

A CRITICAL LOOK AT CO-TEACHING PRACTICES AT THE SECONDARY
LEVEL

by

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful children, Rebecca and Jacob. It is my sincerest desire to instill my love of learning in you both. My father has always referred to me as “the professional student” and I hope that one day I am able to make the same endearing statement to you.

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ABSTRACT

A CRITICAL LOOK AT CO-TEACHING PRACTICES AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

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George Mason University, 2015

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The purpose of special education is to ensure that students with disabilities are provided a free appropriate public education, while accessing the general education curriculum and receiving specialized instruction to address their unique learning needs. To maintain compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2010) and educate these students in the least restrictive environment, schools are adopting inclusive co-teaching practices that integrate students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Current research on co-teaching is focused primarily at the elementary level; therefore, this study examined the perceptions of secondary educators regarding their experience within the co-teaching model. This study replicated and extended a previous study conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004). It included interviews with building-level special education administrators, observations of co-taught ninth, tenth or eleventh grade content area classrooms, and interviews with the general and special education co-teachers

regarding their perspective of the co-teaching model. The results revealed varying definitions and purposes for the co-teaching instructional model, a wide range of experiences teaching within the co-teaching paradigm, and numerous factors that impact co-teaching. The major factors that emerged from the data included the importance of the relationship between the co-teaching partners, a shared professional philosophy, compatible instructional practices, and administrative support. Ultimately, this pedagogy was designed to include students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in order to establish a more heterogeneous community. Current practice shows that practitioners and scholars should continue reviewing and refining the implementation of co-teaching and its appropriateness for all students.

CHAPTER ONE

One of the challenges for educational leaders today is to ensure appropriate educational opportunities for students with disabilities (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). The purpose of current special education programs is to provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum, provide them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA), and offer a continuum of service options (Weiss, 1999). To maintain compliance with IDEA and educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE), many schools are adopting integrated systems of inclusion to provide academic and social supports (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

Aefsky (1995) indicated that inclusion “refocuses the LRE provision to keep a student in the class that he or she would attend if not disabled...unless the nature and severity of the student’s individualized educational needs” (p. 5) requires a more restrictive setting. Her statement aligns directly with IDEA that requires students with disabilities be educated in the LRE, to the maximum extent appropriate, “children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled” (IDEA, 2004). For many children with disabilities today, this means that the majority of their learning takes place in general education classrooms (U. S. Department of Education, 2011). As a result, schools are

implementing inclusive practices and co-teaching models (Austin, 2001; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Reindal, 2010) to support these students in the general education setting (Idol, 2006).

For the purpose of this dissertation, inclusion is defined as the practice of placing students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Savich, 2008). Co-teaching is an instructional delivery method within the inclusive setting. According to Cook and Friend (1995), co-teaching is when “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single space” (p. 2). While the legal directive regarding educating students with disabilities in the LRE is clear, the process for implementation is ambiguous and at the discretion of each state, school district, individual school and often the classroom teacher (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010). Additionally, LRE is poorly defined in the law, and this ambiguity further exacerbates this issue (Rueda, Gallego, & Moll, 2000).

Co-teaching was suggested as early as the 1970s. Deno (1970) reported that special educators acknowledged the need for changes in the general education setting for students with disabilities. This movement began by changing the “inpatient” model to an “outpatient” program that provided students with disabilities the opportunity to be educated in a regular school system through a “cascade of services,” (p. 234) known as a continuum of services. Although this cascade system was considered approximately 45 years ago, there is little documented empirical support for this model within the last 20 years (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). Due to the wide use of co-teaching

practices and the limited documented research on this topic, this instructional model is worthy of further study.

Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) reported that there is a shortage of research on co-teaching methods for students with disabilities at the secondary level. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) also found that within the available research, secondary teachers' attitudes towards co-teaching are more negative when compared to elementary education teachers. This study examined the perceptions of the general and special education teachers regarding educating students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom. The intent of my research study is to unveil factors that impact the effectiveness of the co-teaching instructional model and provide educational leaders with information necessary to facilitate long-term change. It is likely that this research may reveal some underlying issues at the secondary level which could undermine the full potential of the co-teaching model and the closing of the achievement gap for students with disabilities. This is noteworthy because several researchers report that fundamental issues exist within the co-teaching methodology (Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Gal, Schreur, & Engel-Yeger, 2010; Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005; Pivik, McComas, & LaFlamme, 2002; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). These issues include time, teacher selection, and the assignment of classroom roles and responsibilities. This research is intended to further explore these issues.

Statement of the Problem

The achievement gaps between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers are of concern. One of the premises for the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB) of

2002 was to address this gap. According to 2009-2010 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012), 13.1 percent of all public school students nationwide have a disability and many perform considerably below grade level in reading and math (Center on Education Policy, 2009). On average, by the time these students are in secondary school settings, “they are 3.4 years behind their grade-level in reading and 3.2 years behind in math” (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009, p. 60). Further, in 2007, one quarter of students identified with a specific learning disability dropped out of school and only 46 percent of these students had regular paid employment within two years of leaving high school (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009). IDEA requires that students with disabilities are educated appropriately in order to improve their academic achievement (United States Department of Education, 2010). Although school districts are making progress in this area, there is still work to be done (Noguera & Wing, 2007).

The presence of a disability may make the learning process challenging and frustrating (Willis, 2007) for students and contribute to the achievement gap. In order to improve the academic progress for students with disabilities, schools are searching for effective instructional practices to assist the challenged learner and support the instructional team in an effort to level the playing field (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2009). As such, schools are implementing inclusive co-teaching models that afford general and special educators the opportunity to work together in the same classroom to individualize instruction for students with disabilities and “maximize the instructional effectiveness for all students” (Manset & Semmel, 1997, p. 163).

The school's implementation of co-teaching practices requires general and special education teachers to collaborate while meeting the needs of their students (Blask, 2011). The intention is to improve education for all students, not only students with disabilities (Burstein et al., 2004). While the vision of co-teaching is focused on improving students' academic success, the co-teaching model varies in practice and there are multiple elements that contribute to its effectiveness (Austin, 2001; Idol, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Otis-Wilborn et al., 2005; Savich, 2008; Soodak, 2003; Soodak, Podell, & Lehman, 1998; Weiss & Brigham, 2000). In fact, Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) report that "it is not clear what teachers would commonly recognize as sufficient to enhance inclusive practice or even what the norms are for a general education classroom to be considered inclusion" (p. 44). However, Giangreco, Baumgart, and Doyle (1995) support inclusive co-teaching practices and stated:

Inclusive education is an approach that has the potential to positively influence education for many students when it is pursued in a thoughtful manner by professionals, families, students, and community members working together toward common goals. Inclusion is much more than a place; rather, it represents a set of values (e.g., individualization, interdependence, equity, access, diversity, community) from which educational decisions are made. Inclusive education seeks to build on the diversity of students' characteristics as a strength rather than a liability. (p. 274)

Research shows that there is ambiguity associated with the implementation of inclusive practices, as well as variability regarding beliefs and implementation from

educators, as a whole, which leads to resistance from some educators and uncertain outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities (Austin, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Scruggs et al., 2007). The factors that affect co-teaching practices, as reported by teachers in the literature, include time, responsibilities associated with educating students with disabilities, requirement to change/differentiate teaching practices, administrator support, training or input regarding the choice to be a co-teacher, and the presence of another adult in their classroom (Austin, 2001; Gal et al., 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Pivik et al., 2002; Otis-Wilborn et al., 2005). However, as already stated, the majority of this research has been conducted in the elementary setting, leaving open the question of what factors influence the success of co-teaching at the secondary level.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom so that factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the co-teaching instructional model are available for educational leaders to consider when initiating school reform. Instructional practices were explored by utilizing a qualitative methodology. The research included interviews with the building-level supervising administrators for special education to obtain background information regarding inclusive practices and co-teaching models, followed by an artifact review of documents that address co-teaching and inclusionary practices. The building-level supervising administrators for special education were asked to provide names of co-teaching teams

that have experience co-teaching ninth, tenth or eleventh grade content area classes and are considered average to above average co-teaching teams. These teams were observed during a co-taught class and separately interviewed regarding their perspective of the co-teaching model using an interview protocol modified from Keefe and Moore (2004) and Friend (2013). Findings were synthesized in order to discover any consistent themes before comparing it to the literature on this topic, while keeping in mind that the majority of the current research is based at the elementary level. It is the intent of this research to provide educational leaders with current information to consider when working with co-teaching teams to develop and implement a successful instructional model that includes educating students with disabilities in the LRE. The following research questions guide this study:

What are the respondents' definitions of co-teaching?

What do the respondents believe is the purpose of co-teaching?

What have been the participants' experiences co-teaching in a secondary setting?

What factors impact co-teaching in secondary schools?

Rationale for Study

The primary purpose of the collaborative co-teaching model and including students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom is to ensure that they are educated in the LRE, to the maximum extent appropriate for each individual child, and to assist educators in their work towards closing the achievement gap (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Orr, 2009; Ross-Hill, 2009; Rueda et al., 2000). Inclusive practices also allow all students the opportunity to build social relationships and provide students

without disabilities the opportunity to learn to accept and understand people who were different from them (Fisher, 1999; Willis, 2007). Survey results from Hwang and Evans (2011) indicate that including students with disabilities in the general education setting provides social benefits for students with disabilities who are able to initiate peer relationships with students without disabilities. Additionally, Friend and Cook (2003) point out that regardless of a child's cognitive ability, all children can benefit from the expertise and contribution of two teachers offering instruction. Another purpose of the co-teaching model is to ensure compliance with state and federal mandates (Nichols et al., 2010) by educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Teachers have been resistant to educating students with disabilities and this resistance is embedded in the history of these educational policies (Forest, 2007). IDEA (1997) directly addressed equal access to the general education curriculum and required the inclusion of all students with disabilities in the student achievement system, students with disabilities were separated based on the belief that they could not benefit from education in the general education classroom (Forest, 2007). At that time, parents had to convince educators that students with disabilities could benefit from being included in the general education classroom and that “separating children on any characteristic, such as ability or race, inherently leads to an inferior education for those who are ‘tracked’ out of the mainstream” (Soodak, 2003, p. 328).

President George W. Bush enhanced accountability for all students by signing NCLB into law in January of 2002 and ultimately revising the ESEA. The goal of NCLB is “to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility and choice, so that no

child is left behind” (United States Department of Education, 2008). The Act requires educators to improve achievement for all students, including those with disabilities, and mandates standards for accountability, highly qualified teachers, and research-based instruction. This is especially important for students with disabilities as it highlights the academic achievement gap as evidenced by poor performance on standardized tests.

IDEA (2004) requires states to ensure that “each local educational agency shall ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, aged two to 21, inclusive, including those in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children without disabilities” (34 CFR 300.2.) These students must have access to the general education curriculum, as appropriate, while being educated in the least restrictive environment. Heward (2013) argues that the LRE requires students with disabilities to be provided “settings as close to the regular educational classroom as possible in which an appropriate program can be provided and the child can make satisfactory educational progress” (p. 71). Legislation also emphasizes a continuum of services so that local school districts and individual schools make provisions for supplementary services in conjunction with general education class placement (Department of Education 8VAC20-81 Special Education Regulations, 2010). Additionally, IDEA and NCLB monitors accountability through collecting data about schools’ Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs).

While the collaborative model associated with co-teaching is not new, resistance may have been exacerbated since the inception of NCLB due to the increased focus on accountability (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Even before

these policy requirements, some teachers expressed opposition toward this movement as it required them to differ from their normal way of doing things (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Soodak, 2003). Some teachers resist changing their teaching and behavioral management practices and are reluctant to accept students with disabilities into their classrooms (Gal et al., 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Limited research on co-teaching practices at the high school level exists (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). For this reason, it is important to examine the perceptions of secondary educators regarding including students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom so that school administrators can initiate reform, if needed. Reform at the secondary level is important because the public education system and each individual high school need to ensure that these students are provided FAPE in accordance with IDEA (2004) and that these services are provided in the LRE so that their individualized educational needs are met. IDEA specifies that services appropriate to meeting the child's needs are determined by the IEP team and for some students this may include social, emotional and academic instruction in order to adequately prepare them for postsecondary opportunities. Clearly, the aforementioned finding that only 46 percent of students with disabilities had regular paid employment within two years of leaving high school suggests that there is a great need for improvement in preparing these students to become fully-participating and contributing members of society. Inclusive settings may give a great opportunity for a social interaction that will benefit students with disabilities in the future.

Conceptual Framework

IDEA and NCLB require schools to improve the academic achievement for all students; while the directive is clear, the process for implementation is non-specific. This lack of specificity leads to variability in implementation and the potential for uncertainty regarding the fidelity and adherence to policy and procedure. The legislation directs what to do but not specifically how schools are supposed to do it (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Reid, 2010; Zigmond & Baker, 1995), which allows for variety of interpretations and actions (Brigham, Gustashaw, Wiley, & Brigham, 2004). The literature shows that schools have implemented inclusive co-teaching practices as a service delivery option; this practice requires tolerance and flexibility from general educators and extensive collaboration between general and special education teachers as a method (Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Gal et al., 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Orr, 2009; Reindal, 2010; Weiss, 1999). The variability inherent in implementation of the inclusion model and co-teaching practices may cause resistance from educators.

Current research on co-teaching practices is based primarily at the elementary level and according to Mastropieri and Scruggs (2001) “one major challenge is the relative scarcity of research on inclusive secondary classrooms compared with inclusive elementary classrooms” (p. 265). This lack of information, combined with the variability of co-teaching models (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002), leaves a significant gap in the research. The literature review found in Chapter Two of this dissertation provides an overview of the research on co-teaching practices by identifying teachers’ abilities, attitudes and beliefs, and the context of the school.

The conceptual framework for this dissertation study was predominantly grounded in the factors known to affect the co-teaching model (Ernst & Rogers, 2009), primarily at the elementary level, as identified in the literature. These factors have been identified as: teachers' ability, teachers' attitudes and beliefs, and the school context. Teachers' abilities include specific information regarding teacher's age and experience and professional development and training. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs considered self-efficacy, grade level and assessments, type and severity of disability, student's cognitive ability, and role ambiguity and role conflict. The school context contained information regarding administrative support and logistics. Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1994) and Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) expand the school context portion of the conceptual framework as they detail characteristics of effective leadership. These categories and subcategories were used to compare and contrast collected data from this research study with the existing literature on this topic.

Summary of Chapter One

The presence of a disability may make learning challenging and frustrating and contribute to the achievement gap for students with special needs. To address this issue and comply with legislation, schools are implementing inclusive practices and co-teaching models that require commitment and dedication from general educators and extensive collaboration with special education teachers (Blask, 2011). The intention is to improve education for all students, not only students with disabilities (Burstein et al., 2004). Although the legal mandates require students with disabilities to be educated in

the LRE, as appropriate for each child, there is not a clear directive on how to ensure that this occurs. This results in inconsistent practices that may undermine the potential of the co-taught instructional method (Friend, 2008).

As schools attempt to implement co-teaching methodologies, it is critical to identify possible factors that contribute to their success as they work towards meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom. This qualitative study included artifact reviews and interviews of the building-level supervising administrators for special education at three purposefully selected high schools in a county in Virginia regarding inclusive practices and co-teaching models. These high schools were selected as they represent a high school in the urban, suburban, and rural areas of the county. This research also included observations and interviews of general and special education co-teachers regarding their perceptions of co-teaching in the secondary setting. It was the intent of this research to unveil components that impact the effectiveness of the co-teaching instructional model and provide educational leaders with information necessary to facilitate long-term change. Future changes will allow educators at the secondary level to successfully ensure that students with disabilities are educated effectively as they access the general education curriculum in the LRE and close the achievement gap between general and special education students.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration. Collaboration is defined as general and special educators working together to meet the needs of all students. Scruggs et al. (2007) show that successful collaborative relationships form and sustain when they are centered on mutual ideologies

and instructional beliefs. This includes mutual respect, conflict resolution, methods for problem solving, and maintaining open communication (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). Collaboration also leads to a “reconceptualization of how special support programs can best be offered by both general and special education” (Idol, 2006, p. 78). This restructuring requires teachers to negotiate their instructional roles, share evaluations and grading, instructional planning, behavior management, and classroom routines.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching, also referred in the literature as team teaching, is defined as an instructional practice that pairs a special and general education teacher in the same classroom with the purpose of presenting instruction to all children, including students with disabilities (Reinhiller, 1996). For the purpose of this study, I use the term co-teaching to refer to any situation in which the special education teacher and the general education teacher are instructing students in the general education classroom that is comprised of both students with and without disabilities.

General education teacher. The general education teacher is defined as a person who provides the content to students in the general education setting and is responsible for delivering instruction (Hwang & Evans, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007). For the purpose of this study, the general education teacher is the secondary educator who team teaches with a special education teacher in a content area that participates in the co-teaching model. The term general education, regular education, and regular classroom are found in educational literature, as well as relevant court cases. These terms reveal the historical separation of students with disabilities in an educational setting.

Inclusion. Inclusion is defined as an educational approach that places students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Also referred in the literature as co-teaching, inclusion usually includes a general education teacher paired with a special education teacher in an inclusive classroom of general and special education students (Orr, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007).

Least restrictive environment. The least restrictive environment is the educational placement of students with disabilities in a manner that promotes inclusion with general education to the maximum extent appropriate. Under IDEA this provision mandates that:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 20 U.S.C. Sec. 1412).

Placement options are offered on a continuum that includes the general education classroom with no special education support, the general education classroom with the support of a special education teacher, designated instruction services that could be offered in a pull-out setting, special self-contained classes, and private special education programs (Idol, 2006; Rueda et al., 2000).

Special education. Special education is defined as the education of students with disabilities in a manner that addresses the students' individual needs (IDEA, 2004). This instruction aligns with students' IEPs and is at no cost to the parent. It can be provided in a range of settings that include, but are not limited to, public day schools, public separate schools, residential facilities, and hospitals, a student's home and alternative educational settings. Students are eligible for these services under IDEA if he or she meets eligibility requirements for at least one of the 13 types of disabilities listed under IDEA and requires specially designed instruction because of their identified disability.

Special education teacher. The special education teacher is defined as a qualified, licensed teacher who works with students with disabilities. For the purpose of this study, the special education teacher is the person in the team-taught classroom that focuses on the needs of the students with disabilities. In most classrooms, the special education teacher is routinely responsible for modifying instruction, ensuring students are receiving their accommodations, behavioral management, and progress monitoring for data driven IEPs.

CHAPTER TWO

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of general and special education co-teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary inclusive co-taught classroom. In this chapter, I will explore the various aspects of inclusive co-teaching from three different tiers: policy, practices and research outcomes. I will first focus on the policy that governs special education by illustrating the historical and legislative influences. I will also show how this policy was driven by a parent-initiated movement for equal access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities, ultimately becoming the foundation for this instructional delivery model. I will then provide a detailed definition of inclusive co-teaching practices and describe the different models found in classrooms all over the world. These differing models will highlight the variability regarding the implementation and practice of co-teaching and lay the groundwork for investigating the factors associated with this instructional practice. Finally, I will review the literature regarding co-teaching practices and relate my findings to the purpose of this study.

Literature Search Procedures

I completed a systematic search of the literature on co-teaching using ERIC, Psych Info, ProQuest, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, and Google Scholar databases. For the keywords I used the following: co-teaching, team teaching, collaboration, special education, students with disabilities, inclusion, inclusive practices, disability, post-secondary, special education history, and collaborative instruction. I also completed an

ancestry search using reference pages from studies, articles, dissertations, and position papers to identify additional sources. Additionally, I used the Google search engine and Amazon to identify books on co-teaching. Many of the books had previews available online that I could read and use in my literature review. I also purchased and/or borrowed books that related to my topic. Then I used reference lists from studies and articles to identify additional sources. This initial search yielded approximately 300 journal articles on co-teaching and inclusive practices, 30 books, and three dissertations.

Inclusionary criteria. I included articles or dissertations in this review that were original research that reviewed or informed inclusive co-teaching practices. This review does not include studies that primarily focused on student achievement. More specific criteria included placing students in the least restrictive environment, stakeholder perception of inclusion and/or co-teaching practices, and teacher's feelings and attitudes related to working with students with disabilities. All studies included in this literature review defined co-teaching as special education teachers working directly with general education teachers in an inclusive co-taught setting. I excluded studies that focused on only consultation between general and special education teachers.

This review netted 57 research studies (Table 1) and seven literature reviews/synthesis of research (Table 2).

Table 1

Studies Included

Authors	Year	Type of Research	Purpose/Research Question	Educational level
Agran, Alper, & Wehmeyer	2002	Quantitative/survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review opinions of teachers on issues related to access to the general education curriculum for students with significant disabilities 	Elementary, middle and high school
Austin	2001	Quantitative/survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do co-teachers perceive their current experience in the classroom? What teaching practices do collaborative educators find effective? What kind of the teacher preparation do co-teachers recommend? According to collaborative practitioners, what school-based supports facilitate collaborative teaching? 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? Who does more in the collaborative partnership- the special educator or the general educator? What does this say about the model of collaboration used and the need for curricular changes in 	Elementary, middle and high school

			teacher preparation programs?	
Blask	2011	Mixed Methods Quantitative/ questionnaire Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the attitudes of teachers towards collaboration and their perceptions of collaboration with related service providers such as speech/language pathologists, occupational therapist, physical therapists, and teachers of the Deaf? • What barriers exist which restrict collaboration between the general education teachers and related service providers. 	Elementary school
Blecker & Boakes	2010	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation to determine whether teachers displayed the dispositions, knowledge and skills necessary to implement inclusive education 	Elementary, middle and high school
Brady, Swank, Taylor, & Freiberg	1988	Quantitative/ observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review teacher-student interactions with mainstreamed students in middle school social studies classes 	Middle school
Brigham	1993	Quantitative/ questionnaire Informative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of efforts to provide sufficient expertise in special education; describes models currently being employed; and reports preliminary results of student poll 	University
Brownell, Adams, Sindelar,	2006	Qualitative/ classroom observations,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the pedagogical practices and beliefs of teachers who were adopting 	Elementary school

Waldron, & Vanhover		interviews, notes	practices geared toward improving the education of students with disabilities and other high-risk students as a result of their Teacher Learning Cohorts participation	
Buckley	2003	Qualitative/ interviews, observations and review of IEPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of collaboration between regular and special education teachers in middle school inclusive social studies classrooms 	Middle school
Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna	2004	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What changes occurred at schools? • How satisfied were school personnel and parents with change? • What factors influenced school change? • What were the concerns of participants regarding school change? 	Elementary and middle school
Chapman, Larsen, & Parker	1979	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do teacher-afforded interactions with learning disordered students differ from those with low, medium, and high achievement students? • Do student-initiated interactions with teachers differ among the learning disordered and the low, medium, and high achievement students? • Are opportunities to respond provided equitably to the learning disordered and low, medium, and high achievement students? 	Elementary school

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there differences in the level of teacher questions addressed to the learning disordered and low, medium, and high achievement students? 	
Cook, Semmel, & Gerber	1999	Quantitative/survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparison of attitudes of principals to special education teachers 	Elementary and middle school
De Stefano, Shriner, & Lloyd	2001	Quantitative/pre-post test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the effectiveness of interventions with teachers and administrators to improve decision making regarding participation and accommodation for students with disabilities in large-scale assessments 	High school
Dieker	2001	Qualitative/observations, teacher documentation, student interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate the characteristics of these teams to provide a model that other secondary-level teams could use. • How are these teams structured? • What practices do they implement? 	Middle and high school
Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun	2008	Qualitative/focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review methods for and barriers to including students with disabilities in high school service learning programs 	High school
Eccleston	2010	Quantitative/rating scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the relationship between teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and their level of professional development, experiences with inclusion, access to 	High school

			instructional supports, and gender	
Fisher	1999	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do typical students recommend inclusive education? • What do typical high school students see at the benefits and drawbacks of inclusive education? 	High school
Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax	1998	Mixed Methods Quantitative/ survey Qualitative/ questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will students who interact with peers who have severe disabilities in academic classes establish different attitudes and expectations than those whose contact is more limited to lunchroom, hallway, and mainstreaming in primarily non-academic courses such as art and physical education? • Will either inclusive practices or traditional mainstreaming reinforce a set of assumptions that the needs of students with and/or without disabilities cannot be adequately addressed? • Will either inclusive practices or traditional mainstreaming reinforce a set of assumptions that resources and teacher time are compromised at the expense of either students with and/or without disabilities? • Will either inclusive practices or traditional mainstreaming have any impact on attitudes and 	High school

			<p>expectations or the assumption that access to specific instructional strategies is the primary concern in placement decisions?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Or will either inclusive service delivery models or traditional models reinforce attitudes and expectations that people with and without disabilities can effectively and should learn side by side as peers? 	
Fontana	2005	Quantitative/ Grade reviews and record reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do students with LD receiving instruction in co-taught English and math classes earn higher grades than students with LD who receive only support in a resource room? • Do students receiving instruction in co-taught English and math classes demonstrate an improvement in self-concept, math and writing skills as measured on standardized instruments? • Do teachers participating in collaborative co-teaching relationships demonstrate an increase in use of instructional strategies? 	Middle school
Gal, Schreur, & Engel- Yeger	2010	Quantitative/ questionnaires and rating scales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examined whether teachers' attitudes towards inclusion of children with disability in their classes are affected by various teachers' personal characteristics 	Preschool

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How teachers' attitudes relate to their requirements of various environmental accommodations • How their requirements for accommodations differ in respect of four groups of children with different disabilities: learning, sensory/motor, ADHD, and emotional 	
Gurgur & Uzuner	2010	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze the opinions of special and general education teachers, working in inclusion classes based on co-teaching approach, about the preparation stage for the application, planning meetings and applications they carried out 	Elementary school
Hang & Rabren	2009	Quantitative/ surveys Qualitative/ observations and record reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify perspectives of teachers and students with disabilities • Determine the effectiveness of co-teaching using students' academic and behavioral records 	Elementary, middle and high school
Helwick-Jackson	2007	Qualitative/ interviews, observations, and field notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the contributing factors to a successful co-teaching partnership? • What are the varied and emerging roles of the special education and general education partners in an elementary general education classroom co-teaching situation? • How does co-teaching change the traditional role of the typical special 	Elementary school

			<p>education teacher (i.e., resource teacher) and the general education classroom teacher?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What characteristics of the context enhance or impeded the co-teaching process? • What are the perceived effects of co-teaching on student learning for students with and without identification for special education services? 	
Hwang & Evans	2011	Mixed Methods Quantitative/ questionnaires Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review teachers' attitudes towards, and willingness to accommodate the needs of a student with a disability. 	Elementary school
Idol	2006	Mixed Methods Quantitative/ statewide testing data Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine the degree in which students with disabilities are in general education classes, the differences in how they were supported in the least restrictive environment, and difference in how special education services were offered 	Elementary, middle and high school
Ignat & Clipa	2012	Quantitative/ questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine the existing relation between the teachers' emotional intelligence, their satisfaction with life and their work mentality and their general job satisfaction. 	Not specified
Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley	2000	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine opinions of experts regarding inclusive practices for students with moderate and severe 	University

disabilities. Topics included: inclusive school values, collaboration between general and special education teachers, collaboration with related service providers, family involvement, lesson planning, scheduling, coordinating and delivering inclusive services, assessing student progress, instructional strategies, and supporting behavioral issues

Jang	2006	Quantitative/ qualitative student scores, questionnaires, interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the effects of team teaching in a math classroom 	Middle school
Kargin, Guldenoglu, & Sahin	2010	Quantitative/ rating scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the opinions of general education teachers with regard to the instructional adaptations that need to be made for inclusion and to evaluate them against several variables. 	Not specified
Keefe & Moore	2004	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges of co-teaching at the secondary level are explored through interviews 	High school
Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo	2010	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document the current condition of inclusion and address essential elements of quality inclusive practices 	Elementary, middle and high school
King-Sears & Bowman-Kruhm	2011	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review how special education co-teachers accomplish both co- 	Middle and high school

			teaching and specialized reading instruction responsibilities	
Klingner & Vaughn	2002	Qualitative/ case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify the emerging role of the LD teacher by focusing on changes in the experience over a seven year period 	Elementary school
Lawrence-Brown & Muschaweck	2004	Qualitative/ observations of collaborative team meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the collaborative team process 	Elementary and middle school
Leatherman	2007	Qualitative/ Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine teacher perceptions of inclusive practices 	Preschool
Leyser & Kirk	2004	Quantitative/ questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine parents' attitudes towards inclusion/mainstreaming 	Elementary, middle and high school
Litvack, Ritchie, & Shore	2011	Mixed Methods Quantitative/ questionnaire Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigated the attitudes toward disability held by children with disabilities and average to high achieving children in the inclusive classroom Investigate the social and academic implications of inclusive classrooms as reported by peers 	Middle school
Magiera & Zigmond	2005	Quantitative/ observations and time sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Determine if there was an "additive effect" of the special education on the instructional experiences of students with disabilities as compared with the experiences of the same students by only the general education teacher 	Middle school

Montague & Rinaldi	2001	Quantitative/ observations and time sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there significant differences in the number and type of teacher-student interactions between students at risk for developing LD/EBD and NAR students? • Are there significant differences in the number and type of peer interactions between students at risk for developing LD/EBD and NAR students? • Are there significant differences in self-perceptions and students' perceptions of teacher expectations between students at risk for developing LD/EBD and NAR students? • Are there significant differences in the amount of time spent academically engaged between students at risk for LD/EBD and NAR students? 	Elementary school
Moore & Keefe	2004	Qualitative/ written responses and focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review what high school students have to say about their experiences with students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom 	High School
Nelson & Roberts	2000	Qualitative/ Observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the reciprocal teacher-student interactions involving disruptive behaviors in general education classrooms 	Elementary and middle school
Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover	1997	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of successful educators for integrating students with disabilities 	Elementary, middle and high school

Orr	2009	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does inclusion look like in your school? • What are the barriers to inclusion in your school? • What supports for inclusion can you identify? 	Elementary, middle and high schools
Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore	2005	Qualitative/ interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review barriers of co-teaching practices for beginning special education teachers 	Not specified
Paliokosta & Blandford	2010	Qualitative/ ethnographic case studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examination of inclusive practices 	Not specified
Pivik, McComas, & LaFlamme	2002	Qualitative/ focus groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine inclusiveness of schools for students with mobility issues 	Elementary, middle and high school
Praisner	2003	Quantitative/ surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the attitudes of elementary principals toward inclusion of students with severe/profound disabilities in the general education setting? • What is the relationship between principals' personal characteristics, training, experiences and/or school characteristics and their attitudes towards inclusion? • What is the relationship between principals' perceptions of appropriate placements for students with different types of disabilities and their attitudes and experiences? 	Elementary school

Ross-Hill	2009	Quantitative/ rating scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigates the attitudes of regular education teachers towards the implementation of inclusion 	Elementary, middle and high school
Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon	2005	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparison of perceptions of future educators regarding hostility/receptivity and anxiety/calmness 	University/ pre-service teachers
Siperstein & Goding	1985	Qualitative/ observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination of teachers' differential behavior toward isolated/rejected LD children and toward popular non-LD children 	Middle school
Soodak, Podell, & Lehman	1998	Quantitative/ surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What are the nature of and dimensions of teachers' affective responses to including a child with disabilities in their general education classrooms? How do teacher attributes and beliefs, student characteristics, and school climate relate to teachers' responses to inclusion? How well do these factors predict teachers' responses to inclusion? 	Elementary, middle and high school
Thompson, White, & Morgan	1982	Quantitative/ observations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examination of teacher-student interactions 	Elementary school
Voltz, Elliott, & Cobb	1994	Quantitative/ survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze and compare perceptions of elementary-level learning disabilities resource teachers and elementary general education teachers 	Elementary school

Walsh	2012	Quantitative/ assessment comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review state assessment results for students with disabilities educated in co-taught settings 	Elementary and middle high school
Weiss & Lloyd	2002	Qualitative/ observations, interviews and document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do secondary educators define and implement co-teaching? • How do the actions of secondary special education teachers differ in co-taught and special education classrooms? 	Middle and high school
Weiss	2004	Qualitative/ observations, interviews and document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do secondary special educators define the co-taught and special education classroom? • What conditions influence those definitions? • What are the actions of the special educators during instruction in the co-taught and special education classroom? 	High school
Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu	1999	Qualitative/ observations, interviews and document review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the implementation and maintenance of an inclusion program 	Elementary school

Table 2

Literature and research syntheses included

Authors	Year	Type of Research/Dates	Purpose	Educational level
Avramidis & Norwich	2002	Literature review 1980s-2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explores factors that might impact upon teacher acceptance of the inclusion principal 	Not specified
De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert	2010	Literature review 1998-2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore parents' attitudes towards inclusive education 	Not specified
Manset & Semmel	1997	Literature review 1984-1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of successful inclusive approaches 	Not specified
Murawski & Swanson	2001	Meta-analysis 1989-1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesize data based articles pertaining to co-teaching between general and special educators 	Elementary, middle and high school
Scruggs & Mastropieri	1996	Research synthesis 1958-1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the perceptions of general education teachers towards teaching students with disabilities in the general education setting 	Elementary, middle and high school
Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie	2007	Meta-synthesis 1989-2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigation of co-teaching in the inclusive classroom 	Preschool, elementary, middle and high school
Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley	2012	Research synthesis 1990-2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigated research on collaborative models; student outcomes; teachers' attitudes, 	Not specified

			beliefs, and perceptions; and students' perceptions	
Weiss & Brigham	2000	Research synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do researchers actually do in this structure? • Is this structure effective for students with disabilities? • What impact does the structure have on schools, teachers, students, and parents? • Is this structure an appropriate use of resources? 	Elementary, middle and high school

The majority of the studies focused on the elementary and middle school level. For the purpose of this research, elementary school is defined as kindergarten through fifth grade and middle school is defined as sixth through eighth grade and also includes any studies that used the term junior high school but did not specify the grades within a junior high school. High school is defined as ninth through twelfth grade.

