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A BASIC INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF CO-TEACHING PERCEPTIONS:
COLLABORATION OF GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

by

LAWRENCE JOHN WHITE

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of the Incarnate Word
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF THE INCARNATE WORD

August 2020

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I would like to first, and foremost thank God, my Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ for providing me with the self-determination to successfully complete my dissertation. It was through his love, mighty power, and grace, that I was able to stay the course, and finish. In a small still voice, I heard the Father say Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand Isaiah 41:10.

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Lawrence J. White

DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my mother, Roberta Marie White, who made sure that her children received a solid education. Mother raised six children by herself, and ensured that we attended the best of schools. Mother worked, and paid tuition for all of her children, she prepared us and knew that one day, we would have to stand up to survive on our own. Mother introduced all of her children to the Lord our God. As children she took us to church, and trained us up in the way that we should go.

To my beautiful “brown- eyes” wife, who stood by my side during this journey, and encouraged me every step of the way. She has been a positive motivator in my life, and kept me moving forward during life’s trials and tribulations. To all of my children, Tanya, Larry, Garrett and Danielle who stood by me during the struggle, always expressing support throughout the many years it has taken me to complete the process of research and the writing of this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without all mentioned. Thank you with all of my heart.

A BASIC INTERPRETIVE STUDY OF CO-TEACHING PERCEPTIONS:
COLLABORATION OF GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Lawrence John White

University of the Incarnate Word, 2020

Over the past several decades, federal legislation (IDEA, 1990, 1997, 2004; NCLB, 2002) regulated the manner in which students with special learning needs receive instruction and placed greater emphasis on their achievements. This qualitative study examined the perceptions of general education (N=6) and special education (N=6) elementary teachers about co-teaching collaboration in the inclusive classroom. Concerning individuals with academic learning disabilities, inclusion secures opportunities for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms. Teacher collaboration helps to create the best learning environment possible for all students. This study took place in a Title One district located in a southwest region of Texas. Using a basic interpretive qualitative research design approach, data were collected through one-on-one interviews with general and special education teachers. I used semi-structured interviews to obtain data on the perceptions of teachers' collaboration experiences and professional development. The results of this study disclose themes for consideration in co-teaching collaborative practices, and approaches based on the participants' perceptions.

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Chapter 1: Historical and Educational Law

Legislative mandates requiring students with academic learning disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment has increased the number of learners with academic learning disabilities with developmental needs in general education classes (Pugach & Blanton, 2009). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that special needs students be placed in the least restrictive environment with their general education peers to the maximum extent appropriate (Wright & Wright, 2012). Public Law 107-110, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 signed into law January 8, 2002, redefined the federal role in K-12 education with the goal of improving the academic achievement of all American student.

Despite their common goals, implementation of NCLB 2001, and IDEA 2004 presented many potential problems. When taken together, the mandates of each law create multiple layers of accountability, programming, and assessment for educators serving students with academic learning disabilities. The combined laws mandated reform by providing accountability measures for instruction, and assessment of students with disabilities (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). As a result of the reauthorized NCLB Act of 2002, IDEA of 2004, and increased numbers of students with academic learning disabilities being educated in the general education setting, significant challenges for teachers to meet educational standards for special needs children have occurred (Dingle, Falvey, Givner, & Haagar, 2004). This has resulted in significant changes in the classroom and teacher expectations (Smith & Leonard, 2005).

Historically, general and special education teachers have been prepared for parallel and separate roles in schools. The two fields viewed the world of education from different theoretical perspectives. A variety of social and educational forces have also influenced the traditionally dichotomous relationship between general and special education. Teachers face new expectations

for student learning and more equitable educational outcomes, instruction and assessment remain rooted in traditional approaches that are largely inequitable, culturally irrelevant, and intellectually disengaging, contributing to gaps in academic achievement across student groups (Darling-Hammond, 2010; King & Bouchard, 2011).

Education legislation impacted educational settings for students and thereby increased the demand for general education and special education teachers to form unified teaching systems (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). Given this context, the field of teaching has become more complex, as educators must work more strategically to meet the diverse learning needs of all students. The reality is that with the increasing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, special education and general education teachers have been required to work together (Pugach & Warger, 2001). One of the major challenges regarding the merger of the once separated educational delivery systems along with inclusion, is the need for general and special education teachers to work together in collaboration to develop curriculum, and instruction that are accommodating to the needs of diverse learners. In theory, collaboration between general and special education teachers is grounded in the idea that each teacher has a unique knowledge base and expertise (Cook & Friend, 2006/2009), combining both expertise areas would result in a successful process of collaboration.

General education teachers have traditionally focused on curriculum development and implementation with little attention to differentiation of material in years past where special educators have focused only on instructional modifications without much thought to the curriculum (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). A general education teacher must be a content area specialist and must provide initial instruction to all students and specifically that dictated by the school system (Ripley, 1997; Simmons et al., 2012). The special education teacher brings

assessment and adaptation specializations by adapting and developing materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each of their students (Ripley, 1997). Special education teachers must be skillful in adapting curricula, creating assessment portfolios, and providing special education students with accommodations outlined in students' individualized educational plans (Williams & Poel, 2006).

One service delivery model that may be especially useful for reducing the gap between the two systems is teacher collaboration practice. Structured collaboration is used for aligning curriculum to maximize student learning time, diagnose student problems, unify curriculum across grade levels, and provide support for struggling teachers. "In collaborative working environments, teachers have the potential to create the collective capacity for initiating and sustaining ongoing improvement in their professional practice so each student they serve can receive the highest quality of education possible" (Pugach & Johnson, 2002, p. 6).

Teacher collaboration opens doors for teachers to see each other's practices, discuss what they are doing and why they are doing it that way, and begin to participate in new strategies learned from their teammates (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Collaboration may develop insight into students' needs and reduces the burden of bearing sole responsibility for the students' academic growth (Hargreaves, 2003). In this way, teachers work interdependently, supporting and relying on each other in a manner that enables the participants to accomplish more as a group (DuFour, 2006). Horn and Little (2010) found that teachers relieved one another from blame for problems of practice while also reinforcing they were collectively responsible for student learning as well as professional development for each other. Collaboration has been recognized as an essential component of change (Fullan, 2001, 2007, 2008; Hall & Hord, 2006).

According to Fullan (2007), teachers are the most effective facilitators of change. Collaboration between general and special education teachers provides the framework for changing the way we meet the needs of all students. As Brownell et al. (2006) noted, the true value of collaborative efforts lies in the potential to foster changes in instructional practice that improve student learning outcomes. Structured collaboration time can be used for aligning curriculum to maximize student learning time, diagnose student problems, unify curriculum across grade levels, and provide support for struggling teachers. According to advocates of collaborative teaching, more general educators, special educators, and support personnel recognize that collaboration fosters a sense of shared responsibility for educating heterogeneous groups of students (Friend & Cook, 2003).

Context of the Study

History has demonstrated that educational change is difficult to realize (Tye, 2000) and legislative arts frequently fail to exact their articulated goals. Debate has emerged as to how educators can or should interpret the programming mandates of IDEA 2004 in light of the NCLB mandates for inclusion in general education, content taught by “highly qualified” teachers, and participation in large-scale, standardized assessment (Cochran-Smith 2005; Guisbond & Neill 2004; Jarrell 2005; Mooney, Denny, & Gunter 2004). Previously, teachers have worked in isolation--one teacher to a classroom. As children with academic learning disabilities entered the public schools in the 1970s, they were taught in separate classrooms with their own teachers, however there was a needed change. When enacting the above-mentioned mandatory laws, inclusion was introduced to the class environment. Inclusionary practices adhere to the least restrictive environment mandate by promoting the belief that all students with academic learning

disabilities should be fully integrated into the general education community, and that instruction should be planned to meet their individual needs (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2009).

Friend and Bursuck (2009) described three dimensions of inclusive education. First, students with academic disabilities must be placed in the same classroom as their nondisabled peers and removed only when it is necessary. Students may be removed from the classroom environment for many reasons. Removal of disruptive student from the class is necessary to restore a learning environment free from interruptions, and obstructions caused by the student's behavior. A student may also be removed from the learning environment, if current interventions, are not achieving the desired results, and it is discovered that the student requires intensified instruction in response to the students' level of academic ability.

Second, peer and teacher relationships should be nurtured and promoted within the classroom setting. Lastly, students with disabilities should be taught using the same evidenced-based curriculum used for students without disabilities but accommodated and adjusted to meet the needs of the student with an academic learning disability. Most schools are implementing inclusionary practices which have brought about teams of general education and special education teachers working collaboratively or cooperatively to combine their professional knowledge, perspectives, and skills.

The biggest change for educators is in deciding how to share the role that has traditionally been individual: to share the goals, decisions, classroom instruction, responsibility for students, assessment of student learning, problem solving, and classroom management. The teachers must begin to think of the classroom as a mutual class. Additionally, "deliberations about educational equity and student achievement, particularly those related to high ideal of school inclusion, explicitly connect standards of teachers' professionalism to expectations for

teachers and administrators to spearhead collaboration with each other and with other constituents” (Smith & Leonard, 2005, p. 269).

The school district used in this study, has six possible co-teaching models which can be implemented to include: (1) One Teach/One Observe, (2) One Teach/One Assist, (3) Station Teaching, (4) Parallel Teaching, (5) Alternative Teaching, and (6) Team Teaching. These models have been previously discussed and studied (Cook & Friend, 1995; Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Forbes & Billet, 2012; Hepner & Newman, 2010; Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Sileo, 2011). One teach/one assist is a strategy where one teacher delivers the instruction to the whole group. As the instruction is delivered, the second teacher walks about the room to offer individualized help to the students to present the need (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). One teach/one observe is a strategy where two teachers are in one classroom. As one teacher delivers instruction, the other observes the students. The observer gathers data on the students in regards to behavior, academics, and social interactions. The observer can focus on the whole group, or selected students. (Friend et al., 2010).

Tobin (2005) considers the team-teaching model as a situation in which co-educators shoulder the burden of instruction at the same time. One of the features of the team-teaching model is that teachers can change their roles according to the procession set up in the textbook lessons. These roles can also be specified in advance when each teacher knows exactly what he or she is expected to do in the class. Parallel teaching involves splitting the class into two groups with both teachers delivering instruction simultaneously (Friend & Cook, 2010). Alternative teaching involves dividing the class into a large and a small group for re-teaching and enrichment (Friend & Cook, 2010).

Station teaching is very similar to classrooms that use centers for instruction. The difference is that there are two credentialed teachers who lead the stations. The class is broken up into three groups. Two of those groups are delivered instruction by teachers. The third group works independently (Friend et al., 2010). According to the teachers interviewed, several different methods and varied model approaches are used by in the classroom environment. The most common co-teaching service delivery model observed in the district classrooms are one-teach one-assist approach. In this model of co-teaching, the general education teacher maintains all responsibility for delivering instruction whereas the special educator circulates around the room to monitor student performance. Within this study, there are currently two to three inclusion teachers assigned to each of the 13 elementary schools throughout the district. Inclusion teachers' schedules are based upon student case load and service hour requirements stated within the students' Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Statement of the Problem

Co-teaching sets out to meet the needs of all students identified with learning disabilities in general education inclusive classrooms. Due to the increase in adding students with learning disabilities into the general education setting, general education teachers are often required to differentiate their instruction for students with documented disabilities and to share their classroom with special education staff (Allison, 2012). "These classroom partnerships illustrate the potential and complexity of collaboration as contemporary special education evolves to more deliberately and effectively integrate with general education" (Friend et al., 2010, p. 11). A major source of tension between teachers that can erode their collaborative efforts often revolves around differences in philosophy or theoretical perspective regarding how students learn, and

subsequently, what instructional practices are considered best for the students (Hudson, Miller, & Butler, 2006).

Although collaboration sounds like a natural process, it requires a special skill set and is not always easy (Cook & Friend, 1995). Collaboration as a foundation of effective inclusive classrooms requires by its very nature, compromise among co-teachers, and a change in thinking, and practice. Educators must diversify their goals, assessment, and instruction to accommodate and meet the range of developmental and educational needs present in today's classrooms (Beattie, Jordan, & Algozzine, 2007; Gadberry, 2009; King, 2003). These expectations have brought new collaborative challenges for both general education and special education elementary co-teachers that teach students in inclusive classrooms. Teachers are mandated to strengthen academic expectations and accountability for students with learning disabilities, and to close the gap between high-and low-performing, and advantaged and disadvantaged students, so that no child is left behind.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perceptions of collaboration between general, and special education co-teachers in elementary school settings. The participants of this study consisted of general and special education teachers at 13 elementary schools within a south Texas school district. The results of the study allow stakeholders in elementary education to have a better understanding of factors that promote and challenge co-teaching collaboration. The research study provides stakeholders, administrators, teachers, and pre-service teachers with information regarding how to effectively develop collaborative co-teaching teams. Students will also benefit from this study because when collaboration among teachers is high, students learn more (Egodawatte, McDougall, & Stoilescu, 2011).

The following questions were used to guide the study and examine the perspectives of regular and special education teachers concerning co-teacher collaboration practices in an elementary school setting. Based on the purpose statement, this study was guided by one overarching research question with three sub questions. The research question is “What factors promote, and hinder collaboration between general, and special education teachers in elementary school settings? The sub questions are as follow: (a) What perceived skills, and training do general education, and special education teachers need to have regarding co-teaching, and to the various models of co-teaching within the diverse settings? (b) How does the relationship between the collaborators affect the transformational nature of the collaboration? (c) How do the co-teachers measure the success of their collaboration efforts?

Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by the theory of transformational learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The transformational learning theory originally developed by Jack Mezirow (1991) is described as “constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning” (p.222). Transformational learning theory provides a framework that has been described as the process of making meaning of one’s experiences. Mezirow’s theory suggested adults’ assumptions and expectations can be changed only after critical reflection and dialogue with those who can shed light on those preconceptions. Because such critical reflection and dialogue can be personal and important.

As teachers transform their understanding of pedagogy and roles as teachers, they “become more open to alternatives, as [they] root out the habits of mind [they] have acquired in the past” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004, p. 292). Conflict allows teachers to extend beyond existing

frames of reference, and creates a potential for transformational learning to occur. Creating a safe environment which fosters participation and collaboration, as well as critical reflection and receptivity to feedback, are integral components to fostering the transformative process (Baumgartner, 2001).

Transformational learning about teaching occurs when teachers critically examine their practice, and develop alternative perspectives of understanding that practice – an activity common in our current era of curricular reform that encourages teachers to question their understanding and beliefs regarding teaching and learning (Mezirow, 2000, pp. 3-4). Mezirow (1978) outlined a number of phases involved in a transformational learning process which describe people engaged in activities that might lead them to shift meaning perspectives.

The phases include sorting through the effects of shifting processes, grappling with new learning pressures, and engaging with others to integrate new meanings within existing perspectives. Although teachers “learn together by analyzing the related experiences of others to arrive at a common understanding that holds until new evidence or arguments present themselves” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 7), those who study teacher collaboration cannot fail to recognize that transformational learning will be both corporate and individual. The organization of teachers into groups of collaborative learners fosters a supportive environment with the potential to nurture adult learning (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2011). The need for collaboration, the free expression of ideas, and the goal of learning are aligned with the purposes and theory of transformative learning as it serves as the underlying theoretical premise (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008).

When using transformational learning theory as the theoretical framework in this study, teachers were able to make logical sense of the relationships of variables and factors relevant to

their work (Mezirow, 1978). In terms of pedagogical beliefs and values, transformational learning theory allows teachers to answer questions such as: What requirements are needed to increase teacher professional learning? What roles should they assume if their aim is to promote collective pedagogical change? How should teachers facilitate collaboration to engage conflict in positive ways? What specific roles should teachers assume? How might transformation differ among individual teachers? What are the best ways and for what purposes to utilize teacher collaboration?

Significance of the Study

The state of Texas mandated the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142) in 1975 to encourage the incorporation of children with special needs into the regular classroom. Upon implementation, it became the responsibility of every teacher (regular classroom and certified special education) to be knowledgeable and aware of all special education laws. The implementation of the NCLB goals called for high-level standards which are measurable for all students. There is no doubt that NCLB has provided for an increased focus on student populations that have traditionally performed at low levels (Borowski & Sneed, 2006; Guilfoyle, 2006; Haycock, 2006; Lewis, 2006).

Since the reauthorization of IDEA and the focus on access to the general curriculum, the attitudes of stakeholders have been repeatedly analyzed. Research has been conducted on educational stakeholders such as special education and general education teachers, principals, parents, paraprofessionals, and pre-service teachers (Becham & Rouse, 2011), yet very little substantial research has compared the perceptions of special education teachers and general education teachers on the effectiveness of inclusive education. By examining the perceptions of Title I elementary school teachers who teach in inclusive classrooms, the research will not only

add to the existing body of knowledge on including students with academic learning disabilities in general education classes, but also give administrators and teachers information to inform their decisions on how much work and professional development is required to improve the perceptions of co-teaching collaboration in inclusive classrooms.

