general education teachers.

Limitations

Prior to turning to the implications for future research, it is appropriate to discuss the limitations to this study because some of the research recommendations that follow are built on these limitations, and should be the focus new research questions.
The limitations to this study include: (a) all of the participants worked for the same school district; (b) participants’ recall of past events; (c) the researcher as a middle school co-teacher; and (d) a lack of triangulation.

A total of nine co-teachers participated in this study. These nine co-teachers made-up a total of five co-teaching teams. One of the special education teachers worked with two general education teachers, making two co-teaching partnerships. All of the participants worked for the same school district and three of the co-teaching teams worked at the same school. All of the participants working for the same school district provided a limited perspective into the development of long-term co-teaching partnerships. Therefore, comparison across co-teaching teams does not reflect the experiences of co-teaching partnerships outside of a single school district and did not allow for comparisons to be made between school districts.

Furthermore, the research questions in this study required participants to recall past experiences that took place early on in their co-teaching partnerships. Participants expressed some difficulties in recalling past experiences from more than several years ago. These difficulties limited the ability to compare the participants’ experiences in the earlier years of their co-teaching partnerships to the later years of their co-teaching partnerships.

In addition, another limitation to this study is the researcher as a co-teacher and as a co-teacher who has been a member of a long-term co-teaching partnership. As a teacher who participates in the instructional practice of co-teaching on a daily basis, the separation between the roles of teacher and researcher presented challenges during the
analysis of data. The processes for developing effective long-term co-teaching partnerships reflect the processes of my participation in a long-term co-teaching partnership. Therefore, I had to let the interview results dictate my findings without incorporating my feelings or experiences into my interpretation of the findings. In order to do this, I clarified each of the respondent’s answers throughout the interview when necessary. In addition, I emailed each of the participants in regard to the findings of this study and asked for each participant to verify that the findings aligned to their intended interview responses.

Lastly, this study utilized one data source in the form of the semi-structured interview process. Therefore, a lack of triangulation impacts the findings of this research. The conclusions and findings to this study reflect the limitations and biases that come from using a single research method. Therefore, the results of this study were solely based on the participants’ perspectives and lacked additional inferences that could be made by comparing multiple data sources.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study provides new avenues for future research in regard to the development of co-teaching partnerships and the effects of successful co-teaching partnerships on both teachers and students. The current study could be replicated and strengthened by having a larger number of participants and incorporating a variety of school districts across a larger geographic area to determine if the findings from this study generalize to other long-term co-teaching partnerships. In addition, this study relied on one form of data, the semi-structured interview process, and the participants were interviewed independently of
one another. This study could be replicated and strengthened by incorporating classroom observations as another means of data collection and having all participants be interviewed with and without their co-teaching partner in order to gain deeper insights. Additionally, this study could be replicated into a long-term study to investigate and gain insights into the stages of development that co-teaching partners go through over the course of their long-term partnerships. It would be interesting to use the research questions from this study to interview co-teaching partners at the conclusion of their first year co-teaching, and then through the third or fourth year of their co-teaching partnerships. In addition, this would strengthen the current study in that the co-teachers would not be providing answers based on recalling events that happened more than four years ago.

Another aspect that research could address is identifying the specific features that impact co-teachers professional compatibility. Research could investigate co-teaching partners who have been recognized as having effective and successful co-teaching partnerships in comparison to co-teaching partners who have been recognized for having challenges and conflicts in regard to their co-teaching partnerships. Research into this area could help to determine where non-effective or struggling co-teaching partners encounter challenges and how they address and approach these challenges in comparison to effective and successful co-teaching partners. Research into this area of co-teaching could gain insights into the development of school-based support and professional development programs focused on assisting co-teachers with the means for addressing and overcoming the challenges they face within their partnerships. In addition, research
in this area could also identify if there is a stage within the development of co-teaching partnerships where conflicts more readily occur and if there is a stage where co-teachers learn to overcome and work through conflicts.

Another area for future research focuses on the experiences of students who have been placed in a co-taught class instructed by co-teachers who are part of a long-term partnership. Research could investigate what the students’ experiences and perspectives are in regard to the benefits or disadvantages that come with having two teachers, who identify having the ability to anticipate each other’s thoughts and actions in the classroom, and report preferring to co-teach with one another in comparison to the traditional single-instructed classroom environment. Research could investigate if there are any benefits or drawbacks associated with students’ experiences based on their placement in these classroom environments.