Of the 57 research studies, eight (14%) focused solely on the high school level, three (5%) had a combined focus of the middle school and high school level, and 13 (33%) included information from the elementary, middle, and high school level (Table 3).

Table 3

Studies included by educational level

Educational Level	Number of studies included	Percentage
Preschool	2	4%
Elementary school	13	23%
Middle school	7	12%
High school	8	14%
University	3	5%
Elementary and middle school	4	7%
Middle and high school	3	5%
Elementary, middle and high school	13	23%
Not specified	4	7%

The high school studies included six quantitative, two qualitative, and one mixed methods approach. The studies that combined their focused to the middle and high school level included one quantitative study and one qualitative study. The studies that included information from the elementary, middle and high school netted three quantitative studies, seven qualitative studies, and two mixed method studies (Table 4).

Table 4

Studies that included high school references and the type of research method

Educational Level	Quantitative	Qualitative	Mixed methods
Middle and high school	1	1	0
High school	6	2	1
Elementary, middle and high school	3	7	2

Characteristics of included references and citations. In addition to the research studies referenced above, this review includes articles and books that inform inclusive co-teaching practices. The topics contained in the reference section of this dissertation include information on the history of special education, definition and delivery models related to co-teaching, and factors associated with implementing co-teaching. These topics are explored and synthesized within the literature review.

In summary, systematic literature search procedures were completed to exhaust the research regarding inclusive co-teaching practices. This search netted numerous articles, books, and dissertations. The sources included in this literature review are intended to inform the historical and legislative impacts on special education, define co-teaching and its method of practice, and unveil factors associated with this instructional delivery model.

Historical Influences: Policy on Special Education

The history of special education in the United States began when a parent-initiative surfaced, resulting in the formation of several organized initiatives, including the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities (Sacks, 2001) and The National Association for Retarded Citizens (Yell, Rogers, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). During the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, additional parent organizations were formed to advocate for the educational rights of children with disabilities (LaNear & Frattura, 2007). In the early 1960s President John F. Kennedy created the President's Panel on Mental Retardation which recommended the allocation for federal aid for special support for students with disabilities (Braddock, 2007). Although there was an increasing level of access to public school services for students with disabilities, educating students with disabilities was not mandated by federal or state law.

In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which created the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped, today known as the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) (History of Special Education, 2013; Sacks, 2001). ESEA provided funding for primary education and was recognized by the public as a move towards expanding access to public education for children with disabilities. Prior to the passing of the ESEA law of 1965, introducing equal access to the general education curriculum and requiring the inclusion of students with disabilities in the student achievement system, students with disabilities were separated based on the belief that they could not benefit from education in the general education classroom

(Forest, 2007). At that time students with disabilities were home-schooled, uneducated, or placed in residential institutions (Kode & Howard, 2002).

The inclusive model began to take form in the 1970's after parent-initiated demands (Connelly, & Rosenberg, 2009) to have students with disabilities educated with their nondisabled peers (History of Special Education, 2013; Soodak, 2003). Following *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) which mandated that separate was not equal, parents of children with disabilities argued that “separating children on any characteristic, such as ability or race, inherently leads to an inferior education for those who are ‘tracked’ out of the mainstream” (Soodak, 2003, p. 328). In 1972 two Supreme Court cases regarding the right to education surfaced that presented an equal protection argument for students with disabilities: *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. D.C. Board of Education* (Yell et al., 1998). The Supreme Court found in both cases that children with disabilities must have equal access to public education that is equal to their non-disabled peers. Although at that time there were no existing federal laws that mandated it, some students attended school as a result of these decisions.

In 1973, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was enacted into statute (Yell et al., 1998). This federal law protected qualified individuals against discrimination based on their disability. In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was enacted, also known as Public Law 94-142. The purpose of this law was to provide public funds to states to assist them with educating students with disabilities. Initially New Mexico declined these funds and refused to implement the act, however the decision

of the court in *New Mexico Association for Retarded Citizens v. New Mexico* (1982) laid the ground work for the U.S. Supreme court to require all states to comply with this legislation and provide FAPE to students with disabilities, regardless of whether they accepted federal funds (The History of Special Education in the United States, 2013; Yell et al, 1998). This law also required these students to be educated in the LRE. EAHCA was amended in 1986 to include the Handicapped Children's Protection Act (Brief History of Special Education Legislation, 2010). This Act gave students and parents' rights under EAHCA and required the development of a comprehensive system of early intervention for infants.

In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was enacted. ADA adopted Section 504 regulations from the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act and provisions for students with disabilities were written into "504 Plans." These plans were intended to eliminate discrimination on the basis of a disability in any program receiving federal financial assistance and allow persons with disabilities equal opportunity to obtain the same level of achievement in an integrated setting to meet the students' needs. Also in 1990, the EAHCA was amended again and titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Brief History of Special Education Legislation, 2010; History of Special Education, 2013; The History of Special Education in the United States, 2013; Yell et al., 1998) affirming the need for schools to provide special education services for children with disabilities that qualified for service. In 1997 IDEA was reauthorized to include transition services to assist students in transitioning from high school to

postsecondary life, require students with disabilities to take state and district-wide assessments, and include general education teachers on the IEP team (IDEA, 1990).

President George W. Bush enhanced accountability for all students by signing No Child Left Behind (NCLB) into law in January of 2002 and ultimately revising the ESEA to more directly address learners with disabilities and the need to connect with IDEA. NCLB required educators to improve achievement for all students, including those with disabilities, and mandated standards for accountability, highly qualified teachers, and research-based instruction. This is especially important for students with disabilities as it highlights the academic achievement gap as indicated by poor performance on standardized tests.

The law we follow today is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. While each state has the power to enact IDEA as their legislation consider appropriate, this law provides a general framework that requires more accountability and data from school districts to demonstrate adequate instruction and intervention prior to referring students for special education services. It also emphasized educating students with disabilities in the LRE. A component of the law that is often overlooked is the requirement that services are to follow students and that they are to be tailored to meet the needs of the individual learners in the most appropriate setting. The concept of bringing support to students versus the historical isolation model is the underlying premise for inclusive co-teaching practices and collaborative relationship between special and general education teachers (Savich, 2008).

In summary, the legislation regarding special education has changed over the last decade. The law has been requiring students with disabilities to be educated in the LRE, to the maximum extent appropriate. As one method of addressing the legislative requirement and educating students in the LRE, many schools have adopted an inclusive co-teaching pedagogy that is a service delivery option for educating students with disabilities. While the law does not specifically mandate inclusive practices or the co-teaching model, it has become one of the most commonly used approaches in this reform movement (Friend, 2008). However, school districts that utilize this pedagogy are able to demonstrate progress made towards FAPE and show academic growth for student with disabilities educated in the general education setting over time through their Annual Reports to Congress, a requirement of IDEA (United States Department of Education, 2015).

Procedures for Inclusion

As stated in Chapter One of this dissertation, inclusion is defined as an educational approach that educates students with disabilities in the general education setting. It has been proposed as a method for integrating the learning experience for students with disabilities with their general education peers. Giangreco et al. (1995) reported that “inclusion is not new” (p. 273) as it was once referred to as mainstreaming or integration. Inclusion is about access to education in an equitable manner and describe it as “a movement designed to reconstruct classes so that all children representing the range of diversity present in our communities are welcome and provided with an appropriate, meaningful education” (Giangreco et al., 1995, p. 273).

Inclusion, as described in the literature, is a variable term. Although NCLB of 2001 (United States Department of Education, 2010) and IDEA (2004) requires students be educated in the least restrictive environment, it does not specify what conditions should be included. This lack of guidance enables debate between educators, parents and legislators. Some stakeholders consider inclusion to be theoretical and philosophical while others consider it practical, emotional and socially justified. Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) found that some people do not consider it a delivery model for instruction but more of a frame of mind for a learning community. This theory versus practice concept underpins the practice of inclusion as it refers to a broad range of practices and depends upon individual perspectives, student needs and academic level. The literature shows that factors exist within the inclusive co-teaching model which affect educators' responses to this instructional practice and may undermine the full potential of the inclusionary practice (Austin, 2001; Friend, 2008; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Pivik et al., 2002).

Defining Co-teaching Practices

Co-teaching is an instructional delivery model that provides inclusive practices to students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). In Chapter One of this document, co-teaching is defined as an instructional practice that assigns a special education teacher and general education teacher to the same classroom with the purpose of presenting instruction to all children, including students with disabilities (Reinhiller, 1996). During the Council for Exceptional Children conference on co-teaching practices, Friend (2013) stated that co-teaching is a service delivery option that is not prescribed by the federal law. During the same conference, James

Dallas, Principal of Discovery Elementary School in Loudoun County and co-presenter, stated that co-teaching meets the LRE requirement and indicated that, “inclusion in a co-taught setting does meet the mandate when we can cluster [students] according to need in a timely and systematic format” (J. Dallas, personal communication, October 8, 2013). Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) also describe co-teaching as a pragmatic merger between general and special educators in which direct instruction is provided to all students by both teachers in the general education setting. The primary goals of co-teaching are to increase collaboration, encourage the use of new teaching strategies, observe colleagues in a natural setting, and improve instruction for all students (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Eccleston, 2010; Fontana, 2005; Giangreco et al., 1995; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Jang, 2006). Additionally, the expectation of including students with disabilities in inclusive co-taught settings is to integrate their learning experience, both social and academic, with their non-disabled peers (Idol, 2006).

The implementation of co-teaching includes several different components. The first component requires a general education teacher to be paired with a special education teacher in an inclusive classroom of general and special education students (Orr, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007). It involves the joint teaching of academics, social skills and appropriate behavior of heterogeneous groups of students in integrated settings (Bauwens et al., 1989; Friend & Cook, 2003; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996) as both teachers are involved in planning, delivery and evaluation of instruction, and assessing student work.

In an inclusive co-taught setting the student to teacher ratio is decreased (Cook & Friend, 2003; Dieker, 2001; Murawski & Dieker, 2008), and both teachers are supposed to share responsibility in the co-taught classroom (Bauwens et al., 1989; Jang, 2006; Reindal, 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). “They [general and special education teachers] take collective responsibility for maximizing learning to teach or becoming better at teaching while providing enhanced opportunities for their students to learn” (Jang, 2006, p. 180). Current literature indicates that typically the general education teachers possess the expertise in knowledge of the curriculum while the special education teacher has the expertise in instructional processes and modifications used to teach individual students who may learn atypically (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Musti-Roa, Hawkins, & Tan, 2011; Voltz, Elliott, & Cobb, 1994).

Another component of co-teaching is the delivery of instruction and there are several variations of how co-teaching is implemented in the classroom. Cook and Friend (1995) delineated five different models of co-teaching: (a) teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model; (b) station teaching; (c) parallel teaching; (d) alternative teaching; and (e) team teaching (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995). Friend (2010) depicts the different models of co-teaching in Figure 1. The numerous options for delivering instruction in the co-taught setting compounds the issue of variability within this instructional delivery model and contribute to the confusion and resistance from teachers.

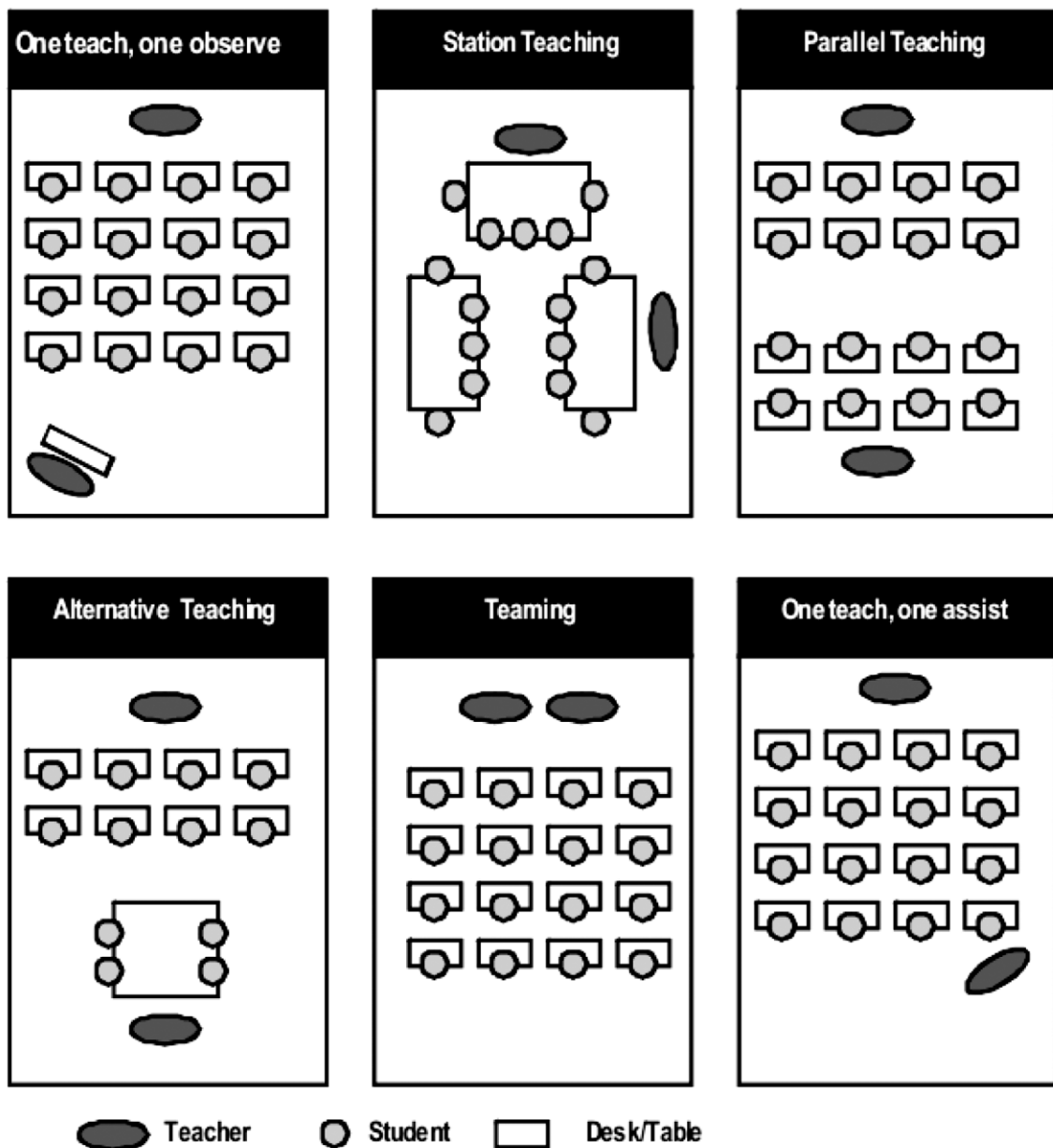


Figure 1. Co-teaching approaches. This figure illustrates the different models of co-teaching according to Friend et al. (2010, p.12).

Teach-and-assist or teach-and-observe. The teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe models include both educators in the room but with one taking the lead presenting instruction while the other systematically circulates the classroom offering assistance to students or observing them working. They are the most simplistic approaches to co-teaching as they do not require extensive planning or communication between the co-teachers. In these models the general education teacher usually assumes the instruction and the special education teacher provides individual support as needed (Scruggs et al., 2007). Stetson and Associates (2012a) and Stetson and Associates (2012b) recommends that educators use these models sparingly and Cook and Friend (1995) report that the assisting/observing teacher may feel like a glorified teaching assistant, especially if that person is the special educator. Cook and Friend (1995) also point out that if one teacher continues to assume the lesser role, the students may question the teacher's authority in the classroom. For this reason, they recommend that the teachers alternate their roles. During use of these models the assisting teacher may also be gathering academic, behavioral or social information on specific students or the class as a whole (Friend et al., 2010).

Station teaching. Station teaching is when teachers divide the instructional content into different stations. The class is typically split in half and each teacher is responsible for planning and teaching a portion of the content. The students alternate stations after a predetermined amount of time. Another option for station teaching is to include multiple stations in which students are able to work independently or with

partners on projects or enrichment assignments (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007).

Station teaching requires more planning than the teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model (Cook & Friend, 1995). It requires the co-teachers to coordinate the placement of students, as well as group movement and time scheduling. Cook and Friend (1995) point out that this model may provide a level of comfort for novice teachers as there is a smaller teacher-student ration and that the question of teacher equity is not present as both teachers are taking active teaching roles. This model is beneficial for students with disabilities as it integrates them into different groups, often regardless of their disability.

Parallel teaching. Parallel teaching is when the special education and general education teacher both provide instruction simultaneously to a separate group of heterogeneous students within the same classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Villa et al., 2004; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). This model lowers the student-teacher ratio, allows students more opportunities for hands-on learning and individualized instruction, and provides a closer proximity to students due to the smaller group size (Cook & Friend, 1995). Further, students are often paired with the teacher or group of students that will maximize their learning potential based upon personalities and students' strengths and weaknesses. This model requires teachers to plan their lesson to ensure that they cover the same material and communicate effectively when dividing the class into two groups (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Alternative teaching. Alternative teaching is when one of the co-teachers, usually the special education teacher, takes a smaller group of students into a different room to provide specialized instruction, remediation, enrichment, and/or pre-teaching (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). Cook and Friend (1995) caution teachers about using this model as it sometimes results in “stigmatizing students with disabilities by grouping them for re-teaching repeatedly” (p. 7). This potential risk can be avoided by selecting different students each time this co-teaching model is implemented. Cook and Friend (1995) also report that alternative teaching is beneficial when addressing student’s social needs as it allows the teachers to purposely select students to include in the smaller groups that could provide a positive role model for the struggling student.

Team teaching. Team teaching is when the special education and general education teachers take turns providing direct instruction to the entire class of heterogeneous students (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). Dr. Marilyn Friend described it as “having one brain in two bodies” (M. Friend, personal communication, October 8, 2013). This model requires a considerable amount of collaboration and communication as the teachers are equally responsible for every student and equally involved in leading the instruction (Scruggs et al., 2007). Cook and Friend (1995) believe that team teaching is one of the most difficult co-teaching models because it requires extensive planning and a high level of mutual trust and commitment. Austin (2001) believes that team teaching is the “most efficient in valuing the contribution of both collaborative teachers through equitable tasking and responsibility” for both teachers (p. 246).

Examples of effective team teaching can include one teacher presenting the instruction while the other teacher is demonstrating a concept or asking clarification questions related to the material. This collaborative effort allows the teachers to model appropriate social interaction, as well as model appropriate ways to ask questions in a large group setting (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). Regardless of the manner in which the teachers' co-teach, this method allows students to see that both teachers are knowledgeable about the content. Through this model, both teachers demonstrate that they are highly involved in classroom instruction, planning, assessing student work, communicating with other stakeholders, and contributing to IEP goals (Bauwens et al., 1989; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2003; Nichols et al., 2010; Villa et al., 2004; Villa et al., 2005).

Although Friend et al. (2010) indicates that team teaching is one of the most beneficial approaches to the co-teaching model as it “adds a depth and richness to the co-taught class” (p. 15), Cook and Friend (1995) point out that some co-teachers, both novice and veteran, may never be completely comfortable using this approach. While some veteran teachers may find team teaching to give them renewed energy and focus for teaching, some are unwilling to change their teaching techniques and try new ideas for reaching their students. Unfortunately, this resistance undermines the purpose of team teaching as current literature shows that teachers at the secondary level have historically taught in isolation. Adams and Cessna (1993) and Voltz et al. (1994) would likely agree that teachers can benefit from engaging in collaborative and collegial interactions that stimulate professional dialogues and creativity.

In summary, the co-teaching service delivery model has several variations to its implementation and execution in the classroom. These variations range from the teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model to a team teaching approach. The current literature demonstrates that there are varying levels of support needed for successful implementation of these models, as well as different skills and abilities of teachers assigned to provide the instruction. These variations lay the groundwork for a discourse regarding factors that promote the effectiveness of this instructional model.

Discrepancies Regarding Effectiveness

The published research regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching on academic support for students with disabilities is relatively small. Available research significantly decreases when the research parameters are focused only on the secondary level. This lack of research highlights the gap in the research and the need for a better understanding of the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom. Acquiring this information will reveal factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the co-teaching instructional model, and therefore be available for educational leaders to consider when initiating reform in their school.

In regards to experimental research, Friend (2013) reports that this lack of data is primarily based on the difficulties related to identifying comparable students, teachers, classrooms and course content. Researchers struggle to find students who can serve as a comparison within a co-taught class and those that are in a solo-taught class.

Additionally, assigning students with disabilities to conditions for experimental purposes

is unlawful as FAPE and LRE requires students to be educated at a level of instruction to meet their individualized learning needs.

Literature reviews and research synthesis on this topic support Friend's (2013) findings. During the search of the literature on co-teaching, only seven literature reviews/synthesis of research were found (Table 2). Of these articles, only three were published within the last ten years and only five were within the last 20 years. To ensure current and relevant reporting regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching on students with disabilities, only articles written in the last 20 years are included in this section.

In Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, and McCulley's (2012) analysis of the research from 1990-2010, they reported finding little research on this topic at any grade level. They stated that, "very few studies systematically manipulated the influence of co-teaching on students with and without disabilities; the most promising interpretation of the data is that co-teaching is likely to be associated with small gains when implemented appropriately" (p. 507). De Boer, Pijl, and Minnaert (2010) support Solis et al.'s (2012) findings as their review of the literature regarding parents' attitudes towards effectiveness of inclusive education from 1997-2007 only netted 10 studies. It is also noteworthy that there were no specific references made to co-teaching practices in their report or which grade levels were included in the studies. Further, Scruggs et al.'s (2007) meta-synthesis of qualitative research from elementary, middle, and high school levels regarding co-teaching in the inclusive classroom revealed only 32 qualitative articles from 1989-2005. Their findings of only 32 studies over a 16 year period supports Solis et al.'s (2012) argument regarding the lack of research on this instructional practice.

Murawski and Swanson (2001) expressed concern regarding co-teaching practices and they argued that there is a lack of data to support its effectiveness. They reported that of the 89 articles they found on this topic, only six provided quantitative evidence. Within these studies the dependent measures included grades, math and reading achievement, attitudes, behavioral referrals, attendance, and social outcomes. A mean effect size of 1.59 was reported for reading achievement and an effect size of .45 was found for math achievement. A smaller effect size of .32 was reported for grades and .08 effect size was reported for social outcomes. Murawski and Swanson found an overall mean effect size of .40 and stated that co-teaching practices are only moderately effective. Murawski and Swanson caution readers regarding this finding as only three of the six quantitative studies included effect sizes regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching practices for students with disabilities. In their concluding remarks, they encourage more research and state, “for co-teaching to be considered as a valid service delivery option for students with disabilities in the general education or least restrictive placement, more experimental research must be conducted” (p. 265).

Weiss and Brigham (2000) foreshadowed Murawski and Swanson’s (2001) concern regarding the lack of studies that include evaluative and interpretative data on co-teaching practices in their study and noted that only three percent of the articles they found included research based findings. Weiss and Brigham specify that co-teaching may be a viable service delivery option for some students with disabilities, but caution educational leaders from fully embracing this model and restructuring of special education programs to focus on the co-teaching model.

The lack of research on co-teaching practices for students with disabilities and the variability of its effectiveness as reported in the review of the literature, provides insight into why the individual researchers report contradictory findings regarding the effectiveness of co-taught inclusive practices for the academic support for students with disabilities. For example, Hang and Rabren (2009) employed a mixed methods approach to their study of 45 co-teachers and 58 students with disabilities at the elementary, middle and high school level during the 2004-2005 school year. They found that students with disabilities educated in co-taught classes significantly increased their performance on standardized tests when compared to the year prior to being included in a co-taught setting. They also found that these scores were comparable to their non-disabled grade level peers. Walsh (2012) also reported positive academic outcomes for students with disabilities at the elementary and middle school level when educated in the co-taught setting. In his study that gathered data over 20 years, he found that students with disabilities who received their services in the co-taught setting improved their scores with an accelerated rate on state standardized testing.

Additionally, Fontana (2005) investigated the effectiveness of co-teaching on the academic achievement for eighth grade students identified with having a specific learning disability. She found that their grades were significantly higher when compared to the average grades of students with learning disabilities who were not educated in co-taught classes. Jang (2006) offers an international perspective on this topic. Results from his Taiwanese study of academic outcomes for students educated in co-taught classrooms at the middle school level are comparable to Fontana's findings. The students in his study

earned higher final exam scores when educated in a co-taught setting. One limitation of this study is regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching practices on students with disabilities is that Jang did not specify whether the students included in this study had disabilities.

Magiera and Zigmond's (2005) study of students with disabilities in co-taught settings at the middle school level netted contradictory results regarding the academic effectiveness of co-teaching. They reported that there is little data to support the effectiveness of co-teaching practices and found that students with disabilities received less attention and less direct instruction from the general education teacher when the special education teacher was present. In fact, they conclude that their results fail to identify any substantial "additive effects" (p. 84) on student learning when educated in a co-taught classroom. Montague and Rinaldi (2001) support Magiera and Zigmond's position as they found that elementary students at risk for being evaluated as a student with disability received more negative and non-academic assistance from general education teachers when educated in an inclusive classroom when compared to their typical peer. These students perceived their teacher as having lower academic expectations for them and therefore saw themselves as less academically competent. Montague and Rinaldi predict that this will ultimately result in lower academic achievement as the at-risk students continue in their education.

In summary, there are differing arguments present in the research regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching. A commonly cited concern is the lack of data to support this instructional practice. Also, the available data illustrates the discrepancies regarding

effectiveness. For example, some researchers report positive academic gains for students, however there is also literature that provides contradictory results regarding the academic effectiveness of co-teaching. The literature base that presents an adverse perspective of co-teaching primarily highlights the numerous factors that impact the implementation of a successful co-taught model. Ultimately this inconsistency suggests that there is a disagreement regarding definition, purpose and implementation of this pedagogy.

Factors Associated with Implementing Co-teaching Practices

Although Friend et al. (2010) reported that “co-teaching seems to be a vehicle through which legislative expectations can be met while students with disabilities at the same time can receive the specially designed instruction and other supports to which they are entitled” (p. 10), co-teaching is an imperfect and complex practice that may be inconsistently implemented. There are a number of factors that research suggests impact the effectiveness of co-teaching practices. Friend and Cook (1996) suggest that presence, planning, presenting, processing, and problem solving are critical to the success of cooperative teaching (Helwick-Jackson, 2007).

My review of the literature revealed the following factors that seem to impact the effectiveness and efficiency of co-teaching:

- Teacher ability (age and experience; professional development and planning)
- Teacher attitudes and beliefs (self-efficacy; grade level and assessments; type and severity of disability; students’ cognitive ability; role ambiguity and conflict)
- School context (teacher selection; time; resources; scheduling)

The following sections summarize this literature, using these groupings

Teacher ability. Experience and preparation are important to a teacher's ability to confidently teach in the co-taught classroom. This preparation impacts their overall tolerance and willingness to differentiate instruction necessary to meet students' learning needs. Weiss and Lloyd (2002) report that due to the extensive variability of inclusion models across districts and individual schools, many teachers question whether inclusion is the best service delivery model and if they are adequately prepared to teach students with varying ability levels (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). Savich (2008) agrees with this position as he argues that the new requirements under NCLB leaves educators ranging from the state departments of education to classroom teachers as feeling that they are unable to administer all of the requirements of NCLB (2004) while still meeting the learning needs of all students.

Teacher age and experience. Teacher's attitudes towards inclusion and their ability to modify curriculum may be related to teacher's age and experience teaching. Overall, novice teachers are often selected to co-teach and their lack of experience compounds the problem as the teachers are still learning their professional responsibility, mastering effective teaching practices and behavioral management skills (Long, Brown, & Nagy-Rado, 2007). While some research reports that general education teachers with more experience were more favorable toward inclusion (Ernst & Rogers, 2009), many veteran teachers remark that through seniority they should be excluded from this requirement and report that students with disabilities are usually not friendly and give up too easily (Gal et al., 2010).

According to Hwang and Evans (2011), older and more experienced teachers are resistant to participating in inclusionary practices and adapting their teaching practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This is a significant factor to co-teaching because the older and more experienced teachers would bring valuable teaching knowledge to these exceptional students. These findings contradict Ernst and Rogers' (2009) quantitative study regarding high school teachers' attitudes about inclusion. Their survey netted a statistically significant finding that experienced teachers within the inclusion model had more positive feelings than those without experience. Additionally, Leatherman's (2007) qualitative study found that veteran general educators have been working with special needs students throughout their career and report successful results. One of the teachers interviewed reported

I have been working with children with special needs for a long time. Even before it was thought as mainstreaming them into the regular classroom. And I think back then it was no problem... I've had some of all children; it's a great challenge. But I enjoyed it better, I think, before it became mainstreaming. Because everybody [is] looking for special needs. They focus on what the child can't do, instead of what they do. (p. 601)

This statement shows that the processes for finding and serving students with disabilities has changed and according to this teacher, has actually caused difficulties within the educational system as the focus has turned towards what a student can't do, instead of what they are able to do.

Professional development and training. Throughout the literature, researchers have found that lack of professional development and training are factors related to a successful co-teaching model and teachers' beliefs that they can modify the curriculum to meet the needs of all learners (Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax, 1998; Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010; Ross-Hill, 2009; Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, & Simon, 2005). This lack of training originates during teacher education program at the collegiate level as Shippen et al. (2005) found that 90% of their respondents, (which included 29% of future special educators, 46% of future general educators, 21% of future dually certified in both special education and general education, and 4% that did not respond) stated that their undergraduate program did not effectively prepare them to teach students with disabilities. Additionally, Praisner's (2003) study found that exposure to co-teaching related topics during preparation programs varied between 13% and 83% amount of the time, with the primary focus being on special education law rather than learning about supporting and working in an inclusive model or being exposed to actual co-teaching activities. Other researchers have also reported that most general education teachers indicate that they have not had college coursework or professional development that prepared them to differentiate instruction or trained them to work with students with special needs (Cullen, 2010; Orr, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007).

Friend et al. (2010) argue that teachers should be provided opportunities for professional development "because co-teaching departs so significantly from the traditional 'one teacher per classroom' model [that] it is not reasonable to expect educators to understand and implement it without specific instruction in the pertinent

knowledge and skills” (p. 20). Cullen (2010) found that fewer than 30% of teachers surveyed about inclusion believed that they had received the necessary training to teach in a co-taught setting. Without this necessary training and professional development Reid (2010) states that “when teachers are not provided the skills to implement inclusion successfully, one should anticipate frustration and resentment by teacher and staff towards the inclusion model. There may also be resentment towards the student” (p. 11). Austin (2001) supports teacher preparation for collaborative teaching and presents qualitative research which suggests that pre-service special education courses for general education teachers would be beneficial in preparing them to teach in a co-taught setting. Lawrence-Brown and Muschaweck (2004) echo Austin’s position and state that effective collaborators and teachers participating in the co-taught delivery model are “made, not born” and “require specific staff development to acquire collaborative teaching skills” (p. 147). Blecker and Boakes (2010) studied the skills necessary to implement co-teaching and found that teachers reported a positive attitude towards inclusive education but consistently expressed concern regarding the lack of training and professional development needed to successfully implement co-teaching practices in the general education classroom.

Teacher attitudes and beliefs. A teacher’s feelings of readiness and comfort when participating in the co-teaching model are very important to their flexibility in the classroom and student achievement. Cooper and Fazio argue (as cited in Ross-Hill, 2009, p. 190) that “trying to understand the factors behind feelings and behavior is pertinent to the success of special needs students in the general education classroom” and when

teachers are able to accept responsibility for their feelings, they are then able to take steps to change their mind or attitude. Research indicates that self-efficacy, role ambiguity and role conflict can affect the success of this instructional practice and an educators' willingness to accept students with disabilities into their general education classroom (Bouck, 2007; Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000; Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their own competency and ability to effectively meet the needs of special education students (Soodak, et al., 1998). General educators sometimes question their ability to work with students with disabilities (Otis-Wilborn et al., 2005) and express fear of working with this special population (Dymond, Renzaglia, & Chun, 2008). Some general education teachers even report that they have high levels of anxiety about teaching students with disabilities (Shippen et al., 2005; Soodak, et al., 1998) and do not have the patience (Shippen et al., 2005) or instructional tolerance (Cullen, 2010; Manset & Semmel, 1997) necessary to be effective with this student population. Many teachers even report that they feel inadequate and overwhelmed by the responsibility for determining how to implement the myriad of adaptations and modifications to their teaching style to successfully accommodate the needs of all students (Dieker, 2001; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Giangreco et al., 1995; Heward, 2003; Kargin, Guldenoglu, & Sahin, 2010).