Alignment with NCLB necessitates a dialogue between special and general educators on how to achieve high standards for students with academic learning disabilities while meeting their unique educational needs and providing appropriate accommodations (Egnor, 2003). The philosophy found in NCLB is a focus on high academic standards and success for all students, in all areas and subgroups which, according to Borowski and Sneed (2006), have a great potential to provide educational equity. NCLB mandated specific requirements to the United States public education system. A fundamental principle of NCLB was that all students, including students with disabilities, perform at proficiency level (on grade level) or higher. Schools not staying the course, or repeatedly not meeting the required percentage of students making Adequate Yearly Progress on statewide assessments, have been subject to corrective action.

While the federal government required such great gains for all students, including students with academic learning disabilities, teachers play an essential role in the academic success of all student. Teachers determine how to maintain the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) they have already achieved, or how to reach an AYP goal that has not been met. Keith (2004) found that the most highly qualified teachers produced the highest student achievement gains. It must also be noted that “Student learning and development do not occur without teacher learning and development” (Hargreaves, 2007, p. 37). If students with academic learning disabilities are not provided the opportunities needed to acquire maximum learning, and retention of reading, math, and science content, their scores on statewide assessments, and AYP may be affected.

As the integration of special education and general education continues to intertwine, it is important to look at the long-term effects for school district school personnel as they continue their ongoing relationships. This study is significant because it provides needed information for teacher development, and preparation in order to most effectively meet the needs of all students in inclusionary classrooms. There is very little research assessing whether the communication and collaboration are a challenge, or ways to improve collaboration between the different schools of thought.

This study will allow stakeholders in K-5 school administration to have an informed understanding of co-teaching relationship collaboration. This research study will provide information regarding how to effectively plan co-teaching teams for a productive co-teaching collaboration. When stakeholders are able to expand the knowledge of the co-teacher's collaborative relationship and teamwork, teachers may benefit and can improve their co-teaching practices in the inclusive classroom setting. Beyond solving the dispute of individual paradigms, it is important for district educators to be able to collaborate, communicate and trust each other in designing the best services for the students with learning disabilities. This study will add to the body of knowledge surrounding the inclusion of students with learning disabilities in general education classrooms. Knowledge of teacher perceptions will lead to professional development opportunities and changes that will contribute to a successful learning environment for students with academic learning disabilities.

This study document insights of the co-teachers through expression of experiences, and contribute to knowledge, theory and practices of co-teaching collaboration. This study will explore relationships among the amount of preparation and prior knowledge that educators receive in both special and general education. The gathering of data through individual

interviews and compared to relevant literature will provide strategies that may be utilized when developing or evaluating co-teaching programs. These data can assist with the enhancement of staff training, professional development programs, and school improvement plans to aid in the development of co-teaching collaboration. This study will also contribute to filling a gap in the literature by examining activities of general and special elementary teachers and by identifying and pinpointing their perspectives about co-teaching.

Role of the Researcher

Currently, I am the assistant principal at an elementary school. I hold superintendent, principal, and dual teacher certification in both general and special education. I conducted this research to explore the topic of co-teachers' perceptions of collaboration to see what would emerge from the data. I decided to conduct this study and research on this particular topic because of the previous STAAR ratings received by the students with academic needs. One of the problem statements on the district's Needs Assessment Summary and Improvement Plan indicated that special education students were not academically successful under the current systems based upon performance standards

Going into the study I had some biases, assumptions and preconceptions that GE and SE teachers respectively knew each other's job, and how to collaborate. I was educated and trained in content, specialized areas, and collaboration and took it for granted. In due course, I eventually conceptualized there was a separation of professional training for most co-teachers. Keeping these biases in the forethought, I had to ensure that he concentrated on the attitude of reflexivity which stated that "A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this

purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484).

With this in mind, I aimed to ensure the credibility of the results by reducing the influence of my personal biases and attending to the content of knowledge construction at every step of the process. I considered reflexivity to also be a positive drive, which assisted me to become more aware of what I value because it assisted me to become aware of my values, opinions, and experiences. My perspective changed after interviewing and discovering there were some gaps in the knowledge the co-teachers brought into the classroom. I am now aware that professional learning communities, professional development, and trainings are required for teachers to collaborate effectively.

Definition of Terms

The following section identifies some basic terms that were used operationally in this study.

Accommodations and modifications. Refers to supports provided to students with disabilities to meet their academic goals. Accommodations include additional time to take tests, modified grading, slower-paced instruction, and shorter assignments. Modifications include modified curriculum, small group or individualized instruction, and special instructional materials (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Collaboration. Refers to when two or more people work together towards a common goal.

People work together voluntarily; assume equal responsibility, and share decision making (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Co-teaching. Refers to a way for two professional educators to jointly deliver instruction to a diverse group of students, in a general education setting in a way that flexibility and

deliberately meets their learning needs. (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chambelain, and Shamberger, 2010). General education. Refers to the educational settings afforded to students without disabilities (Perrault, 2010).

General education teacher. Refers to a public-school teacher for grades K–12 and is responsible for the standard given curriculum within a general education classroom (Sileo, 2011).

Inclusion. Refers to the instruction of all students, with and without disabilities, in the general education classroom, unless substantial evidence is provided to show that such a placement would not be in the student’s best interest U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Individualized education plan. Refers to an individualized academic and social plan that is designed by a multidisciplinary team for a student with disabilities. It lists the student’s present level of performance and goals for the academic year (Bartlett, Etscheidt, & Weisenstein, 2007).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. Refers to a federal mandate that students with disabilities have an Individualized Education Plan with measurable goals, accommodations, and modifications to meet students’ individual and unique needs (IDEA, 2004).

Least restrictive environment. Refers to the environment in which disabled students must be educated with regular education students to the maximum extent appropriate for learning needs (IDEA, 2004).

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Refers to the federal mandate signed into law by President George W. Bush to ensure fair and equal educational opportunities for all

students. The federal mandate held schools, teachers, local educational agencies, and states accountable for meeting adequate yearly progress with the goal of ensuring all students meet proficiency level as measured by standardized tests (NCLB, 2002).

Professional development is the most common path to increasing knowledge and skills in education related to one's area of expertise with the ultimate goal of applying the new knowledge and skills to increase student learning (Eun, 2011).

Professional learning community. Refers to a collaborative, iterative process through which educators attempt to positively influence student achievement through inquiry and research (Feger & Arruda, 2008).

Special education. Refers to a service provided by teachers to students with cognitive, intellectual, emotional, or physical disabilities (Perrault, 2010).

Special education teacher. Refers to teachers who are responsible providing specially designed instruction to students who have Individualized Education Plans. These teachers are certified to provide special education instruction to students with disabilities (Sileo, 2011).

Student achievement. Refers to the result of academic gain measured by a specific variable (Jackson & Lunenburg, 2010).

Transformative learning. Refers to the transformation of the learners' meaning perspectives, frames of reference, and habits of mind (Mezirow, 2006).

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. This study was limited in several ways. First, by the nature of qualitative research, the data collected describes the perceptions of participants of the study and is limited to qualitative data. Next, it was the assumption that all participants in this study interpreted the

interview questions in the manner in which they were intended. Lastly, it was an assumption that the participants would reveal their true understanding of co-teach collaboration. True revelations may not have been the case, and therefore, the results should be interpreted with caution.

Delimitations. The delimitations of this study are the collaborative experiences of general and special education teachers. The relatively number of participants from the district is too small to make inferences about collaboration experiences of general and special education teachers in other school districts in the United States Another delimitation is that there was one male included in the study, this can affect the generalizability of the study, where it would possibly make a difference to see if there was a balance between the genders. A wider scope of study may reveal more information.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of co-teachers collaboration. The literature for this study begins with an overview of the legislation which serve as a backdrop to understanding the foundation of the field of education and its ever-changing nature. The literature reviews the timeline of events that have driven the gradual and progressive evolution of education. The literature reviews the achieved national goals for access to education for all children with disabilities, and a number of special issues and special populations that have required federal attention. The literature views the benefits and challenges in transformative learning situations in context. Finally, the literature concludes with what was previously seen as a privilege is now a legal right, and the basic requirements of the original law remain the hallmarks of education as we know it today

History of Educating Students With Disabilities

To completely comprehend this research topic, one must understand the history of education and the legislative mandates that have formed the current conceptual model of serving students with academic learning disabilities. The exceptional education also referred to as special education framework is grounded in case law and legislative mandates that shape exceptional education programming and services today. The concept of including students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom began as a civil rights movement, based on the rationale that all children—disabled and non-disabled—should have access to the same academic and social opportunities within the school setting (Sailor, 2002).

Federal legislative mandating the education of students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom has evolved over the years. This evolution has placed a great deal of prominence on the educating of students with learning disabilities, and their right to access the

general education curriculum. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was a cornerstone and brought education into the forefront of the national assault on poverty and represented a landmark commitment to equal access to quality education (Jeffrey, 1978). The various subdivisions of the ESEA are designated as titles, followed by a Roman numeral designation (Jeffrey, 1978). Title I, a provision of the ESEA, was created by the United States Department of Education to distribute funding to schools and school districts with a high percentage of students from low-income families. Title I has received the most attention from policy and lawmakers, as it accounts for five-sixths of the total funds authorized by the ESEA. The use of pullout classes for Title I service delivery began in the early years of the ESEA. This, in part, was due to the strong emphasis placed on maintaining greater fiscal accountability. Separating Title I classes from general education classes helped to ensure that Title I money was being used as originally intended--to provide supplementary instructional services for culturally and educationally disadvantaged students (Jennings, 2000; McLaughlin & Verstegen, 1998; Verstegen, 1996). As a result, fragmentation of instruction, conflicting instructional methodologies, and overlap of content occurred. In an effort to reduce fragmented, pullout programs, collaborative, in-class models of instruction were recommended.

The government has reauthorized the act every five years since its enactment. In the course of these reauthorizations, a variety of revisions and amendments have been introduced. The ESEA of 1965 was reauthorized as the "Improving America's Schools Act of 1994. That legislation, in part, presented the challenge for school districts to reduce the number of pullout Title I classrooms. This challenge is retained in the reauthorization of the ESEA, the "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" (NCLB). The two most recent authorizations of ESEA are the

Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 and 2001's NCLB. Both iterations of ESEA focus significant attention on teacher quality and professional development.

Education for all handicapped children act. In 1975, the Education Reform Congress passed Public Law 94-142 (P. L. 94-142), also called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Essex, 2008, p. 132). Lawmakers were overly concerned that there were more than eight million children in the United States with disabilities that were not being provided the appropriate educational services that allowed them to receive a free and appropriate education (Essex, 2008, p. 132). This law was introduced to ensure that special needs students would receive the same education as students without disabilities. The idea of giving these students additional supports and accommodations also furthered the fact that they could be successful in the general education classroom, when given appropriate support and assistance.

Individuals with disabilities education act. In 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Act was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This was the first federal law mandating free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003, p. 26). IDEA has been reauthorized and amended four times since it was first passed into law in 1975. The current version is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Under this mandate, schools were to determine those supports necessary to ensure that students with disabilities were educated in the general education setting to the greatest extent possible (Solis et al., 2012). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 gave way to higher standards for educators and in regard to meeting the needs of special education students. According to federal law, students who are identified and found eligible for special education services under IDEA fall into one or more of 13 disability categories. These categories include autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment,

learning disability, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment including blindness. For the purpose of this study, students within the co-teaching classroom fall under the category of learning disabilities. IDEA mandates that students with special needs be granted access to the general education curriculum and programs in the least restrictive environment with age appropriate peers. (IDEA, 2004). For most students, this is the inclusion setting in the general education classroom.

The popularity of inclusion became widespread in the 1980s as school administrators were looking for a way to carry out Public Law 94-142. This increase in acceptance came from teachers believing that special education and related services could be offered in general education classrooms through partnerships that crossed the traditional teaching boundaries (Friend et al., 2010). Weintraub and Kovshi (2004) noted that P. L. 94-142 required special educators and related service providers work together in the implementation of each American student's individualized education plan. When an IEP is developed for a student with a disability, the IEP team (including teachers, administrators, parents, others who provide related services and the student when appropriate) determines the least restrictive environment for that student. The least restrictive environment is the setting or placement closest to the general education classroom to the maximum extent appropriate where the student can make satisfactory educational progress in his or her individualized program (Heward, 2013; Yell, 2012). In 2001, Congress adopted NCLB, which required all students, including students with disabilities, be given access to the general curriculum, be taught by highly qualified teachers, and be included in accountability testing (Solis et al., 2012).

No child left behind act. NCLB (2002) legislation had a significant impact on the level of achievement expected for all students. NCLB (2002) reinforced the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based reform as these students were identified as a subgroup to be measured for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in grades 3 through 8 as a part of the state accountability system. The focus of NCLB on accountability created a high stakes educational environment. Although accountability is an important goal, guidance on how schools go about building the capacity to effectively accomplish the goals set in NCLB was not part of the legislation. The use of pullout classes for Title I service delivery began in the early years of the ESEA. This, in part, was due to the strong emphasis placed on maintaining greater fiscal accountability. Separating Title I classes from general education classes helped to ensure Title I money was being used as originally intended--to provide supplementary instructional services for culturally and educationally disadvantaged students (Jennings, 2000; McLaughlin & Verstege, 1998; Verstege, 1996). As a result, fragmentation of instruction, conflicting instructional methodologies, and overlap of content may have occurred. In an effort to reduce fragmented, pullout programs, collaborative, in-class models of instruction are recommended. According to Thousand and Villa (1995), many schools have restructured to integrate special education and other remedial services into the regular classroom. This effort has increased educator's flexibility to use team teaching, cooperative learning and integrated curriculum approaches (p. 291). These models have collaboration as their unifying component.

As NCLB has become a catapult for reform in the field of education, the impact on the field of special education has been extensive. Title I of NCLB holds special education students and teachers to new and higher expectations, which equates to a significant addition to the value

of education for these students. These new expectations bring previously uncharted possibilities for students with disabilities (Hager & Slocum 2002).

Every student succeeds act. The latest reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law December 10, 2015, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is in many ways a U-turn from its predecessor, NCLB. Under the ESSA states get significant leeway in a wide range of areas, with the U.S. Department of Education seeing its hands-on role in accountability scaled back considerably. Under ESSA, states and districts will still have to transform their lowest-performing schools, but will be able to choose their own interventions, as long as the strategies have some evidence to back them up. States must identify schools that perform among the bottom 5% on their accountability systems and where fewer than 67% of the students graduate from high school. They must make those designations, based on both academic and nonacademic factors, at least every three years. States also must identify schools where students in racial, language, disability, and other subgroups perform at the level of students in the state's worst-performing schools. Intervention efforts will remain focused at the local level, though, unless those subgroups fail to improve after several years (Burnette 2016).

The Every Student Succeeds Act may be the law of the land, but there are plenty of pieces of the latest edition that will need to be clarified through regulation (Klein, 2016). Under ESSA, states will no longer be able to rely solely on so-called "super subgroups" which allow them to combine a variety of different groups of students for accountability purposes. States liked the flexibility of super subgroups, but civil rights advocates said they masked achievement gaps (Klein, 2016).

Changes in Education

Educational systems are affected by legislation and each school must adapt to comply with legal requirements as laws are changed and updated. On the contrary, with a change in legislation there is a corresponding change in the classroom. The dynamics of the classroom operation is continuously evolving for the betterment of the teaching, learning and achievement of all students. Each classroom of today includes students from special populations. Classroom teachers are challenged to comprehend the benefits, and to overcome the associated challenges. Teachers are to keep pace with the mandated legislative changes that take place. These changes are to be accepted and incorporated, which directly contributes to overall student achievement in the classroom.

Inclusion. Current United States legislative mandates related to the education of individuals with disabilities have resulted in more inclusive and diverse classrooms that must be staffed by special and general educators who are able to demonstrate competency and expertise immediately upon completion of their initial teacher education program (Berry, 2010; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). Inclusive practices are offered in general education classes and becoming widespread day by day. Inclusion is defined as an educational approach providing the students with special needs education in the regular classrooms, which are the least restrictive educational environment for them. Inclusion provides the necessary support services in the same classroom with other students of the same age on a full time or part time (Gulliford & Upton, 1992; Miles & Singal, 2010; Osborne & Dimattia, 1994)

The idea of inclusion seeks to ensure a place for students with disabilities in the general curriculum, while collaboration advances inclusion and enhances the likelihood of its success (Ainscow, 2005; Keen, 2007). Inclusion is a movement that is based on a broad concept of

creating what is called the least restrictive environment, the purpose of which is to integrate services and to provide all forms of education in general education settings (Osborne & DiMattia, 1994). Although it has numerous definitions, the word inclusion is not present in IDEA. As a result, schools, districts, advocacy groups, and educational researchers use a variety of definitions. For example, Katzman (2007) defined inclusion as “an educational philosophy that calls for schools to educate all learners—including students with disabilities and other special needs—together in high-quality, age-appropriate general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools” (p. 129). Osgood (2005) described inclusion in the real world as “more of an ideal than an idea, one to which schools should continually aspire but also one that remains unobtainable in the foreseeable future” (p. 200).