Lastly, research could also investigate the actions and decisions of co-teachers when they are teaching in their co-taught classes in comparison to when the co-teachers are teaching independently of one another in their single-instructed classroom environments. Research could investigate whether there are significant differences in how co-teachers, who identify preferring the co-taught classroom, approach running a classroom with regard to classroom management techniques, types of class lessons and activities, and behavior and discipline issues. Research could gain insights to determine the differences in how teachers approach the dynamics of their classes when they instruct with their co-teaching partner who they prefer to work with in comparison to when they instruct without their co-teaching partner.
Appendix A

Approval Letter

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance
Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 805, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-4448; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: September 4, 2015
TO: Cary Calvillo, Ph.D.
FROM: George Mason University IRB
Project Title: [706038-1] How did we get here? A Study Into the Processes of Developing Positive Long-term Co-teaching Partnerships
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: September 4, 2015
EXPIRATION DATE: September 3, 2016
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited review category #7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The George Mason University IRB has APPROVED your submission. This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that all research must be conducted as described in the submitted materials.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to the Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA). Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed (if applicable).

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to the ORIA.

The anniversary date of this study is September 3, 2016. This project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. You may not collect data beyond this date without prior IRB approval. A continuing review form must be completed and submitted to the ORIA at least 30 days prior to the anniversary date.
anniversary date or upon completion of this project. Prior to the anniversary date, the ORIA will send you a reminder regarding continuing review procedures.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of five years, or as described in your submission, after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Beat Dieffenbach at 703-993-6593 or adeffen@gmu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within George Mason University IRB's records.
Appendix B

Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: How did we get here? A Study into the Processes of Developing Positive Long-term Co-teaching Partnerships

RESEARCH PROCEDURES
The purpose of this research study is to gain a deep understanding and insights into the processes that long-term middle school co-teaching partners identify going through and continuing to go through as a means of developing, sustaining and advancing their co-teaching professional partnerships/relationships. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an individual semi-structured interview which will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview will be audio taped-recorded. As a participant, you may be asked to participate in a follow-up interview that will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes. The follow-up interview will be based on data collected from your original interview. You will be notified of your potential participation in the follow-up interview between 4 to 6 weeks after you initial interview.

Audio-taping will be take place with each interview. The participant's responses will be audio-tapped recorded using Audacity Software and will be saved on the principal investigator's computer. The data from the interviews will be password protected.

RISKS
There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this research.

BENEFITS
There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further knowledge of your co-teaching practices.

CONFIDENTIALITY
The data in this study will be confidential. As a participant, you will be provided a pseudonym to protect your confidentiality and all identifying information like location of employment will be kept confidential. The responses of the interviews will be kept on the principal investigator’s computer and will be password protected. The audio-files will be deleted from the principal investigator's computer after the transcription of the data has been completed. The transcriptions will be maintained for the required 5 year period.

PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. There are no costs to you or any other party.
CONTACT
This research is being conducted by Elaina Bafaro with George Mason University's College of Education and Human Development. She may be reached at 508-245-8955 and by email at ebfararo@masonlive.gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. Her faculty advisor is Dr. Gary Galluzzo he can be reached at 703-993-2567 and by email at ggalluzz@gmu.edu. You may contact the George Mason University Office of Research Integrity & Assurance at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT
I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

_____ I agree to audio-taping.

_____ I do not agree to audio-taping.

Name__________________________

Date of Signature__________________________
Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching? What subject(s) do you currently teach?

2. How many years have you co-taught? How many co-teaching partners have had? How long have you and your current co-teacher been teaching together? Have any of your past co-teaching partnerships impacted your current partnership? How?

3. Have you received professional development/preparation in the area of co-teaching? Please describe the PD received and share any information you can about the role that professional development may have played in your co-taught class and co-teaching practices.

4. Prior to your first co-taught class, did your teacher preparation program provide you with any formal preparation in the practice of co-teaching? (If yes)-In what ways?

5. SPED: Prior to co-teaching, were you highly qualified in the subject/content area?

6. Prior to being part of a co-teaching partnership what thoughts or opinions in regard to co-teaching as an instructional practice did you have?

7. Do you recall your first impression of your current co-teaching partner? (If yes)- What was it? Would you describe any ways that this first impression of your co-teaching partner may have had an influence on shaping or impacting how you co-taught the class? In what ways?
8. What co-teaching models do you currently implement in your class? Which work best with your students? Why do you think this is?

9. How do you and your partner prepare/plan for class? Has this changed over your years working together?

10. Would you please describe your individual responsibilities/roles within the co-taught class, and explain how these roles/responsibilities may have developed?

11. Do you and your co-teaching partner have specific shared responsibilities or roles within the class? If yes, would you please tell me what yours are?