Soodak et al. (1998) reported that personal efficacy was "related to their anxiety about including a student with a disability, such that low levels of personal efficacy were associated with a high level of anxiety and high personal efficacy was associated with

low anxiety” (p. 491). Shippen et al. (2005) reported that 69% of participants reported greater hostility and less receptivity when working with students with disabilities and 75% reported greater anxiety and less calmness. King-Sears and Bowman-Kruhm (2011) also validate the import of a teacher’s belief that they are unable to adapt the general education curriculum as they found that students with disabilities educated in co-taught settings are not receiving individualized instruction. They report that there is little attention given to a student’s IEP when planning or presenting classroom instruction. They note that this was specifically true during reading instruction and they state that “receiving modifications and accommodations is not the same as specialized reading instruction” (p 182). Zigmond and Baker (1995) echo King-Sears and Bowman-Kruhm’s findings and report that “special education in inclusive programs is, by design, no longer special” (p. 245) and accommodations and modification are usually directed at the whole class, rather than specific students.

The beliefs that general education teachers are not competent to work with students with disabilities is shared by some administrators, special educators and parents (Cook et al., 1999; De Boer et al., 2010). Cook et al. (1999) report that principals and special educators, alike, feel that most general education teachers do not possess the skills to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities. Additionally, De Boer et al. (2010) argue that although a small majority of parents in their review of literature recognized the positive aspects of co-teaching and the inclusion model, many parents expressed concerns regarding this instructional practice for their own child. Half of the parents surveyed reported that inclusion was not a good fit for their child, specifying that

special education classes with special education teachers were better suited than the general education setting to meet their child's unique needs and 53.6% felt that inclusion is likely to harm the emotional development of children with special needs. Savich (2008) and Leyser and Kirk's (2004) findings support these beliefs as their research shows that instruction in the general education class dilutes and dissipates the specialized instruction that they would normally receive in a special education class.

In addition to a teacher's academic responsibilities, they are often required to teach the "hidden curriculum" (Wedell, 2008). According to Wedell this includes teaching students about positive behavior and attitudes that support effective learning. For this reason it is important that educators feel confident in their teaching assignments as their beliefs and attitudes are paramount when implementing an instructional program that is focused on teaching academics (Giangreco et al., 1995; Moore & Keefe, 2004; Villa et al., 2004; Villa et al., 2005), as well as teaching morals and values (Sapon-Shevin, 2007).

Heward (2003) reported that one of the reasons that educators lack self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities is that teachers struggle with students with disabilities' attitudes and motivation. In his article, he addresses different methods for encouraging students to learn. First, he found that rewards offer only temporary compliance as they do not create enduring commitments to education. Then he reported that many teachers' primary goal is to build self-esteem and pride in students with disabilities in order to increase their overall academic achievement and progress. He believes that these traits would logically show a "positive correlation between

achievement and positive self-esteem: children who are achieving academically and socially tend to have higher self-esteem than children who are failing and without friends” (p. 193).

Grade level and assessments. Grade level is another factor affecting a teacher’s belief that they are able to adapt the general education curriculum and differentiate instruction to meet the instructional needs of all students (Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The requirement to differentiate and individualize instruction coupled with the expectation to attend meetings, collect data, and collaborate with a special education teacher is a time consuming endeavor for these teachers. Hwang and Evans (2011) report that secondary teachers express the most difficulty, reporting that the emphasis on teaching content and preparing for high stakes testing restricts their ability to effectively modify instruction while still maintaining high standards. In addition to the time restriction, general education teachers argue that they lack specialized training and access to resources necessary to successfully educate this special population (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

The higher expectations that NCLB has set for all students, including students with disabilities, makes general education teachers even more hesitant to participate in co-teaching. This change is a concern that is shared by administrators and teachers alike, as “it presents a challenge to the accountability regimen in the AYP criteria” (Savich, 2008, p. 5) and meeting Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) criteria. This also affects students as they are often unable to be successful on the high stakes tests and as a result, they may have lowered self-esteem and a greater chance of dropping out of school. Weiss

(2004) agreed with these concerns and stated “that students with LD, although more likely to be included in the general education classroom than ever before, are still less likely to graduate from high school and seek postsecondary education than their nondisabled peers” (p. 218).

According to Hwang and Evans (2011) more than half of teachers reported that they don’t have the time or desire to differentiate instruction and feel that teaching students with disabilities would create problems in the classroom. Research from Gal et al. (2010) support this finding and states that students with disabilities are described as are not friendly, give up easily, and do not succeed as well as their general education peers. Due to general education teacher’s cognitive responses, some teachers report that they are willing to lower expectations and standards for students with disabilities so that they are set at a level that would produce some degree of academic achievement (Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover, 1997; Orr, 2009). This decline in expectations for students with disabilities undermines the purpose of the law governing special education.

Type and severity of disability. Type and severity of a disability are considerable factors related to a teacher’s belief that they are able to adapt the general education curriculum (Brigham, 1993; Ernst & Rogers, 2009; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Pivik et al., 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Scruggs et al., 2007). Research by Scruggs et al. (2007) showed that remedial programs and practices known as effective are rarely observed in general education classrooms. Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) suggest that this is partially because students engage in behaviors that inhibit teachers’ ability to effectively teach special needs students. Pivik et al. (2009) also report that students with

severe disabilities often are excluded from the general curriculum due to a lack of ability to modify instruction. They state that these students are sometimes “given inappropriate substitute work when [teachers are] too busy to adapt the curriculum, [these student are] always being assigned as a teacher’s helper in physical education classes instead of adapting or equalizing the playing field” (p. 102).

The transition of a student with disabilities from a learner to a helper demonstrates how the type and severity of a disability affects general education teacher’s willingness to differentiate instruction (Salend, 1999; Soodak et al., 1998). For example, some teachers report that many students with disabilities lack the academic skills and learning strategies needed to be successful or learn in the general education setting (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Other teachers expressed concern about behavioral issues associated with special needs students (Gal et al., 2010; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) and stated that other students may be directly affected by special education students’ negative behaviors (Gal et al., 2010; Orr, 2009). Overall, teachers appear to be more confident of educating students with mild learning disabilities or physical disabilities in their general education classroom, rather than students identified with emotional disabilities and autism (Cook et al., 1999; Pivik et al., 2002; Praisner, 2003).

Hwang and Evans also report that general education teachers are often unfamiliar with disability type and related education needs and unable to recognize academic growth (Heward, 2003). Some general education teachers even reported that inclusion would water down the curriculum and marginalize the specialized attention found in a special

education classroom (Hwang & Evans, 2011; Savich, 2008). This loss of specialized instruction would have detrimental effects for students with more complex and severe disabilities. Further, Montague and Rinaldi (2001) and Magiera and Zigmond (2005) reported that including students with mild disabilities in co-taught classes had limited benefits or “additive effects” due to less instruction from the general education teacher.

Students’ cognitive ability. Students’ cognitive ability is another obstacle that affects teachers’ belief that they can teach students with disabilities in the general education class. Gal et al. (2010) found that teachers believe that students with specific learning disabilities require direct and intensive instruction that would not be available within the general education classroom. Also, while nine of thirteen special education eligibility categories do not include cognitive or intellectual impairment, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) report that general education teachers are more willing to work with students with mild physical disabilities and medical disabilities over students with learning or emotional disabilities.

Many teachers report that inclusion in co-taught classrooms is solely for a social benefit for the student with disabilities as they feel that due to their cognitive ability they are unable to academically benefit (Austin, 2001; Fisher, 1999; Jackson et al., 2000; Litvack, Ritchie, & Shore., 2011; Reid, 2010). In fact, some studies found that male teachers believe that students with disabilities need to earn their way into general education classes by proving that they can maintain acceptable behavior and not distract the classroom instruction (Agran et al., 2002; Giangreco et al., 1995; Soodak, 2003). The requirement to earn their way into classes sends the “message that the child is not a full

and rightful member of the class, which is likely to decrease teachers' expectations for success and their willingness to assume responsibility for student learning" (Soodak, 2003, p. 328).

Dymond et al. (2008) offer a unique perspective on the academic benefits of including students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. They reported that in addition to providing equal treatment and access to all students, students should also be given equal opportunity to fail. "Everybody fails at something and a person with a disability has the right to fail just as much as the next person" (p. 27). Murawski and Swanson (2001) findings support this statement as they question the data associated with co-teaching practices. While they support co-teaching as an instructional delivery model for meeting the needs of students with disabilities, they feel that additional research and data regarding the academic progress for students with disabilities included in general education classes need to be gathered to determine the overall effects of co-teaching.

Role ambiguity and role conflict. The legal mandates associated with NCLB require general and special educators to work collaboratively; however research shows that the variability within the co-taught model affords teachers uncertainty about their specific roles and responsibilities (Bouck, 2007; Buckley, 2003; Gately & Gately, 2001; Hewitt, 1999; Ignat & Clipa, 2012; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Lawrence & Muschaweck, 2004; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2004; Soodak, 2003). Ignat and Clipa (2012) point out that this uncertainty leads to occupational stress and affects personal factors such as self-esteem, ability to be assertive, self-efficacy, and optimism. For this reason it is important that both teachers have a clear understanding of

their job responsibilities and act upon them (Buckley, 2003; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Ross-Hill, 2009; Salend, 1999; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007).

In a co-taught setting, Otis-Wilborn et al. (2005) found that general educators report that role ambiguity left them feeling that they were not the teacher of students with disabilities or responsible for their academic growth. Otis-Wilborn et al. also report that there is little evidence that they work towards building a relationship with these students. These feelings allowed for “decreased teachers’ expectations for student success and affect their willingness to assume responsibility for student learning” (Soodak, 2003, p. 328). Magiera and Zigmond (2005) support these findings as their research discovered less interaction between general education teachers and students with disabilities when the special education teacher was present, signifying that the special education teacher took the instructional lead for these students when present. Disparity in teacher interactions with special need students when the special educators are present contradicts the purpose of co-teaching and may lead to teachers questioning their role when the co-teacher is present. Although the co-taught setting is designed to have both teachers responsible for maximizing learning and teaching all students (Jang, 2006; Olson et al., 1997), general education and special educators often find themselves becoming territorial about their teaching functions and refer to a “my kids-your kids” viewpoint (Sapon-Shevin, 2007).

Hewitt’s research (1999) contradicts the “my kids-your kids” perspective and found that when special education teachers remain in the general education classroom, they often find they are not just working with special education students but with general

education students who need extra help. Although most special education teachers report that they enjoy working with all students, they may feel they are giving less time to the students with special needs and often feel more like instructional aides than fully qualified teachers (Hewitt, 1999).

The belief that the special education teacher takes a subordinate role is found throughout the literature and is considered a barrier to the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. Austin (2001) states that some special and general education co-teachers agree that the general educator does more in the inclusive classroom than the special education teacher and therefore understands why the special educator feels undervalued. He believes that this may be due to the general education teacher's expert knowledge of the content area and the special education teacher's status as the visitor in the classroom. As a perceived outsider, Scruggs et al. (2007) establish that it is usually the special education teacher who is responsible to modify instruction, address behavior management, and monitor student progress, rather than present content instruction. It is understandable that their role appears to be more of a helper, rather than a co-teacher and that it sometimes makes special education teachers feel that they are subordinate to general education teachers (Friend et al., 2010; Gately & Gately, 2001; Salend, 1999).

Keefe et al. (2004) argue that questions over roles and responsibilities lead to role conflict and issues with control of the classroom. The concept of control in the classroom is more prevalent at the secondary level as general education teachers are used to teaching in isolation (Murawski & Dieker, 2004) as they focus on content-specific objectives required to achieve Annually Yearly Progress and AMOs. AMOs are tools

used to measure student progress towards pre-determined annual benchmarks needed to demonstrate proficiency in reading and math. AMOs are targets for each subgroup that must pass standardized tests in reading and mathematics in order to make acceptable progress. Although it is not the specific role of the special education teacher, arguments have been made in the research to support that the special education teacher needs to be knowledgeable of the general curriculum (Buckley, 2003; De Stefano et al., 2001) so that they can be better prepared to assist students with the rigor of the state mandated assessments. King-Sears and Bowman-Kruhm (2011) point out that although the general education teachers are the content experts, many special education teachers are able to provide content instruction but are often left with insufficient opportunities to do so. This lack of opportunity may lead to role stress depending upon the expectations of the schools' administration.

Unfortunately, special education and co-teaching practices are imperfect and general and special educators have a different lens in the co-taught classroom. The general education teacher tends to be the one focusing on accountability as required by high stakes testing (Buckley, 2003; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The special education teacher usually has a more global perspective of meeting the needs of individual learners (Reid, 2010). This global perspective requires that special education teachers possess “specialized knowledge of content and strategies. For instance, special education teachers delivering intervention instruction may provide systematic, highly repetitive, interactive instruction” (Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling and Leko, 2013, p. 61).

In her qualitative study about maintaining a collaborative relationship between general and special education teachers, Buckley (2005) concluded that “the regular education teachers saw themselves as the leader of their classrooms” (p. 187) and they desired to have control of the classroom as they are the content expert who does the majority of the planning. Eccleston (2010) offers a different perspective about teachers’ roles in his article about essential traits to effective special education teachers. He states that to ensure a successful collaborative and co-taught model the special educator is the logical choice for the executive leader in the classroom. He further stated the following:

Being knowledgeable, they will have processed the big picture that steers the collaboration to logical ends. Also, the specialist should have the network with necessary persons involved and have access to methods of accounting for progress. Training and experience have given them the necessary skills to supervise paraprofessionals and communicate student needs with teachers and communicative staff needs with administrators. The specialist is experienced in gathering assessment data and determining authentic learning profiles of exceptional students. His/her holistic perspective makes them a natural first choice. (p. 44)

Regardless of the selected leader in the classroom, co-teachers need to negotiate their roles (Jackson et al., 2000) and “must evaluate how to minimize the devaluing of each other and how to enable each other so that the other teacher can assume new roles, as opposed to being regulated to what one’s education title typically assigns” (Bauck, 2007, p.50). According to Adams and Cressa (1993) this is possible as teachers in their

study report that the general education teacher described their relationship with the special education teachers as having them “fit hand and glove, co-equal teachers like pieces of each other, as the lessons go” (p. 30). Further Lawrence and Muschaweck (2004) argue that the “we sink or swim” outlook found in their study laid the foundation for a successful collaborative relationship for both students and co-teachers.

School context. The implementation of inclusive co-teaching practices at each individual school impacts teachers’ willingness to co-teach. Research shows that effective leadership and administrative support impact the success of this instructional model for students with disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Buckley, 2003; Fontana, 2005; Heward, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1994; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Paliokosta & Blandford, 2010; Weiss, 2004). Effective leadership is important as it requires a shared vision for implementing co-teaching practices and tools for school personnel to address problems associated with implementing this vision (Leithwood et al., 1994; Leithwood et al., 2004). Additionally, effective leadership builds the capacity of school members to address any issues related to co-teaching.

Effective leadership lays the foundation for administrative support as they are both components critical to ensuring effective inclusive co-teaching practices (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Praisner, 2003; Villa et al., 2004; Villa et al., 2005; Worrell, 2008). Although some principals believe that students with disabilities are best served when their rights are protected and supported within the school community (Zollers et al., 1999), some teachers perceive that their administrator does not support the co-teaching vision as they were unable to see how it “fit” with the general curriculum and overall

academic program (Dymond et al., 2008). Leatherman (2007) interviewed a teacher who was confident that support from administration was the most critical component to making the co-teaching model successful. She reported that co-teachers need to ensure that “all the administrative people [are] behind you and who will back you up and are going to be moral support. Who will not just leave you in that room and say, ‘You need to handle it’” (p. 604).

With the strong emphasis on accountability, Orr (2009) found that many administrators may overlook the co-teaching vision and instead focus on the overall school’s test scores rather than inclusionary programs or improvements made by students with disabilities. This lens varies little from the history of special education in which past administrators “believed that the best way to cope with children with special needs was to put them all in a resource room” (Long et al., 2007, p. 498) rather than include them in the general education setting. Without administrative support, general educators may not feel compelled to fully include special needs students in their classes or modify their instruction (Austin, 2001). Scruggs et al. (2007) states that while more classrooms are identified as inclusive, there have been minimal changes to instructional practices in response to co-teaching. The historical exclusion practice permeates throughout the schools, causing the impression that students need to earn their way into a general education class. This directly affects student achievement as they receive the message that they are not considered a rightful member of the class (Soodak, 2003) and therefore do not need to maintain high levels of performance. Additionally, some teachers believe that their administrators are not knowledgeable about the needs of students with

disabilities and for this reason offered minimal support to advance their participation in the school community (Dymond et al., 2008; Lowe & Brigham, 2000).

Teachers feel that the support of school administration is critical to their ability to modify the curriculum and meet the needs of diverse learners. They also feel that this is one of the principle aspects required for the success of any inclusion model as administrators are responsible for the logistical aspects of co-teaching (Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; Praisner, 2003; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). Administrators organize the processes for co-teaching as they select teachers to co-teach, arrange schedules, establish common planning time, manage the school's resources, and provide the overall school climate that may include explaining "co-teaching to parents and community members and ensure that programs are accountable and sustainable" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 20).

Teacher selection. A continued theme found in the research is the ability for teachers to volunteer to co-teach (Austin, 2001; Buckley, 2003; Cook & Friend, 1995; Gately & Gately, 2001; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Praisner, 2003; Scruggs et al., 2007; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996), indicating their shared vision regarding the co-teaching pedagogy. Research by Austin (2001) specifies that only 28% of general education teachers in his study volunteered to teach in an inclusive setting. Hwang and Evans (2011) support this finding as they report that more than half of the teachers surveyed did not want to even have students with disabilities in their classroom, not to mention participate in a co-teaching arrangement. Carlson (as cited in Scruggs et al., 2007) cautions "co-teaching cannot be forced. Rather it is a way of doing things that the two

teachers must choose, though it can be suggested. In other words, teachers have to pick their co-teaching partners” (p. 403) and be able to work together for more than a year (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). Requiring a teacher to participate in co-teaching can have detrimental effects (Buckley, 2003; Gately & Gately, 2001) as it is possible that these teachers will spend even less time helping students with disabilities (Bay & Bryan, 1992; Brady, Swank, Taylor, & Freiberg, 1988; Chapman, Larsen, & Parker, 1979; Montague & Rinaldi, 2001; Nelson & Roberts, 2000; Siperstein & Goding, 1985; Thompson, White, & Morgan, 1982) and feel resentment towards special needs students (Reid, 2010).

Walther-Thomas et al. (1996) also suggest that experienced teachers be selected for co-teaching. They state the following:

Because of the intensity of the work and the focus on meeting students' academic and social needs, this model should not be used as a strategy for remediating weak teachers or for mentoring inexperienced novices. Both co-teachers must be capable contributors to make these partnerships equitable and productive. Even for competent teachers, it takes time to become effective co-teachers. (p. 258)

Time. Lack of time for planning and meeting the needs of students with disabilities has been noted in the literature (Burstein et al., 2004; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010; Jang, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005) as a hurdle for general education teachers to overcome. Teachers report that administrators could support the co-teaching model by providing them time to plan together (Klingner & Vaughn, 2002). Many teachers feel that the lack of time available to plan and work

individually with struggling students had negative effects on the overall academic success of students with disabilities in the co-taught setting (Savich, 2008). According to Cook and Friend (1995) teachers chose to work outside contract hours to meet and plan and some teachers even reported “planning on the fly” (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Resources. Teachers feel that limited access to instructional supports restricts their ability to differentiate instruction in order to adequately meet the needs of special needs students (Cook et al., 1999; Dymond et al., 2008; Gal et al., 2010; Reid, 2010; Savich, 2008). Legal mandates for accountability and direct support for students with disabilities further complicate the issue of general education teacher resistance. While schools’ budgets are often restricted, resulting in limited resources for all student populations, students with disabilities are legally provided special consideration (Savich, 2008). This legal requirement can result in a financial battle over funds and sometimes delay the presentation of necessary instructional support despite it directly conflicting with the law. “When resources needed for the enhancement of the students learning are not available, it is not inclusion” (Reid, 2010, p.24). Additionally, NCLB (2004) monitors the success of all students, including students with disabilities, and holds schools more accountable for student progress and with fewer resources.

Cook et al. (1999) found that there is a “relatively low commitment among principals to protect resources for students with mild disabilities in included settings. These attitudes may suggest that principals see inclusion, at least in part, as a cost-saving measure” (p. 205). Dymond et al. (2008) agree with this statement and report that staffing is another barrier as positions have been eliminated as a result of the co-teaching model.

Some question all stakeholders' commitment to inclusive practices as they feel that they may just be responding with the socially desirable answer about inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Paliokosta and Blandford agree with this possibility as a teacher in their study reported that "we need more money and this idea of inclusion has to be understood to be more than window dressing" (2010, p. 183).

Scheduling. A common concern found in the literature was that there were a disproportionate number of students with disabilities in a general education class (Agran et al., 2002; Cook & Friend, 1995; Dymond et al., 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). When scheduling co-taught classes, administrators need to keep natural proportions in mind and include students with disabilities in proportion to their presence in the general population. According to the Center on Education and Policy (2012) during the school year 2008-09, 13% of public school children ages 3-21 received special education services. Considering this data, a general education class that is considered of natural proportions would only enroll 13% of students with disabilities and administrators should be cognizant of these proportions when scheduling classes. In their article, Walther-Thomas et al. (1996) recognized the unbalanced nature of general education classes that include students with disabilities. For a general education class of approximately 25, they recommend that no more than six students out of 25 in the classroom be identified as having mild or moderate disabilities. They feel that schools should also use caution when placing additional at-risk students in the classroom as the underlying goal in the development of classroom rosters is heterogeneity. Dymond et al. (2008) suggest putting a cap on the number of students with

disabilities in each class so that all students can benefit from the instruction. This idea of a cap loosely aligns with Virginia Regulations as the law referencing caseload standards requires “no more than 14 children shall be assigned to a single class period if there are similar achievement levels and one subject area and level are taught” (Virginia Department of Education, 2010, p. 20). Teachers also report that the over-representation of students with disabilities makes the classroom dynamics difficult to manage, as well as ensure that all students receive the necessary instruction in order to be academically successful (Dymond et al., 2008).

When administration assigns a disproportionate number of students with disabilities or struggling learners in the same classroom, teachers report that this increases their struggle to modify instruction. When this happens, teachers feel that the inclusive setting is synonymous to a dumping ground (Dymond et al., 2008). Reid (2010) agrees with this finding and goes on to say that “When there is a lack of planning, lack of collaboration, lack of support and poor funding there can be no inclusion. When the resources needed for the enhancement of the students learning is not available it is not inclusion, it is dumping” (p. 24).

In summary, there are factors associated with implementing co-teaching practices that may affect the success of this instructional delivery model. These factors include, but are not limited to, teachers’ ability, teachers’ attitudes and beliefs, and the school context. If these issues are not adequately addressed by effective educational leaders, it is possible that this service delivery model will not meet its maximum potential.

Summary of Chapter Two

The purpose of this chapter was to review the policy governing special education, including how historical and legislative components initiated the procedures for the inclusion movement, describe co-teaching and its practices, and examine relevant research regarding teachers' abilities, attitudes and beliefs, and the school context regarding this instructional practice. This review highlights the complexity of this instructional model and is intended to provide research based evidence to support the need to gather further data on co-teaching practices at the secondary level. The purpose of this study is collect information about the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom. It is the intent of this study to unveil potential factors that affect co-teaching practices. This data will allow me to answer the following research questions:

What are the respondents' definitions of co-teaching?

What do the respondents believe is the purpose of co-teaching?

What have been the participants' experiences co-teaching in a secondary setting?

What factors impact co-teaching in secondary schools?

The answers to these questions should provide educational leaders with current information to consider when working with co-teaching teams to develop and implement a successful instructional model that includes educating students with disabilities in the LRE.

CHAPTER THREE

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of individual general and special education co-teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary inclusive co-taught classroom. I explored this instructional practice by utilizing a qualitative methodology, which included interviews, classroom observations and artifact reviews. I selected three different high schools from the urban, suburban, and rural areas of a single county in Virginia. In this chapter, I describe the research design, my rationale for selecting participants and settings, and single teacher perspective for analysis. I also referenced my interview protocols, observation protocol, and artifact review protocol and how they were used during the study to answer my research questions. Lastly, I detailed my procedures for conducting this study, my role as a researcher, procedures for data analyses, and any limitations of this study.

Research Design

This study replicated and extended previous studies conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004). I synthesized my findings in order to answer the following research questions:

What are the respondents' definitions of co-teaching?

What do the respondents believe is the purpose of co-teaching?

What have been the participants' experiences co-teaching in a secondary setting?

What factors impact co-teaching in secondary schools?

I conducted a comparative case study of co-teaching teams in order to gather evidence on their experiences within the co-teaching model because it allows specific issues of practice to be identified and explained. Merriam (1998) states that the more cases included in any study nets a greater “variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be...the inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings” (p. 40).

My research first consisted of selecting high schools from a stratified list within a single county in Virginia. Once the schools were selected, I interviewed the building-level supervising administrators for special education to obtain background information on the school’s vision for inclusive practices and the co-teaching environment. I then purposefully sampled general and special education co-teachers to observe and interview separately. These teachers had experience co-teaching ninth, tenth, or eleventh grade content area classes from the participating high schools and were selected as they were able to provide rich examples of their individual perceptions of co-teaching practices.

The individual teacher’s responses to the interview questions regarding their perspectives as a general or special education teacher within a co-taught classroom was my focus for analysis. The focus on the individual teacher was selected as the intent of this research was to delve beyond their current co-teaching relationship and unveil individual perspectives through past and present co-teaching experiences. This focus supports the functional purpose of this research, which is to provide educational leaders with evidence they can use to address holistic co-teaching practices and work with co-

teachers individually and as co-teaching teams to develop and implement a successful instructional model that includes educating students with disabilities in the LRE at the secondary level.

Setting

This study was conducted within a single county school system in Virginia that promotes inclusive co-teaching practices. The total student population, including students at the elementary and middle school level, categorizes the school system as one of the largest in the state (United States Department of Education, 2012; Virginia Department of Education, 2013). The county's website shows that approximately 10% of high school students receive special education services. Three of the county's high schools were included in my study that represented different geographic locations throughout the county. These schools were selected after I identified and organized the schools into the different geographic locations and secured consent from the building administrator. Pseudonyms are used throughout.

Paperwood High School is located in an urban part of the county which is considered to be a lower socioeconomic area. Approximately 60% of the school's population receives free or reduced price lunch. This school has approximately 1,350 students with about 11% of these students receiving special education services. Of the 1,350 students, 24% are White, 14% are Asian, 52% are Hispanic, 7% are Black, 1% are American Indian and the remaining 3% are multiple races. This school did not make all of its Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) for the 2012-2013 school year. It has an on-time, four-year graduation rate of approximately 82%.

Highwood High School is located in a suburban area of the county with approximately 20% of the school's population receiving free or reduced price lunch. This school has approximately 1,250 students with about 16% of these students receiving special education services. Of the 1,250 students, 55% are White, 10% are Asian, 18% are Hispanic, 11% are Black, and the remaining 6% are multiple races. This school did not make all of its AMOs for the 2012-2013 school year. Highwood High School has an on-time, four-year graduation rate of approximately 96%.

Wentwood High School is located in a rural area of the county. Approximately 8% of the school's population receives free or reduced price lunch. This school has approximately 1,500 students with roughly 11% of students receiving special education services. Of the 1,500 students, 86% are White, 3% are Asian, 5% are Hispanic, 3% are Black, 1% are American Indian and the remaining 2% are multiple races. This school met all of its AMOs for the 2012-2013 school year. This school has an on-time, four- year graduation rate of approximately 97.5%.

Participants

Participants included building-level supervising administrators for special education (e.g., assistant principals, deans) (Table 5), as well as a purposeful sampling of general and special education co-teaching teams from the aforementioned high schools (Table 6). In order to identify administrators, I contacted central office personnel for their names. In my email to these identified administrators I informed them of my study and requested an interview. During my interview I asked questions about the school's philosophy of inclusionary practices and co-teaching methods in order to obtain

background information for my study. I then asked the administrators to generate a list of well-functioning teams that currently co-teach in a content area class at the ninth, tenth or eleventh grade level and have at least three years' experience co-teaching. Three years' experience was selected as an inclusionary factor as these teachers have more experiences upon which to reflect. Once I had compiled the list, I emailed the teachers requesting to observe their co-taught classroom and interview them individually.

Administrators. The administrators for my study included three supervising assistant principals for special education and one special education dean. While it was my intention to only interview the assistant principals, one school invited the dean to join the interview and I allowed her to join the interview with the assistant principal. The administrators were composed of three women and one man. Two administrators were black and their ages ranged from the mid-forties to the early sixties. Of the four administrators, two were licensed to teach special education, one was licensed to teach foreign language, and one was licensed to teach History and Social Science. All four administrators had an administrative endorsement. Additionally, three of the four administrators had experience co-teaching prior to becoming an administrator.

Table 5

Administrative Participants

Participants	Years Admin Experience	Years in Education	Race	Level of Education
Ms. Kicker	12	22	White	Masters
Ms. Reed	4	20	Black	Masters
Ms. Sully	10	22	White	Masters
Mr. Tripple	5	14	Black	Masters

Teachers. The teachers included six general education teachers and six special education teachers. There were four men and eight women and their ages approximately ranged from 30 to 60 years old. Of the twelve teachers, eleven were white and one was Middle Eastern. Their teaching experiences ranged from three years to 29 years. One teacher had a provisional special education license and all others were fully licensed.

Table 6

Teacher Participants

Participants	Job Role	Years Teaching Experience	Race	Level of Education	Current Assignment
Ms. Belk	Special Education Teacher	27	White	Masters	SC Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology SC Envir. Science Co-Envir. Science
Ms. Cage	General Education Teacher	11	White	Masters	Co-Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology Biology AP
Ms. Casey	Special Education Teacher	13	White	Masters	Co-Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology
Ms. Creets	General Education Teacher	18	White	Masters	Co-Biology Co-Biology Biology Biology
Mr. Daniels	Special Education Teacher	16	White	Masters	SC Basic Skills SC Government SC US/VA History Co-Government Co-US/VA History
Ms. Mark	General Education Teacher	10	White	Masters	Co-English 10 English 10 English 10 English 12 English 12

Mr. Mitchell	General Education Teacher	29	White	Bachelors	Co-US/VA History Co-US/VA History US/VA History US/VA History Religion/Psychology
Mr. Reach	General Education Teacher	10	White	Masters	Co-English 9 Co-English 9 English 9 English 9 English 9 Honors
Ms. Safe	General Education Teacher	13	White	Masters	Co-Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology Honors Biology Honors Biology Honors Biology
Mr. Scouts	Special Education Teacher	3	White	Bachelors	SC Basic Skills SC Biology SC Biology Co-Biology Co-Biology
Ms. Taylor	Special Education Teacher	14	Asian	Masters	SC English 9 Co-English 9 Co-English 9 SC English 12 Co-English 12
Ms. Time	Special Education Teacher	4	White	Masters	SC English 9 Co-English 9 Co-English 9 Co-English 9 Co-Earth Science

Note: “SC” means self-contained setting that includes only students with disabilities; “Co” means a general education setting that includes two teachers and general education student and students with disabilities. Most teachers are assigned five classes, however some have department chair blocks and one teacher teaches six blocks.

Instrumentation

To gather evidence in relation to the research questions, I designed the Administrative Interview Protocol (Appendix A) and the Teacher Interview Protocol (Appendix B) based in part on the questions included by Keefe and Moore (2004) and Friend (2013) and from my pilot study during the summer of 2012. I used the interview questions to guide my data gathering, while being mindful that the settings and the participants are diverse and dynamic and that I needed to be flexible during the interview to allow for questions to be modified or added as appropriate. I also used a Co-teaching Observation Protocol (Appendix C) that was adapted from Friend's (2013) Fall Institute to record the data from the observation and the Artifact Review Protocol (Appendix D) to document artifacts found on this topic.

The interview protocols (Appendix A and Appendix B) included questions that were semi-structured and open-ended. This allowed participants the opportunity to confidentially express their viewpoints and experiences. All participants were assured anonymity through the use of pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality. Sample teacher interview questions included (Appendix B), "What are your co-teaching experiences" and "How does each co-teacher contribute to the classroom?" Glesne (2011) notes that semi-structured interview questions allow the researcher to create or modify questions if the participant's responses take the conversation in a way that was not expected. This flexibility allowed me to obtain greater insight into specific topics while minimizing the influence of researcher bias (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Maxwell, 2005).

The observation protocol (Appendix C) included the identification of the instructional objective, activity and method of instruction. I noted which type(s) of co-teaching method is used during the observation and for approximately how long. I considered specific areas for observation and determine if they occur in the classroom. Lastly, I made any anecdotal notes about my findings through a journal log. The artifact review protocol (Appendix D) included information regarding the type of artifact (e.g., school handbook, website, evaluation form, lesson plans, and documents related to co-teaching) and how it related to inclusive practices and co-teaching methods.