Inclusive schooling, according to Slee (2007) is not the adaptation or refinement of special education. It is a fundamental rejection of special education’s and regular education’s claims to be inclusive. Inclusion demands that we address the politics of exclusion and representation” (p. 164). For purposes of this study, inclusive education has been defined as an educational setting in which students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, participate in school activities alongside students without disabilities, and attend their neighborhood school (Bryant, Smith, & Bryant, 2008, p. 605).

Inclusion can benefit the student with a disability as well as typical peers in the classroom. Halvorsen and Neary (2009) emphasized the instruction of special needs students must embrace human diversity as an expected and valued characteristic among students. To achieve this goal, a growing number of schools are practicing “inclusion” education in which students with disabilities are placed in a “regular” classroom and participate in all school activities. Inclusion has been successful when it concentrates on several key factors: ongoing

professional development for regular and special education teachers, knowledgeable teachers about special education terms, law, and issues; positive teacher attitudes toward inclusion; effective collaborations between special and regular educators; individualized support for students with disabilities; and instruction that recognizes each student's chronological age, personal preferences, and individual potential structured around a curriculum to accommodate learning styles of a diverse student population.

Inclusion has grown to consider the culture of the whole school, and of the whole community (Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011). How 'inclusion' is interpreted and defined determines the depth of quality that can be achieved in efforts to build more inclusive schools (McMaster, 2012). Creating an inclusive education system, then, would necessitate the identification and removal of barriers. This activity, carried out at the level of school culture, would allow for the cultural transformation that Kugelmass (2006) sees as necessary for inclusive change to be sustained. Carrington, Deppeler, and Moss (2010) argue that schools need to reflect on their values and beliefs in order to develop inclusive cultures.

Benefits and challenges of inclusion. Research has demonstrated better academic outcomes for a wide range of students in inclusive classrooms (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013), including those students with learning disabilities (Salend & Duhaney, 2007) as well as students with more significant support needs (Hudson, Browder, & Wood, 2013). Effective inclusive practices occur when general educators and other education team members collaboratively design, implement, and evaluate the outcomes of instruction (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010). Indeed, Schalock et al. (2012) argued that inclusion "works best when educational teams develop plans that incorporate the supports needed to complement students' desired life experiences, goals, and activities" (p. 30). Everybody benefits when teachers work

together to achieve a common vision. They can change their instructional practices in important ways. “In collaborative working environments, teachers have the potential to create the collective capacity for initiating and sustaining ongoing improvement in their professional practice so each student they serve can receive the highest quality of education possible” (Pugach & Johnson, 2002, p. 6). Inclusion has resulted in greater communication skills, greater social competence, and greater developmental skills for all special education students who have been a part of the inclusive setting (Bennett, DeLuca, & Bruns, 1997). Although the benefit to implementing inclusion may be great, there are challenges to inclusion, as well.

Hence, teachers generally face serious difficulties regarding inclusion, and inclusion practices may not yield the desired outcomes (Batu, 2010). Teachers are also expected to assess children’s development, prepare an effective learning environment, engage all children in learning activities, use different instructional methods and strategies, and work with families (Bruns & Mogharberran, 2009). Despite a growing movement toward the model of educational inclusion, a number of vocal opponents including parents, teachers and educational scholars, continue to resist the change.

As this inclusive trend continues, more students with disabilities will be receiving their academic instruction in general education environments (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007). Inclusion is intended to provide specialized instruction to students with disabilities in the general education setting (Friend et al., 2010). Within the inclusion setting, a co-teaching arrangement is often established so that a special education teacher works along with the general education teacher to provide needed supports, precluding the need for students with disabilities to leave the classroom to receive specialized assistance.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching is defined as ‘two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended group of students in a single physical space’ (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2) and thus comprises four basic characteristics: two qualified teachers (i.e., a general education teacher and a special education teacher), teaching that is dispensed by both teachers, a heterogeneous group of students (i.e., both general education and special needs students) and a shared setting (i.e., classroom) (Friend & Cook, 2007). Co-teaching between special and general educators is now a common approach to effective inclusion in K-12 schools. Common to the many definitions of co-teaching is an expectation that general and special education teachers work collaboratively within the general education setting to teach students with disabilities and those at risk for academic difficulty (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Sileo, 2011). Co-teaching, a specific form of collaboration, has been described as a particularly promising approach for blending the expertise of school-based stakeholders (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Friend & Cook, 2010).

The intuitive appeal of co-teaching as a means for improving the educational outcomes of students with disabilities cannot be denied. The purpose of co-teaching is to make it possible for special education students to have access to the general curriculum, while also benefiting from specialized instructional strategies (Friend et al., 2010). Co-teaching has been used successively as a model to guide the work of general education and special education teachers in inclusive classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2006; Murawski, 2010). In a co-taught classroom, the role of teacher quality has a significant impact on student achievement than do other factors such as class make-up, background of student, class size, and class composition (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008, p. 12).

Within an inclusive classroom, six different models of co-teaching can be applied to include: one teach, one observe. When utilizing this particular model, the GE teacher of record teach from a lesson plan, while the supporting SE teacher rotate throughout the classroom and provides inconspicuous support to develop the students skills, on a as needed basis. When using the station teaching model, the students and the content is divided into small groups. The student periodically rotate through the different stations at preassigned designated times. When the teachers decide in advance to use parallel teaching; the students are split into two smaller group sizes, according to their learning profiles. The instruction is differentiated and taught to the students according to their leaning abilities. The fourth model, alternative teaching requires that the students are broken into one large group, and one small group. The teachers are responsible for providing instruction to each of the separate groups. This particular model of co-teaching is used when the students have different needs in acquiring and understanding the instruction content. When using the team teaching approach, the teachers collaborate about the lesson to be taught and work seamlessly in teaching the curriculum to the students. In the last model; one teach, one assist, the approach is very similar to one teach, one observe. While one teacher is teaching, the second teacher provides additional support to the students as needed.

Davis, Dieker, Pearl, and Kirkpatrick (2012) found that the one-lead, one-assist teaching model was predominantly used in co-taught middle school classrooms. Of the 775 days analyzed, 46% of the days involved this type of teaching structure. The second most commonly used structure was team teaching with 14%. Idol (2006) found that co-teachers often revert to using the one-teach/one assist model when the lesson was not thoroughly co-planned prior to instruction. In a review of 32 qualitative studies on co-teaching, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) found that the 'one teach, one assist' was the most prominent model of co-

teaching by a considerable margin. They also found that the special education teacher assumed the responsibility for any problem behaviors that occurred in the classroom.

Despite the effectiveness and uniqueness of the co-teaching techniques, if they are not used, and used as designed, they do not make a difference in the education and lives of children and youth with disabilities (Cook & Schirmer, 2003). The outcomes of co-teaching are to improve the performance of students with disabilities, improve the participation of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, and make available a wider range of instructional activities that would not be available with one teacher (Zigmond & Magiera, 2001). For the purpose of this study, stations teaching and the parallel teaching approach, are the most widely used models engaged in by the co-teachers in the district. The special education teachers spend 90 minutes, Monday through Thursday, and 45 minutes on Friday, co-teaching students with academic learning disabilities in the classrooms.

Benefits and challenges of co-teaching. The complexities of providing meaningful education to students with disabilities within appropriate educational settings require a high degree of cooperation between teachers and other school personnel. When teams of teachers work together, numerous positive outcomes can ultimately contribute to overall academic achievement for their students. These outcomes can also have impact on the team of teachers, in gaining content knowledge and accommodation of instruction. and as well as the students. Although it is very difficult to conduct research on co-teaching effectiveness due to the number of different variables impacting classroom instruction, a growing number of case studies and program evaluation studies have revealed that co-teaching can be an effective means of improving academic, behavioral, and other outcomes for students with learning disabilities without negatively affecting the achievement of non-special education students (Friend & Cook,

2014). Quantitative and qualitative research over the past 20 years have consistently determined that students in co-taught classrooms learn more and perform better on academic assessments than do students in more restrictive service delivery models (Walsh, 2012).

Taken as a whole, the co-teaching model poses unique challenges to teachers. Of great importance is the relationship between co-teachers which constitutes a major critical component influencing the success or failure of the inclusion of students with disabilities (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 268). Research suggested that co-teaching is time-consuming and requires strong interpersonal and collaborative skills by teachers (Fennick & Liddy, 2001). Friend et al. (2010) stated that “because co-teaching departs so significantly from the traditional ‘one teacher per classroom’ model, it is not reasonable to expect educators to understand and implement it without specific instruction in the pertinent knowledge and skills” (p. 20).

Themes in literature. Several specific themes have emerged from the research findings involving inclusion and co-teaching, to include: preparation, attitudes, expectations; planning time, collaboration, and professional development. As crucial as inclusion is to the betterment of education, it is still a topic of contention among many teachers (Ainscow & Miles, 2008). Many new teachers do not feel confident in their ability to be inclusive, despite being highly enthusiastic about the prospect, and feel that they were not adequately prepared in their teacher education (De Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). While many teachers welcome the change, some may feel challenged, even confused, about the expectations of their new role as an inclusive educator. Despite inclusion dominating the educational landscape, there is a lack of clarity regarding its translation in practice (Sikes et al., 2007). Practitioners have different interpretations of inclusion which affects how inclusion is performed (Sikes et al., 2007). There is sufficient evidence in the literature suggesting teacher attitudes are a decisive factor in

determining the success of inclusive education programs and the philosophy of inclusion (Jerlinder, Danermark & Gill, 2010).

Extensive research has been conducted in an effort to examine teachers' attitudes on inclusion (De Boer et al., 2011). It is believed that teachers and their attitudes toward inclusion and their ability to teach with disability students within the regular classroom, are very important variables in the implementation of successful inclusive practices (Parasuram, 2006). It is clear that inclusion will remain a significant challenge if practitioners are not committed to its principles and it will be impossible if practitioners fail to embrace their responsibilities for the education of all children.

According to Berry (2010),

a teacher who believes that inclusion is unfair to typically achieving students may act in subtle (or not so subtle) ways that negatively affect students with disabilities in that classroom. It may be that the presence or absence of positive attitudes and a sense of commitment to principles of inclusion can tip teachers toward making or avoiding efforts to effectively teach students with disabilities. (p. 76)

According to Scruggs et al. (2007), providing educators with greater awareness of the range of inclusion programs in our schools, is a first step toward success in inclusive education. This implies, therefore, teachers must be knowledgeable about all that inclusion entails, if they are to successfully implement the practice. The complexities of providing meaningful education to students with disabilities within appropriate educational contexts require a high degree of cooperation between co-teachers. In successful co-teaching, neither teacher is considered the main teacher of the class—they are both equals (Murawski, 2008).

In an examination of inclusive education, Ferguson (2008) explored the changing roles and responsibilities of both general and special education teachers: "Special educators are continuing to reinvent their roles in schools as more and more schools make the effort to become more inclusive" (p.115). The challenges associated with general and special educators working

together are significant: “They must overcome a long history of working so separately that the language, routines and timeframes for their work have little similarity” (p. 115). Ferguson described the transformation of teachers becoming “educators without labels” engaged in a new mode of cooperative practice that will potentially benefit all students.

The premise of co-teaching rests on the shared expertise that special educator and classroom teacher collaboration brings to the instruction, not merely on having two adults in the classroom. Combine a general educator’s knowledge of standards, curriculum, and content with a special educator’s knowledge of differentiation strategies, a Title I teacher’s knowledge of research-based reading strategies, or an English language specialist’s knowledge, and the result can be impressive. Without time for sharing this expertise, teachers often teach a class the way they have always taught it and there is no “value added” by the second professional educator (Zigmond, 2006; Zigmond & Matta, 2004). Quality co-teaching is dependent on common planning time, which can lead to more consistent and thoughtful implementation of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 2010; Simmons & Magiera, 2007).

Effective use of co-planning time can encourage general education and special education teachers to become one team (Howard & Potts, 2009). Finding time for planning is one of the most significant challenges for co-teaching partners, particularly special education teachers, who work with more than one general education teacher across different grade levels (Bettini et al., 2017). Meeting before the start of the school year is important to address critical pieces of the classroom setting, including how the teachers will begin to address standards, assessment, accommodations/modifications, instructional strategies, and classroom set-up (Howard & Potts, 2009; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2004) explain that teachers need to know themselves, know their co-teaching partner, know their students, and know the curriculum

in order to be successful in creating and maintaining co-teaching relationships. Truly collaborative partnerships take time and effort to develop (Gately & Gately, 2001). The inclusion for students with disabilities is most effective when teachers are collaborative and consultative.

This collaboration can facilitate the successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Merchant, 2009). Similarly, allowing the special educator to choose the content area of knowledge, interest, preference and strength in which to co-teach goes a long way in nurturing confidence in both educators as well as a willingness to share the teaching stage (Nierengarten & Hughes, 2010). Teachers are often placed together in a classroom without adequate preparation to collaborate effectively. Teachers do not intuitively know how to co-teach. To be successful in a collaborative co-teaching arrangement, they need training and preparation to help develop skills in communication and collaboration, instructional strategies, responsibilities, building on another's strengths, and understanding of content (Cook & Friend, 1995). As calls for all classroom teachers to be better prepared for inclusive education become increasingly common (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011), a consideration of the professional development needs of teacher educators cannot be overstated.

Research shows effective professional development facilitated by school level staff, such as through professional learning communities, was key to the positive effects of co-teaching (Walsh, 2012). Kaser and Halbert (2009) described how a shift in mindset is required for teachers to engage in professional learning that transfers to greater quality and equity in classrooms for all learners. They suggested this shift can happen as teachers work together to reflect on their practice and inquire into their habits and beliefs. It is common knowledge general and special education teachers discuss students' needs. They problem solve together,

demonstrate instructional techniques, participate in professional development, share resources, and network with other professionals (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

Teacher collaboration and transformational learning. There is no universal definition for collaboration. Collaboration has been frequently mis-used but most commonly used to describe the interaction between two individuals working together planning instruction (Friend & Cook, 2003, 2009; Paulsen, 2008). Collaboration has also been defined as an interactive process enabling people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems (Idol, Nevin, & Paolucci-Whitcomb, 2000). Teacher collaboration offers opportunities for teachers to critically examine evidence, arguments, and alternative points of view. These conversations encourage self-reflection and lead to personal transformations in teachers' beliefs, values, and practices related to teaching and learning (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2011).

Friend and Cook (2003) identify several specific facets of successful collaboration, including: (a) parity, (b) mutual goals, (c) shared responsibility in decision making, (d) shared resources and accountability, and (e) valuing personal opinions and expertise. Collaboration is voluntary and can take on many forms. In comparison, Mezirow (1997) believes transformations come about in one of four ways: (1) elaborating existing frames of reference; (2) learning new frames of reference; (3) transforming points of view; and, (4) transforming habits of the mind. The transformative model fits within a constructivist paradigm where individuals construct knowledge through their experiences in the world (Candy, 1991). The collaborative model implies that knowledge is socially constructed by a group of individuals—the transformative model goes one step further to include both the individual and social construction of meaning perspectives. Although many teachers view their collaboration with other teachers as a means to

improve student achievement, it is important to consider the transformational learning that occurs within teacher collaboration (Mezirow 1997).

Mezirow and Taylor (2009) described a transformative learning environment as one in which the participants are free to express their opinions, but are not forced or coerced into adopting a particular point of view. All participants in the transformative learning environment should have a fair and equal opportunity and ability to express their feelings and have a role in the full process (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). They should be able to listen well and empathize while freely discussing different perspectives of a topic or issue (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). For the purpose of this study, collaboration refers to an interdependent activity, and it requires two willing teachers who have the same goal in mind (Friend & Cook, 2003). The increased emphasis on collaboration in special education has been caused by an inherent urgency to move students to proficiency and close the achievement gap.

When researching collaboration, Blask (2011) stated that as classrooms become more and more integrated with students with disabilities, all educators must acquire more knowledge about their students through collaboration. According to Taylor (2008), transformative learning does not occur in a single individual; rather, it occurs when two or more individuals share their experiences. Transformational learning theorists posit that learning and growth do not occur for an educator in isolation, but requires discourse (Taylor, 2008). Discourse, or “dialogue involving the assessment of beliefs, feelings, and values” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 59) is also a core tenet of transformative learning theory, meaning that a social context for learning is inherent. Learners are not transformed in isolation; as Brookfield (1995) observed, the most critical and self-aware among us still have blind spots and require observations, insights, and challenges from others to identify them.