12. Teachers make many on the spot decisions throughout the course of the workday. How do you and your partner handle these situations? Could you provide an example?

13. Do you think you and your co-teaching partner have similar teaching philosophies? If yes or no- How does this impact the co-teaching environment? Or, have you and your co-teaching partner always had similar teaching philosophies?

14. Do you think that having similar personalities or being personally compatible impacts your co-teaching relationship? If yes/no please explain. At what point in your relationship did you recognize your similarities or differences in regard to being compatible?

15. Do you and your co-teaching partner share the same educational goals? If yes or no- How does this impact the co-teaching environment? When did you come to understand your partner’s educational goals?

16. When you experience those inevitable challenges in your partnership, how do you handle them? Has how you handled them changed over time?
17. Can you share an example of a time when you and your partner had a disagreement or difference of opinion as a result of your co-teaching partnership? How did you address this disagreement? What was the outcome? Why do you think this is?

18. Do external factors (factors outside the dynamics of the classroom) impact your co-teaching relationship? Please provide examples? How do you negotiate or work around these factors?

19. Would you please describe any professional benefits that you view as specific to your co-teaching partnership?

20. What do you see as “opportunity costs” that might exist in the co-teaching model? Do you feel you have given anything up as a result of your co-taught partnership? If so, please explain.

21. Do you believe that classroom territory issues ever impact your partnership? If so in what ways? How do you and your co-teaching partner work through this?

22. Can you share an example of a time when you and your partner had a shared success or achievement together? Did this impact your professional co-teaching relationship? If yes- How?

23. How would you define trust in regard to your co-teaching partnership? Do you think trust is important in regard to co-teaching? How do you build trust?

24. Do you think you and your co-teaching partner have similar styles of communication/communication skills? Please describe.
25. Do you feel that you and your partner have open and honest communication? If yes, how did you come to have this type of communication? What do you think is the significance of this type of communication?

26. Will you talk to me about communicating with your co-teaching partner today in comparison to your first year working together?

27. Do you think you have taken a professional risk as a result of your co-teaching partnership? What type of risk(s) and why did you take it? If no, would you also speak to this?

28. Do you believe you have gained knowledge professionally as a result of your co-teaching partnership? Please explain.

29. What role do you believe students play in your co-teaching partnership? Explain.

30. Has your co-teaching partnership changed over the years? Could you tell me a story that shows how your partnership has changed?

31. Would you change how you first approached co-teaching based on your co-teaching experience? If yes- how?

32. Do you depend on your co-teaching partner? If yes- In what ways?

33. Are there benefits to teaching with the same co-teacher over time? If so what?

34. What professional skills do you think co-teachers must possess or learn to possess in order to co-teach successfully?

35. What skills or steps are involved in developing a long-term co-teaching relationship?

36. How is your current co-teaching partnership different or unique compared to your past co-teaching partnerships?
37. Based on your experience with co-teaching what advice would you give to new co-teaching teams? 38. Based on your experience with co-teaching what advice would you give to struggling co-teaching teams?

39. Do you believe that co-teaching is preferable to a traditional single instructor approach? Would you please explain your response?

40. Is there anything else you would like to add that I’ve not asked?
Appendix D

Recruitment Material

Email to potential participants

Subject line: Opportunity to participate in cooperative teaching research

Good afternoon (Name of potential participant),

I am doctorate candidate at George Mason University, performing research into the interpersonal dimensions of long-term co-teaching partners at the middle school level.

Your contact information was provided to me by (Name of Administrator or County Specialist) because you have been recognized as a long-term co-teacher who has been teaching with the same co-partner for a minimum of three years.

I am studying the processes that take place between co-teaching partners as a means of developing successful and effective partnerships from the perspective of long-term, co-teachers. I would like to know if you would be willing to participate in this study.

Your participation would include your participation in an interview in regards to the development of your co-teaching partnership. If this is something you find interesting, I will contact you at your convenience to discuss the details of the study and what the interview process would entail.

Thank You,

Elaina Bafaro,

Teacher & Social Studies Department Chair
Longfellow Middle School
ebafaro@masonlive.gmu.edu
XXX-XXX-XXXX
References


Douvanis, G., & Hulsey, D. (2002). *The least restrictive environment mandate: How has it been defined by the courts?* Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED469442)


Elaina R. Bafaro graduated from Barnstable High School, Hyannis, Massachusetts, in 1999. She received her Bachelor of Arts from Susquehanna University, Selinsgrove, Pennsylvania in 2003. She received her Master of Education from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia in 2011. She has worked as a history teacher for Fairfax County Public Schools since 2006, with nine years as a co-teacher.