Procedures

Prior to the commencement of the study, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at George Mason University was obtained to ensure the rights and welfare of the study participants. Application for research permission contained the description of the project and its significance, methods and procedures, participants and identifiable data, and research design. Permission was then obtained from the school division. The request for approval included information about the research design, purpose of the study, data collection instruments, audience for the information, amount of time that may intrude on instruction, number of staff needed for the study, a timeline for the research, any school resources that will be used, and any potential benefit to the school and community. The required information was submitted to the appropriate administrative office so that they could review and approve the research request. When the research request was approved by the Director of Research, it was forwarded to the Director of High School Education and Director of Special Education for approval before being

forwarded to the school principals. Once the school principals reviewed and approved the study, the request was sent to the Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services for final approval.

Once district approval was granted, I emailed or personally met with all persons who approved the study to thank them for their time and consideration. During my conversation with each building principal, I shared the purpose for the study, the interview, observation and artifact protocols and offered a copy of the dissertation proposal for his/her review. As stated above, I located their names by using the school's website and consulting with central office personnel. I then contacted the building-level supervising administrators for special education to schedule an interview. During the interview with the building-level supervising administrators for special education, I asked questions regarding the school's philosophy regarding its commitment to inclusive education and co-teaching and any school-level factors that might be known to this individual. I also inquired about their experiences with co-teaching practices at the school, how they support co-teaching teachers and classrooms, and how they select co-teaching teams. Finally, I asked them for the list of well-functioning co-teaching teams.

To gather data and obtain information that cannot be directly observed, I completed an analysis of artifacts related to co-teaching practices (Patton, 2002). I asked the building-level supervising administrators for special education to provide me copies of the school's internal documents that relate to inclusive co-teaching practices. The documents included the teacher evaluation form, co-teaching planning documents, and lesson plans for co-teaching classrooms.

Once a list of general and special education co-teachers was generated, I sent an email to these teachers requesting to observe their co-taught class and participate in an interview about co-teaching practices. Within the content of the email request I informed the teachers that any data collected will remain confidential. When they agreed to participate in this study, I further informed them that their confidentiality will be maintained by assigning them pseudonyms. My goal was to get at least two co-teaching teams from each high school to participate.

Observations were conducted in the co-taught classroom during a class period that was convenient for the participants. The intent was to see beyond the selective perceptions of the participants and observe their interactions. Patton (2002) supports observation as a method of fact gathering and states that through “direct observations the inquirer is better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact. Understanding context is essential to a holistic perspective” (p. 262). He goes on to say that observations allow the researcher to learn things about a phenomenon that participants may be unwilling to discuss during the interview.

Interviews with co-teachers were conducted at the high school during the participants’ planning blocks. With their permission, all interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim by a third party. The questions were semi-structured with the emphasis on open-ended questions that allowed the participants to candidly voice their experiences and perspectives of the inclusive co-teaching environment (Creswell, 2005). This method allowed me the opportunity to discuss any relevant findings from the observations (Patton, 2002). Prior to beginning the interview questions, I engaged in

general conversation with the participant to form a relationship with them, as well as assure them that they can trust that their statements will remain confidential.

Participants were provided a copy of their interview transcript for review to ensure that the recorded responses accurately reflect their perceptions of the inclusive model. If the participant did not feel that the transcript was accurate, they were asked to correct it to reflect their views. This included allowing the participant making additions, changes or deletions to the transcript. This process of member checking was used to validate the accuracy of the findings to ensure that the description is complete, the themes are accurate, and “the interpretations are fair and representative” (Creswell, 2005, p. 252). Participants were also reminded that their confidentiality will be protected as a pseudonym will be assigned and all person-identifying information will be deleted. An informed consent form (Appendix E) was used that stated that the participants were guaranteed certain rights, were voluntarily participating in the study, and were aware their rights are protected.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data from the interviews, observations and artifact review, occurred in the three coding phases (open, axial and selective). It was the intent of this research to discover any current and consistent themes in the data to unveil insights into the co-teaching model at each school. If found, the themes were compared and contrasted to the factors regarding co-teaching practices found in the literature to determine if this instructional method has improved in the last decade. I also identified any current factors that are involved in participants’ co-teaching efforts and their efforts to meet the needs of

their students. This qualitative approach allowed me to understand the processes that coincided with these themes taking place. Merriam (1988) reported that in qualitative research “the interest is in process rather than outcomes” (p. xii) and therefore the findings explain the processes associated with co-teaching in the selected secondary schools.

As I began my data analysis, I followed Creswell’s (2005) instruction to qualitative researchers and reviewed the data holistically. In order to do this, I first read the transcripts to obtain a “general sense of what was being explored” (Creswell, 2005, p. 236) before I engaged in a preliminary exploratory analysis in order to extract a general sense of information. I then used my observation protocols, artifact protocols, notes and transcripts to address the three coding phases (open coding, axial coding and selective coding). For the purpose of this dissertation, open coding is defined as the process for reviewing the raw data to determine which main concepts emerge (Saldaña, 2009). Axial coding is described as “grouping the codes according to conceptual categories that reflect commonalities among codes” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 215). Selective coding is the final stage of data analysis where previously identified categories are further defined and developed (Mills, Durepos, & Wiebe, 2010).

During the open coding phase, I sought affirmation of my interpretation of the data by seeking the assistance of impartial coders who had experience in the areas of special education, general education and educational research (e.g., Ed.D. or Ph.D) to verify my perceptions and determine if there is inter-coder reliability (Marshall & Rossman, 2011) during the first round of coding. Each impartial coder and I

independently analyzed and coded all data collected from one high school site and each co-teaching pair (e.g. administrator and teacher interviews, artifacts, observations). Once everyone completed their independent coding, the team met to discuss codes and negotiate a common understanding for continued coding. We discussed our findings and rationales for identifying major themes and together we used the constant comparative method to ensure that we obtained “a holistic overview of the general dimensions of inquiry and a focus more specifically” (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 26) on the participants’ co-teaching experiences. We generated and connected categories by “comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories” (Creswell, 2005, p. 406). We continually discussed our findings and created a table to organize all of the general themes by participant.

Mouter and Vonk Noordegraaf (2012) argue that the consistency of the coding between impartial coders and the research should be at least 80% to ensure good inter-coder reliability. Ryan and Bernard (2003) would likely agree with Mouter and Vonk Noordegraaf as they report that “agreement across techniques gives us further confidence that we have identified appropriate themes in the same way that finding similar themes across multiple investigations does” (p. 104). If inter-coder reliability was judged to be insufficient or less than 80%, the team discussed their findings and proposed clarifications (Hrushka, Schwartz, St. John, Picone-Decaro, Jenkins, & Carey, 2004). Further, if incongruent codes were apparent with the first coding pair and resulted in less than 80% agreement after the clarification discussion, a second co-teaching pair was coded. This process allowed for impartial coders to review a minimum of 16% of the

total data collected. I then coded the remaining pairs using the agreed upon coding paradigm.

The impartial coders were also asked to assist with 100% of the axial coding phase. We met and discussed the categories from the open coding activity to determine a central feature to be studied and compared to the other categories (Pandit, 1996). We independently organized the categories according to similarities prior to comparing our findings. We then discussed our individual rationales regarding how we categorized the initial themes. Together we developed primary categories and subcategories that include as many general themes as possible (Hrushka et al., 2004).

Selective coding was the last phase of the coding process. The coding team met approximately one week later to make additional revisions to the themes and categories. Inter-rater reliability was present for one hundred percent of the selective coding process. The team independently identified the various relationships and interdependencies which provided an “abstract explanation” (Creswell, 2012, p.426) of the participants’ perceptions and possible resistance of secondary educators to co-teaching. We then compared our categories and agreed on areas to collapse into subcategories. The results of selective coding were compared and contrasted to the literature that is included on Chapter Two of this dissertation.

As a researcher, I knew when I had gathered enough data as consistent themes and conclusions emerged from the subsequent interviews and data sources. Although Merriam (2009) acknowledges that qualitative data collection can go on “indefinitely,”

the saturation of categories with a diminished return on new concepts signals the researcher that there is little need for additional data collection (Suter, 2012).

Validity

I validated my protocols by having a team of reviewers provide input prior to using them in my study. My team consisted of my three dissertation committee members, three critical friends, and an additional person whose experience made her input valuable to this review. The first member of my dissertation committee has an administrative background, as well as both special and general education teaching experience. She is currently a professor in the Special Education department at George Mason University and has several publications related to professional development and leadership strategies to support the responsible inclusion of learners with disabilities. The second member of my dissertation committee has experience as a school administrator and has taught both general and special education. He is currently a professor in the Special Education program at George Mason University and has written many articles related to co-teaching practices, the laws governing special education and inclusion. The final member of my dissertation committee is Director of the Education Leadership Division and professor in the Education Leadership program at George Mason University. He has written extensively on educational leadership and school improvement.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the term critical friend is a person who agrees to analyze and critically reflect on my work with the purpose of improving it (Handal, 1999). The first member of my critical friend team has her Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and has experience working with students with disabilities, as well as

experience conducting qualitative educational research. She currently works as a school psychologist but has several years of administrative experience. The second member of my critical friend team has her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. She has taught both general and special education students in the public school system and also at the college level. She has experience co-teaching as the special education teacher. She also has extensive administrative experience and currently works directly with school administrators on topics related to academic interventions and eligibility for special education services. The final member of my critical friend team has her Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology. She currently has an administrative position in which she supervises school psychologists and educational diagnosticians that work directly with school teams to determine eligibility for special education services. Her professional experience also include co-authoring several books and articles, working as a psychologist in private practice and is an adjunct professor at a local university. To ensure a balanced perspective of experiences, a review of the protocols was provided by an additional person. This person has taught for approximately twelve years, has a Masters in Special Education and a general education endorsement in mathematics at the secondary level. He has experience co-teaching as a special education teacher and as a general education teacher. In summary, my expert team was comprised of graduate level scholars that have experience teaching general and special education, including teaching in co-taught settings, current and/or previous administrative experience, knowledge of educational research, and have published articles or books on related topics.

I validated the findings and the emerging themes by using triangulation, member checking, and inter-coder reliability, also known as external auditing, through the use of critical friends (Creswell, 2005). For the purpose of this dissertation, triangulation is defined as a method of checking the integrity of the inferences one concludes.

Triangulation “is often wedded to the assumption that data from different sources or methods must necessarily converge or be aggregated to reveal the truth.” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 298). Member checking is the processes of having the participants review their interview transcripts to ensure that they accurately reflect their views of co-teaching practices. Inter-coder reliability is when impartial coders review the collected data, independently code and assist the research in formulating a coding protocol. This research extended the roles of the impartial coders by asking them to participate in a minimum of 16% of the open coding and 100% of the axial and selective coding phases. The coding team worked together to ensure the consistency and agreement of meanings and application.

I used triangulation throughout my study. In the data collection phase I used three different data sources. These include interviews with administrators and general and special education co-teachers, observations of co-taught classrooms, and an artifact review of documents or evidence related to the inclusive co-teaching environment at the selected high school. Patton argues that “multiple sources of information are sought and used because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (2002, p. 306). In his article he also reports that triangulation is useful to increase the validity of the study as it minimizes bias and allows the weakness of a data

collection tool to be compensated by strength of another data collection tool. I also used triangulation during the data analysis phase as three reviewers participated in the coding process. I had the impartial coders participate in a minimum of 16% of the coding for the opening coding stage and 100% of the coding for the axial and selective coding stages.

Member checking was utilized by my asking the participants to read their interview transcript to ensure that information is complete, themes are accurate, and their responses reflect their perceptions of the co-teaching model. If the participant did not feel that the transcript is correct, I asked them to make changes so that it portrays their views of the co-teaching model. To increase the validity of this process and document their responses, I asked each participant to send me a letter or email confirming their changes or indicating that the transcript accurately reflects their views.

To strengthen inter-coder reliability, I selected three impartial coders who have experience in the area of general and special education, educational leadership and educational research to assist with identifying themes in the data. As stated in the section on triangulation, these people evaluated my data collection and coding process, validate my findings, and ensure accuracy within the interpretations of my study. They also read my dissertation in its entirety and offered any constructive criticism (Handal, 1999).

The Role of the Researcher

As a qualitative researcher, I assumed a more participatory role due to my personal investment in the research topic (Creswell, 2005). Although qualitative research allows the researcher to consider one's experiences when asking questions and interpreting data responses within their lens (Maxwell, 2005), researchers need to be

mindful of bias. As the researcher of this study, I know that I am driven by the desire for self-betterment through learning so that I can help others, especially people with disabilities. I feel that I am able to relate to this special population, as there was a time in my life that I had to overcome my own deficiencies. At that low point in my life, I was fortunate to have someone who offered their time and support, without an ulterior motive. This kind gesture made a significant impact on my life and I made a commitment to pass this dedication for serving others forward. Through my roles as a special educator, special education administrator, emergency service therapist and member of the local fire department, I feel that I am making difference one day and one person at a time.

My experience as a secondary special educator and administrator who has worked with students with disabilities in co-taught settings may lead to my bias within the report. I am currently employed as a special education administrator, and while I have no direct administrative connection to any of the schools or individuals participating in this study, I must acknowledge that my professional role could lead to an unintentional prejudice. Additionally, I am very passionate about working with students with disabilities and providing them the opportunity to be included in the general education setting as much as possible. While I intend to collect data and report my findings systematically as described, I must consider how my co-teaching experiences and strong interest in working with this population may influence my perceptions of my interviewees' comments and experiences. This bias must also be monitored in the development of the research protocols to avoid undue influence on the data collected.

Limitations

Limitations must be considered in drawing conclusions from these data. Four limitations of this study include the single geographic location, diversity of participants, potential for the teachers to not respond honestly, and unintentional reporting bias.

A primary limitation of this study is the single geographic location and therefore limited generalizability. Administrators and teachers were interviewed at only three different high schools in a single county in Virginia. While I selected high schools that represent different socioeconomic and geographic areas of the county, I cannot discount the small number of school sites within only one county in one state. Additionally, I had no control over who agreed to participate in this study. For this reason, potential lack of diversity of participants was a factor in this study and therefore I am considering it as a possible limitation as there are no concrete steps to minimize this potential factor.

Another limitation of this study was the possibility that the teachers did not respond honestly to the interview questions. While teachers were assured of their confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms in reporting, it is common for people to either over-exaggerate or under-exaggerate situations. While this is always a limitation with self-reporting, it may have been increased because I am a central office administrator. Due to my position, I needed to be cognizant that it may have influenced the participants' responses. For this reason I selected high schools that I am not assigned to support or supervise in order to minimize the effect of my administrative role. Further, given the limited time to build a trusting relationship with the participants, it is possible that they may have hesitated to share openly for fear of retribution from school

administration if they believed that administration would somehow find out that they participated in this study. However, using both observations and interviews served to help mitigate this limitation.

As a special education teacher and administrator for the last eight years, I must be cognizant of any reporting bias. While I intended to report the data as I find it, I am aware that my passion and experience for serving this special population may present itself in this report. In order to minimize this limitation, I audio-taped interviews, and I elicited the assistance of three critical friends. These persons were actively involved in the coding processes, as well as read the dissertation product in its entirety. Additionally, my dissertation committee assisted in this area by critically reviewing my dissertation.

In any qualitative study, the issue of generalizability is a topic for debate (Patton, 2002). According to Huberman and Miles (2002), critics report that regardless of the attempts to achieve external reliability in qualitative studies, the results will always be inconsistent when compared to quantitative methods. I made several provisions in this study, in an effort to exhaust all opportunities to make the results more generalizable. These provisions included selecting three different high schools that differ in geographic and socioeconomic status. I also triangulated my data to ensure that I have reviewed the different components related to co-teaching practices. I expanded my sample size to include interviews with the building administrator for special education, as well as two co-teaching pairs.

Summary of Chapter Three

In this qualitative study, the goal was to examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom. Through the process of interviewing, artifact review, and observation, I explored general and special educators' successes and struggles, as well as examined the influences on their abilities, experiences, and attitudes on their perceptions of co-teaching practices at the secondary level. The information was rich in detail and analyzed through transcriptions and three levels of coding. As I immersed myself in the data, I found emergent categories and themes that were connected back to my research questions. In the final analysis, I compared data from the interviews, artifact reviews, and observations to the research found within the literature review and analyze what, if any, changes have been reported to co-teaching practices. This research was validated through the verification of the research questions and the practice application of this research in relation to the research on this topic.

CHAPTER FOUR

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of general and special education co-teachers regarding their instructional practices for students with disabilities in their secondary co-taught classroom. The findings presented in this chapter were the results of data gathered through interviews, classroom observations, and review of artifacts provided during the interviews of six co-teaching partnerships in a county in Virginia. The schools for this research were selected in order to represent the rural, suburban and urban geographic regions found within the county. All participants reviewed and signed the informed consent waiver and freely volunteered to take part in this study. They also reviewed their interview transcript and responded in writing that it accurately depicted their position on each interview question. All names of schools, places, and people are pseudonyms in order to keep the information from the participants confidential.

The data were collected in three different ways. First, I interviewed the supervising administrator(s) for special education in each school. Following these interviews, I was provided a list of co-teaching pairs, composed of a regular education and special education teacher, to participate in my study. Then, I observed each co-taught classroom and interviewed each co-teacher separately, using the same interview protocol. Finally, I reviewed artifacts from each school that related to co-teaching practices in order to answer the following research questions:

What are the respondents' definitions of co-teaching?

What do the respondents believe is the purpose of co-teaching?

What have been the participants' experiences co-teaching in a secondary setting?

What factors impact co-teaching in secondary schools?

This chapter provides answers to the four research questions. The results are reported in four different sections with each section answering one of the research questions. Section one presents the respondents' definition of co-teaching. Section two provides an in-depth view of the respondents' beliefs related to the purpose of the co-teaching instructional model. Section three reports evidence related to participant experiences with co-teaching in the secondary setting. This section is divided into subcategories based on the respondent's current professional role. The results from this section lay the foundation for the variability in responses for the fourth research question. The fourth section addresses the factors that impact co-teaching. This section is divided into four major themes derived from the analysis that include: professional philosophy, relationships, instructional practices, and administrative support. These main themes are then divided into smaller subcategories which address these areas in greater detail.

Definitions of Co-teaching

The literature referenced in Chapter Two identified co-teaching as an instructional delivery model that provides inclusive practices to students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). Specifically, this instructional practice requires that a special education teacher is paired with a general education teacher in the same general education classroom for the purpose of presenting instruction to all children, including students with disabilities (Reinhiller, 1996). Further, Bauwens,

Hourcade, and Friend (1989) describe co-teaching as a pragmatic merger between general and special educators in which direct instruction is provided to all students by both teachers in the general education setting. Defining co-teaching practices is important to understanding the fundamental pedagogy for this instructional model. Teachers interviewed for this study provided varying definitions of co-teaching which foreshadows uncertainties regarding the expectations and implementation of this instructional practice.

Ms. Safe, a general education teacher, explained that “co-teaching, in my opinion, is where there are two teachers in the classroom who really split up the role as teacher.” Mr. Daniels, a special education teacher, built on her explanation and shared that the teachers “work as a collaboration so that no student is able to distinguish [the roles] between the two teachers.” Mr. Mitchell, a general education teacher, also considers co-teaching as a “shared experience between the two teachers.” This concept is reiterated by Ms. Mark, a general education teacher, who reported that this practice is allowing her to have an “educational peer in the classroom” to assist her in educating each student.

Co-teaching was initially intended as a service delivery model to support students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). Ms. Taylor, a special education teacher, provides a definition of co-teaching that most closely parallels the current research identified in Chapter Two. She stated, “Co-teaching is when there is a general education teacher in the classroom along with a special education teacher. It’s actually to provide support for students who have an Individualized Educational Plan.” Mr. Reach, a general education teacher, supports Ms. Taylor’s position and indicated that “co-teaching is meant to help provide structure to a lot of special education kids that need it. They don’t belong in self-

contained classes because they can perform; they just need a little more scaffolding to assist them.” Mr. Daniels echoed Mr. Reach’s statements and feels that co-teaching is the best way to mainstream students with disabilities into the general education setting.

While the co-teaching model was primarily designed to support children with disabilities, many respondents define co-teaching as an avenue for supporting all students in the classroom. Mr. Scouts, a special education teacher, stated that, “in a co-teaching classroom there is a general education teacher and a special education teacher present in the classroom at all times...both working with all students...Ideally they take turns teaching the lessons.” Ms. Creets, a general education teacher, agreed with Mr. Scouts and responded that co-teaching has a second classroom teacher to support all students. She stated that, “it is very important to me that every student utilizes this support and that they [special education teachers] don’t just work with the students with disabilities.

Ms. Belk reiterated Ms. Creet’s position and stated that the co-teacher doesn’t go in and say “these are my two kids or these are my four kids and I am only going to be working with these kids.” This perspective is shared by Ms. Casey, a special education teacher, who adamantly stated that co-teaching “is very powerful...there are two teachers involved and we’re here to help all students; we don’t segregate.” She goes on to share that she and her co-teacher provide a pamphlet to parents explaining their educational backgrounds, define co-teaching and report how they intend to work together as a co-teaching team to teach every child in the classroom.

In her interview, Ms. Kicker, an administrator, addressed the varying definitions surrounding co-teaching practices. As a special education administrator, she

acknowledged that co-teaching is an instructional model primarily used to meet the needs of students with disabilities and as a support tool for their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). However, she recognized the value of using this practice for any struggling student and stated,

The co-teaching model is for the benefit of all students. We feel that the co-teacher is there for every student; however they obviously have responsibilities to the special education student. But I always rely on the co-teaching model for a lot of my child study students who need support or really any student that might need extra support. There are some students who don't respond well in a co-teaching classroom, but I think that it's supportive for every student in the building.

Ms. Kicker invited Ms. Sully, another administrator, into the administrative interview.

Ms. Sully supported Ms. Kicker's position and supplemented Ms. Kicker's statement by sharing that co-teaching is an instructional delivery model used to facilitate student learning. She stated that placement in a co-taught classroom depends on student need and is not a guarantee for any child, regardless of whether they are a student identified as having a disability. Additionally, she insisted that their administrative team consider each child's educational needs individually when assigning them to classes and providing instructional supports. She reiterated that this is a process that is school wide initiative and not solely for the benefit of students with disabilities.

In summary, definitions of co-teaching varied between respondents. For the most part, the respondents agreed that co-teaching is an instructional practice that places two professional educators in a shared classroom. Some respondents considered this

instructional practice to be an opportunity for an “educational peer” in the classroom, while others focused on the service component of providing academic support to both general and special education students enrolled in the co-taught class. For example, many respondents acknowledged that the co-teaching paradigm was intended to support students with disabilities; however several participants insisted that this construct is beneficial for serving the needs of all students. These findings are especially significant because it appeared that the respondents’ definition and purpose of the co-teaching practice are interchangeable.

Purpose of Co-teaching

The participants’ responses to the purpose of co-teaching varied. While most respondents agreed that the presence of two teachers working in the same classroom benefits instruction and student learning, the findings indicated that there is a disagreement regarding the purpose and intended recipients for this instructional model. Although there may be several reasons for this phenomenon, Ms. Sully, a veteran special education teacher and current special education administrator, pointed out that co-teaching is an instructional practice and service delivery model that is currently in its infancy in today’s public schools, relatively speaking, and that this newness may explain the different perspectives of this construct.

During her interview, Ms. Sully made direct reference to the emergence of this instructional practice when she was asked about her experience co-teaching at the secondary level. She reported that she began co-teaching in 1995 when her supervisor asked her to “embark on this idea to just feel out the waters.” At that time she was paired

with a non-licensed science teacher who she reported believed that the purpose of co-teaching was to have two teachers in the classroom so that one teacher could leave the classroom to take a break. Ms. Sully explained that her co-teacher's "idea of co-teaching was that when I arrived it was time for her cigarette break." She went on to share that by midyear her co-teacher would ask her to be timelier in her arrival to class so that she could extend her cigarette break. While Ms. Sully's initial experience using the co-taught model was almost twenty years ago, her perspective is that this instructional model is still in its infancy and even today continues to have many inconsistencies in its purpose and implementation.

The inconsistency in the purpose and implementation of co-teaching was a common theme noted during the teacher interviews. The majority of respondents stated that co-teaching is a service delivery option provided to students with disabilities. Mr. Tripple, a special education administrator, maintained that the co-teaching model was designed to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. He specified that when the IEP team determines that a student with a disability needs extra support in the general education classroom he enrolls them in a co-taught class where there is an additional teacher to meet the child's educational needs. Ms. Time, a special education teacher, supports Mr. Tripple's position as she reported that co-teaching allows her the opportunity to provide special education accommodations and ensure that students with disabilities are receiving the supports they need as required by their IEPs. Her standpoint was supported by Ms. Reed, a special education administrator, who stated that co-

teaching is primarily intended to ensure that students with disabilities receive their accommodations and have their individual educational needs met.

Ms. Belk and Ms. Cage took a more global perspective on co-teaching and reported that the purpose of co-teaching is to provide both teachers the opportunity to clarify instruction and present concepts differently with the intent of reaching the diverse learning styles of the students within the classroom. Ms. Cage stated, “I am the driver of the content...and my co-teacher is the clarifier. She comes up with little ways to help all students learn the material and is better able to differentiate the material.” Mr. Daniels would likely agree with Ms. Cage’s statement as he reported that co-teaching is “very beneficial not only to students that require the extra accommodations but for all students because it gives the students two teachers with two different teaching styles” because “many students have different learning styles.” Mr. Reach went on to say that his “co-teacher is used a lot to reinforce information” and ensure student understanding and field clarifying questions. This belief is shared by Ms. Casey. She shared that, as a special education teacher, with expertise in differentiating instruction, she is able to support the general education teacher and assist all students by “bringing different aspects out to the kids, [from the of use] technology to learning how to study.”

Ms. Mark, a career switcher with little experience working within the co-teaching model, reluctantly responded that she was uncertain about the purpose of co-teaching. She reported that “I am not always sure I know what the concept of co-teaching is” if she had to explain it to a parent. She stated that she thinks that it is intended to provide

support to students with disabilities as she has a co-teacher in one of her classes that contain several children with IEPs.

Ms. Mark's confusion, combined with the varying responses to this construct from other respondents, suggests that there is a degree of uncertainty regarding the purpose of co-teaching practices. While most respondents agree that co-teaching enhances student learning, there is an inconsistency within the respondents' perception of the primary purpose and recipient of this instructional model. This discrepancy is further highlighted by Ms. Sully's report of the changing practices since 1995 and her assertion that co-teaching is a relatively new construct in public schools today.

In summary, respondents tend to agree that the purpose for co-teaching was to enhance student learning within the general education setting. However, this study suggests that a disparity regarding the purpose for co-teaching currently exists as several respondents stated that this instructional model should be considered an instructional tool to provide support for all students within the co-taught classroom, including non-disabled students. While most respondents agreed that co-teaching globally enriches student performance, the interviews revealed that the intended recipient of this instructional practice may be different across classrooms. For example, Mr. Daniels, a special education teacher, insisted that co-teaching is an instructional practice that is intended to benefit all students enrolled in the co-taught classroom. He stated that this allows all students the benefit of learning from "two teachers with two different teaching styles." Additionally, this position is supported by Ms. Casey, another special education teacher. She reported that her expertise is in differentiating instruction and supporting the general

education teacher to assist all students by “bringing different aspects out to the kids.” To others, the practice is focused exclusively or primarily on support for students with disabilities. These findings are especially significant because even the special education teachers in this study had varying opinions regarding their targeted audience for providing services.

Experiences Co-teaching in the Secondary Setting

Perhaps as a consequence of these differing opinions regarding the purposes and foci of co-teaching, respondents reported very different experiences co-teaching at the secondary level. These differences depended upon their current job role, previous job assignments, number of years in education, and professional relationship with their co-teaching partner or partners, past or present. One respondent provided a historical perspective on the changes in co-teaching practices that she has observed throughout her career. Overall, the respondents reported positive experiences co-teaching at the high school level but many stated that their experiences were impacted by a variety of factors that are addressed in a later section.

Evidence gleaned from respondents is presented by role of the participant (e.g. administrator, special education teacher, general education teacher), starting with the administrators and followed by special educators and general education teachers.

Administrators’ experiences. The special education administrators at the three high schools reported varying experiences co-teaching at the secondary level. These experiences ranged from assuming the role of the special education co-teacher in the classroom to having the role of the regular education co-teacher to being a previous

foreign language teacher that has never participated in the co-teaching instructional model. Mr. Tripple and Ms. Sully both reported experience working as a special education co-teacher. Mr. Tripple stated that he was a special education co-teacher before assuming an administrative position. He said that he would go “into the [general education] class and help the teacher support the students in the class [by] differentiating instruction and scaffolding” material for students with disabilities. He also responded that he provided the “teacher with a different way of teaching a student with special education, because as special educators we are the experienced ones to help modify those students’ needs based on their IEP.”

Ms. Sully reported a role similar to that of Mr. Tripple in her most recent years in the classroom but described a completely different experience in her early years co-teaching. As explained earlier, she shared that her first co-teaching experience in 1995 was “a horrible experience” and remembered being perceived as “second class citizens” who were not allowed to do anything other than menial secretarial duties. She insisted that she “persisted” and has witnessed a significant evolution in co-teaching practices throughout her career. She stated that she regularly reflects back on her early experience co-teaching and vows to “never allow myself to be put in that situation again.” She instead began advocating for the professional rights of special education teachers and “became a very effective and proactive special education teacher [who would] not to allow myself or other special education teacher” to be treated poorly.

Ms. Kicker viewed co-teaching from a general education teacher perspective and she reported that she has eight years’ experience teaching in a co-taught classroom as the

content area teacher. As a former History teacher she shared that she had the unique experience co-teaching classes for students with disabilities, as well as regular education students. She stated, “I was a general education History teacher and I co-taught special education [students] my first three years.” She then co-taught with another content area teacher for a Humanities class.

The range of experiences within the co-taught setting are significant because these individuals are responsible for supervising and supporting the special education department and its initiatives, including the co-teaching paradigm. As building-level administrators supervising special education, they perceived themselves as setting the climate for acceptance and inclusivity of the co-taught model. Both general and special education co-teachers need their support and understanding regarding the complexity of this instructional model, a topic that is further explored in a later section.

Teachers. The teachers’ experience co-teaching varied based on their job role and responsibilities. Some teachers emphasized the scope of their experience and reported the number of years they have taught or participated in co-teaching or how many different co-teachers that they have worked with during their career. Other teachers referenced their experience and discussed the quality of these experiences as either positive or negative. The respondents’ experiences co-teaching are divided into categories based on their job role, general or special education teacher. The emergent themes are divided into subcategories that represent the predominant ways that the respondents shared their positions. While it may appear that their years of teaching experience may just be contextual information, the data revealed that the number of years teaching did not

always drive the teachers' understanding of the co-teaching paradigm. For these reasons, experience over time and quality of experience emerged as subcategories. The quality of teachers' experiences was further narrowed to focus on the professional relationship and the special education teachers' content knowledge.

General education teachers. The interviews of the general education teachers revealed significant differences in the responses regarding their experiences co-teaching. The data shows that there is variation in their years' teaching experience and the number of co-teachers that they have worked with during their career. Many general education teachers also noted that their experience depended directly on their relationship with their co-teacher, years that they have been working together and the special education teachers' knowledge of the content.

Teaching experience. The general education teacher participants were mostly experienced educators with their number of years teaching ranging from nine to 29 years. Mr. Mitchell was the most veteran teacher with 29 years of experience teaching History at the secondary level. He stated that he has worked for this county for the last 13 years and during this time he has had about 10 different co-teaching partners. He also reported that since transferring to his current school approximately three years ago he has had at least four co-teaching partners. He expressed confusion regarding co-teaching practices and specifically noted a lack of understanding about the process for pairing co-teachers. He stated that he has previously co-taught with one of the two of his current co-teachers and said that he did not understand why administration didn't continue to pair him with the same teachers each year.

Ms. Creets reported a very different co-teaching experience in her 18 year teaching career. She reported having taught in three different states and noted that not all states or school districts use the co-teaching model. While teaching Biology at the high school level she has had only five different co-teachers, one of which was her husband. She stated that she has been in this county for the last 12 years and during this time has co-taught with three different people. She reported that her most recent co-teacher was a brand new teacher when she started working with him three years ago and that his lack of experience has been challenging.

Ms. Safe, Ms. Cage, and Mr. Reach all agreed that they have been fortunate during their careers in regards to their co-teaching experiences. Ms. Safe stated that in her 13 years teaching Biology she has worked with five different co-teachers and spoke very fondly of one particular co-teacher that she had been paired with for approximately the last nine years. She reported that this longevity in teaching together has improved their ability to meet the needs of their students. She stated that since she has had such a good experience working with this teacher that she “hogs all of the co-teaching sections.” She stated, “I don’t know if that’s a good thing or a bad thing... [we] work well together and I think the reasoning they [administration] haven’t really asked anyone else to do it is because we do it well.” She reiterated that her success was due to having the opportunity to refine their co-teaching skills together over the decade.