Transformation and collaborative situations. Approaches to classroom instruction has evolved considerably by the development of several learning principles and methods of instruction. Classroom teachers are the instrumental change agents in the on-going process of school improvement, however working together is not always an easy task. Collaboration between teachers' is key, and a basis for effective transformational learning by embodying values and bringing forth emergent and creative qualities that teachers alone could barely imagine. Collaboration is a root of transformation, which integrates skills and provides a vital context for transformation. From this perspective the sharing of different strategies and underlying characteristics can be viewed as complementary components to classroom instruction. When teacher values are synergistically related and used together, it can maximize student potential and teacher personal growth.

Perceptions of collaboration in inclusive situations. A review of the research literature and methodological literature in teacher development theory in inclusive practices and collaborative teaching demonstrate that a significant level of specialized professional development is a key factor in the creation and implementation of an enriching, positive education experience for students with special needs (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Of particular importance and relevance to the professional development of teachers is Mezirow's theory of transformational learning. Mezirow defined transformative learning as "the social process of constructing and appropriating a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experiences as a guide to action" (Mezirow, 1994, p. 222-223). Although transformative learning involves profound personal change, explicit to the theory is that such change emerges from dialectic engagement among a group of learners with diverse perspectives (Mezirow, 1995).

Research indicates that many general education teachers do not feel well prepared for inclusion. For example, research on teacher attitudes toward inclusion has shown that general education teachers support the concept of inclusion, but do not feel well prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Waldron, 2007). Research from Saloviita and Takala (2010) indicated that when teachers have had experience with inclusion their perceptions are more positive than the perceptions of teachers who have had no experience with inclusion; thus they are more willing to have students with disabilities in their classrooms. Mezirow's theory emphasized learning as a change in how an individual thought about things rather than an increase in the amount of knowledge a person had (Mezirow, 1997).

Leatherman (2007) found that early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion were influenced by factors such as training, administrative, peer and professional support, participation in the decision making process such as whether or not to include students with disabilities in their classrooms and positive experiences with students with disabilities. It is important to understand how special education and general education teachers differ in their perception of their responsibilities (Blyth & Milner, 2007; Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco & Pelsue, 2009). Moore (2009) stated that collaborative efforts between general education and special education teachers present challenges largely due to the ambiguity and differences of opinions the teachers have regarding inclusive education. Often, this discord leads to miscommunication or a lack of communication and impedes the collection of information regarding student behaviors and their needs.

In particular, general education teachers have expressed a need for ongoing classroom support, and professional development to develop the necessary skills to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Waldron, 2007). Nichols and Nichols (2010) found that special

education teachers perceive the role of instruction to be the responsibility of the general education teacher while the special education teacher handles modifications, accommodations, and classroom management. According to Bull and Buechler (1997), teachers have reported that professional development designed specifically to their needs in creating an inclusive classroom is most meaningful because the strategies can be implemented immediately.

Accordingly, they engaged with the new information provided differently because of their background. In this way what is “learned” is distinct for each participant. Each learner takes in new data and interwove it through already present personal and intellectual knowledge schemas and arrived at varying nuanced positions. Thus, learning is constructed differently for each individual, each time learning opportunities arise (Baumgartner, 2001; Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow’s transformational theory of adult learning is particularly focused on education that enabled adults to become autonomous reflective thinkers that critically engaged with their environment (Mezirow, 1997). Appropriately then, the content, context and process of adult learning situations or in this case professional development sessions should be intertwined on a very personal level for every teacher.

Perceptions of collaboration in co-teaching situations. According to Ploessi, Rock, Schoenfeld, and Blanks (2010), “over the past decade, co-teaching has become a popular approach to special education service provision in which two teachers work together to support diverse students” (p. 158). According to many authors, co-teaching is an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a co-active fashion, jointly teaching students who are academically and behaviorally diverse (Leko & Brownell, 2009; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Ploessi et al., 2010). As a result of more focused accountability measures, federal mandates, and publicity of student’s achievement data, there is a greater need for specialized programming for

students with disabilities. “In many ways co-teaching demonstrates the potential as well as the complexities of collaboration that joins the fields of general education and special education”

Friend, et al. (2010).

Although the research base on co-teaching is growing, many of the studies thus far report on professionals’ perceptions of its implementation or effectiveness, or their concern observations of its implementation (Keefe & Moore 2004). Scruggs et al. (2007) synthesized qualitative research on co-teaching found that co-teachers generally believed their practices were beneficial to students, they reported that successful co-teaching teams shared expertise during teaching and found ways to motivate their students. The teaching teams that struggled demonstrated less collaboration; with differences in teaching styles leading to conflict instead of compromise. These authors found that special educators often assumed the role of being a classroom assistant rather than a teaching partner (Scruggs et al., 2007). In keeping with Mezirow’s Transformational learning theory, the complexities involved in the development of the requisite dispositions (e.g., empathy and perceptions of parity) and competencies (e.g., conflict resolution and negotiation) for successful professional collaboration, more than just informational learning is required; learning that is transformative in nature must often be achieved. This understanding has lead researchers and theorists of adult learning to assert that in order for adults to internalize and appropriately apply professionally relevant concepts, skills, and strategies, learning must be a transformational, rather than simply informational, experience (Baumgartner, 2001; King 2004; Merriam & Clark, 1993; Mezirow, 1997). Perhaps most notable in describing this process is Mezirow (1997, 1998) who asserts that through the transformational learning process, individuals may free themselves from unexamined or distorted ways of thinking and engage in more rational assessment and action.

Collaboration and co-teaching blur the traditional boundaries of general and special education (Friend et al., 2010; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Although multiple barriers have been identified to inhibit collaboration, co-teaching is a vehicle for creating inclusive schools (Villa et al., 2013). Specifically, the term co-teaching sometimes is used interchangeably with collaboration. Although co-teaching should be highly collaborative, the latter term refers to how professionals and others interact in a variety of situations, including meetings, teams, and parent conferences. Narrowing the meaning of collaboration to apply to just the classroom setting detracts attention from the importance of collaboration across all contemporary school endeavors and belies the well-established knowledge base on this broader topic (Kochhar-Bryant, 2008).

Benefits and challenges of collaboration. The coordination between special education teachers together with that of the general education teacher is important, since they are working closely in order to provide the learning environment that is most suited to the one demanded by the needs of the child with disability. Effective collaboration between special and general education teachers can facilitate the successful inclusion of students with disabilities who are in general education classrooms (Friend & Cook, 2006). When co-teachers are getting along and working well together, students with disabilities are more likely to be successful and have successful experiences in the inclusive environment (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Collaboration in a school setting is a complex and challenging endeavor. One of the foremost challenges for K–12 teachers is to provide relevant learning experiences for their students in an environment of increasing accountability and student diversity while maintaining the idea of the classroom as a place of engagement, possibility, and creativity (Palmer, 2003). Additionally the skills to become an effective collaborator are not at all intuitive (Arthaud et al., 2007; Friend, 2000). Skills of

collaboration entail responding to difficult situations, effectively communicating with various individuals, and developing shared problem-solving competencies (Friend, 2000).

Mezirow declared that a transformation could also occur in the communicative domain. The communicative domain involves the relationships between people; how people communicate together; how people present themselves; and generally, how beliefs and practices of human communication occur. The communicative domain includes “understanding, describing and explaining intentions; values; ideals; moral issues; political, philosophical, psychological, or educational concepts; feelings and reasoning” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 75). The communicative domain is where people learn about cultural and social group norms of behavior and thought. It is where meaning is created through abductive reasoning, which Mezirow described as the process of using our own experience to understand another’s, and where each step in the logic chain suggests the next step (Mezirow, 1991). Lack of collaboration also impedes the sending and receiving teachers’ abilities to measure the knowledge of the students, to gather significant information regarding the IEP, to learn more about the students’ behavior, and to complete a variety of tasks associated with student and facilitator success (Moore, 2009, pp. 31-33).

As a whole, the literature regarding special education team teaching in the inclusive classroom demonstrated that teachers are not always able to provide support or help both special needs and regular students thrive which have a result on their ability to succeed in their teaching roles (Doyle., 2010). Adera and Bullock (2010) found that there were specific parts of the jobs for which teachers felt that they were underprepared, specifically the type of differentiated instruction that was required for special needs students. As a result, both regular and specialist teachers come to their jobs with a certain teaching ideology, which seems to be split between functions for general classroom educational frameworks and direct instruction frameworks,

which are more readily used in special needs environments (Keen, 2007). When teachers lack either direct knowledge or collaborative skills, they are more likely to become frustrated and disengage from the process of teaching (Keen, 2007).

Mezirow stated for adults to effectively engage in a learning experience which is transformational in nature after encountering a disorienting dilemma, critical reflection and rational discourse are essential. Critical reflection is the process through which adults evaluate their frames of reference by assessing their credibility validity in light of new experiences or information (Cranton, 2002). Mezirow (1997) defined rational discourse as a dialogue in which individuals defend reasons supporting their beliefs and examine evidence supporting and refuting competing interpretations. Participants in this type of dialogue intend to set aside their biases, share and evaluate their experiences, and reach common understanding (Mezirow, 1991). Both processes require a learning environment that is challenging, safe, and empowering while fostering collaboration, feedback and respect among adult learners (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1997).

Conclusion

As schools emphasize accountability and academic progress for all students, professional collaboration is a critical aspect of planning accommodations and interventions that address the learning needs of diverse learners. Several studies have reported that when collaboration follows the tenants of transformational learning such as (i.e., specific procedures and models are used to guide collaborative interactions) and also that is supported by school administrations, educational outcomes improve for students with academic learning disabilities (Amato, 1996; Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Hunt, Soto, Maier, & Doering, 2003).

When teachers collaborate in a transformational way, it opens doors for them to see each other's practices, discuss what they are doing and why they are doing it that way, and they begin to participate in new strategies learned from their teammates (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Unlike learning that simply builds skill or knowledge, transformative learning causes an individual to come to a new understanding of something that causes a fundamental reordering of the paradigmatic assumptions held and leads them to live in a fundamentally different way. Transformative learning and education entail a fundamental reordering of social relations and practices (Brookfield, 2003, p. 142). Training in collaboration therefore affects teachers' feelings of competence in working with special education students (Blyth & Milner, 2007; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009; Sharma et al., 2007). Leonard and Leonard (2003) posited that professional collaboration has consistently led to meaningful instruction. An investigation into the inclusive classroom reveals that the inclusive classroom is an excess of stress, according to the literature, not only because of the fact that few preservice teachers are being certified in this area, but also because of the emotional, mental and organizational stress which is associated with this type of role (DeMik, 2008; Nartgun, 2010; Williams & Gersch, 2004). However, challenges in the partnership may occur such as sharing responsibly in planning and implementing the instruction for students, lack of time for collaboration, and different views on teaching (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010).

Chapter 3: Methodology

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative study methodology was used to collect data on the perceptions of collaboration between (GE) and (SE) teachers. I interviewed teachers to learn from their experiences about co-teaching/inclusionary classroom/team teaching, including sharing ideas, goals, and planning for appropriate curriculum, and instruction for students with academic learning disabilities. I transcribed and analyzed the data that I collected from the interviews. The results of the analysis are organized into themes for better understanding of how collaboration leads to shared planning, and commitment by the teachers who work together. Using the qualitative approach with interviews and relying upon the perceptions of the participants, their experiences in collaboration brought personal value into the study (Creswell, 2003).

I used a qualitative research approach in this study because qualitative research approach is sensitive to the natural environment, the researcher has a participating role, there is an integrated approach, flexibility in the research design, it enables perceptions to be revealed, and it has an inductive analysis (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). Additionally, practical knowledge, and the success of collaboration rests with the opinions, values, and experiences of individual teachers. Qualitative research allowed for a greater chance of breath and depth of understanding by probing deeper with questioning to the response given by the teacher.

When conducting my review of literature, it was acknowledged that a qualitative method in research into teachers' perceptions of collaboration was overwhelmingly neglected (Pring, 2004). This should be a cause for concern, since it can be problematic if any one methodological approach to educational research is allowed to dominate any particular line of enquiry, as only certain kinds of explanations and interpretations may then be heard (Pring, 2004).

An established list of inquiry questions was used. These questions were used to guide and develop the framework for the interviews. During the interview all opportunities were used to expand the discussion of the responses in greater detail to the questions. The data of the study were collected by unstructured interview method from general, and special education teachers. In an unstructured interview, the interviewees' opinions on a specific issue are tried to be 'discovered' thoroughly and if any specific topic is discovered during the interview, these topics are tried to be scrutinized with more detailed questions. This kind of interview is based on open-ended questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Design of the study. Creswell (2013) explained qualitative research is used to “explore” a complex problem or issue that requires detailed understanding. To accomplish this, I employed the basic interpretive qualitative design. Basic interpretive designs are the most common type of qualitative research and can be found in all disciplines and applied fields (Merriam, 2009). Basic interpretive is used when the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. It uses an inductive strategy, collecting data from interviews, observations, or document analysis (Merriam, 2002).

Following Klein and Myers (1999), the foundational assumption for interpretive research is that knowledge is gained, or at least filtered, through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings. Interpretive research focuses on identifying, documenting, and “knowing”—through interpretation of: world views, values, meanings, beliefs, thoughts, and the general characteristics of life events, situations, ceremonies, and specific phenomena under investigation, with the goal being to document and interpret as fully as possible the totality of whatever is being studied in particular contexts from the people's viewpoint or frame of reference (Leininger, 1985).

It involves using issues, language, and approaches to research that empower the participants, recognize their silenced voices, honor their individual differences, and position both the researcher's and the participant's views in a historical/personal/political context (Deem, 2002). Individual constructs are elicited and understood through interaction between researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 111) with participants being relied on as much as possible (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). It provides an opportunity to get a deep insight into the problem under study because a interpretive explanation documents the [participant's] point of view and translates it into a form that is intelligible to readers" (Neuman, 1997, p. 72).

Research questions. Based on the purpose statement and review of literature, this study was be guided by one overarching research question with three sub-questions to answer the following research questions. 1. What factors promote and hinder collaboration between general, and special education teachers in elementary school settings? The sub-questions are as follows: (a) What perceived skills, and training do general education, and special education teachers need to have in regard to co-teaching, and to the various models of co-teaching within the diverse settings? (b) How does the relationship between the collaborators affect the transformational nature of the collaboration? (c) How do the teachers measure the success of their collaboration efforts?

Participants. The district being researched has 11 elementary schools with a total of 197 teachers in the grade levels 3 thru 5, there are 175 general and 22 special education teachers. The research focused on teachers in the grade levels 3 thru 5. I selected these grade levels because these are the state of Texas mandated testing grades. The majority of students in the Texas public school system within these grade levels are required to take the yearly State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). The 3rd through 5th grade levels are where collaboration

between general and special education teachers can make a difference in student academic success on the state assessment.

For the intention of this study, I used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases for the most effective use of limited resources (Patton, 2002). This involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with a phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979) note the importance of availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner. Maxwell (1997) further defined purposive sampling as a type of sampling in which, “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (p. 87). Purposive sampling techniques have also been referred to as nonprobability sampling or purposeful sampling or “qualitative sampling”. As noted above, purposive sampling techniques involve selecting certain units or cases “based on a specific purpose rather than randomly” (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003a, p. 713).

I had to obtain permission to conduct this study within the district. I met and discussed the research topic with the Superintendent of the school. Permission was granted to conduct the study under certain conditions. I submitted a requested to the Assistant Superintendent which was created on district letterhead. I provided the research title and wrote a synopsis of what the study entailed. The request was approved with the stipulation that I would provide a non-signature copy of the University of the Incarnate Word IRB-approved stamped consent document

before recruiting any district teachers. Also, I am required to provide a copy of my published study.

The participants consisted of state certified GE and SE teachers. Selection of the teachers was based on the standard that the teachers were working in a collaborative inclusion classroom and setting. I acquired a list of all the special education teachers that were teaching in an inclusionary classroom from the director of special education. I obtained a list of the amount of teaching years that all teachers have from the superintendent of human resources. I worked with human resources to investigate possible participants' total years of teaching. This step was done to rule out the possibility that newly hired teachers are counted as a new teacher when actual they just recently changed districts. Once all individuals were identified email invitations were sent to all those GE and SE inclusion teachers who were collaborating and fell within the specified criteria as outlined to seek their participation.

I emailed the teachers explaining the purpose of my research, I also sought to find out if they are dual certified, currently working in an inclusion collaborative setting, or have ever received training or experience in collaborative practices. Once I received back all replies, I entered the names of the GE and SE teachers that worked together as inclusion teams, into a random name picker program in several combinations based upon their teaching team schedules. The program randomly selected a combination of three seasoned and three novice general education teachers, and three seasoned and three novice special education teacher teams. I used the 3-year mark to determine whether a teacher is novice or seasoned. I selected the 3-year time frame because this is the amount of time that it takes for a teacher to complete coursework, student teach, pass all certification exams, and to successfully complete a pedagogy and professional responsibility examination, in order to become fully certified as a teacher.

The first step was to convince the selected participants to see me as a person, by scheduling a face to face visit with the teachers. I was very transparent with the participants about my purpose. I knew that I was asking teachers to give up their valuable time, and privacy. Therefore, I let them know that I was as flexible as possible to accommodate their time and schedule. I visited with those identified and eligible to give a short presentation about my research interests, and the study in general. I let the participants know that their participation in the study can contribute to their field of work as well as let them find out a few things about themselves. My contingent plan was to win over teachers to participate in the study by addressing that the teaches can learn about themselves as well as contribute to student academic achievement.

Instrument. I developed a semi-structured interview schedule based on 10 open-ended interview questions. The focus of these questions varied to include co-teacher's perceptions on collaborative inclusive skills, and knowledge (See Appendix E). My primary research question with four sub questions guided the development of the open-ended interview questions, which partially included: 1) How do teachers describe inclusion collaboration in terms of factors that contribute and deter from a successful classroom partnership? 2) How do the teacher's skills, and knowledge of the various models of co-teaching impact collaboration skills? 3) How does the transformational nature of collaboration impact the co-teaching relationship? 4) How is the success of the students measured?

Protection of Human Subjects and Ethical Considerations

The institutional review board (IRB) is a committee that has been officially designated to review, screen, and approve social science research involving human subjects (Creswell, 2008).

The main purpose of the IRB is to protect human subjects from any harm in the research. The IRB assesses risk and benefit to determine whether the research should be continued.

Before data collection, the interview questionnaire guide was approved by IRB. This research was inspected for the protection of human participants' rights and proceeded only after receiving the approval from the IRB at the University of the Incarnate Word and participating school district. The participants were not offered financial benefit for their voluntary participation in this study. However, individuals who participate in this study had certain rights. Participants were informed about the purpose of this research, and that they had the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time. If the selected participants refuse to participate, I attempted to motivate them on the benefits of participating in research interviews, and how their participation would immensely contribute to the phenomenon being studied. I advised them that everything that is discussed would be kept confidential. Moreover, participants also had the right to the protection of their privacy and preservation of their personal dignity. I collected only the personal information that was absolutely essential to the research.

Data Collection

Informed consent forms were sent to the teachers. Data were collected by semi-structured interviews from teachers who work at elementary schools within an independent school district in Texas during the 2017–2018 academic year. The interviews were conducted in each teacher's classroom, or office, except for one, who preferred to meet at a coffee-shop. After having the participants sign the consent forms, we began the discussion, following the general order of the interview questions. Participants were asked identical questions, and the questions were worded so that responses are open-ended (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). This open-endedness allowed the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire and it also allows the me to

ask probing questions as a means of follow-up (Creswell, 2007). Preparing the questions ahead of time in interviews both allowed the interviewer to be prepared and appear competent during the interview and allows informants the freedom to express their views in their own study. The interviews each lasted between 45-60 minutes and were recorded using a digital voice recorder. Participants were then thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis

The basic interpretive method was used to guide the data analysis process to focus on gaining an understanding of the data through the voices of the participants. The data analysis followed the description-reduction-interpretation method (Wolff, 2002). First, the interviews were transcribed from the digital voice recorder files. From this point, the interview data were reviewed, first to gain a general understanding of the meaning and then more thoroughly to develop open codes. This was followed by reduction of the interview transcription, by using an inductive approach to determine common themes, and patterns within each interview and across interviews (Shank, 2002).

The interview transcriptions were analyzed through constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). All data were collected was coded with a code based on themes or ideas of major concerns of the participants. The codes were generated from the data and referenced to literature that helped frame the study. A definition was created for each code, and categories were created from the codes. This process included reading and rereading of the interview transcripts and field notes to search for emerging themes. Repeated coding was performed until no new themes emerge (Glaser, 1978). If further analysis was warranted, qualitative analysis software was used to further exam the data.

A three-step inductive coding approach was used to process and analyze the recorded and transcribed data collected from the semi-structured interviews. To make sense of the data, I browsed through the transcripts as a whole and made notes about first impressions. I then read each transcript again, one by one, several times in order to become completely familiar with the data. To check for accuracy, I listened to each interview while carefully reading, and scrutinizing the transcripts line by line. The open coding process was the first step used in the analysis of the interview data. The individual responses to each interview question by the participants were considered a unit of data for coding. The open coding process “involves segmenting data into categories of information” (Creswell, 2007, pp. 239-240). The second step in the analysis of the interview data was deciding which codes were most important, and to create categories by bringing several codes together. Descriptive labels were assigned to each of the categories during the open coding analysis (Miles & Hubberman, 1994).

The third step was to analyze what predominant themes were reflected in the consolidated categories and codes. I used 23 different colored highlighters (see Figure 2) in the process to mark and identify codes, categories, and emerging theme patterns. I determined that the data set was adequately coded when after multiple readings of the data no additional categories or themes were found. The coded data, and categories were sorted, ranked, and used to develop a thematic presentation.

Coding Categories Patterns Themes	
1. Co-Teach Model	47
2. Teacher Student Relationship	37
3. Time/Obstructions	37
4. PLC/Professional development	36
5. Teacher assignment	35
6. Co-Teach Benefits	34
7. Co-teach preparation	33
8. Teacher-Teacher Relationship	30
9. Content Knowledge	30
10. Training requirements	29
11. Collaboration	27
12. ARD	24
13. Caseload/Schedule	24
14. IEP	20
15. Communication	19
16. TEKS	19
17. Teacher perspective	18
18. Understanding the disability	15
19. Student Growth	15
20. Transformative Learning	14
21. Why I became a Teacher	12
22. Students are different	8
23. Emotionally tied	4

Figure 1. Coding category pattern themes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, or validity, is the verification that the information presented is accurate and true (Creswell, 2003). The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods refers to triangulation as the observation of a research issue from a minimum of two points (Flick, 2006). As a basic concept in the social sciences, triangulation refers to using multiple, different approaches to generate better understanding of a given theory or phenomenon (Burton & Obel, 1995). However, in practice, qualitative studies in the field of social sciences often involve picking triangulation sources that have different strengths and foci so that they can complement

each other, enhancing the validity of the research findings (Brewer & Hunter, 1989; Denzin, 1978, 1989). Gliner (1994) described triangulation as a method of highest priority in determining internal validity in qualitative research.

The qualitative origins of triangulation favor completeness and cohesiveness over confirmation (Greene, 2007) and reside within more comprehensive explanatory or holistic frameworks (Howe, 2012). Seeking complementary information or synthesizing divergent views to overcome strengths, weaknesses, and associated biases of a particular approach are consistent with this perspective (Bergman, 2008). There are many different approaches to triangulation, and there are articulate proponents for each approach. The emphasis of this paper falls within the category “triangulation by method”. Methodological triangulation which is an approach to research that attempts to improve validity by combining various methodological techniques in one study (Dootson, 1995).

In this research study, I used the methodological triangulation as a process of combining and synthesizing data or results that will be gathered using different instruments. Trustworthiness was achieved by careful triangulation in general between semi-structured face to face in-depth interviews and what literature informs about the topic. The review of literature content as well as the interview transcription served as a methodological of triangulation. All data were recorded in extensive field notes and personal notes. I analyzed the field notes to ensure that their unspoken words match up to what is recorded and transcribed.

In order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study, I conducted member-checking, in which interview transcripts interpretations were taken back to the participants to ask for accuracy and plausibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton 2002). Member checking involved asking the participants to review interpretations and conclusions and having the participants confirm the

findings. Before data collection began, three of my university peers reviewed the interview protocol and data collection procedures, I did this to ensure methodological rigor. Last of all, as a form to ensure credibility I conducted peer debriefing.

Peer debriefing is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical sessions and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Peer debriefing required that I work together with one or several colleagues who hold impartial views of the study. Afterwards, feedback was provided to enhance creditability, and validity.

I accomplished peer debriefing by having three colleagues review the study for credibility, and to determine whether the results seem to follow from the data. The colleagues are university peers who have conducted studies in education using qualitative research and methods but had no connection to any of the participants interviewed. I utilized peer debriefing because through analytical probing a debriefer helped uncover taken for granted biases, perspectives and assumptions on my part and through this process I can become aware of my posture toward data and analysis.

Because researchers are the instruments of investigation, it is important to address reflexivity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Reflexivity involves researchers recognizing existing biases, beliefs, and knowledge and making intentional efforts to minimize how those skew their interpretations of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). During the process of converging findings from all data sources, I cross-checked and resynthesize information to create codes that captured the essence of what was being communicated through various data sources. The cross-check procedure allowed for more accurate interpretations of the participants' words as assessed and validated.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of general, and special education educators on the conventions, and implementations of co-teaching in an inclusive environment. This basic interpretive study includes all dimensions of teaching as it pertains to collaborative teaching literature. In the ever-evolving field of education, understanding and meeting the needs of a diverse group of learners including those students diagnosed with academic learning disabilities has become the norm for local, district, and state school systems (McAnaney & Wynne, 2016). There is limited information on how collaboration between general and special education teachers is viewed, (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014) and how perspectives align with practicing teachers. Studies have been done on special education teachers, general education teachers, principals, parents, paraprofessionals, and pre-service teachers (Becham & Rouse, 2011; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), yet very little substantial research has compared the perceptions of special education teachers, and general education teachers on collaborative inclusive education. Past research has shown educators that collaboration or co-teaching is an innovative way of educating students with academic learning disabilities, however with any new innovation dilemmas sometimes arise. I chose to focus on teachers' perceptions to help fill the gap in the literature, and to produce data to contribute to understanding the larger issues of teacher collaboration in elementary school classroom settings within the United States.

For this study teachers with 0.4 months to 22 years teaching experience were selected from 11 Southwestern Pre-Kindergarten through fifth grade elementary schools, using the criteria and strategies outlined in Chapter 3. Of the 11 elementary schools, six were chosen to provide a representation of the diversity, broad range of teaching experience, and beliefs about

collaborative setting within the communities of elementary schools. The years of teaching experience, and levels of education was of important consideration in this study.

The primary question that was used to guide this study was: “What factors promote, and hinder collaboration between general and special education teachers in elementary school settings?” The 3 sub-questions inquired about what the participants in the study perceived as the skills and training required in regard to co-teaching. How does the relationship between the collaborators affect the transformational nature of the collaboration? How do the teachers measure the success of their collaboration efforts? A qualitative mode of inquiry was selected to allow the participants to explain their teaching day, and experiences in an elementary school setting.

Participants were provided with informed consents, and after reading and asking any pertinent questions they were asked to sign the form. All participants were asked to respond unreservedly to questions during the digitally recorded, semi structured interviews, and to provide examples as to how they understood the concepts based on the interview protocol. The use of conversation, asking questions to elicit more detailed information and examples that illustrated participants’ responses to the interview protocol, reflection, and asking for clarification to ensure a more accurate understanding of the participants’ responses was my focus of the research.

Upon completion of the semi-structured interviews, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Each participant was provided with a pseudonym while removing overly detailed information from each transcript that would potentially identify each participant. I immersed himself in the transcribed data, and followed the steps of the constant comparative, and descriptive data analysis method outlined in Chapter 3. Themes were identified that emerged

from the participants' experience and were organized based on the aim of the study. Findings were based on the interpretation of the participants' explanation of their lived experience, learning and understanding of teacher collaboration factors, and the connection to their perceptions. In the following section, basic demographic data and generalized information is presented to provide a snapshot of the variety of individual differences represented by the participants in the study united with a look at teacher years of experience. Next, highlighted background information was included in the individual profiles. The next part and the bulk of the chapter provided themes with information that emerged during the descriptive interpretive analysis. The themes were explained and supported with the participants quotes.

Demographic Data

The study participants consisted of a total of 12 co-teachers from within one school district. Eleven of the participants were female, whereas one participant was a male. Seven of the participants were identified as Hispanic and five as White. The representation highest level of education included a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree. Eight participants had a Bachelor of Arts degree, and four had a master's degree. Six general education co-teachers and six special education co-teachers described their collaboration in their co-teaching arrangement. The co-teachers discussed the relationship collaboration factors that assisted and delayed their co-teaching success.

Table 1 provides a summary of the participants' demographic data which includes pseudonyms, ethnicities, years of teaching, and years of co-teaching, education, and teaching setting. Three of the special education teachers service students in Grades 1 through 5. Three special education teachers service students in Grades 4 and 5. One of the special education

teachers service students in Grade 5 and has one additional kindergarten student. Four general education teachers teach Grade 5, two general education teachers teach Grade 3.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pair	Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Years of teaching	Yrs of co-teaching	Highest level of ed	Setting/ Certification	Currently Teaching
A	Norma	Hispanic	9	8	BS in Disciplinary Studies	SPED EC-12 Univ	Gr. 1-5 Math
A	Yvonne	White	11	9	BS in Ed	GE/Generalist EC-12 SPED EC-12 Univ	Gr. 5 Math
B	Valerie	Hispanic	6	4	Master in Administration	SPED EC-12 Univ	Gr. 4-5 Math
B	Vincent	White	3	2	BA in Interdisciplinary Studies	GE/Generalist EC-6 Univ	Gr. 5 Math
C	Mary	Hispanic	0.4	0.4	BS in Psychology	SPED EC-12 Alt Cert	Gr. 4-5 Math & Science
C	Susan	Hispanic	6	5	MS in Ed Leadership	GE EC-6 Univ	Gr. 4 Math & Science
D	Kelsey	Hispanic	3	3	BA in Fitness	SPED EC-12 Alt Cert	K-5 All Subjects
D	Melinda	Hispanic	3	3	BS in Disciplinary Studies	GE/Generalist EC-6 SPED EC-12 Univ	Gr. 3 Reading & Soc. Studies
E	Kim	White	4	2	MS in Administration	SPED EC-12 ELAR 4-8 Principal EC-12 Univ	Gr. 3-5 Reading & Soc. Studies
E	Candice	White	2	2	BA	GE/Generalist EC-6 Univ	Gr. 5 Reading & Soc. Studies
F	Shirley	White	13	9	BS in Soc. Work	SPED EC-12 Alt Cert	Gr. 5 Reading
F	Wendy	Hispanic	22	8	MA in Reading	GE/ELEM Self-Contained 1-8 ELEM Health EDU 1-8 Alt	Gr. 5 Math & Science

Participants

All the participants in the study are highly qualified state certified teachers, with 0.4 months to 22.0 years of teaching experience in a public school setting at the time the data were collected and met other criteria outlined in Chapter 3. I reviewed relevant data collected through the interview to produce each participant's profile. Each participant was given a pseudonym in the participants profile section to provide anonymity, and protect the identity of the participant. I explained to the participants the reason for using pseudonyms as an important ethical safeguard, to prevent the identification of the participants who contributed to the research. I assured that the data provided would remain confidential. A brief introduction of the professional background and current work context is provided in the profile of each participant.

Norma. Norma is an SE inclusion teacher with nine years of teaching experience. She services multiple grades levels (1-5) and enters 10 different classrooms on a daily basis. Norma indicated that she became a special education teacher because ever since she was younger and in school, she would volunteer to help the students with an academic learning disability. Her initial experience was with the severe and profound population, which was a big eye opener for her. She stated that special education always won her heart, but that she did not know exactly what she was getting into. Norma is true to the profession and is a conscious educator because she has a child who is a student with academic learning needs.

Norma SE acknowledged that during the beginning of the school year, there was time to collaborate with Yvonne GE. Unfortunately, as her caseload numbers increased to servicing grades 1-5, her time to collaborate diminished to a minimum. Norma admits that it's hard when a teacher is spread so thin or have multiple grade levels. Norma SE stated,

that's why I don't think it's affective co-teaching because we don't get the time to plan. I don't have conference with any grade level, my conference is at the end of the day for 30

minutes, after I've already done all of my inclusion. I do get to do PLC with 5th grade, but that's just reviewing the data.

Norma articulated finding the time to plan and go over the TEKS is challenging, but when the pair of teachers are in the classroom collaboratively teaching together, the students are provided with their individual education, which enhances their learning. Norma attributes that student success is not based upon passing a standardized state assessment. Norma states: "it's the student showing growth, not test scores, showing growth, that's the thing that matters. We can't standardize our students because our students are not standard. We need more training, more collaboration and planning time."

Yvonne. Yvonne is a fifth grade GE math teacher with 11 years of teaching experience. She has been in a co-teach classroom for nine years. She stated that she has always wanted to become a teacher, and as a little girl played school any chance that she would get. She stated that she was a marathon school person, who comes from a military family, and had attended 13 schools in 12 years. She has been in a lot of different school systems, not only as a student, but a teacher as well. Yvonne stated that she knows what gaps to look for, because of the constant moving she developed the gaps herself. She was always the teacher's helper, and loved to help students that were struggling, and so becoming a teacher was a natural calling for her.