Alternatively, Ms. Cage has taught for the past 11 years and reported only having two co-teaching partners in her career. She stated that she had not previously co-taught prior to her current school assignment. Ms. Cage shared that she is currently in her fourth

year co-teaching with the same teacher and feels that this continuity of time together has given them the opportunity of “really getting to know how each other teaches and what we are good at.” In fact, Ms. Cage expressed displeasure about having her current co-teacher “taken away from me for all of my four [co-taught] classes.” She reported that the replacement co-teacher for one of the classes isn’t the best fit for her and for this reason the students do not benefit as much from this co-teaching partnership. She inferred that she is willing to build a professional relationship with this teacher but feels that administration should have considered the fluidity of her teaching practices with her original co-teacher instead of having her “taken away.” Finally, Mr. Reach stated that he has been teaching for 15 years and during this time has worked with about five co-teachers. He noted that has been paired with his current co-teaching partner for the last two years and that “we’ve worked together long enough so we’re both on the same page.”

Ms. Mark provided an entirely different perspective to this question. She reported that she moved to this county two years ago and although she is on her ninth year of teaching, she has not had a lot of experience within the co-teaching model. She shared that she did not co-teach prior to coming to this county and has had only two co-teachers since working in this county.

Quality of experience. A common theme that resonated throughout the interviews with the general education teachers was the importance of their relationship with their co-teacher. Ms. Safe insisted that building both a professional and personal relationship with her co-teacher has really impacted her perspective and success within this instructional strategy. She referred to a previous co-teaching experience and shared that she initially

did not like the concept of co-teaching because she did not have a good relationship with the co-teacher or have clearly defined roles in the classroom. She said, “to be honest I thought the co-teacher was there for legal purposes, to take the load off of the content teacher, to make sure all the accommodations were met.” She went on to say that her experience is now much different with her current co-teacher and reported, “we are friends...I feel very fortunate that I got to work with [current co-teacher] because I thought the role was different.” Despite teaching an extra class with the additional workload associated with this extra course, she asserted that due to her relationship with her current co-teacher, she “hogs all of the co-teaching sections.”

Ms. Cage echoed Ms. Safe’s responses regarding the importance of a good relationship with your co-teacher. Ms. Cage reported working with the same co-teacher for multiple consecutive years and became very disgruntled when administration switched her co-teacher this year. While she continues to have some co-taught classes with her previous co-teacher, she reported that it was like starting over when she is paired with someone new. Ms. Creets understands the concept of starting over as she has had three unique relationships with her co-teachers. Interestingly, one of her co-teachers was her husband and she said that it was during this co-taught experience she had to learn to build a professional trusting relationship. She said, “I have learned to kind of let go a little bit” and work towards building a professional relationship with my colleagues rather than taking complete control of the classroom.

Ms. Creets further explained that building a trusting professional relationship and letting go has been a “big step” for her in most recent years co-teaching. She indicated

that her current co-teaching partnership has been challenging and that it continues to be a work in progress. She reported being paired with a novice special education teacher three years ago and has continually struggled to build a professional relationship with him. She acknowledged that they have had difficulty developing professional communication and that she often had to seek out the assistance of the special education department chair and special education administrator. She noted that these difficulties impacted student performance and instruction and indicated that “if I wasn’t there, they didn’t look at him as a teacher and I don’t want that to happen.” Ms. Creets continues to co-teach with this teacher and reported that they have made considerable progress and have a better working relationship.

Mr. Reach would likely agree with Ms. Creets’s statements regarding having to be flexible in order to build a good professional relationship with his co-teacher. He shared, “I’ve heard horror stories where they are not [positive co-teaching experiences], but every experience I have had is positive.” He attributed this to his willingness to work with another teacher towards becoming a united team. He stated that the “easiest thing to do is just be open and flexible when you are the primary teacher and then just communicate so you really do become a team.” He felt that this viewpoint allows both teachers to see where they fit and build on that together; however, his use of the term “primary teacher” might suggest an implicit hierarchy in his relational view.

Ms. Mark again provides a different perspective as she has minimal experience co-teaching. She considers her co-teacher to be her “educational peer” and stated that she has a good relationship with her current co-teacher. She reported that this is contrary to a

previous co-teaching relationship because her current co-teacher and she “actually work together” and she is “actually going to take the lead” on the next unit. She reported that she did not particularly enjoy co-teaching prior to being paired with this co-teacher because her experience was that the special education teacher only worked with the special needs children in the class rather than with her as a professional.

The potential for the special education teacher to take the lead for a unit or provide direct content instruction was another issue that emerged within the context of the quality of their professional relationship. Mr. Mitchell really stressed this topic in his interview as he has two remarkably different experiences co-teaching this year based on his co-teacher’s content knowledge. He reported that “the content situation for the special education teacher makes a difference.” He shared that one of his co-teachers is able to “actually participate in the teaching of the content of the class” because he has a History background. Mr. Mitchell goes on to share that he has co-taught with teachers that, “are not History people. That changes the concept a little bit. My other team-taught class is different in terms of, we don’t switch off between one of the classes; she does not have a History background.” He emphasized that she supports his instruction but does feel that her lack of content knowledge is not an ideal situation for teaching History to students with special needs.

Ms. Cage understands the limitations of working with a special education co-teacher who lacks content knowledge. She reported that she is currently working with one co-teacher who has never been in a Biology classroom before. She said that this is both a good and bad thing and that “we’re kind of working through where we are going to be.”

She commented that this teacher is able to ask leading questions to ensure student understanding, especially when she does not understand a concept. Ms. Cage stated, “if she doesn’t understand something because she has not been in a Biology classroom since high school, then she will assume that the kids don’t understand; so she raises her hand and sometimes she’ll ask little questions.” Ms. Cage indicated that this arrangement has worked out well since it provides the students the answers to questions that they may have without having them feel uncomfortable asking.

Ms. Creets also reports very different experiences co-teaching based on the special education teacher’s knowledge of the content. She readily reported that her husband did not have a Biology background and “he didn’t feel comfortable with the content” and therefore she was not comfortable letting him take the lead in the classroom. She also referenced her two other co-teaching experiences and stated that one specific co-teacher was well versed in Biology and for that reason she was able to trade off the teaching responsibilities. Ms. Creets then shared that this co-teacher “would teach a unit and then I would teach a unit.” Most recently she has worked with a novice teacher who has learned the content over the last three years. She reported that their first year together was very challenging and that her co-teacher spent that majority of the time supporting her instruction and addressing disciplinary issues. She proudly stated that he has recently passed the Biology Praxis and is fully endorsed to teach Biology as a general education teacher. Since acquiring the content knowledge and developing their professional relationship, Ms. Creets reports that her experience with him has improved. She

analogized their current teaching style being similar to a “little Top Gun swap out” in which they seamlessly picked up where the other teacher left off.

Special education teachers. The interviews of the special education teachers exposed substantial differences in the responses regarding their experiences co-teaching. The data indicated that there is a significant disparity in their years as an educator and number of co-teachers that they have worked with during their career. As reported by the general education teachers, many special education teachers insisted that their experience in the co-taught classroom depended on the number years that they have been working together and the quality of their experience with their co-teacher.

Teaching experience. The special education teachers that participated in this study ranged in experience from three years teaching to 27 years. The median and mean years teaching were both approximately 13 years. I feel that it is important to include these statistics to demonstrate that this diverse group included respondents that are new teachers, mid-career teachers and veteran teachers. Mr. Scouts and Ms. Time are the most novice teachers with less than five years teaching experience. Additionally, Mr. Scouts reported that he has a provisional teaching license. During his brief teaching career, he shared that he has only had two co-teaching partners, with one being a partner that he has worked with since his first year. He reported that working with the same teacher for these three years has allowed him to grow as a professional and educator. Although his “first year was very rough” because he was “still trying to get [his] bearings,” he reported that things have improved and he enjoys co-teaching now that he has more experience.

Ms. Time reported that she worked as a paraprofessional in special education prior to becoming a special education teacher. She explained that she has been teaching for four years and has had at least one new co-teaching partner every year. She is currently co-teaching with one of the same partners from last year but also co-teaches an Earth Science class with someone she has never worked with before. She stated, “I’ve had different ones every year. This year with [current co-teacher] is the only year I have team taught with the same teacher for two years in a row.”

Ms. Casey, Ms. Taylor, and Mr. Daniels are mid-career teachers. Ms. Casey reported that she has had a unique experience because she has only taught with two different co-teachers in her 13 years of teaching. She explained that she has even taught with the same teacher for nine years, though not consecutively. She reported, “I’ve taught with [current co-teacher] for probably going on nine years; we’ve taught at different schools but we came back here and met at [current school] again.” She explained that this length of time teaching together in two different schools has allowed them to complement each other in the classroom and provide a great educational experience for their students.

In sharp contrast, Ms. Taylor and Mr. Daniels both reported teaching with upwards of 25 different co-teachers throughout their careers. Ms. Taylor indicated that it is not uncommon to co-teach with more than one teacher a year. She said, “You can actually be assigned to two or three teachers co-teaching together; one year I was working with three teachers.” She shared that it is difficult to work with so many different teachers at a time because their teaching styles differ and as the special education co-teacher “you have to get used to what it is and what their understanding is.”

Mr. Daniels echoed Ms. Taylor's statements and reported that although "each year is with a different teacher" he has taught with a few teachers more than once. He also specified that he has changed content areas from Math to History and attributes this switch as part of the reason for his high number of different co-teachers. While he enjoys co-teaching with different teachers to observe different teaching styles, he stated that "at the same point it's good to get with one particular teacher for a few years because you can establish a great team together; it's great for the students because then they're definitely getting the best from each teacher."

Ms. Belk reported that she has taught for 27 years in several different states and academic levels. She shared that during her career she has had at least 20 different co-teaching partners, with the longest teaming relationship being approximately three years. She considered herself to be very fortunate to teach Biology with the same teacher for the last three years. She shared that this is most likely due to their school's policy of only having one general education teacher assigned to teach the co-taught Biology classes. She expressed frustration with the pairing process and stated, "we get this comfortability about us and then we're moved to someone else. We take what we have done in the past and they may be new at co-teaching and then we have to start all over again."

Quality of experience. A topic that was repeatedly mentioned by the special education teachers was the need for a good working relationship with their co-teacher. This subject was most pronounced during the interview with Mr. Scouts. He noted that as a new teacher he was overwhelmed by every aspect of the profession. He indicated that in addition to not knowing the Biology content that he was assigned to teach, he did not

initially have a good relationship with either of his co-teaching partners. Mr. Scouts shared that he spent a lot of time working with administrators as they acted as “the go-between between [primary co-teacher] and I when we weren’t seeing eye-to-eye; so she’d go to them, then I’d hear from them and we’d go back and forth trying to find a new way of making things work.” He stated that this administrative intervention continued until he and his co-teacher formed a good working relationship. He shared that they continued to struggle, “until [primary co-teacher] and I started becoming friends; that’s what helped more than anything else.”

Ms. Taylor’s responses supported Mr. Scout’s stated need for a good working relationship with the general education co-teacher. She shared that building a relationship with your partner is imperative to building the professional trust that is needed for successful co-teaching. She said that, “it really works well when you can build a relationship and you know the style of the general education teacher and that way you are building trust.” Once this is established she insisted that the co-teachers are better able to “share responsibility for everything that goes on in the classroom.”

Ms. Belk addressed the issue of building a trusting relationship when she referenced her experience teaching with a new general education teacher. She said that this teacher was unsure of her role in the classroom and she didn’t like the way that he treated her. She reported that she was able to build a relationship through “courageous conversations.” She acknowledged that he was new and uncertain about the co-teaching model and that through numerous conversations they developed a relationship based on effective communication and understanding of roles and responsibilities. She said,

He wasn't sure what my role was in there... We kind of got on the same page where I wasn't in there as an assistant, I wasn't in there to run copies, I was in there to help; and it worked out really well after a while.

During her interview, Ms. Casey repeatedly referenced the exceptional co-teaching relationship she has had with her current co-teacher of nine years. She said that their style of co-teaching in the classroom is seamless because of their relationship. She stated that they completely trust each other and indicated, "We don't really say, you are going to do this, this and this; since we've already built that relationship, we know and we trust each other" and know what to expect from one another.

Similar to the responses from the general education teachers, the special education teachers reported that quality of the co-teaching relationship depended upon the special education teachers' ability to actively contribute to the classroom instruction. Instead of being perceived as an instructional assistant, the special education teachers emphasized their desire to be equal educators in the shared classroom and also be able to provide direct content instruction. For this reason, a consistent theme that emerged that affected the special education teachers' experiences co-teaching in the secondary level was their comfort with the content and curriculum of the classes in which they were assigned to co-teach.

Mr. Daniels presented a very interesting perspective on this issue. He stated that his knowledge of the content was necessary for him to be an effective co-teacher at the high school level. He said that he learned the content while co-teaching during his 16 year career. He reported that he initially co-taught in math classes, specifically Algebra

and Geometry and has even passed the Math Praxis. He felt that passing the Math Praxis validated his understanding of the mathematical principles. Most recently he has been co-teaching in the History department and stated that he really enjoys this subject. Mr. Daniels was observed taking an active teaching role in the co-taught History classroom. In fact, he presented the entire lesson and an observer would not have known that he was not the general education teacher.

As a result of his demonstrated content knowledge, Mr. Daniels reported that it has been strongly suggested that he take the History Praxis to become fully endorsed in History as he reported that the county appears to be gravitating towards a model that requires the special education teacher to also be a content area expert. He stated that, “if I was forced to take the Praxis II to be able to teach, then I would probably look more for a History position rather than a Special education position.” He goes on to say that if special education teachers are forced to become content area experts, equivalent to the general education teachers, then it would be counterproductive because “by forcing special education teachers to do that because then they are going to get out of special education and the special education departments are going to lose great teachers that may be more suited for that field.”

Ms. Taylor also reported feeling the need to know the content in order to be an effective co-teacher and professional equal in the classroom. She reported that special education teachers need to prove their understanding of the content for the general education teachers to fully trust them in the classroom. She said that, “they know that you know the curriculum and can step right in” and be able to support them in the classroom.

Otherwise, she stated the general education teacher may be reluctant to share the teaching responsibilities if they are not confident that you can accurately teach the material.

Mr. Scouts and Ms. Casey both shared that they did not know the Biology content when they first began co-teaching. Mr. Scouts stated that he learned the curriculum while co-teaching and has even passed the Biology Praxis. His content knowledge was directly observed as he was able to take an active teaching role in the co-taught classroom. His co-teacher even made multiple references to the class about previous lessons Mr. Scout has taught with an assumed intent of informing an observer of his ability to teach the content and also attempting to remind the students of the prior material.

Ms. Casey reported that regardless of her lack of content knowledge, she has had great co-teaching experiences. She indicated that she has learned a lot from her co-teachers, including how to be a better teacher and also understanding of the Biology curriculum. She stated that one of her co-teachers “has taught me so much basically by learning the content. I taught with another co-teacher...she really walked me through everything and let me take the warm-ups until I got comfortable and then I’d do the notes.” Ms. Casey also acknowledged that she has been fortunate to have been assigned the same content area throughout her career. She indicated that this has made it easier to learn the curriculum.

Ms. Time reported a different experience as she has not had the opportunity to teach within one content area during her four years working as a special education teacher. In fact, she reports that she has been assigned a random Earth Science class this school year. As the primary ninth-grade English co-teacher, she stated that she has never

taught Earth Science. In previous years she has been assigned a World History class. She reported that this random class assignment happens every year and said, “there’s usually just one...oddball” class that we are assigned. This “one oddball subject area that you are not as familiar with the content, so, you are not teaching the material, you are just helping the teacher and the students in other ways.”

In summary, the data revealed significant variability in the respondents’ experiences co-teaching at the secondary level. Their experiences ranged from a novice special education teacher to veteran educators with more than 25 years teaching experience. A consistent theme that emerged was the multiple different co-teaching partnerships that all respondents reported, regardless of the length of their teaching career. Within these partnerships, all respondents conveyed that the longevity of their pairing and quality of the professional relationship, with specific reference to the special education teachers’ content knowledge, significantly impacted their experiences working within the co-teaching model. These findings foreshadow the multitude of factors that impact co-teaching.

Factors Impacting Co-teaching

An analysis of the interviews, classroom observations and review of artifacts revealed numerous factors that impact co-teaching. These findings were narrowed into four major themes based upon my interpretation and those of the impartial coders. These emergent themes are significant as my coding team used the constant comparative method to discover recurring themes as we first independently generated and connected categories. Our independent coding resulted in consistent conclusions, which allowed us

to negotiate an appropriate designation for the primary themes and secondary categories. This ability demonstrated that there was a consistency to our findings and ensured that the data was saturated. In the end, the four major themes that emerged regarding factors impacting co-teaching practices were: (a) professional philosophy; (b) relationships; (c) instructional practices; and (d) administrative support (Table 7). For each theme, subcategories were designated to address these areas in greater detail.

Table 7

Factors Impacting Co-teaching

Professional Philosophy	Relationships	Instructional Practices	Administrative Support
Purposeful teaching	Communication	Clear division of labor	Expectations
Co-teaching model	Partnership	Shared teaching	Evaluation process
Inclusivity	Trust	Teacher responsibilities	Master scheduling
	Flexibility		Pairing of teachers
			Professional development

Professional philosophy. The first theme that emerged related to the factors that impact co-teaching from the interviews, classroom observations and artifact reviews was the need to have a clearly defined professional philosophy as it relates to co-teaching practices. By professional philosophy the respondents meant an agreement that students with disabilities can benefit from the expertise and contribution of two teachers offering instruction (Friend & Cook, 2003) and that these co-teachers were willing to adjust their instructional methodologies to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Soodak, 2003). After a review of the data, my coding team and I agreed that the following subcategories emerged within this theme: purposeful teaching, the selected co-teaching model, and the focus on inclusivity.

Purposeful teaching. The intent of co-teaching is to provide the opportunity for co-teachers to collaborate with another professional educator to enhance instruction for students with disabilities. While this may seem to be a simple concept, effective co-teaching requires purposeful teaching and well-planned instruction. All administrators included in this study agreed that the expectation is for every co-teacher to be an active member of the co-taught classroom and indicated that this requires extensive planning. Specifically, Mr. Tripple stated that he tells his teachers, “they’re not just another body in the classroom; they’re in that classroom, they’re teaching, the teachers work together, they plan together, they meet in cohorts together. Both the teachers are teaching.”

The expectations from administration are clear regarding the requirement for purposeful teaching and collaborative planning. While many co-teachers’ responses to questions about planning aligned with this directive, it was apparent through a review of

the lesson plan and during some of the classroom observations that thorough planning did not always occur or was poorly implemented. When asked to review the lesson plan for the observed class period, all teachers provided me an oral account of what the class was covering that day. Five of the six classroom observed had, to varying degrees, an objective or agenda posted. When specifically asked for their written lesson plan, the teachers were unable to provide me a detailed lesson plan. For example, Mr. Reach showed me a brief note about the lesson which specified that the students would be working in the library and developing a literature map to identify the elements of plot from a story that they were reading. He indicated that this is a lesson that he uses each year and that he and his co-teacher know what to do. Ms. Creets also showed me her lesson plan book that included a short list of items to be covered during the class block.

When asked about purposeful teaching and collaborative planning, Ms. Cage reported that she and her co-teacher share a common planning block in which they “sit together and figure out what we are going to be doing.” She also said that they share the same lunch period and that they frequently use that time to plan together. However, during the observation Ms. Cage was out of the classroom on two separate occasions for more than thirty minutes. During her absence the special education co-teacher took charge of the classroom and it appeared that she was unsure of the class agenda and engaged in an impromptu review while waiting for Ms. Cage to return. The co-teacher also did not appear to know the expectations on an upcoming assessment as she said, “I don’t think [Ms. Cage] will make you remember that on the test.” Additionally, the special education co-teacher was observed answering the classroom phone and telling the

caller that she did not know where Ms. Cage was or when she would return. While it is understandable that teachers must adjust the implementation of their lesson plans to meet the needs of the class, it appeared that the special education co-teacher was not prepared to do this in Ms. Cage's absence. Specifically, she did not appear to know the content covered on an upcoming assessment and also articulated that she was not aware of the reason for Ms. Cage being out of the classroom.

The observation of Ms. Mark's class was another example of questionable planning or purposeful teaching. Ms. Mark and her co-teacher were observed discussing the lesson plan while the students were present. It appeared that there was no prior planning as Ms. Mark was sharing the lesson plan with her co-teacher. This conclusion is supported by Ms. Mark's statement during her interview in which she said that she typically creates the agenda the night before the class and then "will email it to [co-teacher] as well as another teacher because we're kind of doing some common planning activities. That way she has kind of an awareness of what we're doing that specific day." She goes on to share that she and her co-teacher plan or discuss students' individualized needs while the students are completing group work. She said that this is "an opportunity for us to kind of check in with each other and say, ok what do we want to do next or what are some concerns we might have about students." This procedure of emailing the agenda the night before class, planning the next activity during class and her statements regarding ensuring that her co-teacher has an awareness of the lesson plan demonstrates a lack of purposeful planning. Ms. Mark's co-teacher must also be flexible and a

cooperative partner as she did not seem surprised or unnerved by this method of planning and delivery.

Mr. Daniels acknowledged the need for collaborative planning and purposeful teaching during his interview. He insisted that he strives to be actively involved in teaching and stated, “One of the worst things that can happen as a team teacher is walking into the classroom and asking, what are we doing today?” While he acknowledged that this can happen he said that “over the years I have tried to make sure that never happens; sometimes on occasion it may be but 99% of the time we know what’s expected of each other in moving forward in the classroom.” Ms. Safe agreed with Mr. Daniels and stated that she has had previous co-teaching experiences where the special education teacher is not aware of the lesson because they did not plan together. She said that a prior co-teacher “finds out what we’re doing prior to just walking in and I’ve had experiences where there have been teachers that would just do that and not really help plan or grade. It’s not often, but it has happened.”

Ms. Safe reported that she now takes a very proactive approach to purposeful teaching and collaborative planning with her current co-teacher. She shared that she and her co-teacher are always planning together so that they can provide quality instruction to the students. She indicated that they sit down together and plan every other day. She also said that she provides her co-teacher a copy of a study guide and assessment about a week in advance of giving it to the students so that her co-teacher can make suggestions and changes. She reported that this process is especially beneficial to her co-teacher as the materials are also used for the self-contained Biology class.

Ms. Taylor echoed Ms. Safe's process for collaborative planning and shared that she tries to meet with her different co-teachers weekly. She indicated that she supplements face-to-face planning through email correspondence. She said that they are always "shooting stuff back and forth about the curriculum saying, you're going to do this today, I'm going to be doing this." Ms. Taylor also shared that through planning and purposeful teaching in the co-taught setting that student performance is positively impacted. She said, "I've found no matter what class you're in, usually the test scores go up by having two teachers in the classroom." This allows for "two educators in the classroom being able to give more one-on-one attention to whoever needs it."

Ms. Reach also provided an excellent example of a well-planned lesson. During his observation he and his co-teacher were actively engaged in purposeful teaching. They alternated between parallel and station teaching to assist their students to complete their story maps. This observation was supported by Mr. Reach's interview in which he stated that they meet regularly and plan instruction to meet the individualized needs of their students. He even referenced how he and his co-teacher adjust the curriculum to address basic skill deficits. He said that in order for them to provide purposeful teaching that they "spend a lot more time with a lot of those kids on basic skills as opposed to other skills; we're working more on elaboration and how can you get at this level." He goes on to recognize that students enrolled in the co-taught class require a lot of assistance and structure. He said that through effective collaborative planning, he and his co-teacher are "working on just structure and organization."

In summary, the interviews, artifact review and classroom observations revealed varying levels of purposeful teaching and collaborative planning despite the reported expectation from administration. While it was evident that there is a variety of approaches used to provide instruction to students with disabilities, all respondents agreed that effective and purposeful planning was imperative to student success. Unfortunately, the review of lesson plans and some of the respondents' statements during their interviews did not align with their teaching practices that were observed in their co-taught classroom.

Additionally, a component of purposeful teaching was the selection of the co-teaching model used in the shared classroom. In order to select a co-teaching model to implement in the classroom, co-teachers must consider their professional philosophy and engage in collaborative planning. Therefore, the consideration of the co-teaching model emerged as a subcategory in connection to the purposeful teaching category.

Co-teaching model. As reported in the literature regarding co-teaching practices and described in Chapter Two, there are multiple co-teaching models that educators can select when participating in this instruction practice. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker referenced these different models during their administrative interview. They reported that they utilize an artifact titled, "Collaborative Teaching and In-Class Supports Reflection" to encourage collaboration by their co-teachers. They use this artifact as a tool for educating the co-teachers about the commonly used co-teaching models so that they can have an open dialogue about which to use in their co-taught classroom. This conversation is reinforced by the worksheet requiring each co-teacher to identify which model(s)

describe their instructional delivery most of the time. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker insisted that they use this artifact prior to the start of every school year to facilitate the communication regarding the different co-teaching models so that the co-teachers will talk through their professional philosophy and how they may want to use these different models while co-teaching together.

Like Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker, Ms. Reed acknowledged that there are multiple different designs to co-teaching and reported that she allows her co-teachers to decide which model or models work best for their classroom based on their professional philosophy regarding this instructional practice. She said that her administrative team has, “given them [co-teachers] some professional liberties in terms of how they want to design the co-teaching that best suits that team.” She shared that through her classroom observations she has seen co-teachers using a variety of co-teaching models and noted that she frequently sees more than one model used within the same class block. She indicated that her implementation of the co-teaching practices varies and that she has observed, “One will teach one unit, one will teach the next unit but they work collectively.” She goes on to share that some co-teaching pairs agreed that “the general education teacher will provide most of the instruction” and the special education teacher will support the instruction by completing the warm-up activities or “any type of activities that are the beginning activities; and then maybe the closing activities and the exit ticket for the students.” She insisted that she has no preference regarding their professional approach to co-teaching as long as both teachers are actively engaged in the learning objectives. Additionally, she acknowledged that she has some teachers that

prefer a “behind the scenes kind of role in the classroom” and elect to only work with the students with disabilities rather than taking an active role in the classroom instruction. She stated that “that’s not the kind of direction I want us to go in. I want the teachers to both be instructional models for the students.”

These “professional liberties” as termed by Ms. Reed are appreciated by many of the co-teaching pairs. Several respondents explained that their administrators are always available for support when needed, but that their administrators ultimately allow them the latitude to have their own professional philosophy as it relates to co-teaching instruction in the classroom. This autonomy results in varying models of the co-teaching model utilized in the classroom.

Many of the different co-teaching models were implemented during the classroom observations and referenced during the teacher interviews. Throughout the six different classroom observations I observed the following co-teaching models: teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model, station teaching, alternative teaching, parallel teaching and team teaching.

The teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model was also the primary model utilized during my observations. This model was most evident when the general education co-teacher was providing content instruction and the special education co-teacher was either circulating the room ensuring student understanding or observing the lesson. Ms. Mark’s classroom observation represented this model as she clearly assumed the primary teaching role. In fact, despite her interview statements where she considered her co-teacher to be an “education peer” and someone that she relies on to “actually take

the lead” it appeared that on this occasion she treated her co-teacher as more of a teaching assistant rather than a licensed teacher as she was observed directing her co-teacher to hand back graded work and read to the class. Additionally, the students seemed accustomed to this approach as many looked towards the circulating special education co-teacher for support when completing independent work.

Ms. Cage and Mr. Mitchell’s observation revealed the teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model. Ms. Cage presented the content notes while her co-teacher circulated the room and assisted all students. Mr. Mitchell and his co-teacher were also observed using the teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe co-taught model. However, this observation was unique because the special education co-teacher assumed the primary teaching role while Mr. Mitchell assisted by circulating the room and helping struggling students. During his interview, Mr. Mitchell reported that he and his co-teacher “use the term team-teaching literally, that it’s a shared experience between the two of us.” He stated that he is only able to assume the support role because his co-teacher knows the History content.

The teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model was observed during Ms. Creets’s classroom observation. The classroom objective was to review dichotomous keys through the use of a jelly bean lab. While Ms. Creets explained the purpose and process for completing this lab, her co-teacher supported her instruction by ensuring that students were on task and listening to the instructions. Once the class began the lab both co-teachers engaged in parallel teaching by circulating the different work tables to provide direct instruction regarding dichotomous keys and relating it to the jelly bean classifications. I overheard both teachers answering questions and reinforcing the same

content at different tables. The students appeared to be accustomed to this selected approach as all children were on-task and actively asking questions of their respective teacher. It was during this time I was unable to determine the specific job roles of each co-teacher as they were both actively teaching the material to all students. During the interviews both co-teachers shared that they have grown within their co-teaching partnership and that their professional philosophy regarding co-teaching practices is more in agreement than it was when they were first paired together.

Mr. Reach and his co-teaching partner were observed using the parallel and station co-teaching models. The class was observed working in the library to review the literary elements of a fictional story by drawing a story map of the island in the story, “The Most Dangerous Game.” The co-teachers were initially observed parallel teaching by working with groups of students at the different library tables. They were both providing direct instruction on the learning objectives to all students. In fact, the students with disabilities appeared to be dispersed throughout the different library tables as I was unable to easily identify them until I overheard one student remind the co-teacher that he has a reduced assignment. Throughout the observation the co-teachers switched to a station teaching format in which they continued to circulate the library while focusing their instruction on a specific element of the story. For example, Mr. Reach was observed discussing the plot and timeline and his co-teacher emphasized the characters and setting. It was evident that both teachers respected one another and were well liked by the students. In his interview, Mr. Reach noted that he enjoys co-teaching with his current

co-teacher because she has a very flexible professional philosophy and has “done a really good job of seeing where she fits in.”

Alternative teaching and team teaching were observed in Ms. Safe’s co-taught Biology classroom where the learning objective was to review the water unit to prepare for a test the next class block. The co-teachers initially utilized an alternative teaching model as the special education co-teacher took a few students into the science workroom to review the material that was covered while they were absent prior to asking them to make-up a quiz. While she was in the workroom, Ms. Safe and her student teacher reviewed the answers to the quiz and prepared for the Water Bingo review game. The special education co-teacher returned with the students approximately fifteen minutes later and all students participated in the review. During this time the team teaching model was observed by both co-teachers, as well as the student teacher. As the student teacher referenced specific water related vocabulary, both co-teachers were observed taking turns providing direct instruction and hints related to the vocabulary. It was clear that this style of co-teaching was routinely used in this classroom as the students were able to keep up with the instructional banter. Additionally, Ms. Safe shared in her interview that she has been co-teaching with the same special education teacher for nine years and that they “are always planning” so that they can truly “split the role as teacher.”

In summary, throughout the interviews, classroom observation and review of artifacts, it was apparent that most of the co-teachers embraced co-teaching. While their specific co-teaching model depended on their shared philosophy and collaborative planning, content knowledge, relationship with their co-teacher and support from

administration, varying degrees of co-teaching practices were observed during this study. For example, Ms. Safe's interview and her statements about how she and her co-teacher work together and engage in instructional banter was observed during the classroom observation. Her interaction with her co-teacher appeared seamless and the students' responded favorably to this style of co-teaching. On the other hand, Ms. Mark indicated during her interview that her co-teacher was like an "educational peer" in the classroom, yet her classroom observation revealed her giving her co-teacher directives about what to do in the shared classroom. Overall, each co-teacher appeared actively engaged in student learning and contributed to the classroom instruction.

Inclusivity. The administrators agreed that the purpose of the co-teaching instructional model is to provide academic support to all students, especially students with disabilities. Ms. Kicker stated that the co-teacher "is there for every student, however obviously [she must] have responsibilities to the special education student." Ms. Sully interjected and stated that the co-teaching model was designed to provide students with disabilities the opportunity to access the curriculum in the least restrictive environment. She shared that their professional philosophy has evolved and that their focus is taking support to the students in the general education setting. Ms. Kicker reiterated this position and stated that "whole school community is really driven on the inclusive philosophy."

Ms. Sully shared that, "there are a lot of kids that are not self-contained anymore; it is in and out, kids going into inclusion classrooms and needing support out in classes." This position is echoed by Ms. Belk who reported that the inclusive focus allows all

students to be more included in the school culture. She shared that “co-teaching has its advantages. I think for some kids if there wasn’t a co-teacher in that classroom, the kids would have to go self-contained.” She referenced three specific students that the school team took a “risk moving them” but that it is a “very important part from getting kids from self-contained and out into the world” of the general population.

As a general education teacher, Mr. Reach acknowledged that teaching students with disabilities takes a lot more collaborative planning and purposeful instruction but insisted that it is worth it. He said that, “co-teaching, from my opinion, is meant to help provide structure for a lot of the kids that need it. They don’t belong in self-contained classes because they can perform” and benefit from being included in the general education setting.

In summary, the belief that students with disabilities belonged in the general education classroom and that support services would be provided in that setting to address their individual needs was shared by respondents.

Relationships. A consistent theme that emerged from the interviews was the importance of the co-teaching relationship. By relationships the respondents meant their ability and willingness to successfully collaborate and work together to meet their students’ needs. As referenced in Chapter Two, Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) described a successful collaborative relationship as one that is based on mutual respect, conflict resolution and methods for problem solving, and open communication. To further this relationship, Idol (2006) asserted that co-teachers need to re-conceptualize their positions in the classroom in order to negotiate their instructional roles and share classroom

responsibilities. While the primary theme that emerged for this section was termed relationships, the subcategories of communication, partnership, trust and flexibility are all characteristics of a successful collaborative relationship. Additionally, the ideology of a successful collaborative relationship is such a complex construct that there are interrelated characteristics within each subcategory.