Yvonne GE shared she honestly believes that GE need more preparation on what to provide students with learning disabilities prior to entering the classroom. Yvonne expressed that while attending certification training at the university, she was never taught anything about special education, and more specifically nothing about collaboration with the special education teachers. Yvonne expressed that they do not have a common planning time to sit down together because of their conflicting schedules and have committed to finding time as well as learning on

the job. Yvonne stated that part of her success is contributed to working closely, and learning strategies and techniques from her co-teach partner Norma SE.

What she has learned works for the students with learning disabilities, regular learners and her high learners. She said that she learned to modify and accommodate student instruction from Norma SE. Yvonne stated,

we have worked together a lot, we stay after school, and we come in early, and we talk in the hallways. We do have a common lunch time so sometimes we talk about plans. We really work well together, we talk about what topics we're covering in the weeks to come. Norma is a really good resource to ask how to accommodate certain instructional material in order for the student to be successful. Having Norma as the special education teacher show me what she knows, could only make me a better teacher. She has lots of new ideas, and I've done nothing but learn, and change, and grow.

Yvonne believes that the cohesiveness that they share, just like in any team is important. Together they have learned each other's teaching style, expectations, and to appreciate each other.

Valerie. Valerie is the lead SE inclusion teacher on her campus. She keeps all the special education, Preschool Program for Children with Disabilities (PPCD), and Life Skills teachers up to date. She is the case manager for fourth and fifth grade students, but also does resource education. She decided to become a special education educator after working at a child development center. She had two students, one student that had to be fed with a tube and another student with Down syndrome.

Valerie SE discussed that she had many challenges because she was not taught anything about collaboration. She expressed that she received her understanding of collaborating from her partner through her day to day experiences. Valerie is still amazed at how some teachers who have been teaching for upward of 20 years still is not aware of her role, and what she can do to help them in the classroom. Valerie stated: "I think GE teachers need to be more aware, or even

go through classes to learn how to deal with special education students and collaborative teaching.” Due to her schedule she mentioned that their co-teach classroom is not truly affective. Valerie stated: “time is limited in the classroom and there needs to be either more SE teachers, or we need to spend more time in the classroom because it is hard to do in 30 minutes with a limited amount of staff.”

Valerie claims that she has learned a lot from Vincent GE. He has taught her to limit the choices and options, given to the student, or else they will become confused. She stated: “Vincent has shown me a better way of presenting the math material to our students, a way that I was not even aware of, and now they are now I adamantly believe that it’s the ability in the student, not the disability.” She has seen a lot of progress at the students level, and believes that some of their students will pass the state assessment.

Vincent. Vincent is a fifth grade GE math teacher and has 3 years of teaching experience with 2 years of inclusion experience. Vincent has served in the military in numerous job capacities, and has enjoyed the comrade between military members. He indicated that one of the many reasons that he became a teacher was to get the fulfillment of a fellow supporter, and develop tightly knit friendships that other jobs just wasn’t providing.

Vincent relayed that due to the difference in schedules, the teams does not get a chance to regularly meet during the day. Due to Valerie’s SE conflicting schedule, there has been no consistency with her coming into his classroom. She has 3rd, 4th and 5th grade students to take care of and doesn’t have the same lunch time as he does. Vincent GE understands that the time to plan with her during the day is outside of their control. There is a lot of communication when they are passing in the hallways, or when she first enters into his classroom. Vincent stated: “the

logistics of co-teaching is difficult because she would have to have a separate time for us to really plan together.”

Vincent believes that in order for planning to take place, the co-partners have to make time to collaborate, whether it is early before class, or staying late to plan instruction out.

Vincent shared “I will not say that we don’t have the time, I don’t know if we make the time for planning to happen, I am a 6:30 guy, and we can meet to make things happen.” Vincent GE made it clear that when his co-partner is in the classroom it benefits the students tremendously. To have two teachers approaching material in different ways is beneficial.

The years of experience that Valerie SE has enabled her to teach the material differently. Vincent stated: “this benefits the students as the students get a better understanding of the material from both perspectives.” As all teachers agreed, student success, is not based upon passing a state assessment. Vincent declared,

the goals that we set are thoughtful, and tied to a concept that will assist the students in the state exam. Together, we look at the goals to see if they are being achieved and yes that success is called growth. I think if someone is really interested in collaboration the only way to really figure out how to work with someone and how to interact is to do it. I never attended a workshop in how to do inclusion or how to collaborate.

Mary. Mary is a SE inclusion teacher who services all students with a academic learning disability in the fourth and fifth grades. She has 4 months of teaching experience and 4 months of co-teach experience. Co-teaching is new to her and she freely discussed that point. She has a Bachelor’s in Psychology, with a minor in Criminology. She attended an Alternative Certification program for teachers and earned her Early Childhood - twelfth grade certification in special education. After having her first child Mary received a job as an Autistic Therapist working with children on the Autism spectrum and fell in love with her line of work. She says that she has the heart, appreciation, and the patience to work with students with academic learning disabilities.

Mary SE says it's a challenge to collaborate with Susan GE due to her hectic case load. She has 15 students on her caseload and is getting ready to receive two additional students. Mary articulated: "It's a lot and there's not enough hours in the workday. The students that I serve, are the ones who need the most help." Additionally, there are other instances that detract from collaboration, such as attending Annual Review and Dismissal meeting [ARD]. Unfortunately, Mary was never trained on the whole ARD process, and when one is scheduled, she still is required by law to make up the service time, because the students educational needs are not being met. Mary expressed,

some days I have two ARDs, so that is a couple of hours that I have to make up. In addition, I have to write the Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance statement [PLAAF] and goals which is usually on my time. I take my computer, and paperwork home, and stay up late preparing for the meeting.

When the pair of co-teachers collaborate, they communicate about many different areas concerning student learning, and behavior. One of the benefits of collaborating with Susan GE is discussing the best learning timeframe for their students. Mary SE stated: "Knowing when to catch the students at their best time of the day, knowing when they are actually able to absorb the material better." Having a special education and general education teacher collaborating and communicating about the students, benefits the partners because it reduces that amount of times that they have to repeat themselves, due to instruction being planned out. Having two different mind frames, two different theories and thought process of how students learn being communicated benefits the students in the classroom.

Susan. Susan is an elementary GE Math and Science teacher. She has five years of teaching experience, and five years of co-teaching experience. She decided to become a teacher because she was not happy as a manager at a clothing retail store. She went back to college and her English professor helped her tremendously with building her confidence and made her

realized that one teacher could make a difference. This changed her outlook on education, and she decided to become a teacher. Susan received her master's in the summer of 2018.

Susan admit that the challenge she initially faced was fear of the unknown when entering an inclusion classroom. While attending her university, she was never taught anything about collaborating with the special education teacher. Susan stated: "When it comes to collaboration, I can't recall learning anything about it, one course that I was enrolled in wasn't about collaboration, it was more about what to expect in the classroom. It has been overwhelming to her because there is so much to know and understand and she was just kind of thrown in without training. Another challenge that she face is not having time to sit down and collaborate with her co-teacher, because she gets pulled during their conference time or grade level meetings.

There are two inclusion teachers on campus, and they are responsible for all six grade levels. Realistically they are not always going to be available to sit down and plan. However, when the co-teachers are in the classroom together Susan articulated,

I feel like it's more help for my students, and I have another set of eyes in the classroom. She has knowledge and training that when applied makes a difference in the education of all of our students. I think that's why we have good results.

Susan GE welcomes and uses the advice that Mary SE has to offer, she wants progress for all of her students.

Kelsey. Kelsey is a SE inclusion teacher, and describes herself as Hispanic. She has three years of teaching experience and three years of co-teaching experience. Kelsey is the only inclusion teacher on her campus and services 21 students with academic learning disabilities within all grade levels. The prior year there was a second inclusion teacher on campus. Between them, they were able to split by grade levels which she believes worked much better. The inclusion teacher was servicing 1st and 2nd, and Kelsey was servicing 3rd and 4th. She was able to attend PLC's and had time to meet with teachers before ARDs. Currently being the only

inclusion teacher, she feels that she is not much of a resource to her teachers because of her workload.

Being the only inclusion teacher on campus and servicing all grade levels can be very demanding. It is very challenging especially when the teacher in conjunction to being new to the campus, and servicing K-5 is a whole new experience. It is difficult to find the time to collaborate with the GE with such a caseload and schedule, coupled with having to handle the behavioral problems. Kelsey relayed,

for the most part I've been able to create a relationship with a few of my teachers, but unfortunately there has not been enough time to meet with 10 different generalists. I am not as flexible, because of the several different grade levels, conflicting schedules, and covering all the ARD meetings, it's just challenging because I am not provided the time.

The co-teachers, contrary to not having enough time to plan has shared pockets of success. It is during instruction time and when they integrate their work together collectively in the classroom. Kelsey SE has taught Melinda GE some of the strategies that she utilizes with the students. Kelsey articulated,

I explain to Melinda what I use in math with a particular student and that it worked for him, and in-turn she used the strategy; we both have seen him make proficient progress. The best thing about co-teaching is having another person in the classroom. Knowing that there are targeted students in the classroom who need extra help and having either the co-teacher or myself address those while the other teacher is doing something else.”

It is coming together and figuring out what is the best way to teach the student the best strategies that work for them.

Melinda. Melinda is a 3rd grade English Language Arts Reading, and Social Studies GE teacher, she describes herself as Hispanic. She has three years of teaching experience, and three years of co-teaching experience. Melinda also has her special education certification and is interested into some day moving into the special education teaching field. Melinda adamantly believes that all teachers should be dual certified. She began her career as a long-term substitute

for special education inclusion. This is where she received a firsthand view and experience as how to work collaboratively with a general education teacher. This also when her passion started gearing towards special education.

Melinda has had several challenges during her time as a classroom teacher. She was basically put into the classroom without any formal or informal training. She did not receive any instruction or training on teacher collaboration, nor was she ever enrolled in any special education classes. Melinda bypassed being exposed to training, because she was able to challenge the special education certification test. Melinda emphasized “I kind of feel lacking, and I did not hear about special education until I started teaching, and that’s why I feel the stigma of general education.”

Melinda (GE) and Kelsey (SE) have a great professional relationship, and do whatever it takes to talk about what they can do for their students. They make time to discuss the student’s unique needs based upon their IEP, they also have a passion for their students’ education. Melinda expressed this about Kelsey: “She is very good about coming to me with the students’ IEP. She will explain it thoroughly, and make sure that I understand everything by providing examples for clarification.” Collaboration has helped both teachers grow and has provided skills that they need to practice. Melinda articulated “I am noticing the more experience that I get, the more committed I become in contributing to our students learning and eventually becoming successful in life, and not just on a state assessment”.

Kim. Kim is a SE inclusion teacher and describes herself as White. She has four years of teaching experience, and four years of co-teaching experience. She recently received her master’s degree in administration. Kim indicated that in the next year, she plans to work on her doctoral degree. She was initially apprehensive about becoming an inclusion teacher, but after

experiencing the job, she admits that she really loves doing the job. Kim is very energetic and processes information quickly. Kim appears to be a serious, and devoted educator, and she aspires to become an assistant principal within her district in the future.

Initially when a SE teacher goes into the classroom, the GE teacher may be hesitant in relinquishing the equal sharing of the classroom. It takes an established trusting relationship for the sharing to take place. Kim stated,

at first I had to show them that I came with a lot of available resources, and what I had to offer, and bring to the classroom. I had to let them know that I can add some value if they let me, and that is what broke down the barrier.

Kim now has full reign of the classroom and the teachers are relieved that she is there. Before they were not sure in having her there, but now they look forward to her coming into the classroom.

A major contributor for Kim and her co-teacher's success is communication. Kim stated, that most probably 98% of her collaboration is done after school through text message or through phone calls. I have a really good relationship with my teachers, and I have their phone numbers. I text or message them, and we discuss what we are going to do, because otherwise there's little to no collaboration. PLC's are monopolized with desegregating data, it's never about let's talk about what we are going to do for the week.

Kim dislikes not having the time to collaborate with her co-teachers. She despises entering a classroom and picking up the pieces where it seems to fit.

Candice. Candice is an English and Social Studies GE teacher, and describes herself as white. She has two years of teaching experience and two years of co-teaching experience. She has a Bachelor of Art degree. Candice indicated that in the next year, she plans to work on her master's degree in education. She is interested in special education because of her work as a co-teacher, and her discussions with her co-partner. When she was in college, she had the opportunity to be placed in a full inclusion classroom where co-teaching continuously went on.

Candice GE discussed that she was able to see how co-teaching works successfully. For her first year of teaching she was very successful with student achievement and admits that her mentor teacher, and professional development trainings have provided her with a stronger insight into instructional strategies that she can implement into her classroom. Candice emphasized,

I was blessed with the opportunity to be placed in a full inclusion classroom when I did my field work in college. There was co-teaching going on 27/7. There was a SE and GE teacher in the classroom all the time. I was able to see how co-teaching works successfully. I was able to see two teachers collaborate and work with each other strengths and weaknesses, and I brought this understanding with me into my own classroom.

SE teachers have demanding schedules that do not permit them to be in the classroom for any lengthy period of time. Candice stated: “I think that it is an issue that our inclusion teachers are only with us for a short period of time, and we are not able to utilize them to the fullest”. The GE co-teachers’ believe that it would be beneficial to have the inclusion teacher in the classroom for a longer duration. They believe that this would be a win-win situation for both the team of teachers as well as all the students in the classroom.

Shirley. Shirley is a SE Reading teacher and describes herself as white. She has 13 years of teaching experience, and nine years of co-teaching experience. She is the lead inclusion teacher and, lead special education teacher on her campus. She has a bachelor’s degree in social work, and has been employed as a social worker at the middle and high school level. Shirley was prompted to get her certification in special education after seeing the relationships between teachers and students at those levels. Shirley went through alternative certification and received her special education certification. Shirley strives to be a mentor to the students, and to build trusting relationships with the students. She believes that it’s essential that her students have a mentor to assist and guide their success.

The majority of participating teachers agree that the lack of planning time is a major hindrance which prevents co-teaching in the classroom. Unless there is time to planning it is not the true sense of co-teaching. Shirley explained,

we actually tried to carve out time this year for co-teaching to occur. It's a lot of prep time, and then there is the time that you have to be in the classroom. I have two teams that I have to service in math, reading, and science, and it's just not enough time to fully collaborate.

Fortunately, the team has been working together for five years and know each other well. When teaching, in the classroom, they feel each other out, and know when to jump in, and jump out during instruction. This is not co-teaching in its true sense.

Shirley's team fortunately has a common planning time, which positively promotes collaboration. During planning time, Shirley addresses the learning style of each student amongst other things. Shirley stated: "we talk about the student's academics and behaviors. We talk about the progress that the student has made thus far, and we talk about whose team we will place the student in the upcoming year." Shirley mentioned that her caseload numbers are low enough that the team can focus on the testing grades more.

Wendy. Wendy is a GE Math and Science teacher and describes herself as Hispanic. Wendy has 22 years of teaching experience and eight years of co-teaching experience. While growing up, Wendy believed that she was going to be a veterinarian or physical therapist. While she was attending college, she also worked a job teaching at a daycare, and absolutely enjoyed it. Wendy background includes a family of teachers. Her mother, aunt, sister, uncle and two cousins are teachers. Teaching inescapably was a topic of conversation at the dinner table. Wendy believes that her family members' passion was a big incentive that drew her into the field of teaching. Wendy expressed that she is planning to retire in the next eight years, but her present

circumstances may dictate otherwise. Wendy is a single mom and has a daughter that is going to be in college, and it all kind of depends on how everything works out.

Co-teaching is a mainstay of inclusion, which requires more than assigning two teachers to a class. Teachers need to develop a working relationship that benefits the students. In a co-teach partnership, it helps to know the person and what they are capable of doing for the students in the classroom. Shirley shared,

it helps that you have been with that person for as long as you have. I think it's a strength because you feel comfortable with that person, and you trust that person. You trust that person has your children's best interest, and it's not only her assigned specific. We realize that we both have something good to offer.

Co-teaching has its benefits, but it has its challenges as well. The most common concern that among co-teachers is a lack of common planning time. Common planning time, and meetings are essential for a successful co-teach relationship. Wendy (GE) emphasized,

having time to collaborate is the key component. Time to plan together, to debrief lessons, and to talk about how we want the classroom and lesson to operate. We need regular scheduled time to plan to discuss how we can best utilize each other.

The majority of the participants feel that the district should have built in planning time for co-teachers to collaborate.

Throughout the remainder of the findings section I will discuss the four major themes that emerged from the descriptive interpretive data analysis of the participants' responses as they relate to the individual research questions. The four overarching themes were teacher relationships, need for professional learning communities, barriers to collaboration, and positive outcomes of collaboration.

The emergent themes provide detailed descriptions from the life world of the research participants with quotations from the participants and a discussion of their experiences to support the context of the findings will be presented in the section (See Table 2).

Table 2

Themes and Categories

Theme	Categories
1. Relationship between teachers	Trust, Sharing responsibilities, Communication, Respect for each other
2. Need for Professional Learning Communities	Content knowledge, Co-Teaching model, Collaboration
3. Challenges to collaboration	Time, Schedules, Caseloads
4. Positive outcomes of collaboration	Students success, Building confidence, Change of mindset

Relationship Between Teachers

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was the relationship between teachers. Participants provided a rich description of their relationship in comparison to their daily co-teaching assignment. The participants conveyed their interpretation through elaborated experiences using rich descriptions which discussed that co-teaching is about teachers working together for a common goal. The participants established that relationships, and connections with colleagues played a large role in one's ability to enjoy work and grow as a professional. When taking into account the relationship between professional co-teachers, I have discovered that there are several interdependent factors that are imperative for the best co-teacher relationship and collaboration to exist.

Through semi-structured interviews with general and special education teachers, I have learned that relationships take time and that the most effective co-teachers combine their expertise with each other in collaborative ways, through communicating with each other. It is apparent that there are benefits from honest and open discussion of teaching belief and philosophy. In a co-teacher relationship, teachers must learn to engage in a new style of

educating children, one that accounts for another educator in the classroom, who is not there as support, but as an equal partner in a child's learning. There are diverse considerations to make, particularly for those educators who may be used to running their own classrooms.

The teams of co-teachers identified four key elements of the co-teaching relationship: trust, sharing responsibilities, communication, and respect for each other. Understanding and applying these essential concepts helped to facilitate co-teaching style and preferences. While GE and SE teachers had slightly different perspectives on the order of importance, it is evident that the building of professional relationships between GE and SE partners is key to effectively create a positive learning environment. I explored and revealed that trust is a critical factor in the co-teaching relationship.

Trust. Trust is a vital component to any relationship, and effective in improving teacher collaboration and student achievement. Trust relationships thrive when they are based on positive affect and interpersonal cohesion, which contributes to forming the foundation for effective communication. Trust in individual expresses expectations about individuals' not being damaged in their relationships with other individuals, and also, they benefit from their relationships (Shockley-Zalabak, Ellis & Winograd, 2000). Co-teachers should make every effort to build trust relationships amongst the team members and understand the role of trust in collaboration.

Co-teacher should accept and concur with absolute terms to develop and establish trust in partners. An enormous challenge for GE teachers, and SE teachers is establishing, and gaining trust in the classroom. The GE teacher must trust that the SE teacher knows the curriculum being taught to students. A trusting co-teaching relationship heightens the occurrence of transformative learning between partners. Trust facilitate teachers to share openly teaching styles, and

preferences. Trusting teachers, critically reflect on their assumptions, beliefs, and consciously implement plans to bring about innovative ways of engaging in the classroom environment to fulfill students' needs.

I have revealed that the initial levels of trust between the majority of co-teachers was developed through the everyday conversations, and decisions made to put the needs of the students first. These conversations initiated mutual respect for each other's strengths and weakness. Over time, co-teacher's confidence levels in each other became established, and they began to share openly. Sharing openly in itself is a significant factor in a co-relationship and success. Wendy (GE) reported,

it helps that you have been with that person for as long as I have. I trust that Shirley (SE) has the students' best interest at heart, and it's not only for her students, she is dedicated to all of the students.

As their roles became one, Yvonne (GE) made this statement about Norma (SE) as they developed into equal partners in the classroom "she is like my life-line because of the relationship that we have built. I think that it's really helpful, and healthy to establish a trusting relationship, you get to learn each other's style, and expectations".

Shirley (SE) commented that she made it her business to establish rapport, and build a relationship with the majority of the teachers.

I saw that there was a lack of relationship between some teachers. I just felt like there needed to be more trustworthy relationships. I felt that I wanted to build relationships with teachers and that way, they could have somebody to guide them, to listen to them, somebody that they can trust, and that somebody happened to be me.

Shirley (SE) expressed that she doesn't just work with her GE teachers, she actively strives to have a relationship with every teacher on campus. Kim (SE) noticed that at the on-set of co-teaching, GE teachers were hesitant, and did not want her in their classroom. Over time there was a change of mind, Kim stated,

they realized that they could use me, and it wouldn't be so stressful for them, it all came together. The teachers eventually put their guard down, and now we work together as one, the results are incredible, it has changed the way of doing business in the classroom.

In retrospect, Candice expressed the trusting relationship, she has with her co-teacher Kim: "I let her teach, so she is an equal in our classroom, she's me, just like I am her, we're one whenever we are teaching." Their relationship is indisputable, and they are honest to each other. They continuously provide feedback on how they can provide a better service to the students in their classroom.

Trusting relationships involve risk, reliability, vulnerability, and expectation. The parity of trust within a co-teach relationship does take time to establish. Each partner in a relationship maintains an understanding of his or her role's obligations and holds some expectations about the obligations of the other partner. Teachers are to be open to communication, and express their preferences, and different teaching styles explicitly. A trusting co-teaching relationship provides opportunities for teacher to learn in an environment that model's collaboration, demonstrates respect for different perspectives, and utilize a process for building on each other's strengths to meet a common goal.

Sharing responsibilities of expertise. Co-teachers work together in sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom. Equally sharing responsibility for participation, is defined as shared responsibility between general education and special education teachers in participation and planning the program when they collaborate (Friend & Cook, 2003). It involves the distribution of responsibility among teachers for planning, instruction, and evaluation for a classroom of students. Some of the participants stated that co-teaching is a way for students to learn from two or more people who may have different ways of thinking or teaching, that co-teaching is a creative way to connect with, and support others to help all children learn. Yvonne (GE) reported that: "Norma (SE) is a great resource, she is great

at accommodations and modifications, whether for behavior reasons, or for how instruction needed to be presented for all students to be successful”.

It should be noted that careful consideration be given to ensure, that both teachers are provided ample opportunities to present instructional material. This is done to eliminate the impression, that one teacher does not always take on the supporting role or, conversely, the lead role. It’s also just as important for students to see both teachers’ relationship as equally invested in their education to ensure consistency. Mary (SE) expressed,

it is important that all of the classroom responsibilities be shared by each partner in a collaborative teaching relationship, although all responsibilities will not always be shared by both teachers, it is important that our roles rotate, and that all kiddos who are assigned to us are getting serviced.

The bouncing of ideas off of one another, supports to orchestrate the perfect lesson, and makes the curriculum more accessible to all students. Mary does ARDs does the PLAFF and the goals for their IEP, and shares the responsibility with the GE teacher to make sure that their IEP needs are being met. It should be noted that clearly defined roles, and responsibilities be established to prevent either partner from feeling the other has overstepped a boundary or evaded responsibilities.

Valerie (SE) reported that a lot of the teachers are open to her helping and sharing. She states: “I always include the general education teachers in everything that pertains to the students. It’s more like they are our students, and we each have an important part in servicing our students.” Valerie usually give the teachers a feedback form for them to fill out, she has the students name on it. She will have the ARD date on it and have a deadline of when they should have that paperwork back to her. She gets everything from that form and then builds her PLAAF and report. “I always include the GE teacher in everything that I do.” Susan (GE) reported,

I see myself as a co-teacher in two ways. When I co-teach with a special education teacher, I see myself as sharing the responsibility for teaching all of our students by

working together for planning instruction, delivery lessons/activities, managing student behaviors, adapting/modifying lessons, and assessing students.

Sharing of responsibilities in a co-teach partnership is synonymous to when airline companies put a new plane into service. Planning a successful, and safe flight requires testing, adjusting, and checking by a team of confident, skilled workers. Two highly trained pilots are responsible for making sure the plane arrives safely at its destination. The passengers' safety relies upon the coordinated efforts of two competent individuals. Such as it is with co-teach teams. The co-teaching relationship brings together two people with their own wonderfully rich expertise, skills, and experiences. It is important to note that the co-teaching partnership does not remain static. Flexibility and openness to change can enable co-teachers to maximize the benefits of teaching together. Each teacher has an important role to perform to the best of their ability. The sharing of responsibilities can enhance the academic success of all students within the inclusive classroom.

Communication. Communication was stated by all GE and SE teachers as an important to every aspect of an effective co-teach relationship. It is a key element contained in collaboration which must be cultivated. Successful partnerships are built upon effective communication, by investing the time, and effort to build, develop, and nurture the co-teaching relationship. Co-teachers develop a sense of equality in knowing what their partner is thinking, feeling, doing, and bringing into the classroom environment. Susan (GE) expressed that communication is important to her co-teaching relationship with Mary (SE),

I can't make all the decisions in my co-taught class without consulting my co-teacher. It would not be fair to her or to our students. I think if we did not communicate with each other, the whole co-teaching relationship would deteriorate.

The understanding of general instructional beliefs, and especially those that affect decisions about instruction, is essential to a strong co-teaching relationship. As the relationships

developed, and greater communication is achieved, the team's ability to confer varying views and attitudes toward the workplace becomes valued. Melinda (GE) reported,

I got to see how important it was for GE, and SE teachers to communicate and work together, co-teaching does requires a great amount of flexibility, communication and opportunities for collaboration, and while it can have its difficulties, it can be an amazing experience.

It is important to understand and respect each other's preferred mode and method of communication. Communication helps to foster mutual respect, reduces the likelihood of being misunderstood, and maximizes collaboration. Valerie (SE) declared that communication is important for a co-teaching relationship to be successful: "We both need to know what is going on. I do appreciate being kept in the loop, particularly when it comes to our students."

Four of the SE co-teachers expressed frustration from their difficult experiences while attempting to communicate with their general education co-teachers. The participants felt frustration from not having the time to collaborate. The teachers felt the inability to connect was disturbing when considering how vital they are to student's development and learning. These feelings of frustration were also found by (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant 2009) who stated that teachers are showing frustration with collaboration because they do not have enough time, are finding it difficult to find the time, or there are other mandatory meetings planned during the collaboration time. When teachers are unable to express themselves in a way that is comprehensible, information and knowledge is not effectively shared. Poor communication between teachers directly effects the experience of collaboration. Mary (SE) reported it extremely difficult to communicate with all her co-teachers,

finding the time to communicate effectively together is what I am working on, and to me it's so overwhelming, I need to communicate the needs of the kids with my partners so that we can stay on the same page.

Regular ongoing communication between co-teachers is extremely valuable and has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness. Lines of communications must be open between the team, who rely on one another to get the work done. Communication includes clarification of roles, responsibilities and expectations, making the best use of a shared time, and sharing a similar teaching style/philosophy of teaching. Effective communication allows both teachers to work with each other to form a cohesive way of teaching, which benefits not only special education students, but also the general student population.

Respect for each other. Mutual respect is critical to the co-teaching rapport and relationship. More important than friendship is respect for the role, and expertise that each individual and different professional bring to the partnership. Co-teachers share ideas openly and provide most of their instruction facing students together. Respect is a co-teacher relationship factor that fosters positive communication for team members. When co-teachers have mutual respect, a successful collaborative relationship allows the team to achieve their goals. Both teachers should support each other, and work as a team, respect for each other is paramount. The understanding is that each teacher is perceived as an equal and valued participant in the education of students. Mary (SE) described respect this way,

in my first year of teaching Susan (GE) served as my co-teacher and mentor. She understood what I was going through as a new teacher, and adapted her teaching to accommodate my areas of need. She didn't do this with angst, frustration, or annoyance. She did this because it allowed me time to grow comfortable in my role and it benefited the students. To this day, we embraced the shortcomings/strengths and respected each other for it. Respect produces results.

It is important to respect each other as teachers and understand that everyone is different. Co-teachers need to be willing to bend and try new ways of doing things. The teachers often mentioned the need for acceptance, Wendy (GE) communicated that she has the utmost respect

for her co-teacher Shirley (SE), because of the teacher that she is. She has worked with Shirley for many years. Wendy stated,

in case you were wondering, Shirley and I became very good friends. However, we were partners first. Our friendship was built on a strong foundation of trust and respect. She has a plethora of experience, and having first set foot into the classroom, she has shown me many different teaching strategies.

Shirley (SE) expressed her view,

a common misconception among many teachers when considering co-teaching is that you have to really like the other person, but this is actually not true. You do, however, have to respect each other. “respect” and “like” are two different things. Just because someone respects you doesn’t mean they like you, and just because someone likes you, doesn’t mean they respect you.

The team of teachers expressed an essential piece of a co-teaching relationship as respect and value for your partner’s time, ideas, and effort.

Co-teachers partnerships requires more than a casual agreement to work together in a classroom. For co-teaching to be most effective, trust must be established. Developing trust creates the foundation for respect and establishes communication for the co-teach members. Two-way communication helps to express the co-teachers shared thinking, and shared responsibilities and joins the two individuals as one. Both teachers should be viewed as equals, within the inclusive classroom environment. This will be accomplished once both teachers share roles, and responsibilities within the classroom. The understanding and respecting each other’s method of communication fosters mutual respect, reduces the likelihood of being misunderstood and maximizes collaboration so all students’ needs will be met comfortably .

The Need for Professional Learning Communities

The second theme that emerged from the data analysis was a need for professional learning communities (PLC). Participants contributed their perception and interpretation of what areas was in need of the PLC. All of the participants were able to express their interpretations

through elaborated experiences using rich descriptions which discussed where teachers were in inclusive classrooms. A PLC is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students. The course of action to increase participation in the practice of teaching, and becoming knowledgeable in, and about teaching. The overall purpose is to contribute to how a teacher learns a particular set of knowledge and skills within a specific context of situations.

The teams of co-teachers collectively identified five key elements concerning the need for professional learning communities in the areas of: differentiation of instruction, teacher collaboration, understanding the different co-teach models, comprehending the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), and knowing the content material. While GE and SE teachers had slightly different perspectives on the order of importance, it is apparent that additional professional development is required, and is key to effectively create a positive learning environment. I explored and revealed that knowledge and application of differentiating instruction is critical.

Differentiation of instruction. Differentiation instruction is not a single strategy, but rather a framework approach which helps teachers to tailor their teaching. Teachers implement a multitude of options so that all students, regardless of their ability, can learn the classroom material. During the conversations between GE and SE co-teachers, it became evident that the differentiation training each received was extremely different. Yvonne (GE) expressed that her training on how to provide accommodations, modification, and differentiating the instruction was taught in a three-hour class. She stated,

I honestly believe that GE teachers need more training prior to entering the classroom, specifically on what to do for students with academic learning disabilities. When I was going through college, I honestly thought that it was going to be the job of the special education teacher to differentiate the instruction.

Several of the special education teachers such as Norma (SE), believe that the district should be have professional learning communities and training for the GE teachers on differentiating instruction, and that training should be mandatory, not optional. Norma reported,

the GE teachers need to have a training forum just like we do, it's hard when you have multiple ability groups, kids on different levels and you trying to teach them the same thing in the same way. It's a hard place to be. We all need more training, we all need to have the different training experiences, that's how we all get better, and we all are still students.

Yvonne GE expressed,

you know every day is new, every challenge is new, because every kiddo is different and the same kids we have now are not going to be the same kids we have 5 years from now, so we are only going to get better if we grow, and this is through professional learning communities.

The content is just one area, but consequently it requires much more knowledge and a well roundedness. Vincent (GE) reminisced, and concluded that the last thing he remembered is differentiation, "They did say there's going to be an inclusion teacher that's going to do the differentiation, and what I do know is that I go to them when I have a question." He strongly admitted that he really wasn't at the point where he could differentiate the instruction, reemphasizing that it's a lot.

Elementary GE and SE co-teachers are unique in that they are trained to use pedagogy, theoretical instructional strategies, and methods across all areas of the curriculum. Each teacher is valued for their unique expertise, and procedures with student interaction, interdependence, monitoring, and individual accountability. A central factor in the vitality of a collaborative teaching partnership is the clarity of expectations, and the challenge of meeting each student's individual learning needs. Students with disabilities are capable of learning grade-level content from GE teachers who know and use research-based techniques that are responsive to their needs. Unfortunately, due to the different trainings received by GE and SE teachers,

differentiation of instruction is fundamentally taught to SE teachers. GE teachers cannot present curriculum in one way, and expect every student to learn effectively, that's where differentiated instruction comes in. Unique to SE, is the pedagogical demand for differentiated instruction. GE teachers should learn how to differentiate instruction either through professional learning communities, or through collaborative efforts with the SE teacher.

Teacher collaboration. Teacher collaboration occurs when teachers work together to increase student learning and achievement. It's an ever-changing, ongoing process which taps into various perspectives and ideas. Collaborating teachers purposefully build interpersonal relationships, and work towards interdependence. This occurs when teachers are comfortable giving and receiving help without forfeiting accountability. The majority of the teachers expressed that they were not taught and were unfamiliar with teacher collaboration. When asked about her understanding of collaboration, Valerie (SE) expressed, "I think that teachers need to become more aware and attend trainings to learn how to better service students with special needs. Teacher need to get a better understanding on the overall teacher collaboration part."