Mr. Daniels, Mr. Reach, and Ms. Creets agreed that this relationship sets the climate in the classroom. They noted that students are able to recognize tension between the teachers and that it directly impacts student learning. Mr. Daniels believes that personal relationships are important and said that the relationship “is going to impact how you’re going to be able to work together; kids and students pick up on that if they’re not on the same page or if there is any type of tension.”

This statement is echoed by Ms. Creets’s explanation of her first year co-teaching with her current co-teacher. She acknowledged that this relationship was difficult for her but she stressed the importance of working together and said “that when you don’t get along, the kids pick up on it immediately.” She admitted that she did not initially realize the impact it had on the classroom until the “kids started making comments that I realized just how much they were picking up.” Mr. Reach also shared that any conflict between the co-teachers can affect the classroom environment and student learning. He stated that it is imperative to get along with your co-teacher because “if you don’t get along with them, the kids will see it and it will create a negative classroom environment.”

As evidenced above, the relationship between the co-teachers is a critical component to the success of the co-teaching model and meeting the instructional needs of

the students. As this theme was analyzed closely, several fundamental components of this relationship were exposed. All participants either directly acknowledged this theme or made reference to the subcategories: communication, trust, partnership, and flexibility. As previously stated these subcategories have interrelated components.

Communication. The concept of effective communication resonated throughout the interviews as being a component necessary to the success of a co-teaching relationship. Gately and Gately (2001) define effective communication through the “use of verbal, nonverbal and social skills” (p. 40). They report that teachers develop their communication skills through the “give and take of ideas” as they cultivate respect for one another. As their relationship grows they are able to use more nonverbal communication in the classroom and “become positive roles models of effective communication for students” and colleagues as they model “effective ways to listen, communicate, solve problems, and negotiate with each other” (p. 41). Further, Keefe and Moore (2004) insist that co-teaching partners need to have “frank discussions from the beginning” to facilitate their communicative relationship.

Mr. Daniels reported: “It is very important to have that personal relationship that connects them from the beginning of the year.” He stated that a successful collaborative relationship is developed through effective communication which allows both teachers to be “on the same page from the beginning...so you understand what you are doing and what expectations are for each other.” Ms. Time agreed with Mr. Daniels and reported that her school provides a checklist at the beginning of the year to both co-teachers as a tool to open the lines of communication and begin the process of developing a

relationship based on effective communication, trust and partnership. She shared that this checklist requires that they, “go through and say, I will do this and I will do that.” She also said that this allows both teachers to communicate a clear understanding of what each other are taking responsibility for in the classroom. Since it requires the co-teaching pairs to review their expectations, indicate their preferred model of co-teaching, identify goals, divide up classroom responsibilities, and begin the process of building trust through open communication. It also is used as a decision making tool to allow each person to decide which partner will be responsible for each of a list of typical classroom responsibilities.

The majority of the respondents indicated that communication continues to be a vital component to ensuring a positive co-teaching relationship throughout the school year. When there is a concerning issue, participants stated that it is best to communicate directly rather than allowing it to erode the relationship, as reported in the previous section. Ms. Belk stated that she needs to be able to have “courageous conversation” with her co-teacher in order to address any issues. Ms. Safe reiterated this statement and shared that “sometimes it’s an awkward conversation if you don’t know a person...because I think sometimes we don’t want to step on their toes and they don’t want to step on our toes” but when something needs to be discussed with her co-teacher they have agreed to “step on each other’s toes, we tell each other how we feel.” She goes on to say that developing this relationship early on in their co-teaching partnership has allowed them the comfort with one another to speak freely. Mr. Reach also shared that the freedom to speak openly is important to building and maintaining an effective

teaming relationship. He stated that, “freedom to be able to say, we should do it this way, we should try this, or we could try a different way; it’s just a different way to approach it, but you truly are a team.”

As administrators, Ms. Kicker and Ms. Reed insisted that early communication, specifically regarding classroom roles and responsibilities, is the expectation for the co-teachers in their buildings. They asserted that a teacher’s willingness to engage in an effective communicative relationship is a consideration when hiring and selecting co-teaching pairs. Ms. Reed stated that she directs teachers to discuss their issues together before seeking administrative intervention. She tells her co-teachers that, “whatever concerns you have, have a dialog. It doesn’t need to involve administration; it needs to involve two professionals that are sitting down” with the ultimate goal being “the success of the students” and answering the question, “what do we need to do as a team to get the kids where they need to be?”

Ms. Creets indicated that she follows these administrative expectations and always attempts to talk directly with her co-teacher. She stated, “I think you have to be willing to sit down; as a regular ed teacher I have to be willing for him to look at me and go, that’s not working, you need to try this.” However, Ms. Creets admitted that she has struggled with professional communication with her current co-teacher and has sought administrative assistance to facilitate effective communication. Through administrative support and the development of an effective communicative relationship, Ms. Creets said that she is now able to talk candidly with her co-teacher. She reported that that she has

learned through experience that “I’m just better off if I just flat out say it and don’t try to beat around the bush; just say it and I take care of it.”

Partnership. In order to develop a successful co-teaching relationship, both the general and special education teacher have to engage in a cooperative and mutually beneficial partnership. Partnership is defined by Mohr and Spekman (1994) as a “purposeful strategic relationship between independent firms who share compatible goals, strive for mutual benefit, and acknowledge high levels of mutual interdependence” (p. 135). While this may be analogous to a personality characteristic needed for a willing co-teacher, Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker insist that they screen their co-teachers when hiring and pairing them to ensure that they have the aptitude to develop a successful collaborative relationship. Ms. Sully stated that a prerequisite for developing a partnership is a desire to do so. She said “you have to want to be a team teacher. It’s got to come from within. We can give you all the tools you need, but I can’t internally make you be that; you either have it or you don’t.”

Ms. Taylor’s responses supported Ms. Sully’s statements regarding the requirement to want to engage in a co-teaching partnership. She stated that, “one of the biggest factors I would say that impacts co-teaching is the willingness of a general education teacher to accept the special education teacher” as an educational partner and “as an equal educator in the classroom.” However, the statement about being an equal educator contradicted my finding from the classroom observation. I observed Ms. Taylor circulating the room and assisting struggling students until the general education teacher instructed Ms. Taylor to read the novel to the class. This may call into question whether

what Ms. Taylor reported is present in this partnership as there did not appear to be evidence of joint efforts of direct instruction. Ms. Taylor's statements revealed her mindfulness of the theory and equity of the co-teaching relationship model but observation suggests that this may not always be practiced in the classroom.

Ms. Safe would likely agree with Ms. Sully and Ms. Taylor's statements as she stated that she considers her co-teacher to be her teaching partner and a supportive friend in the classroom. She stated that this partnership is reciprocal and that each co-teacher goes out of their way to support one another. Ms. Safe stated, "I feel she is there to help, not just the kids but me also; I think she knows that's the way she feels about me."

Ms. Time also shared that a true partnership allows for a sense of comfort when working with each other to meet the individual needs of students. Ms. Time and Ms. Mark reported that this enables both parties to actively engage in instruction and be able to "bounce ideas off of each other." Ms. Creets agreed that it is imperative to communicate ideas and associates the concepts of communication and partnership. She stated that effective communication is imbedded in the co-teaching professional relationship and insists that when co-teaching relationships truly become a partnership based on effective communication, that the teachers:

Get to the point where he can almost read what I'm about to say before I even say it. We actually have eye signals that we can give each other when a kid in the back of the room isn't doing what they're supposed to do; he can look at me and then look over to where they are and I know immediately to go over there. To me that's all part of co-teaching. It should be seamless and we need to be together.

Multiple participants reported that a genuine partnership takes years develop. While the intent is to develop a successful professional partnership that allows for open and honest communication, many respondents stated that their co-teaching partners are often changed from year to year. Ms. Taylor shared that in “some schools, I talked to special education teachers where they continuously work with the same teacher” and insisted that this “is the ideal model.” However, Ms. Taylor reported that working with the same co-teacher for consecutive years has not been her experience. She reported that she has only had one co-teaching experience in which she has been paired with the same teacher for three consecutive years. She reported that they had such a good teaching partnership that they were able to “finish each other’s sentences and that’s kind of the ideal model for me where you know their style and they equally know that you know the curriculum and it works well.”

Ms. Cage agreed with the time needed to develop a successful co-teaching partnership. She stated that she has been co-teaching with the same special education co-teacher for the last four years and they are now “really getting to know how each other teaches and what we are good at.” Ms. Time reiterated Ms. Cage’s statements and said that with any partnership, co-teaching is “a work in progress.” She shared that she has been paired with her current co-teacher for two consecutive years and she is able to recognize his “strengths and weaknesses and what to do to help the students; you learn about his teaching style. It’s just being comfortable and just over time knowing where you can be most effective with the students.” Ms. Casey restated the advantage of co-

teaching together for multiple years and said, “We just know each other because we’ve been teaming forever. I know. It’s like what the right hand/left hand is doing.”

Trust. The concept of trust resonated throughout the interviews as being a component necessary to the success of a co-teaching relationship. Pope (2004) indicated that trust is a complex concept and stated that there is little consensus on what the term truly implies. Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) defined trust as a “psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another” (p. 395). This position is supported by Opatz and Hutchison (1999) who indicated that trust is only a factor in a relationship if the parties have something to lose or to gain. Therefore, Pope (2004) concludes that trust is “an element in a consensual relationship in which there is equal risk and equal benefit as perceived by the parties involved, and there is a belief that the other party will act in a reciprocal manner” (p. 76).

Ms. Creets acknowledged that she takes a risk when co-teaching and stated that she is comfortable turning over instruction to the special education teacher if she trusts that the special education teacher is able to teach the material. She believes that part of co-teaching is trusting the other teacher in the classroom and compromising about their job roles to meet all of the needs of the students. She also said that as the general education teacher she is willing to “give up a little control and put a little more on [the co-teacher]...we’re going to take turns and you’re going to do this and I’m going to do this; and we’re going to take turns as we do things.”

Ms. Taylor agreed that trust is an important component to building a successful relationship with her general education co-teacher. She shared that often the general education teacher doesn't trust the special education teacher to accurately teach the curriculum. She indicated that she usually reviews the material and introduces some topics. She indicated that, "sometimes general education teachers are real reluctant if they think you don't know the content, to let you step in" and teach. She noted that she has co-taught with multiple different co-teachers throughout her career and stated that building a relationship based on trust is imperative to working as a cohesive team. She shared, "it really works well when you can build a relationship and you know the style of the general education teacher and that way you are building trust." Mr. Daniels reiterated Ms. Taylor's position regarding the general education teacher trusting the special education teacher to accurately teach the content. He stated that a special education teachers' reputation is important to building trust and feels that since he has a reputation for knowing the curriculum that the general education teacher "kind of lets me share in all aspects [of teaching]; whereas maybe some teachers might be resistant."

Mr. Scouts also reported that trust is an important element to being a successful co-teaching partner. During his first year teaching, he explained that central office personnel were asked to observe him and one of his co-teachers for the purpose of offering support and recommendations to novice teachers. After receiving a formal observation from the observers, he stated that it was clear that he and his co-teacher lacked trust in each other's teaching abilities. He said that "it came down to just being able to rely on the other person" but insisted that it is specific to the person and situation.

The data from this study supports Pope's (2004) definition of trust and a person's willingness to engage in the consensual co-teaching relationship. In order to have a successful trusting co-teaching relationship, multiple respondents reported that they must take a risk and allow their co-teacher to teach the class. In taking this risk, both parties accept vulnerability as they expect their colleague to provide direct and accurate instruction to the co-taught class.

Flexibility. A successful co-taught setting requires significant flexibility and cooperation from both the general education and special education teacher. Olson, Chalmers, and Hoover (1997) describe a flexible person as one who is "laid back," "friendly," and "open" (p. 30). In their study a teacher commented that she doesn't get "really excited about an awful lot of things" (p. 30) and that this even-tempered attitude helps her be successful in her co-taught relationship.

Ms. Sully insisted that it takes a "very flexible person" to be a successful co-teacher as she recognizes that the perspectives from the general and special education teacher differ due to their instructional roles. She provided an example of a student who has a writing deficit and requires accommodations and individualized instruction to make progress towards his writing goal. She maintained that a flexible person is able to appreciate both instructional perspectives and work together to allow this student the opportunity to master the curriculum while making progress towards his writing weakness. Although the general education teacher is focusing on teaching the content to more than one hundred students and may not understand the need to individualize

instruction for a small percentage, she explained that both co-teachers need to be flexible with each other and within their teaching practices to “bring the two together.”

The edict of working collaboratively is appreciated by Ms. Cage, who reported that she welcomes the special education teacher into the classroom so that there is a “free flow” of ideas and supports to meet the needs of the students. Ms. Casey echoed Ms. Cage’s statements about the importance of being welcome into the classroom and shared that some general education teachers are rigid about their ownership of the classroom. She stated that the flexibility of the general education teacher is imperative to the climate of the classroom and providing a high quality education to students. She reported that there are still some general education teachers that insist that, “this is my classroom.” When confronted with this type of inflexibility she says that “going in you feel like you don’t want to step on their toes but you want to feel like that’s your classroom” too. She said that her role is to support the instruction and her contribution is impacted by an inflexible co-teacher who is unwilling to change their instructional methodology or compromise their roles and responsibilities to support the shared classroom and the co-taught relationship.

As general education teachers, Mr. Reach, Ms. Creets, and Mr. Mitchell recognized that they need to give up some of the control in the classroom and be flexible to the role of the special education teacher. Mr. Reach specified that the physical classroom space is “an awkward thing, if you’re the sped person coming in because it’s not really your classroom, but it’s your classroom.” He said that he values the support from the special education teacher and appreciates how she is always willing to work

with him. Mr. Mitchell considers himself lucky to have special education co-teachers that are flexible and “willing to do whatever it takes, willing to pitch in” as needed to meet the needs of the students in the class. Ms. Safe and Ms. Mark shared Mr. Mitchell’s position and both reported that it was evident from the first day paired with their co-teacher that their co-teaching partner was flexible and genuinely willing to help out as needed.

Ms. Sully’s interview summarizes the critical components needed for a professional relationship. She stated that as an administrator she enjoys observing the professional interactions of her co-teaching pairs. She strives to ensure the longevity of her successful co-teaching pairs and insisted that it is very rare for her teachers to express concern about their co-teaching partner. She stated that in the past she has had a special education teacher say, “They’re not accommodating, or they’re not flexible, or they don’t treat me as an equal.” As an advocate for special education she addresses these rare occurrences through open communication. She titles this “a meeting of the minds” and reminds both co-teachers to reflect on their relationship with a focus on professional trust, compromise, and communication.

In summary, the characteristics of a professional relationship include effective communication, willing partnerships, trust and flexibility. These attributes are often interrelated and it is often difficult to decipher one from another. For the purpose of this study, these qualities were presented in relation to how my coding team and I perceived them given the definitions provided in each section. We concluded that these characteristics complement each other and that they all needed to be present in order for a successful collaborative co-teaching relationship to be established and maintained.

Additionally, although each of these constructs is referred to within the context of the co-teaching relationship, they are also characteristics considered when administrators hire teachers and select co-teaching pairs.

Instructional practices. The third theme that emerged from the interviews builds on the evidence already presented and relates to the theory versus practice conflict within the co-taught setting. In theory the special education co-teacher should be considered an equal member of the instructional team, however in practice this was not always observed. All respondents alluded to this tug-of-war and agreed that it is beneficial to have clearly defined job roles and responsibilities for both co-teachers. Overall, they agreed that the general education co-teacher is the content expert whose role is to deliver instruction and the special education co-teacher is typically the collaborative expert whose responsibility is to assist with the differentiation of instruction, implement accommodations, modify assignments, and ensure compliance with IEPs.

Within this chapter, we have already discussed themes related to having a common philosophy relating to co-teaching models; purposeful teaching and inclusivity; and relationships epitomized by trust, communication and flexibility. However, through the interviews and classroom observations there appeared to be variability in instructional practices and co-teachers' roles and responsibilities from classroom to classroom and between different co-teaching pairs. When viewing the co-teaching pairs in action, the following dimensions appeared to be important: division of labor, shared teaching, and teacher responsibilities.

Clear division of labor. The variability in co-teaching practices was apparent throughout the interviews and classroom observations. Ms. Reed alluded to this discrepancy in her interview as she reported that she allows her co-teachers “professional liberties” to divide the classroom responsibilities. Through her administrative observations she shared that she has seen a variety of models used in different co-taught classroom. Ms. Reed insisted that she has no preference on how the instruction is presented or how the workload is divided as long as “both teachers are instructional models and both teachers are involved” in classroom instruction.

Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker echoed Ms. Reed’s position about understanding the different divisions of labor in the classroom but insisted that co-teachers need to communicate their expectations. To facilitate this communication they offer professional development prior to the start of each school year. Ms. Sully was particularly sensitive to this topic because she has had negative experiences in the past in which her job was not clearly described to her co-teacher. She said that without a clearly defined role or a division of the workload, her co-teacher was unsure of how to utilize her in the classroom and ultimately treated her like an assistant. Ms. Belk shared that she has had a co-teaching situation similar to Ms. Sully’s experience. She said that her general education co-teacher was new and not familiar with co-teaching. She indicated that before they had clearly articulated their roles in the classroom or divided up the workload she was treated like a subordinate. She stated that through “courageous conversations” which outlined the division of labor “it really worked out well after a while.”

Ms. Kicker acknowledged this possibility and said that she routinely provides novice co-teachers clearly defined roles. She said it is part of her administrative responsibility to “give them cut and dry roles” if needed. She provided an example of a new co-teacher who was uncertain of his responsibility in the co-taught classroom. In order to expedite his contribution to the co-taught classroom she told him “to make sure papers are graded, papers are posted, and the communication happens with the parent.” She also shared that he “wasn’t a content expert at that time but that is what we needed in that team...he shored up her weakness area and then as he became more and more comfortable with the content, they became a true team.”

Mr. Reach and Ms. Cage reported that they use the professional development days prior to the start of the school year to discuss the division of workload with their co-teacher. Mr. Reach stated that he takes the lead and that his co-teacher “piggybacks” him. His co-teacher “goes around and reinforces and makes sure a lot of the kids that are in our classroom stay on task. I’m the lead and she is usually the secondary.” He said that this is a good method of working equally with the students and providing effective instruction. He insisted that this model benefits instruction because there is one co-teacher “whose primary goal is to present the material and another person whose primary goal is checking for understanding. It just divides the task up more” to enhance student learning. Ms. Cage echoed Mr. Reach’s statements and shared that teaching is easier when the workload is equally divided. She said that she and her co-teacher have agreed that she delivers the instruction and her co-teacher circulates the room to ensure student understanding and on-task behavior.

Ms. Creets reinforced these statements and shared that communication and the equitable division of the workload is a yearlong effort. She said that she routinely talks to her co-teacher to ensure that they are in agreement of their roles. She stated that she has “a really hard time saying, this is your job and this is my job, because I feel like the two of us need to” discuss the needs of the class. Mr. Scout’s statements support Ms. Creet’s insistence that communication and a clear division of roles need to exist for a successful co-teaching partnership. He shared that his first year he was only in charge of discipline and “was the bad guy and nobody wanted to interact with the bad guy.” This inequitable division of labor was recognized by both teachers so they “started shifting that role.” He said that his second year with the same co-teacher was “a little more of the blending together.” He reported that he did some discipline but also took a more active teaching role. Ms. Creets and Mr. Scouts’ responses are great examples of how through professional communication regarding a clear division of labor, both co-teachers are able to initially divide the classroom workload and reassess their strategy when it isn’t benefiting student learning.

Mr. Mitchell agreed with reassessing his strategy as he reported a very different division of labor when working with two different special education co-teachers. He insisted that he has a great relationship with both of his current co-teachers but shared that one co-teacher is able to equally share classroom responsibilities while the other is not. He reported that since the second co-teacher is “in more of a heavy floating situation” they are really unable to equally share responsibilities in the classroom. He said that their communication and interaction is “kind of hit or miss” and for this reason they

have agreed that she will assume a more supportive co-teaching role and allow him to provide the direct instruction.

Shared teaching. The reported directive from the administrators that participated in this study was to be active teachers in the classroom. While this directive is clear, the manner in which the co-teachers implement it in practice is ultimately up to the co-teachers. The consistent methodology discovered throughout the classroom observations and teacher interviews was that the general education co-teacher primarily delivers the content and the special education co-teacher supports this instruction. The underlying theme regarding the special education co-teachers' contribution to the classroom instruction was the need for them to be familiar with the course content.

Ms. Cage reported that content knowledge plays a large factor in determining the co-teaching model that is used in her co-taught classroom. She stated that as the general education teacher she is the “driver of the content and my co-teacher is more of the clarifier.” She is impressed with her co-teachers ability to differentiate the material and “come up with little ways to help the students learn the material.” Ms. Cage said that she “she knows all these little tricks” and recognized her co-teacher’s ability to utilize mnemonic strategies as memory tools for remembering abstract concepts. The classroom observation supported Ms. Cage’s reported role in the classroom as she was observed providing the majority of the instruction. As she was presenting notes on the Promethean board, her co-teacher was observed circulating the classroom, helping students remain on task and encouraging them to complete their outline. Ms. Cage’s co-teacher also

demonstrated a solid understanding of the curriculum as she was observed providing direct instruction when Ms. Cage was out of the classroom.

Mr. Mitchell agreed that content knowledge plays a key part in the ability for the special education co-teacher to take an active instructional role in the classroom. He shared that he has two different co-teachers this year and only one is familiar with the curriculum. He said that one of his co-teachers “volunteers to share in the teaching because of his content knowledge.” He stated that his other co-teacher assumes a more supportive role by working with the students with special needs to ensure that they receive their “accommodations that they are on task, that if they are having any special difficulties she helps address that.”

Mr. Mitchell’s statements were validated during his co-teaching observation with Mr. Daniels. During this time Mr. Daniels took the lead teaching role and Mr. Mitchell circulated the room to ensure that the students understood the lecture and completed their notes. Mr. Daniels indicated that this observation was a typical lesson as he and Mr. Mitchell alternate units. He shared that his relationship with Mr. Daniels is reciprocal as they strive for an observer to not be able to tell who is the special education teacher or general education teacher. Mr. Daniels explained that for every unit “one teacher teaches the unit and I am more of the support, and then I will switch and teach the next unit and they become the supporting teacher.” Mr. Daniels indicated that it is his normal co-teaching practice to always share the direct instruction and referenced a different co-teaching experience when he was assigned to the math department. He stated that his general education co-teacher was pregnant and unable to stand for long periods of time so

during that school year he took the lead role and she “became more of the supporting teacher because she needed to sit down.” He stated that he was only able to teach the content because he had a mathematical background, as proven by him successfully passing the Math Praxis.

Mr. Reach and Ms. Creets both shared that their co-teacher typically takes more of a supportive role in the classroom. Mr. Reach stated that he is usually the “lead but then [co-teacher] is able to piggyback on some points.” He also shared that it is his goal to make sure that every student is engaged in learning. He said that he and his co-teacher are proactive about student involvement “so they feel like they’re caught up and they don’t feel different. I think if you walked in the class you wouldn’t really be able to identify who is a ‘different’ kid.”

Ms. Creets echoed Mr. Reach’s statement about having the special education co-teacher “piggyback” her instruction. She reported that her co-teacher provides valuable and real-world connections to the curriculum as he is an avid reader and is able to reference current articles from the Washington Post. She said, “He’ll pull out some article that has to do with something [we are teaching]; he’ll mention it, and I’m like Oh and it will catch me off guard. It’s very cool for the kids!” Mr. Reach agreed that his co-teacher provides a valuable service to the classroom through her reinforcing the material. He stated that this is especially important due to the focus on standardized testing because the tests require the curriculum to be “locked and loaded in terms of what you have to do; and what we try to do is figure out, what’s the best vehicle for us to get the kids to do what they need to do.” Mr. Reach’s and Ms. Creet’s statements were confirmed during

the observation as both were observed providing the content instruction in the classroom while their special education co-teacher supported student learning.

Ms. Safe acknowledged that she is the content expert but insisted that her special education co-teacher of nine years “really splits the role as teacher.” She stated that since Biology is a lab oriented subject they both actively work with the students. She said that they both “float around to all the kids during a lab...it seems like we model each other.” She goes on to say that her co-teacher is an asset to the classroom because she “never sits at her desk; if I am up doing something with the kids, she is walking around” and supporting student learning. Ms. Safe’s report of equitable and shared teaching was demonstrated during the classroom observation as both co-teachers were actively engaged in teaching through a variety of co-teaching models that included both co-teachers leading instruction.

Teacher responsibilities. The consensus between the respondents is that both co-teachers are actively involved in the instruction within the co-taught classroom. While this has proven to be true during all six of the classroom observations, throughout the interviews each co-teacher admitted to having a specific teacher-related responsibility due to their job role. Interestingly, other than presenting the majority of the content and completing most of the subsequent grading, the general education teachers reported that the special education co-teachers are equally involved or sometimes even more involved in other classroom responsibilities. In fact, Ms. Creets reported that her co-teacher “does everything that I do.” She shared that this includes grading, discipline, classroom expectations and housekeeping issues, direct teaching, and contacting parents.

Although not all of the general education co-teachers reported that their co-teacher “does everything,” they all agreed that the special education co-teacher takes the lead for all special education related issues that include paperwork and ensuring compliance with the IEPs. Ms. Mark reported that her co-teacher “is there to provide support for students that might have IEPs” and to ensure that they receive their accommodations and modifications in compliance with those IEPs. Ms. Mark admitted that she is not very familiar with the special education process nor has she really considered the goals or objectives within the IEPs while planning her instruction. She shared, “I haven’t done it yet. I haven’t been called for, like when we have to do a review, an IEP review; I haven’t had that yet so I haven’t had to address it.” She went on to share that she has access to all IEPs and perused them but “I haven’t assessed it from a goals standpoint.”

Ms. Time reported that it is her responsibility as the special education teacher to focus on the goals and track student progress in compliance with their IEPs. She said, “That’s something I do, just because I am more aware of what’s on the IEP. Obviously he has access to it, but I am just more familiar with the goals and the IEP itself.” She also shared that she is always the one to communicate with parents of students with disabilities. Ms. Belk agreed with Ms. Time and shared that she supports classroom instruction but knows that her specific purpose for being in the co-taught classroom is to service the students with disabilities. This service includes providing accommodations, documenting services and progress towards goals, collecting data, and communicating with parents. She said, “When it comes to students with special needs, I will contact the

parents, I do all the documentation and all the data collection; and then we will discuss if we see some issue, but mostly I will do that.” Mr. Scouts echoed Ms. Belk’s insistence that she is responsible for the students with disabilities. He said that the only thing that “I strictly keep to myself is the IEP process...tracking the students’ IEP accommodations and goals. I will let [co-teacher] know what I’m tracking or what needs to be done, but I am the one that takes responsibility for that.”

Mr. Daniels repeatedly stated during his interview that he strives to be an equal educator in the co-taught classroom and enjoys alternating teaching the units. In addition to the planning and content knowledge required for this self-imposed role, he reported that he is primarily responsible for the success of the students with disabilities within his co-taught classroom. He indicated that he has a system of charting goals and accommodations at the beginning of the year so that he can keep track of his responsibilities as the special education co-teacher. He also said, “So, no matter what, if I am teaching or the other teacher is teaching, I take the role on of the kids with IEPs to make sure they get study guides, copies of notes and everything throughout the year.”

In summary respondents indicated that the special education co-teacher was an equal instructional member, however in practice this was not always observed. While they espouse openness of communication and a participative approach to their classroom organization, what they actually do may be very different.

Administrative support. The final theme that emerged from the data was the need for administrators to support co-teaching practices. The subcategories that presented

within this theme were: expectations for co-teaching, evaluation process, master scheduling, pairing of teachers, and professional development.

Expectations for co-teaching. The administrators in this study all agreed that the co-teaching instructional model is a valuable tool for meeting the educational needs of students with disabilities. Ms. Sully, Ms. Kicker, Mr. Tripple and Ms. Reed reported that both co-teachers are expected to be actively involved in student learning. They expect the teachers to engage in professional communication and agree on a division of labor that works for their partnership. The administrators anticipate their roles as being a source of support for their co-teaching pairs.

Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker reported that they routinely ask themselves, “How can the co-teaching model help students access the curriculum?” To ensure that this question is fully answered with effective instruction, they feel that there must be clear expectations from all administrators regarding the co-teaching model.

First, Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker insisted that the entire administrative team must support co-teaching practices and be available to assist co-teachers in order for it to be fully accepted and implemented throughout the school. Ms. Sully stated,

If you do not have an administration, and I’m talking principal, APs, everybody and department chairs that believe in the philosophy of co-teaching and inclusion and special education, I would say it’s not going to work. It is almost impossible to keep it going, because you don’t have that support. If up here is not supporting it then what happens is, down here they’re not supporting it either; you know general ed teachers, well, they don’t care about us, so why should I?

Ms. Reed echoed Ms. Sully's position and stated that she is an advocate for special education and adamantly supports her co-teachers. While she insists that both co-teachers are "instructional models" and expects them to be "involved with planning...involved with the assessment...involved with providing the students with the necessary accommodations," she has an open-door policy to support their professional needs. Mr. Tripple agreed with Ms. Reed's open door policy and added that he is never in his office as he chooses to be out in the school completing walk-through evaluations to assess and support his teachers. Mr. Tripple's support of his co-teachers was validated during an interview with Ms. Creets who reported that her administrative team was very helpful when she was having difficulties with her current co-teacher. She shared that she would seek out their input and through their classroom observations, they were able to identify problem areas and make suggestions for improvement. She reported that this style of management was very beneficial because her administrators now "don't get involved that much" since she and her co-teacher have made so much progress.

Ms. Belk also shared that she appreciates the clear expectations from her administrator. She said that when issues arise she is very comfortable seeking out assistance from her administrators. She shared that they "come in without these strong arms and they say, 'how can we make this better or what can we do to make this work?'"

Interestingly, many respondents disagreed with Ms. Creets and Ms. Belk and shared that they don't know the administration's expectations for co-teaching practices. Ms. Taylor reported that she is a veteran co-teacher and stated, "Since I've been here for 14 years, there hasn't been a clear definition of what the expectations are for co-

teaching.” Ms. Mark also shared throughout her interview that she does not completely understand the co-teaching paradigm and said that “it has been ill-defined for me.” Later in the interview she stated that she does not even know what role administration is supposed to play in regards to the co-teaching model. Ms. Cage would likely agree with Ms. Mark regarding the presence of administration in her co-taught classroom. She reported that she rarely sees anyone from the administrative team in her classroom but attributes this to her co-teaching reputation. She said that since she and her co-teacher “mesh so well, we’re not the people they worry about...they leave us alone.” Ms. Time also shared that her administrators leave her alone but did not specify whether that was a good or bad sign.

Ms. Safe agreed with Ms. Time and Ms. Cage as she struggled to identify the role administration plays in co-teaching practices. She reported that she sees the administrators if she needs something or if she is in the evaluation cycle. She stated, “I don’t know. I know who the administrator is for special ed and she has a very open door policy; if I had a question, I’m sure she would answer it.” Mr. Mitchell agreed with Ms. Cage and stated that his administrators are not micromanagers. He knows that they are available if needed, but doesn’t routinely see them otherwise.

Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker insisted that there must be an inclusive focus for both students and teachers within the school community provided by the school’s administration. They shared that all students are included and accepted into their school community. Ms. Kicker stated that “I guess you would call us the most inclusive school.” Ms. Sully interjected and said, “Our model is inclusion for everyone...all students and all

adults in the building are very familiar with the special education community.” She goes on to provide examples of how general education students accept students with disabilities in the hallway by either ignoring behavioral issues or offering assistance when needed.

All administrative respondents reported that they also want the special education teacher to feel included within the content area in which they co-teach. Ms. Reed indicated that she makes the teachers feel more included by ensuring common content planning. This was confirmed by co-teachers at her school as they reported that they plan with their co-teacher and also share a workroom with their content area. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker also indicated that their co-teachers belong to two different departments, the special education department and the content in which they co-teach.

Additionally, it was the expectation that co-teaching focuses on supporting the educational needs of all students enrolled in the co-taught classroom, including kids without disabilities. In his interview Mr. Tripple reported, “I don’t feel its providing support to the special education student, but it’s providing support to all the students in the class.” This position is reiterated by Ms. Reed whose expectation for both teachers is to equally educate all students. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker expanded on Mr. Tripple and Ms. Reed’s statements and shared they rely on the co-teaching model for supporting all students in their building. Ms. Kicker stated, “I always rely on a co-teaching model for a lot of my child study students who need support or any kid who might need support.” She admits that there may be some children that would not benefit from the co-teaching

model but says overall she believes that the vision of co-teaching is focused on “supporting every student in the building.”

The importance of expectations related to co-teaching was emphasized by Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker who insisted that they always ask about a candidate’s teaching philosophy during the interview process before they hire a teacher. They explained that they want to assess the prospective hire’s willingness to embrace an inclusive school model. Ms. Kicker reported that they always ask about co-teaching experience and inform all potential candidates that “at any given time anybody can co-teach. We find out coming in what their philosophy is related to that or their experience because that’s one of the qualifying things in determining who we hire as new staff.”

In summary, the respondents presented varying perceptions of the expectations that are set by their administrators. This lack of clear expectations allows for uncertainty regarding their professional performance and implementation of the co-teaching model. While some respondents shared that the lack of an administrative presence is a positive sign, it was very interesting that Ms. Time did not comment either way. Additionally, these teachers were selected as effective co-teachers to participate in this research study and yet they were unclear about their administrator’s expectations regarding the implementation of the co-taught model.

Evaluation Process. Despite the apparent import of administrative support and the promotion of a school climate that values co-teaching, the general consensus of the respondents was that there is no formal evaluation process for co-teachers. In fact, Ms. Sully stated, “there’s an unfairness to the evaluation that I always try to balance when I

look at them.” She shared that this can be problematic because while she refers to the co-teaching evaluation sheets that her school has created, she insisted that they do not align with the evaluation criteria required by the county. Ms. Sully reported that her concerns are specific for special education teachers as there aren’t categories for case management and co-teaching responsibilities and that she has to generally address these additional duties under the headings of professionalism or professional knowledge. The special education participants also acknowledged that there is no specific evaluation process that addresses the fluidity of their professional responsibilities. A review of the teacher evaluation forms utilized by the county validated their statements and concerns regarding the lack of alignment on co-teaching practices as there were not any references to co-teaching on the forms.

Mr. Scouts reported that he does not even think he is evaluated for his co-teaching practices and said, “We are observed just like when we’re observed for our self-contained classes.” Mr. Daniels and Ms. Taylor supported Mr. Scout’s statements and both reported that they are evaluated in a manner similar to the general education teacher. Ms. Taylor said that she thinks the expectation for her evaluation is to be presenting the lesson, assisting students, and be familiar with the curriculum. She said, “One thing a couple of the teachers have said, well, I got dinged on not participating in the presentation of the lessons that day.” She added that administration should consider the variability of the special education teachers’ responsibilities and said, “I think that if it’s equally shared every day, the lesson plans and the implementations and what’s going on in the classroom; I think that’s what you’re evaluated on.”

Ms. Sully also expressed concern that co-teachers are not observed from the perspective of a co-teaching partnership but instead the co-teachers are evaluated individually. She said that “if there is a problem team, with the walkthrough process we really are alerted to it” but that this could be perceived as unfair for an individual teacher’s evaluation due to the team element of the classroom dynamic. Mr. Tripple also acknowledged that the co-teachers are evaluated separately but insisted that he includes feedback on the co-teaching observation within each teachers’ evaluation. He said, “They are not evaluated together. When we do evaluations their evaluation is separate... I will write something about what they do in the co-taught classroom that they work in.” Ms. Reed agreed with Mr. Tripple and Ms. Sully and stated that many components to the co-teaching partnership are “not tangible, that you may not be able to give a score.” Because many of the components are not concrete she instead tries to assess the “atmosphere and climate between the teachers” to include on the evaluations knowing that “that may not be specifically indicated” for specific evaluative consideration.

All general education respondents reported that there is not a formal manner of evaluation for their roles as a co-teacher when they are evaluated. Ms. Creets said that she believes that the co-teachers are evaluated separately based on their evaluation cycle. She said, “They just come in and either observe me or they will observe him. I don’t know that they have ever come in and observed us formally together to see what we do.” Ms. Safe’s response was similar to Ms. Creets as she expressed confusion about the co-teaching evaluation process. She said that during either of the co-teachers’ formal evaluation that they don’t make any changes to their lesson or job roles. She stated, “We

have never been evaluated together; it's been a separate evaluation.” Additionally, Mr. Mitchell reiterated the lack of co-teaching evaluation by stating that the observation for this dissertation was the first time he has ever had any school administrator observe his co-taught classroom. He explained that he was unaware that administrators observe or even visit co-taught classrooms for the purpose of evaluating teachers, which implies that the teachers do not receive either formative or summative feedback related to co-teaching.

In summary, the consistent report from co-teachers was that they are individually evaluated. The lack of reference to the co-teaching paradigm on the county endorsed evaluation forms supports these statement and together reveal a structural misfit to the co-teaching paradigm. Interestingly, these co-teachers are required to have a consensus of purpose and method, and to collaborate, plan, and provide instruction as a team; yet they are not evaluated for their team efforts. This directly contradicts the construct of partnership within the co-taught relationship. In fact, it is understandable why co-teachers report uncertainty regarding expectations since they receive no feedback as co-teaching teams through the formal evaluation process.

Master scheduling. All respondents agreed that administration is responsible for completing the master schedule and reported that scheduling is an important aspect to the success of the co-teaching model. Some respondents shared that common planning for co-teaching partners and the number of students with disabilities enrolled in a co-taught class are relevant components to consider when building the master schedule. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker reported that it is necessary to build the master schedule with a strong

emphasis on the needs of the students with disabilities. They said that students with disabilities typically consists of 10 to 18 percent of the student population at any given school and that “unless we start with the special ed schedule and build out from there...you can create the best teams, but what happens is something doesn’t match up and then once you lock it in, it’s very difficult to change it.” Ms. Kicker also stated that “for years we have built out from special ed and even singletons in certain AP classes” but acknowledged that “it’s hard to convince some general ed that that’s the best way...the priority has to be the kids and their schedule.”

Ms. Kicker, Ms. Sully and Ms. Reed all shared that scheduling common planning time is another critical consideration when building the master schedule. Ms. Kicker reports that approximately 90 percent of her co-teachers have a common planning time with their co-teacher. She stated that this process of common planning has been “phenomenal” and insisted that the special education co-teacher actually belongs to two departments, since they are also active members of the Cooperative Learning Teams (CLT) for the content area that they co-teach. Ms. Reed agreed that common planning time is important and said that she makes every effort for the co-teaching partners to have time built into their day to plan. She stated that, “this year we have more teachers that are special ed teachers that have common planning with their gen ed teacher counterpart so they can do cohort planning.” She also said that when the schedule does not allow for common planning that she gets creative and convinces the administrative team to forgo a special education teachers’ duty so that the co-teaching pair has time to collaborate.

Most of the teachers reported that common planning is vital to collaboration and being an active member of the co-taught lesson. Ms. Cage and Mr. Reach stated that this time allows co-teachers to join the content area CLT meeting and plan with their co-teacher. Ms. Cage shared that this is especially beneficial as all Biology teachers follow the same teaching calendar and use common assessments. Ms. Creets agreed that this process of shared planning is especially helpful for the special education co-teachers as it allows them to “keep self-contained classes on the same pace as much as possible with the non-co-taught classes.”

In addition to scheduling common planning for co-teachers, many respondents reported that the number of students with disabilities in the co-taught class impacts the success of co-teaching practices. Ms. Cage expressed concern with the inequity of students with disabilities in her co-taught classes. She shared that she has one co-taught class that has more than half of the students identified as having a disability. In fact, Ms. Creets also reported that her co-taught class consisted of 31 students total with more than half of them being students with disabilities. She shared that this co-taught class actually had a self-contained class imbedded within it. When asked about this phenomenon she said that there were scheduling limitations for “these particular [self-contained] students. They [administration] knew that they needed a self-contained class, but they felt that I could handle it; so they put them in with me and they gave us an aide.” These reported imbalances were observed through the classroom observations at two of the three schools.

Ms. Belk and Mr. Mitchell also reported scheduling limitations. Ms. Belk shared that there are many students moving from self-contained to co-taught classes and that they need to find more teachers to service the co-taught classrooms. She stated that “we may have a co-teacher in a classroom with only one or two students because they are either switching from a self-contained setting to the Honors program.” She shared that many students with disabilities have the aptitude for the advanced curriculum but may need a special education co-teacher to “help them process” the material or provide special education accommodations.

Mr. Mitchell also shared inequities within the scheduling for the special education teachers. He reported that he is unable to plan or fully co-teach with one of his co-teachers because she is in a “heavy floating” situation. He stated that she does not know the History content and actually floats amongst different content areas. He understands that this is not her fault but feels that their co-teaching relationship would improve if they had time within their schedules to plan and discuss student progress. Ms. Kicker acknowledged that sometimes special education co-teachers end up having a “hybrid” position as a result of the master schedule. She recognizes that this is not the best practice for ensuring the success of the co-taught model but insisted that administrators really try to minimize this practice.

Pairing of teachers. All participants directly or indirectly referenced a special item within administrative support that is critical: the appropriate pairing of teachers. Mr. Mitchell, Ms. Kicker, and Ms. Sully all indicated that the first component to pairing co-teachers is the willingness of the general education teacher to participate in the co-

teaching model. Mr. Mitchell specified that at his school the special education administrator casually asks all general education teachers if they would be willing to co-teach. He stated that after their willingness is assessed the administrators make their decisions regarding the pairing of teachers.

Ms. Kicker and Ms. Sully consider themselves to be “special ed whisperers” and shared that they “get that gut feeling” about a teacher who would be a good fit for the co-teaching instructional model. They reiterated that regardless of the professional development and support offered, the general education teacher must want to co-teach. They said that they don’t have time to convince someone or force this role on someone as doing so would harm student performance. They also shared that they monitor co-teaching teams for potential burnout. They recognize the stress of high stakes testing and frequently separate teams after about five years. Ms. Sully said, “For whatever reason, sometimes people are just completely burned out; five years of teaming...the stakes are so high” that teachers get tired and anxious about their professional reputation. She tells the co-teachers that she respects their continued efforts but insist that “it’s time for a change. Sometimes, those teachers will say, I don’t want a change and we say well, this is what we’re going to be doing because we recognize it and we know.”

Ms. Casey shared that she participates in the pairing of co-teachers and admitted that there is variability within the pairing process. She stated that a team reviews the schedule and “looks at the content to see if they [special education teachers] are comfortable or have any kind of certification; and then we sit down and kind of just plug it in.” Mr. Daniels agreed with Ms. Casey’s reported process but insisted that “a lot of

times changes have to be made through an administrative standpoint and sometimes you get put into a classroom that you don't have background knowledge." He stated that it is his responsibility as a special education teacher to "be as professional as possible in regard to making sure for the students, their accommodations are met; and then as far as the knowledge, just work the best that you can."

Mr. Tripple also indicated that he focuses on student needs when pairing co-teachers. He said that he assesses "best fit" and looks for someone who is "knowledgeable in that specific content and they have a background in that content they're going to be teaching." Mr. Tripple stated that pairing teachers is typically easy for him because general education teachers frequently request to teach with a specific special education teacher due to reputation or a previous good experience working together. Ms. Reed echoed Mr. Tripple's approach and shared that teachers are asked to volunteer to co-teach. She said that often teachers have previously worked together and usually request to continue co-teaching together.

However, several teachers reported that they are uncertain about the process for pairing co-teachers. A review of the schools' handbooks and website supported this uncertainty as neither data sources revealed any policies for co-teaching and/or assignment to a co-teaching pair. Ms. Belk stated that she believes that it is by subject matter and/or teacher preference but specified that this process has never been clearly defined. Ms. Time agreed that teachers are paired by subject matter but reports that she always has an "oddball" class outside of her English content area. Mr. Scouts supported Ms. Belk and Ms. Time's statements and indicated that there is an unsystematic approach

to the pairing of co-teachers. He said that when he was hired three years ago the four new special education teachers were randomly assigned to contents that had a need for a special education co-teacher. He said that out of the four new teachers, only one had a background in the area in which they were assigned. He attributed part of his struggle during his first year teaching to being assigned to an unfamiliar content area. He said that he had to work hard to teach himself the curriculum.

Professional development. A consistent theme that was reiterated throughout the interviews was the importance of professional development. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker referenced multiple professional development opportunities they offer to co-teachers in their building. They reported that these trainings start prior to the school year and require early communication between the co-teachers through the completion of a co-teacher driven divisions of labor and an expectations checklist.

Ms. Reed also reported that she offers professional development each year and encourages her co-teachers to attend trainings available within the county. She said that she has been provided inventories from workshops that require teachers recognize “this is my area of strength, this is my area of weakness, these are my pet peeves, my non-negotiables.” She then indicated that teams share this information so that they “kind of know going in.” Ms. Reed even stated that she has invited central office personnel out to her school to assist struggling co-teaching teams.

Despite the professional development offered at two of the three schools in this study, the majority of respondents reported that they would like more professional development. Mr. Reach stated that he understands the purpose for co-teaching and has a

good relationship with his co-teacher but feels that he would benefit from additional training on how to implement co-teaching. He said, “I actually would enjoy going to a seminar or a workshop...not necessarily like the one the county runs, but go to like a real one where you learn some skills and learn some traits, and pick up some stuff.” This idea is shared by Ms. Meats who repeatedly reported throughout her interview that she has had no formal training on the expectations of co-teaching practice or how to implement co-teaching into her lesson.

Ms. Safe also shared that she thinks professional development opportunities would be beneficial, especially if she could take a course with her current co-teacher. She also said that observing an exemplar co-teaching pair would further her co-teaching practice. She shared that she has never had the chance to watch another co-teaching pair and said that “watching somebody else do it that does it well would give us some ideas. I think observation of other co-teaching would be a really good learning tool for anybody that does co-teaching.” Ms. Casey would likely agree with Ms. Safe and reported that her school needs more training on the co-teaching model. She admitted to providing training for the special education teachers but reported that they have been remiss in offering professional development to the general education teachers. She also said, “We want to do something for the pairs too, to come together, to go to the workshop together and talk about their success.”

Summary of Chapter Four

The purpose of this chapter was to examine general and special education co-teachers perceptions regarding their instructional practices for students with disabilities in

their secondary co-taught classroom through interviews, classroom observations and artifact reviews. The respondents willingly participated in this study and openly shared their beliefs, experiences and perceived factors that impact co-teaching. After analyzing the results there appeared to be variability to the respondents' responses to the interview questions which highlights the complexity of this instructional model.

First, the definitions of co-teaching varied between respondents and it appeared that many participants interchanged the definition and the purpose of co-teaching. Although the majority of respondents reported that co-teaching is an instructional practice that assigns both a general and special education teacher to a shared classroom, some viewed co-teaching as an opportunity for an "educational peer" in the classroom, while others focused on providing academic support to the students enrolled in the co-taught class. Many respondents acknowledged that co-teaching was intended to support students with disabilities, but indicated that this instructional model can be used to support all students.

This position was further complicated when the special education co-teachers had varying degrees of understanding regarding their targeted audience for providing services. Specifically, Mr. Daniels and Ms. Casey proudly reported that as special education teachers they were able to enhance the instruction for all students, including students without disabilities, by utilizing specifically designed instructional strategies that are intended to target the learning needs for students with disabilities. While their desire to service and support all students is admirable, it ultimately contradicts the purpose and intended audience, as reported in the literature, for the co-teaching paradigm. The

uncertainty associated with the definition and purpose of the co-teaching paradigm is compounded when respondents share their very different experiences within this instructional model.

Additionally, the data revealed significant variability in the respondents' experiences co-teaching at the secondary level. Respondents' experience ranged from a novice special education teacher to veteran educators with more than 25 years teaching experience. Within their teaching careers all respondents reported, regardless of the length of their career, multiple different co-teaching partnerships of varying years in duration. They indicated that the quality of their professional relationship stemmed from the longevity of their pairing and their familiarity with one another. Many even made specific reference to the special education teachers' content knowledge and how this impacted their experiences working as an instructional team within the co-teaching model. The concept of the special education teacher being a content expert appears to contradict their presumed role in the shared classroom. As referenced in the literature, the role of the special education teacher is to support student with disabilities rather than provide direct instruction on the curriculum. However, this definition seems more in keeping with the self-contained classroom model; the specific roles and responsibilities of each co-teaching partner in the co-teaching environment is not at all static, which contributes to the ambiguity of this instructional model.

The ambiguity foreshadowed in the three previous sections becomes most apparent when reviewing the factors that impact co-teaching. The respondents consistently identified that shared professional philosophies, cooperative professional

relationships, agreed upon instructional practices, and administrative support are needed to be successful within the co-taught setting. However, the data shows inherent contradictions to these requirements. First, purposeful teaching and a common belief of inclusivity was at once espoused but not always present during the interviews, classroom observations or lesson plans. Although respondents agreed that there are a variety of co-teaching models available so that students with disabilities could be included in the general education setting and stated that effective and purposeful planning was imperative to student success, their espousals did not always align with what was observed in their co-taught classroom. Additionally, the selected models for co-teaching appeared to be the ones that required the least amount of purposeful planning, as referenced in the literature regarding the different co-teaching models.

Next, the idea of a collaborative co-teaching relationship resonated throughout the data. The characteristics of this relationship included effective communication, willing partnerships, trust and flexibility. These themes are interrelated and it appears that all characteristics needed to be present to some degree in order for a successful collaborative co-teaching relationship to be established and maintained. All respondents agreed that they need a good working relationship with their co-teaching partner but this requirement was not always observed in the classroom or specifically shared during the interviews. In fact, many respondents indicated that establishing a successful working relationship was very difficult and some even admitted to currently having trouble with this construct. Further, some general education teachers acknowledged their struggle to release some of the control of the classroom and appear willing to do so only when they have formed a

trusting relationship with their co-teacher. This creates a bit of a conundrum, since trust may be facilitated only when some control is released so that the special education co-teacher can demonstrate their capabilities.

A willingness to discuss and agree on instructional practices was another topic that emerged from the data. The interviews and observations revealed variability in instructional practices and co-teachers' roles and responsibilities from classroom to classroom and between different co-teaching pairs. Upon further analysis the following dimensions appeared to be important: division of labor, shared teaching, and teacher responsibilities. Interestingly, all respondents espoused that the special education co-teacher was an equal instructional member, but this was not always observed. While the majority of the respondents, including the administrators, provided the politically acceptable answer to the interview questions, their observed actions in the classroom frequently did not support their statements, at least in the small sample of observations done across schools. This phenomenon became even clearer when delving into the component of administrative support.

The four administrators who participated in this study had very different experiences working within this instructional paradigm. In fact, one administrator had never even been a co-teacher yet was tasked to lead her school's special education program and its initiatives. These significantly different experiences co-teaching coupled with lack of clear administrative expectations for the co-teaching paradigm understandably lays the foundation for teachers' uncertainty regarding the implementation of the co-teaching model. The majority of the respondents indicated that

there is a lack of an administrative presence in the co-taught classroom. While some viewed this as a positive sign, some were unsure of its meaning. Interestingly, these teachers were selected by their administrators as being effective co-teachers and yet they were unclear about their administrator's expectations regarding the implementation of the co-taught model.

The lack of clear expectations for co-teachers was further explored when the data from interviews and artifact reviews revealed an evaluation process out of sync with the expectations for co-teaching. These teachers are assigned to teach together, effectively collaborate and plan together, build trustful and communicative relationships, yet they are not given summative or formative feedback on their efforts. Time and again respondents insisted that they are individually evaluated and one even reported that in his very lengthy career has not seen an administrator in his classroom during a co-taught lesson. This statement is likely the most significant take-away from the entire study. The fact that important formal administrative structures do not "fit" well with espousals regarding the value and commitment to instruction in the co-taught classroom likely contributes to the ambiguity regarding the implementation of effective co-teaching practices. These missing critical components contribute to the variability and ambiguity of co-teaching practices and support a need for the school division to implement purposeful professional development for all professional levels to ensure best practices for this paradigm.

CHAPTER FIVE

The purpose of this study was to analyze the viewpoints of general and special education co-teachers regarding teaching students with disabilities in their secondary co-taught classroom. Three data collection tools were used: I first interviewed the supervising administrator(s) for special education and received a list of co-teaching pairs that would likely agree to participate in my study. After receiving their consent to participate, I observed each co-taught classroom and interviewed each co-teacher separately. Finally, I reviewed artifacts from each school that related to co-teaching practices in order to answer the following research questions:

What are the respondents' definitions of co-teaching?

What do the respondents believe is the purpose of co-teaching?

What have been the participants' experiences co-teaching in a secondary setting?

What factors impact co-teaching in secondary schools?

The participating schools were selected from geographic areas within a single county in Virginia. To ensure validity of the interviews, all participants reviewed their transcripts and replied that it accurately portrayed their statements for each interview question. All names of schools, places, and people are pseudonyms in order to keep the information from the participants anonymous. The preceding chapter presented the results of the study.

This chapter is composed of three primary sections. The first section focuses on my conclusions. I summarized the data from Chapter Four and analyzed the responses to

each of the four research questions relative to existing literature. The second section includes recommendations that are directly related to the research findings. I reviewed the findings and informed the reader of any unexpected themes that emerged from the data. In doing so, I reported the evidence and identified any patterns that would benefit from additional study. Lastly, I describe the implications of this research, particularly how educational leaders can apply the results of this study from the school and local level to the global paradigm of co-teaching practices.

Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the results reported in Chapter Four and connects the findings to the literature using the same organizational structure as Chapter Four as it outlines conclusions specific to each of the four research questions identified above.

Definitions of co-teaching. At a minimum, all respondents agreed with Cook and Friend (1995) who defined co-teaching as an instructional practice in which two professional educators are assigned to teach together in a shared classroom. However, respondents disagreed with the operational component of this definition. Some respondents considered co-teaching from a practitioner standpoint and stated that they have an “educational peer” for collaborative purposes, while others focused on the service component of providing academic support to students enrolled in their co-taught class. Throughout the interviews there appeared to be an overlap in their definitions of co-teaching and the purpose for its implementation. For example, many respondents acknowledged that the co-teaching paradigm was intended to support students with disabilities; however, several participants suggested that this construct is beneficial for

serving the needs of all students. This inconsistent definition aligned with the literature as Reinhiller (1996) specified that co-teaching is an instructional practice that pairs a special and general education teacher in the same classroom with the purpose of presenting instruction to all children, including students with disabilities. More recently, however, Friend (2010) stipulated that co-teaching is a service delivery option for complying with legislative requirements of providing specially designed instruction to students with disabilities. Though a subtle difference, the implications associated with the latter perspective may be quite different than the former, and may add to ambiguity associated with implementation of the co-teaching model.

The varying definitions for the co-teaching instructional model that emerged throughout this study and that is also present in the literature foreshadowed the uncertainty regarding enactment of specific aspects of this model. In fact, this ambiguity was prevalent among scholars and school administrators. For example, Reinhiller (1996) and Friend (2010) provided differing definitions of co-teaching and the intended recipients of this service. Additionally, this study included two special education administrators at one high school that admitted to using this practice for multiple purposes and recipients, including supporting students with disabilities in the general education setting. The other two special education administrators were not even referenced in this section as they did not directly define co-teaching practices and instead focused on the purpose for co-teaching. The absence of a consensus regarding an operational definition, particularly as espoused by school leaders, was noteworthy.

Purpose of co-teaching. The consistent response regarding the purpose for co-teaching was to enhance student learning. With the exception of one respondent who admitted that she did not understand the co-teaching paradigm, the participants agreed that the co-teaching model is beneficial to student performance within the general education setting. Multiple participants reported that co-teaching is an instructional strategy intended to provide academic support to students with disabilities. This position was supported through the literature as Savich (2008) indicated that the concept of bringing support to students with disabilities rather than the historical isolation model is the underlying premise for inclusive co-teaching practices and collaborative relationships between special and general education teachers. Additionally, Weiss and Brigham (2000) specified that co-teaching may be a viable service delivery option for some students with disabilities.

While most respondents agreed that co-teaching globally enriches student performance, the interviews revealed that the intended recipient of this instructional practice is unclear. Specifically, Mr. Daniels, a special education teacher, insisted that co-teaching is an instructional practice that is intended to benefit all students enrolled in the co-taught classroom. He stated that this allows all students the benefit of learning from “two teachers with two different teaching styles.” Additionally, this position is supported by Ms. Casey, another special education teacher. She reported that her expertise is in differentiating instruction and supporting the general education teacher to assist all students by “bringing different aspects out to the kids.” These findings are especially significant since even the special education teachers in this study had varying degrees of

understanding regarding their targeted audience for providing services. A functional issue regarding their uncertainty is that it allowed for the special education teachers to be inappropriately allocating their time and resources on children that are not eligible to receive this additional service. An argument could be made that the students with disabilities are not receiving the full benefit of the special education teacher's expertise as that person was working with a non-disabled student when their purpose, as governed by IEPs, is to serve and support students with disabilities.

Experiences co-teaching in the secondary setting. The data revealed that participants in this study had varying experiences. This ranged from a novice special education teacher currently on a provisional license to a veteran general education teacher with close to 30 years teaching experience in several school districts. Responses specifically related to experience teaching within the co-taught setting also exposed significant differences.

Out of the four special education administrators, two reported experience working as the special education co-teacher, one described experience as the general education co-teacher and one explained that she had no experience teaching in the co-taught setting. Specifically, one special education administrator was a veteran educator and referenced her experience observing the historical evaluation of this instructional practice. She maintained that this paradigm was initially not well received by general education teachers but stated that she has witnessed a change in acceptance and implementation of this instructional practice throughout her career. For these reasons she advocates for positive co-teaching experiences for her co-teachers.

The general education teachers also described varying levels of experience within the co-taught model and the data revealed that years of teaching experience did not necessarily drive their understanding of the co-teaching pedagogy. Mr. Mitchell, the most veteran general education teacher, expressed confusion regarding the pairing of co-teachers. In fact, five out of the six general education co-teachers reported co-teaching with multiple different partners throughout their career. While many of these teachers shared concern regarding the repeated change in their co-teaching partner and their co-teacher's knowledge of the content, they expressed familiarity and overall supported this instructional practice. In fact, only one of the general education teachers, a novice educator, stated that she had minimal experience co-teaching and did not completely understand her co-teacher's role in the classroom.

The special education teachers understandably reported the most experience within the co-taught model as it is a component of their professional role to service students with disabilities. A common theme that emerged from these interviews was the large number of co-teaching partnerships that they have had throughout their career. Several special education teachers shared that the change in co-teaching partner has required more professional effort from them as their assigned co-teacher was not always familiar with their role in the shared classroom. They reported that the repeated change in co-teacher pairs, different content assignments, and unfamiliarity with a new partner impacted their co-teaching experience.

The selection of co-teachers found within this study both contradicted and supported the literature. The participants in this study were selected by their supervising

administrators as they were identified as persons who were skilled in the practice of co-teaching. The ages of the participants varied from novice young teachers to older more experienced educators. This variance in age contradicted Hwang and Evans's (2011) statements that older and more experienced teachers tended to be more resistant to co-teaching and adapting their teaching practices to meet the needs of students with disabilities. It also contradicted Gal et al.'s (2010) report that veteran teachers, due to their seniority, feel that they should be excluded from the co-teaching model. However, the selection of the more experienced teachers did support Leatherman (2007) and Ernst and Rogers' (2009) statements that veteran teachers support co-teaching practices and report successful results co-teaching.

These varying positions found in the literature regarding the assignment of experienced teachers to co-teaching was validated in this dissertation study. First, the majority of respondents, novice and veteran alike, reported positive experiences co-teaching. Mr. Reach, a veteran teacher and coach, insisted that he enjoys co-teaching but stipulated that it is an expectation to co-teach at his school regardless of his preference to do so. Mr. Reach's statement is validated by Ms. Kicker who reported that age and veteran status are irrelevant at her high school because co-teaching is a recognized practice and all teachers are informed during the hiring process that they could be selected to co-teach at any time.

Additionally, Long, Brown, and Nagy-Rado (2007) said that selecting novice teachers to co-teach is often a poor administrative choice as the teachers' lack of experience negatively impacts their teaching practices and behavioral management skills.

This statement was supported in the study as Ms. Mark and Mr. Scouts reported a lack of experience as professional educators and/or teaching within the co-taught model.

Specifically, Ms. Mark shared that she has only been teaching for nine years and has minimal co-teaching experience. She also shared that she does not have a clear understanding of the instructional paradigm. Her inexperience was evident in her interview and classroom observation as both data collection tools revealed little appreciation for the co-teaching methodology. Further, Mr. Scouts repeatedly referenced the difficulties he experienced during his first two years teaching. He acknowledged his lack of experience teaching and his lack of content knowledge contributed to his struggles within the co-taught environment.

Factors impacting co-teaching. The data from this study revealed multiple factors that impact co-teaching. The major themes included the importance of a shared professional philosophy, the relationship between the co-teaching partners, compatible instructional practices, and administrative support. These findings are reflected in the literature as Friend and Cook (1996) suggest that presence, planning, presenting, processing, and problem solving are critical to the success of the co-teaching instructional practice.

Professional philosophy. A shared professional philosophy was another common thread that emerged from the data. This included the selection of a co-teaching model, purposeful teaching and a mutual belief in inclusivity. The literature described numerous options for delivering instruction in the co-taught setting (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995). These choices were also noted in an artifact “Collaborative Teaching and In-Class

Supports Reflection,” provided by Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker. The primary type of co-teaching observed during the classroom visits was the teach-and-assist/teach-and-observe model. During most observations, the general education teacher lead classroom instruction and the special education teacher supported on-task behavior and work completion. Parallel teaching was the second most commonly observed model of co-teaching. In two of the six classrooms the teachers circulated around the classroom providing direct and comparable instruction to groups of students. In their article, Cook and Friend (1995) supported parallel teaching and explained that it lowers the student-teacher ratio, allows for more individualized instruction, and provides a closer proximity to students due to the smaller group size. They also acknowledged that it requires purposeful planning and instruction from both co-teachers.

Purposeful planning and instruction were expectations noted by all of the administrators in this study. While they insisted that they provide co-teachers “professional liberties” regarding the division of labor, they require that both “teachers are teaching.” Unfortunately active teaching and purposeful planning were not observed in all classrooms. In fact, the variation between the observations was profound as only four out of the six classrooms involved active teaching by both co-teachers. In one classroom the general education teacher left the room twice for a total time of more than thirty minutes. In another classroom, the special education co-teacher was treated like an assistant who received orders from the general education teacher. Surprisingly, some teachers even admitted to planning during their co-taught class and this practice was actually seen during an observation. This apparently was not a novel concept as Keefe

and Moore (2004) reported that their study found many co-teachers “planning on the fly.” Furthermore, the review of lesson plans supported the concept of “planning on the fly” as the lesson plans included only brief sketches of the lesson’s objective. In actuality, when specifically asked for their written lesson plan, none of the teachers were able to provide me a detailed lesson plan that outlined the agenda or specified the co-teachers role in presenting the lesson.

The final component to a shared professional philosophy was a common belief in inclusivity. The respondents in this study consistently supported including students with disabilities in the general education setting despite their acknowledgement that inclusive practices require more effort and planning. Interestingly, the literature was inconsistent on this topic. Hwang and Evans (2011) reported that many general education teachers do not have the desire to differentiate instruction for students with disabilities. They also shared that general education teachers believe students with disabilities create problems in the classroom. This position was supported by Gal et al. (2010) who described students with disabilities as unfriendly, easily frustrated, and not performing as well as their general education peers. Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010) also shared that many teachers question whether inclusion is the best service delivery model for students with disabilities. Alternatively, Dymond et al. (2008) said that students with disabilities are welcomed into the general education classrooms by their content teachers. Their study showed that general education teachers believe in inclusivity and feel that these students should have equal access to succeed or fail in the general education setting. Blecker and

Boakes (2010) also stated that general education teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusive education.

Relationships. The professional relationship between co-teachers was a common theme that emerged from the data. All participants reported that establishing a positive professional relationship through effective communication early in the school year was a critical element to their success. While Ms. Belk and Ms. Safe referenced possible uncomfortable conversations and interactions with their co-teacher, all participants insisted that ongoing and effective communication is necessary to working collaboratively. Administrators in this study also acknowledged this requirement and some even promoted early communication through professional development. Interestingly, there did not appear to be current literature regarding the importance of a positive relationship between co-teachers. The most recent research that addressed this concept was from Lawrence and Muschaweck (2004). In their article they argued that the “we sink or swim” together attitude shared by some co-teachers is the foundation for a successful collaborative relationship for both students and co-teachers. Though not as recent as Lawrence and Muschaweck, Adams and Cressa (1993) found that many general education teachers described their relationship with the special education teachers as having them “fit hand in glove, co-equal teachers like pieces of each other, as the lessons go” (p. 30).

Interestingly, existing literature instead primarily focused on the components needed for a good working relationship between co-teachers and reported the typical roles that each co-teacher assumes within the co-teaching paradigm. For example, Otis-

Wilborn et al. (2005) found that general educators felt that they were not the teacher of students with disabilities or responsible for their academic growth due to role ambiguity. Sapon-Shevin (2007) also stated that many general education and special educators reported being territorial about their teaching functions and referred to a “my kids-your kids” viewpoint. The uncertainty, coupled with the territorial viewpoint, is likely why general and special education co-teachers had such varying perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in the shared classroom. Additionally, Austin (2001) stated that some special and general education co-teachers agree that the general educator does more in the inclusive classroom than the special education teacher and therefore understands why the special educator feels undervalued.

Willingness to participate in the co-teaching partnership was another topic that materialized in the study. Ms. Sully and Ms. Kicker reported that co-teaching should not be mandated for general education teachers as doing so impacts the co-teaching relationship and ultimately student learning. Their position was supported in the literature as Carlson (as cited in Scruggs et al., 2007) insisted that co-teaching “cannot be forced. Rather it is a way of doing things that the two teachers must choose” (p. 403). Further, Buckley (2003) and Gately and Gately (2001) stipulated that requiring a teacher to participate in co-teaching can have detrimental effects on student learning.

The respondents also stipulated that a successful co-teaching partnership requires both parties to be committed to co-teaching and be provided time to build a relationship based on trust, flexibility, and effective communication. For these reasons, many teachers reported that it is important to be paired with the same co-teacher for consecutive years.

This was supported by Walther-Thomas et al. (1996) whom stressed the importance of longevity within the co-teaching partnerships. They indicated that the prolonged relationship allows co-teachers the opportunity to become familiar with their co-teacher's instructional style and to develop a trusting professional collaborative relationship.

Instructional practices. Compatible instructional practices was another factor noted by respondents that impact co-teaching. These instructional practices were narrowed into the following subcategories: clear division of labor, shared teaching and specific responsibilities. Throughout the interviews, the administrators stressed the importance of early communication to agree on a clear division of labor within the co-taught classroom. Most respondents expressed success with these early conversations and shared that it sets the tone of clear expectations in the joint setting. Ms. Cage and Mr. Reach agreed that co-teaching is easier when the workload is equally divided. Mr. Mitchell supported their statements but insisted that this varied based on his co-teachers' content knowledge. The need for a clear division of labor is reinforced in the literature as Ignat and Clipa (2012) reported that uncertainty regarding job responsibilities leads to occupational stress and personal frustrations. Otis-Wilborn et al. (2005) also noted that role ambiguity leads general educators to report that they were not the teacher of students with disabilities or responsible for their academic growth. This response supported Jackson et al.'s (2000) insistence that co-teachers need to negotiate their roles.

Shared teaching was a topic that emerged frequently during this study. The expectation from administrators was that both co-teachers are instructional models and actively teaching. Overall, respondents agreed that content knowledge is a significant

factor to the special education teacher's ability to share in the teaching responsibilities. With the exception of Mr. Mitchell, all general education teachers stated that they are primarily responsible for the direct instruction and that the special educator supports them. Mr. Reach's report that he takes the "lead but then [co-teacher] is able to piggyback on some points" was a common response from all respondents. This practice was echoed in the literature as Austin (2001) reported that the general education teacher's expert knowledge of the content area defines their role in the classroom. Additionally, Buckley (2003) and De Stefano et al. (2001) indicated that the special education teacher needs to be more knowledgeable of the general curriculum in order to equally participate in providing classroom instruction. Murawski and Dieker (2004) insisted that the content knowledge issues are more prevalent at the secondary level as general education teachers are used to teaching in isolation and the content is very specialized.

Finally, specific responsibilities within the co-taught setting was a theme found within the instructional practices umbrella. The consensus between the respondents was that both co-teachers are actively involved in the instruction within the co-taught classroom. Ms. Creets even reported that her co-teacher "does everything that I do." While Ms. Creets's statement was not repeated by other general education teachers, every general education co-teacher agreed that the special education teacher is completely responsible for all special education related issues including paperwork, data collection and compliance with IEPs. These statements were vaguely referenced in the literature as Scruggs et al. (2007) noted that special education teacher is typically responsible for monitoring student progress, rather than present content instruction. Eccleston (2010)

also stated that the special educator is the specialist and the logical choice for the executive leader in the classroom.

Administrative support. Administrative support was another critical element to the success of co-teaching reported by the respondents in this dissertation study. Specific themes that emerged were the need for clearly defined expectations of co-teachers, formalized evaluation processes, consideration when completing the master schedule, pairing of co-teachers, and the need for professional development.

All administrators expected both co-teachers to be actively involved in student learning and support their co-teaching partners. However, the teachers' responses differed from these statements. In fact, only two of the 12 teachers interviewed reported that administration actively supported them or provided them with clear co-teaching expectations. Specifically, Ms. Taylor insisted that during her 14-year career there has never been clear definition of what the expectations are for co-teaching. She even stated that she does not even know what role administration is supposed to play in regards to the co-teaching model. Although most teachers agreed that they are not aware of co-teaching expectations, overall they reported that their administrators do not micromanage them and that they are comfortable approaching them when needed.

The lack of specificity regarding the expectations of the co-teaching instructional model and its implementation in the joint classroom was evident in the literature. Idol (2006) reported that the expectation of including students with disabilities in the co-taught setting is to integrate their learning experience, both social and academic, with their non-disabled peers. Additionally, multiple scholars reported that the primary goals

of co-teaching are to increase collaboration, encourage the use of new teaching strategies, observe colleagues in a natural setting, and improve instruction for all students (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Ecclestone, 2010; Fontana, 2005; Giangreco et al., 1995; Hwang & Evans, 2011; Jang, 2006). Unfortunately other than descriptions of the different co-teaching models, the literature was deficient in describing clear expectations and implementations of this instructional strategy. This deficit laid the groundwork for a discourse regarding the effectiveness of this instructional model.

The lack of a formalized evaluation process for co-teaching was another area of concern shared by most respondents. Some administrators acknowledged the unfairness of the evaluation process and all teachers reported that they are not evaluated for co-teaching. Holdheide, Goe, Croft, and Reschly (2010) acknowledged this unfairness and indicated that while some school officials perceived that using the same evaluation process for evaluating general and special education teachers is fair, there are additional components to each co-teacher's job responsibilities that are not appropriately captured by the streamlined evaluation system, particularly the special educator's. Further, though not directly addressed in the literature, Dymond et al. (2008) and Lowe and Brigham (2000) stated that teachers feel that their administrators are not familiar with the needs of students with disabilities and therefore are unable to provide concrete suggestions or supports to co-teachers. This reported inability for administrative support further undermines the current evaluation system as the administrators are perceived as not being able to build human capacity by effectively evaluating and "cultivating effective special educators" (Baker & Brigham, 2007, p. 122). Additionally, Scruggs et al. (2007) reported

that while there are co-taught classrooms that are supported by special education teachers found throughout schools, there have been minimal changes to instructional practices in response to co-teaching. These conclusions may help explain the absence of a different or unique formalized evaluation process as administrators may not be expecting any real differences in the co-taught setting.

Careful consideration to the needs of students with disabilities when completing the master schedule was the third subcategory that emerged from the data. All respondents reported that the administration team is responsible for finalizing the master schedule and they insisted that scheduling is one of the most important components of the co-teaching model. This is echoed in the literature as Friend et al. (2010) reported that the logistical aspects of co-teaching that includes arranging schedules, establishing common planning time, and ensuring a positive school climate regarding co-teaching practices falls to the administrative team.

Almost all participants indicated that planning time and the number of students with disabilities assigned to the co-taught class impacts the success of this instructional model. The need for shared planning resonated throughout the literature. Klingner and Vaughn (2002) reported that an allotted time for co-teachers to plan together is a necessary support needed from their administrators. Savich (2008) found that that lack of planning time negatively impacts student success. Additionally, researchers suggested that when scheduling co-taught classes, administrators should consider natural proportions. Walther-Thomas et al. (1996) recognized the unbalanced nature of co-taught

classes and recommended no more than six students out of 25 in the classroom be identified as having mild or moderate disabilities.

The pairing of co-teachers was a recurrent theme presented throughout the interviews. Administrators explained they consider the willingness to co-teach and personality traits when assigning their co-teaching partners. Specifically, Mr. Tripple stated that he looks for a “good fit.” The administrator’s positions were not supported in the literature as Austin (2001) reported that only 28% of general education teachers in his study volunteered to teach in an inclusive setting, although this finding is nearly a decade-and-a-half old. More recently, Hwang and Evans (2011) indicated that more than half of the general education teachers surveyed did not want to teach students with disabilities. Further, most teachers in this study shared that there did not appear to be purposeful pairing of co-teachers. While some teachers believed that it was based on the special educator’s content knowledge, some special education teachers reported that they are often assigned co-taught classes outside their content area.

The need for professional development was the final theme that emerged under the category of administrative support. Despite varying opportunities for professional development, most teachers reported the need for more training. Mr. Reach specifically identified the need for training on how to effectively implement co-teaching practices in the shared classroom. The need for training was reiterated throughout the literature. Shippen et al. (2005) reported that teachers are unprepared to implement this instructional practice as their undergraduate programs did not effectively teach them to work with disabled students. Cullen (2010) reported that few teachers have received the necessary

training to teach in a co-taught setting by either their colleges or school districts. Friend et al. (2010) stressed the need for professional development as they argued that co-teaching is significantly different from the traditional one teacher pedagogy. They stated that this model will not be successful without providing co-teachers specific instruction regarding pertinent knowledge and skills associated with this instructional practice.

In conclusion, findings from this study supported the variability of practice found in the research and illustrated that “it is not clear what teachers would commonly recognize as sufficient to enhance inclusive practice or even what the norms are for a general education classroom to be considered inclusion” (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010, p. 44). This unknown resulted in considerable variability regarding expectations, leading to degrees of ambiguity from general and special educators, alike. While the directive from the legislation is very clear - ensure that students with disabilities are educated effectively in order to compete with their non-disabled peers - the practice and implementation for co-teaching at the high school level is variable, even within the same school district. The legislation directs what to do but not specifically how to do it. Schools in this study and referenced in the literature implemented this instructional model, but the practice of co-teaching varied from classroom to classroom and had multiple elements that caused uncertainty from educators at all levels of the profession today.

Recommendations

In the following section, recommendations suggested by the findings of this study are offered to address improvements to the co-teaching instructional practice as well as

for future research on this topic. Specific suggestions for practitioners and researchers are as follows.

Recommendations for practitioners. The findings of this study suggested that there is an absence of clear expectations regarding the co-teaching practice and its implementation in the secondary classroom. Specifically, the data suggests the need for a shared vision regarding the definition and purpose of the co-teaching instructional model, general guidelines addressing this paradigm, additional professional development and training, and a formalized evaluation process to determine the teachers' effectiveness in the shared classroom. According to Leithwood et al. (1994) and Leithwood et al. (2004) these missing components are critical for administrators to consider when supporting teachers in the implementation of the co-teaching vision and influencing student learning.

Shared vision. The results suggested that administrators and co-teachers need a shared vision regarding the definition and purpose of the co-teaching instructional model. All respondents agreed with Cook and Friend (1995) and recognized co-teaching as an instructional paradigm that places two professional educators into a shared classroom composed of general and special education teachers. However, respondents consistently differed on the purpose and intended recipients of this model. The interview data, as well as the literature on this topic lacked specific guidance.

The perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom varied depending upon their experiences co-teaching and administrative support and expectations. It may be the case that a common district or school vision is less important

than co-teaching pairs agreeing on the purpose and focus of co-teaching, but given that educators may be paired with numerous different co-teachers, it seems likely that striving for a common definition would be beneficial. It is recommended that district and school-based educational leaders provide a clear vision regarding the co-teaching paradigm so that all teachers have a distinct understanding of the purpose and intended recipients of this instructional model. This clear vision will assist educational leaders build capacity within their co-teaching partners and ultimately strengthen this instructional model.

General guidelines. In addition to ensuring that co-teachers have a shared vision regarding the co-teaching instructional practice, the data revealed that it would be prudent for educational leaders to provide general guidelines for implementation of this instructional paradigm that included key elements such as some specificity regarding teacher roles and responsibilities, training materials and evaluations. An analysis of the interviews and artifacts revealed that some administrators attempted to provide general guidelines, but this was not found consistently throughout the school sites. Additionally, general guidelines in conjunction with shared vision may also reduce teacher turn over and burn out as according to Baker and Brigham (2007), “teachers are likely to leave the profession because they feel poorly equipped to solve the problems that they face in their classroom and also because they feel inadequately supported in dealing with the challenges of contemporary classroom instruction” (p. 118). The absence of general guidelines was further present in the literatures as multiple scholars stipulated that while legislators require school districts to improve the academic achievement for students with disabilities, they do not specify how school districts, schools and individual classroom

teachers are supposed to do it (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Reid, 2010; Zigmond & Baker, 1995). The lack of clear direction lays the foundation for a variety of interpretations (Brigham, Gustashaw, Wiley, & Brigham, 2004), and may result in inadequate administrative support processes (e.g., evaluations) or professional development.

The perceptions of general and special educators regarding the co-teaching model varied based on their experiences and administrative support. Throughout the interviews teachers consistently inferred the need for general guidelines from their administrative team regarding the implementation of co-teaching practices in the secondary co-taught classroom. They appreciated their “professional liberties” and associated variability but maintained that they would benefit from more specific guidelines for implementation. It would be beneficial if these guidelines included some specificity regarding teacher roles. For example, the need for the special education teacher to have content knowledge in order to fully support the shared classroom was repeated throughout the teacher interviews. Specifically, Mr. Daniels insisted that his knowledge of the content was necessary for him to be an effective co-teacher and shared that the county appears to be gravitating towards a model that requires the special education teacher to also be a content area expert. He even said that he has been encouraged to take the Praxis to becoming a fully endorsed teacher. Interestingly, while there appeared to be an assumed requirement for the special education teacher to have content knowledge, there was no mention of how the general education teacher would be better able to support the students with disabilities if they possessed an expertise regarding special education processes and

the implementation of specialized instruction. Therefore, it is recommended that educational leaders at the district level provide a general structure to this instructional practice with some specificity regarding teacher roles and responsibilities so that school based administrators and classroom teachers are able to consistently implement effective co-teaching strategies in the shared secondary classroom. The need for guidelines associated with training and evaluations are addressed in the subsequent sections.

Professional development and training. The findings from this study revealed that additional and purposeful professional development and training was needed. While opportunities for professional development varied based on the individual school, many respondents reported a desire for concrete strategies to implement effective co-teaching practices in the inclusive classroom. This request was addressed in the literature as several scholars found that many educators reported minimal professional development that prepared them to differentiate instruction or trained them to work with students with special needs (Cullen, 2010; Orr, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007).

The perceptions from teachers regarding the co-taught paradigm varied based on their school assignment and amount of professional development provided throughout their career. The interviews revealed significant disparity in their responses and the classroom observations exposed substantial differences in their implementation. For this reason, it is recommended that district administrators provide purposeful professional development and training to school based educators, a step that would be facilitated by first spelling out a definition and philosophy for co-teaching. It is further suggested that the training includes information regarding the different co-teaching models and

functional strategies for effectively implementing these strategies in the co-taught secondary classroom. For example, an option for professional development would be to provide secondary co-teachers the opportunity to observe and interview an exemplary secondary co-teaching team. This would not only afford teachers the opportunity to observe a well-functioning team, but professional networking and the sharing of co-teaching strategies may be a secondary effect.

Formalized evaluation process. The final component to these recommendations regarding the establishment of general protocols and procedures for the co-teaching instructional model is the need for a formalized evaluation process to determine the teachers' effectiveness in the shared classroom. In this study, the respondents consistently reported that they are not evaluated for their co-teaching practices. This finding was also present in the literature. Some scholars made references to the possibility that administrators do not know what they are specifically evaluating in the co-taught setting, and inference that connects to the absence of a clear definition and philosophy for co-teaching (Dymond et al., 2008; Lowe & Brigham, 2000). Benedict et al. (2013) insisted that there is a "critical need for evaluation models that support all teachers in fostering professional growth and are valid and reliable" (p. 61). Therefore, it is recommended that educational leaders at the district level manage the co-taught methodology and provide general guidelines regarding purpose, implementation, and evaluation to the schools within its district. This framework should also permit a degree of flexibility and "professional liberties" so that individual school administrators and their teachers are able

to manipulate the construct to align it with the needs of their individual co-taught classroom.

A possible component of a formalized co-teaching evaluation system is to implement an evaluative process that requires co-teachers to agree on a shared goal at the beginning of the school year which would be assessed throughout the year. The selection of a shared goal may lay the foundation for professional communication and cooperative teaching and drive the professional relationship. Additionally, this may make administrators reconsider their processes for pairing co-teachers as the effectiveness of the co-teaching professional relationship may have evaluative consequences.

Another possible consideration for evaluating co-teaching teams is for the school district to endorse an evaluative model that directly addresses co-teaching practices. This may include evaluative worksheets and walkthrough documents that are designed to consider the shared instruction within the co-taught classroom. Appendix C of this dissertation presents an adaptation of an observation tool from Friend's (2013) Fall Institute, which could serve as an example that could be used when evaluating a co-taught classroom. Unfortunately, while the administrators reported that the co-teaching paradigm was an important instructional strategy for meeting the individualized needs for students with disabilities, a review of artifacts that included school handbook, website, evaluation form, lesson plans, and documents related to co-teaching revealed a minimal focus on co-teaching.

In summary, there appeared to be a misalignment within the co-teaching paradigm beginning at the administrative level. For example, Leithwood et al. (1994) and

Leithwood et al. (2004) described characteristics of effective leadership as having a shared vision, providing tools for school personnel to address problems associated with implementing this vision, and building the capacity of school members to address any issues related to the shared vision. Friend and Cook (1996) supported these statements and suggested that presence, planning, presenting, processing, and problem solving are critical to the success of cooperative teaching. However, the data from this study did not reflect the fluidity of co-teaching practices from preparation and professional development to evaluation.

So from a practitioner standpoint, what do we do about it? First, there appeared to be a presence of a shared vision as the participants in this study repeatedly stated that they enjoy planning and presenting instruction with another person. They also agreed that the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities was in the general education classroom. But, the respondents reported a need for tools to process this pedagogy and problem solve issues related to co-teaching. They repeatedly expressed an interest in professional development and training that would provide them strategies to improve their co-teaching craft. They felt that they would benefit from a formalized co-teaching focused evaluation system to process and problem solve issues regarding the complexity of the co-teaching paradigm as they appeared to be genuinely interested in feedback that would improve their instructional efforts in the shared classroom.

Recommendations for future research. The findings of this study suggests that future research is needed to support this instructional paradigm. Specifically, the data revealed that educational leaders and practitioners would benefit from additional inquiry

regarding how to effectively implement the co-teaching paradigm, examples of what an effective model could look like, including the creation and testing of frameworks to assist school districts to formalize evaluations and determine teachers' effectiveness in the co-taught classroom. Administrators and co-teachers could use this information to support co-teaching practices across the school district while also bridging the gap between the legislative directive and implementation in the classroom.

Future research should replicate and extend this study in varied district settings to determine if findings are generalizable and to build a more robust knowledge base on co-teaching in the secondary setting. Studies may also be done at the elementary and middle school level to determine if the emergent themes were consistent at all levels of the public education system. This duplication may yield valuable information that could be compared to the literature base that is primary based on research at the elementary level. The results of additional research may show what progress has been made to co-teaching practices over the years. Additionally, research could be conducted to consider how the supervising administrator's experience within the co-teaching paradigm impacts co-teaching practices and student achievement. Lastly, this study could be conducted at all academic levels with the co-teaching partners interviewed together. Their responses could be compared to this study or aforementioned subsequent duplicated studies to determine if there is a difference in the findings.

Although the findings from this study may be beneficial for stakeholders to consider when supporting this instructional paradigm in the future, I must reiterate the limitations of this study. As previously stated, the primary limitations included the single

district, single state sample; diversity of participants; potential for the teachers to not respond honestly; and unintentional reporting bias. While data analysis and findings were conducted to carefully minimize these limitations wherever possible, these limitations must be considered when using the findings.

Conclusion

Identifying the problem or limitations of legislative requirements to provide specially designed instruction to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment is only the beginning. The factors that impact the success of the co-taught model as reported by the respondents provide scholars and educational leaders with information to address this complex issue during implementation of the legislatively-supported strategy. The first step to making positive gains in co-teaching practices is to conduct purposeful research in order to provide a framework and clarify subsequent expectations for the implementation of co-teaching. This should have broad guidelines with provisions to allow for professional discretion. Second, supporting structures for professional development need to be developed, an area that is inconsistent throughout the three schools included in this study, perhaps as a consequence of ambiguity related to the definition and purpose of the model. Finally, there needs to be an evaluative component to this instructional practice that provides co-teachers with constructive feedback and suggestions for bettering their co-teaching craft.

In conclusion, the instructional co-teaching paradigm and directive to educate students with disabilities alongside their non-disabled peers is a worthy goal to work towards. In theory it could be the key to establishing a more heterogeneous and accepting

community. In practice educational leaders, practitioners and scholars are still working on the specifics regarding its implementation and appropriateness for all students. While co-teaching is no longer a particularly controversial strategy, the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting through co-teaching methodologies continues to be a work in progress. Alignment of school and district philosophies and purposes of co-teaching; provision of high-quality professional development to support general and special education teaching partners; and administrative support through formative and summative evaluation suited to the growth and development of co-teaching pairs would each provide pieces of the puzzle necessary to making this strategy optimally effective to support student learning.

APPENDIX A



Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

Research Hall, 4400 University Drive, MS 8D5, Fairfax, Virginia 22030
Phone: 703-993-5445; Fax: 703-993-9590

DATE: August 12, 2013
TO: Scott Bauer
FROM: George Mason University IRB
Project Title: [497628-1] A Critical Look Into Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level
Reference:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project
ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: August 12, 2013
REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category # 2

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Office of Research Integrity & Assurance (ORIA) has determined this project is EXEMPT FROM IRB REVIEW according to federal regulations.

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

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

If you have any questions, please contact Bess Dieffenbach at 703-993-4121 or edieffen@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

Administrative Interview Protocol

Project: A Critical Look into Co-teaching at the Secondary Level

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom. To gather this data, I am interviewing general and special education teachers assigned to teach a 9th or 10th co-taught content area class. This interview will be confidential and the data will be used in my research paper. This interview will last no longer than an hour and will be audiotaped.

Administrative Interview

1. How is co-teaching used in this school?
2. What is the school's philosophy regarding co-teaching?
3. What has been your experience with co-teaching?
4. How do you select co-teaching teams?
5. How do you support co-teaching teachers and classrooms?
6. How do you evaluate co-teaching teams?
7. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that I may have overlooked?

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

A CRITICAL LOOK INTO CO-TEACHING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: This research is being conducted to examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to consent to an interview approximately 45-60 minutes in length that asks questions related to this topic.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks.

BENEFITS: There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research concerning the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The data in this study will be confidential. Participants will be given pseudo-names so that their responses remain confidential. All participant data will be kept in a password protected location (e.g., thumb drive) locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's office at George Mason University, and only the researcher will have access. Interviews with participants will be recorded and transcribed. Transcriptions of your interviews will be emailed to you for your review. Records of these transcriptions will only be seen by the transcriber, impartial coder, and the primary researcher. After analysis is complete, audio files will be erased.

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 Shanna Takacs, a doctoral student at George Mason University in the College of Education & Human Development, and Dr. Scott Bauer, Associate Professor at George Mason University in the College of Education & Human Development. Shanna Takacs may be reached at 703-785-0311 for questions or to report a research-related problem. Dr. Bauer may be reached at 703-993-3775. 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 and agree to participate in this study.

Name

Date of Signature

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Form

A CRITICAL LOOK INTO CO-TEACHING AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL

RESEARCH PROCEDURES: This research is being conducted to examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to consent to an interview approximately 45-60 minutes in length that asks questions related to this topic.

RISKS: There are no foreseeable risks.

BENEFITS: There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research concerning the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The data in this study will be confidential. Participants that agree to a confidential interview will be given pseudo-names so that their responses remain confidential. Transcriptions of your interviews will be emailed to you for your review. All participant data will be locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's office at George Mason University, and only the researcher will have access. Interviews with participants will be recorded and transcribed. Records of these transcriptions will only be seen by the transcriber, impartial coder, and the primary researcher. After analysis is complete, audio files will be erased.

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 Shanna Takacs, a doctorate student at George Mason University in the College of Education & Human Development, and Dr. Scott Bauer, Associate Professor at George Mason University in the College of Education & Human Development. Shanna Takacs may be reached at 703-783-0311 for questions or to report a research-related problem. Dr. Bauer may be reached at 703-993-3775. 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 and agree to participate in this study.

Name: _____

Date of Signature: _____

APPENDIX D

Letter to the School Principal

Dear Principal _____,

I am currently completing a research study as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University. In my study I will examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom.

I am seeking to interview the building-level supervising administrators for special education, as well as two general education and two special education teachers who have experience teaching in a co-taught classroom. It is my intent to gain background information on the school's vision for inclusive practices and co-teaching from the administrator supervising special education. During this interview I will request a list of current co-teaching teams with the intent of interviewing at least one co-teaching pair regarding their experiences co-teaching at your school.

All interviews will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length and will be audiotaped. The questions will be semi-structured with the emphasis on open-ended questions that allowed the participants to candidly voice their experiences and perspectives of the inclusive environment. The data and information I collect from my research study would be kept strictly confidential and all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Additionally, each participant will be provided the transcription of the

interview for their review and to ensure that their responses accurately reflect their perceptions of the inclusive model. If the participant does not feel that the transcription accurately reflects their views regarding inclusion, they will be asked to correct it to accurately reflect their views.

If you are interested in having your school participate in my research study, please reply to this e-mail and I will set up a separate time to meet with you to discuss more details. Thank you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,

Shanna E. Takacs

APPENDIX D

Letter to the School Principal

Dear Principal _____,

I am currently completing a research study as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of at George Mason University. In my study I will examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom.

I am seeking to interview the supervising administrator for special education, as well as two general education and two special education teachers who have experience teaching in a co-taught classroom. It is my intent to gain background information on the school's vision for inclusive practices and co-teaching from the administrator supervising special education. During this interview I will request a list of current co-teaching pairs with the intent of interviewing at least one co-teaching pair regarding their experiences co-teaching at your school.

All interviews will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length and will be audiotaped. The questions will be semi-structured with the emphasis on open-ended questions that allowed the participants to candidly voice their experiences and perspectives of the inclusive environment. The data and information I collect from my research study would be kept strictly confidential and all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Additionally, each participant will be provided the transcription of the interview for their review and to ensure that their responses accurately reflect their perceptions of the inclusive model. If the participant does not feel that the transcription accurately reflects their views regarding inclusion, they will be asked to correct it to accurately reflect their views.

If you are interested in having your school participate in my research study, please reply to this e-mail and I will set up a separate time to meet with you to discuss more details. Thank-you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,

Shanna E. Takacs

APPENDIX E

Letter to Teacher

Dear Teacher _____,

I am currently completing a research study as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at George Mason University. In my study I will examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom.

I was provided your name from the school administration as I am seeking to observe and then interview general education and special education teachers who have experience teaching in a co-taught classroom. All interviews will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length and will be audiotaped. The questions will be semi-structured with the emphasis on open-ended questions that allowed the participants to candidly voice their experiences and perspectives of the inclusive environment. The data and information I collect from my research study would be kept strictly confidential and all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Additionally, each teacher will be provided the transcription of the interview for their review and to ensure that their responses accurately reflect their perceptions of the inclusive model. If the teacher does not feel that the transcription accurately reflects their views regarding inclusion, they will be asked to correct it to accurately reflect their views.

If you are interested in participating in my research study, please reply to this e-mail. Thank you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,

Shanna E. Takacs

APPENDIX E

Letter to Teacher

Dear Teacher _____,

I am currently completing a research study as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of _____ at George Mason University. In my study I will examine the perceptions of both general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-taught classroom.

I was provided your name from the school administration as I am seeking to interview general education and special education teachers who have experience teaching in a co-taught classroom. All interviews will be approximately 45-60 minutes in length and will be audiotaped. The questions will be semi-structured with the emphasis on open-ended questions that allowed the participants to candidly voice their experiences and perspectives of the inclusive environment. The data and information I collect from my research study would be kept strictly confidential and all participants will be assigned a pseudonym. Additionally, each teacher will be provided the transcription of the interview for their review and to ensure that their responses accurately reflect their perceptions of the inclusive model. If the teacher does not feel that the transcription accurately reflects their views regarding inclusion, they will be asked to correct it to accurately reflect their views.

If you are interested in participating in my research study, please reply to this e-mail. Thank-you in advance for your time.

Respectfully,

Shanna E. Takacs

APPENDIX F

Teacher Interview Protocol

Project: A Critical Look into Co-teaching at the Secondary Level

Date: _____ Time of Interview: _____

Interviewer: _____ Interviewee: _____

Introduction: The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of general and special education teachers regarding instructional practices for students with disabilities in the secondary co-teaching classroom. To gather this data, I am interviewing general and special education teachers assigned to teach a 9th, 10th or 11th grade co-taught content area class. This interview will be confidential and the data will be used in my research paper. This interview will last no longer than an hour and will be audiotaped.

General and Special Education Teacher Interview

1. What is your educational background? Teaching experience? Current teaching assignment?
2. How would you explain the concept of co-teaching to a parent?
3. What are your experiences co-teaching?
 - a. How do you plan for co-taught instruction?
 - b. How does each co-teacher contribute to the classroom? What is your role?
 - c. Which decisions do you share? Which belong to one teacher or the other?
 - d. How much of your current load is co-taught? Same partner or not?
4. What accommodations and modification are being made so that students with disabilities can access the general curriculum?
5. How are you addressing students' IEP goals (and objectives) within co-taught lessons?
 - a. What exactly does the special education teacher do in the co-taught classroom?
6. How is the classroom different when two teachers are present compared to when only one teacher is here?
7. What factors impact co-teaching?
8. What is the process for pairing teachers to co-teach?
 - a. How many different co-teaching teams have you had in your career?
9. How are you evaluated for co-teaching?
10. What role does your administration play in co-teaching practices?
11. What are the next steps you plan to take to enrich your knowledge of co-teaching and further its implementation?
12. Is there anything else that you would like to discuss that I may have overlooked?

APPENDIX G

Co-teaching Observation Protocol (Friend, 2013)

Date: _____ Teacher: _____
Class: _____ Teacher: _____
Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Information Gathered Before Classroom Visit

Objective(s): _____

- _____ Lesson plan that explains implementation of co-teaching
- _____ Indication that lesson was jointly planned
- _____ Information (as needed) on students with disabilities in the class

Information Gathered During Classroom Visit

Amount of Evidence

1= little/no 2= small amount 3= adequate evidence 4= significant
5= extraordinary NA= Not applicable/not observed

Instructional Environment

- _____ Students with disabilities are distributed throughout the classroom rather than clustered in a single location
- _____ Furniture and other classroom equipment has been arranged to foster co-teaching (e.g., desks moved to form groups)
- _____ Students and teachers are arranged in the class so that instructional groups are separated as much as possible from each other to minimize noise and distractions (e.g., opposite sides of the room)
- _____ Teachers have positioned themselves to foster student attention and minimize distractions (e.g., back-to-back, seating instead of standing)
- _____ Classroom displays and decorations convey an inclusive belief system (e.g., student work is displayed; individuals with disabilities are part of photos)
- _____ Teachers use classroom equipment/supplies (e.g., flipcharts, furniture, smart board) to divide groups and reduce distractions

NOTES:

Co-Teaching Approaches

- _____ A specific co-teaching approach (or variation) is in use
Specify _____
- _____ Teachers and students appear accustomed to implementing the selected approach
- _____ The approach being used appears to facilitate attainment of the instructional objectives
- _____ The approach being used appears to facilitate appropriate student participation and behavior
- _____ Instructional intensity is greater than it would be if only one teacher were present

NOTES:

Differentiation

- _____ Instruction is based on principles of active student participation
- _____ Students are using a variety of materials, selected based on their learning needs
- _____ Students are using instructional technology as necessary to foster learning
- _____ Students are using assistive technology as necessary to foster learning
- _____ Appropriate accommodations are provided to students (e.g., fewer examples of work to complete, oral responses instead of written, audio access to instruction instead of sole reliance on print)
- _____ Teaching procedures are clear, structures, and responsive to student needs
- _____ The evaluation of student performance comprises a variety of techniques designed to encourage success
- _____ Evidence is noted that IEP goals (and objectives) are being directly addressed as part of classroom instruction

NOTES:

Classroom and Behavior Management

- _____ Pace of instruction is brisk
- _____ Transitions between activities occur with a minimal loss of time

- _____ Students appear to have been taught strategies
- _____ Instruction is well-organized (e.g., each teacher knows assigned roles, procedures for planned activities, routines)
- _____ Students have options for moving or standing, as needed (e.g., standing desk)
- _____ A positive behavior support system is in place and implemented consistently

NOTES:

The Professional Relationship(s)

- _____ Talk time in the classroom is appropriately equal or otherwise equitable
- _____ Teachers interact with each other in ways that further the goals of the lesson
- _____ Teachers both interact with all students for instructional purposes (e.g., asking questions, responding to questions)
- _____ Teachers both interact with all students for classroom management purposes (e.g., permission to use the restroom or go to locker; discipline)
- _____ Both teachers address classroom chores (e.g., distributing materials, getting out supplies, cleaning up)
- _____ Students interact with and respond to teachers approximately equally
- _____ Parity is evident between teachers
- _____ If paraprofessionals are present, they work under the direction of the teachers in review or other supplemental instruction (e.g., rather than initial instruction)

NOTES:

Follow-up question

How typical was this lesson compared to other lesson?

APPENDIX H

Artifact Review Protocol

School: _____

Date: _____

1. **What is this artifact?** (school and classroom websites, school handbook, teacher evaluation form, lesson plan, posted information in classroom)
2. **How does it relate to inclusive practices or co-teaching models?**

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