Mary (SE) confessed that she needs to learn beyond, and in addition to her college courses taken while pursuing her teaching certification. "I did not get any formal training in the PLAAF, IEP, and ARD process or what collaboration between teachers entailed. There wasn't any training for her position like inclusion, it was just general teaching." Susan (GE) echoed the words of Mary emphasizing that while taking college courses in preparation for her teaching certification, the college did not offer courses or teach her anything about collaborating with special education teachers. Susan remembered taking maybe one class about classroom expectations, but it wasn't about collaboration. When it comes to collaboration, she does not recall any instruction on it. Susan (GE) expressed her view of the benefits of professional

development and training. “The training and education of teachers should include the ins and outs of collaboration, and how to bring together two or more certified/licensed professionals.”

Collaboration between GE and SE teachers is a necessary component for the successful inclusion of students with a disability in a general education classroom. When teachers collaborate, the interest, background, and strengths of each teacher contributes to the effectiveness of the instruction as a whole. Teachers can draw support from each other and delegate tasks that allow each teacher to feel effective. Teacher collaboration between teachers contributes to school improvement and ultimately student success. Unfortunately, effective collaboration among teachers is not happening in any formalized or regular way despite the obvious benefits. Teacher collaboration is uncharted territory, leaving the practice unstructured and inconsistent. The most common challenges of high-quality effective teacher collaboration is that many teachers did not have the training and do not have a firm grip on what co-teaching collaboration entails.

Content knowledge. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) are the state standards for Texas public schools from kindergarten to grade 12. They detail the curriculum requirements for every course. The current standards, which outline what students are to learn in each course or grade. It is important to distinguish what the TEKS are so teachers are on familiar terms with what is expected to be taught to the students during the school year. Several general education teachers expressed their concern on how imperative it is for special education teacher to fully comprehend the TEKS and understand content knowledge. During the course of instruction problems sometimes arise when teachers are not strong in the deconstruction of the TEKS. Unfortunately, some teachers do not have the ability to break down instruction to small enough increments to solve a problem.

There are instances when teachers may have to go back, and make sure students understand a math concept before solving the problem, as mentioned by Yvonne (GE) reported: “A SE teacher should have prior knowledge to walking into a classroom, specifically when it comes to knowledge about the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, it’s a lot to know about the TEKS of K-5.” A SE teacher has to comprehend that the TEKS starts from kindergarten, then goes to 1st, 2nd, and maybe something’s are tweaked in 3rd grade, and 4th and one word is going to change in 5th grade they all kind of stay on the same pattern and tweaked a little bit but it’s a lot of information to remember. It is difficult when someone has to actually go back and forth from grade levels.

Teachers should have a clear understanding and know each grade level TEKS. For example, when finding equivalent fractions and all those parts that come with it, a teacher may have to go back and make sure students comprehend this before solving the problem. Melinda (GE) stated,

foremost teachers need to be proficient and know their content area. If you don’t know your content backwards and forwards you don’t need to be teaching it. A lot of the times teachers don’t understand how to do it themselves that’s where we get into trouble with math concepts.

It is imperative for the teachers to comprehend and follow the structure of the TEKS because the skills develop upon one another. Due to student mobility, the TEKS build upon itself and becomes more complex as the students’ progress in grades. Teachers can increase the complexity of their teaching and, ultimately, the students in their learning. The most important benefit of knowing how to implement the TEKS is for teachers to provide greater equity to each student in the classroom. If teachers are not completely teaching all parts of the TEKS, the result could be gaps in the students’ learning.

Co-teach models. Friend and Cook (2010) described co-teaching as an approach that provides specialized services to individual students in a general education classroom. Especially, co-teaching involves two or more educators working collaboratively to deliver instruction to a heterogeneous group of students in a shared instructional space. In this environment, teachers blend their expertise, share materials, and develop common instructional goals. Being in a co-taught classroom has many benefits. Students have the opportunity to spend more time with the teachers and get more individual attention. With more than one teacher, it's easier to teach students in smaller groups or one-on-one.

Unfortunately, all teacher because of different training they received did not have a firm understanding of which model was being used, or the different types of models overall. Shirley (SE) shared,

I can't remember what it is called, it's not one teach one assist, it originally started that way but now I'm in there I mean I can come in there, and just start doing something wherever the teacher has left off.

There is no set co-teaching style used in her inclusive classroom. Valerie (SE) reported,

it just depends grade to grade, teacher to teacher, like every class is different and I know it's a Stetson model, but in order for that to be truly effective there has to be either more of us, or we need to spend more time in the classroom, our time is limited, it's really hard to do.

As far as co-teaching and using one of the models Vincent (GE) reported, "No we have not really got to the degree of using any particular model, I think the logistics of co-teaching is difficult."

Utilizing the different co-teach models requires extensive implemented instructional strategies that pose unique challenges to teachers and may possibly require targeted training. Although GE teachers conduct more of the instruction and SE teachers provide more individualized assistance, both use a full range of instructional roles. Each teacher has a responsibility to jointly combine their skills and knowledge to meet the diverse needs of all

students. For the co-teaching models to be effective there are certain guidelines that must be followed and maintained throughout the duration of the co-teaching relationship. The different co-teach models provides students with opportunities to learn in environments that model collaboration, demonstrate respect for different perspectives, and utilize a process for building on each other's strengths to meet a common goal. In effective co-teaching classrooms, teachers must engage and support collaborative learning environments that are results-driven and standards-based.

Challenges to Collaboration

The third theme that emerged from the analysis was the challenges to collaboration. Participants contributed their perception and interpretation of those challenges that interrupts or interferes with teacher collaboration. The description of challenges to collaboration were particularized with a rich description on how these factors disrupted daily teaching. All participants were able to express their interpretation through experiences using description that communicated the theme of frustration within the work environment.

When taking into account the challenges that co-teachers face when attempting to collaborate, the teams of co-teachers identified critical issues that clustered around three major areas: planning time, conflicting schedules, and teachers' workload. These areas were examined to uncover obstacles in the co-teaching collaboration. While GE and SE teachers had slightly different perspectives on the order of importance, it is evident that the overcoming the challenges of collaboration between these partners is key to effectively create a positive learning environment.

Co-planning time. Time is an essential component for co-teaching teams, the ability to meet, plan, and prepare for instructional, and compatibility needs for instruction cannot be

overlooked. Many teachers feel like there are not enough hours in the school day. When asked “What is the biggest challenge of effective collaboration that prohibits teacher collaboration?”, the participants responded with the same major factor. The problem of common planning time was the dilemma most frequently mentioned by all the co-teachers as constraining their practice. Scheduled time for collaboration and shared instructional planning was critical to them in building, and sustaining a successful co-teaching system. Time is a valuable resource for educators that should be embedded in their teaching responsibilities.

The team of teachers indicated that they would value having a designated time to collaborate with other teachers. The teachers’ justifications were (a) they would be able to see other teachers in action, and (b) they would be provided an opportunity to share ideas. All 12 co-teachers expressed that the lack of planning time was the foremost barrier to the success of co-teaching collaboration. Valerie (SE) expressed,

the leading issue interrupting the ability to collaborate is time, if we are going to do a full day of co-teaching, we need to be able to have time to plan, and make sure that these kids are getting what they just deserve.

All the teams of teachers specifically expressed that there is no time set aside by the district which is devoted entirely for collaboration. The teams provided details that even though they were eager to collaborate, circumstantial factors prohibited co-teaching collaboration. The co-teachers articulated that it would be a convenience to have a schedule set aside, to plan together. Without intense collaboration, the co-teachers believed that they could not maximize the benefits of co-teaching. Yvonne (GE) expressed, “we do not have a common planning time, we either have to come in early, or talk as we are passing in the hallways during the school day.” Melinda (GE) shared, “Without time to plan, we are not fully servicing the student to the fullest capabilities, and it’s so hard when you are spread so thin or you have multiple grade levels.” Kim SE shared,

I have to collaborate with the teachers of all my students to make sure I am supporting what is being taught in the classroom, and supplementing my own resources. Finding the time to talk to each teacher is extremely important and extremely challenging. Being organized enough to do so is also a very difficult task.

Each of the GE and SE teachers acknowledged that they had intentions to set aside time during the school year for collaboration to occur, but discovered the hardship in accomplishing this. Shirley (SE) declared, “It’s a lot of preparation, and then there has to be a lot of time that you have to be in the classroom.” Mary (SE) stated, “When co-planning time is not part of the school day, co-teaching is not nearly as effective.” Candice (GE) shared, “I don’t think people know that if we don’t collaborate, we don’t come together, we need more special education teachers, more training, and definitely more collaboration time.” SE educators are knowledgeable in individualizing curriculum and instruction. GE teachers tend to have broad knowledge of the curriculum, standards, and desired outcomes for the larger number of students. Therefore, when general educators plan lessons, they tend to aim for the whole class. Both perspectives are important, and co-teachers need ample planning time to work through how to best utilize each other. Planning time is vital to the success of co-teaching on many levels. From establishing a collaborative, and compatible relationship to lesson preparation, planning time is the factor that can positively cement a team together.

Co-teacher schedules and caseloads. Even when teachers are committed to co-teaching, barriers often arise related to the logistics of implementing it as a service delivery. The majority of the special education teachers frequently mentioned concerns pertaining to their conflicting schedules and caseloads. Shirley (SE) shared that there is much that is pulling her in many directions,

another thing I feel like it is obstructing collaboration is that I am a special education teacher. I get called for all behaviors. We don’t have a behavior person on this campus at the present time, so I get called to help out if administration is gone.

Mary (SE) expressed how frustrating and confusing her schedule and student load can be. She made a comparison of her student servicing schedule to the movie, *A Beautiful Mind*. Russell Crowe was attempting to solve an incredible mathematical problem with several formulas and numbers up on the blackboard.

I can't pull him from social studies, or from science. I am required to be in inclusion when they are in these classrooms, when they have their conference time, I have kids in my class for resource. I have not figured out my schedule yet.

Candice (GE) stated, "the biggest obstacle is probably just my time, I'm not as flexible as I use to be because of the several different grade levels, and conflicting schedules."

Trying to figure out how to manage a demanding schedule in such a short amount of time is exhausting. Someday because of the type of case load, Mary (SE) attends two ARDs a day. She also must write up all the paperwork that goes along with the ARD to include the PLAAF, and the goals. Mary stated,

as of now I have 15 for inclusion but that number is going to grow. I want to say I have two more ARDs coming up and I think I am going to get two more on my case load. It's such a heavy caseload, it's a lot. We have so many kids that need resource right now, there seem to be not enough hours in a day. With such a demanding type of schedule and caseload, it's difficult to sit down and collaborate with the teachers and come up with a plan for the kiddos.

When Norma (SE) initially started at her current campus and assignment, she had the pleasure of having only the 1st grade pod to provide SE services to. Since then her case load has increased: "I am up to 33 kids. It takes a lot to effectively manage that amount of students, and this is why I don't think its affective co-teaching, we don't get to plan together." She concluded,

that's why we get drained as teachers because we are trying to do it all and it's just impossible. We are the mom, we are the discipliner the caretaker the teacher we're trying to do this and that and it does get very exhausting especially when you do not have the time collaborate with your partner and plan for the success of the student.

The case load and schedules that the paired teachers have determines the degree to which collaboration and planning occurs. The capability of having a well-planned, purposeful lesson in

which the co-teachers have a vested interest affects the quality of their practice, and sets the stage for effective lesson implementation.

Positive Outcomes of Collaboration

The fourth theme that emerged from the analysis was the positive outcomes of collaboration. Participants contributed their perceptions and interpretations on the positive outcomes of collaboration. The descriptions of positive outcomes were provided with a rich explanation and connection to their positive outcomes. All of the participants were able to express their interpretations through experiences using descriptions that communicated their wanting all students to be successful.

When taking into consideration the positive outcomes of collaboration, the teams of co-teachers identified three major sub themes to include student success, building confidence, and change of mindset. These areas were explored to address the teachers' perceptions of the benefits of collaborations. While GE and SE teachers had slightly different perspectives on the order of importance, it was evident that all the teachers agree that bringing together two intellectual minds to co-teach is always better than one. The teachers accept as true that delivery of instruction to students with academic learning needs is too complex or numerous for one person to complete. According to the analysis of the interviews with participating teachers, co-teaching provided benefits to the teachers, and helped their students.

Student achievement. When team members work together to increase student learning, the ultimate destination as educators is student achievement. Collaboration is not only the ability to tap into various perspectives and ideas, but also to share responsibility for students' learning. Mary (SE) emphasized, "Collaboration narrows down the focus to what needs are required to accomplish student success, ideally it's knowing what and how we are going to instruct the

students.” Valerie (SE) described her students’ success results from collaborative efforts in the classroom, she made a comparison based on student support.

I do see a lot of progress but it’s at their level, and I try to share with the teachers that they might not see the progress in their class per se, because they are teaching them on grade level.

Given that teachers who collaborate on instruction are on the same page, they can potentially increase the level of academic rigor to match the core competencies they want students to meet. Teachers who communicate, and share ideas, also share an enlarged repertoire of instructional strategies that encourage creative instruction. Colleagues may be influenced to try different approaches or have opportunities to help a peer with a new approach. Melinda (GE) expressed, “teachers are able to practice the skills that they share between each other, and teachers are also able to provide two different points of view versus just one, I mean two teachers are better than one.” Shirley (SE) reported,

I have learned to celebrate the smallest of accomplishments. Their growth is not going to be as fast or as noticeable as their general education peers. However, it is progress! Sometimes, it is very hard for people to recognize the successes of a student when they are constantly comparing them to the best and brightest of the class. This is only doing a disservice to the student, not the special education teacher.

There are several benefits of SE and GE teachers joining forces and uniting their expertise. Mainly because students will be provided their individualized education. The instruction is delivered in a manner where the student comprehends the material, ultimately leading to student success. Norma (SE) shared,

it makes no sense if they are getting what everyone else is getting, then what is the point of special education, to me if the kiddo is showing growth. The test scores, and the state assessment results do not matter. My kid showing growth, that’s the thing that matters.

Candice (GE) shared,

I think that’s why we get drained as teachers because we are trying to do it all, and it’s just impossible we are the mom, we are the discipliner, caretaker and of course the

teacher. We're trying to do this and that and it does get very exhausting. We need to take the time and collaborate with our partner and plan for the success of the student.

Mary (SE) expressed,

collaboration is more than just a matter of academics. So many areas come into play that enhances the possible chance of success for our student. When we collaborate, several different types of concerns are addressed. This contributes to the teachers being on the same page. The only way that I see this coming into fruition is through collaboration.

Melinda (GE), expressed her perspective on the positive outcome of teacher collaboration as teachers' growth. "Teachers are able to practice the skills that they share between each other, and this directly contributes to student success."

Building confidence. When co-teachers work together in a classroom sharing, and opening up to ideas, the transformation of learning can take place. Collaboration is a win-win situation for both student and teacher. Teachers get to see, learn, and practice different ways of teaching a subject or learn how to proficiently do accommodations and modifications leading to teacher confidence. General education teachers expressed the many benefit of co-teacher collaboration as being able to come together as one. Many shared in the appreciation of how having a special education teacher in the classroom makes a tremendous difference. Susan (GE) shared,

oh my gosh! She knows the parents, and she knows how these parents are going to react to certain situations. She knows how to phrase things to kids to make them not shut down. She is like my lifeline because of the relationship that she has built with these kids. I feel like I have gotten more out of these kids this year because of what she has told me, than me trying to figure out the students.

The teachers together have the ability and know-how, to instill confidence into the students. Susan (GE) shared, "The students' confidence in their learning because the majority of the time when we collaborate, we are able to provide a well-rounded lesson. Realistically the students get the support they need which helps them boost their confident level."

The team also supports the students and make sure that they are not falling behind. Some of the SE students, are so quiet, and they don't speak up. They do not relay that they don't understand. Kelsey (SE) shared "Just having that extra person there to provide that support to them makes all the difference." The partners emphasize that they have seen a boost in student motivation since working together.

Change of mindset. A change of mindset embraces the notion that intelligence can be developed through teaching and learning. A change is crucial for teachers because they must believe that their students are capable of moving forward. The teachers' relentless belief that every student has an unlimited capacity to learn, perhaps at different paces, perhaps demonstrated in a variety of ways, but still capable of intellectual growth. It is of identical importance that students believe they are continually evolving, this which ultimately allows students to soar to new heights.

When collaborating, the SE co-teacher shares pertinent information about individual students to the GE teacher. After sharing, GE teachers have more of an awareness of their students' needs. Kelsey (SE) reported,

so, when we talk, I share with the GE teachers how to use strategies, methods and concepts that I use to present the material. Recently I have noticed that as the students rotate to that teacher, they have expressed that they are now understanding the material that she is presenting now.

Norma (SE), expressed,

when I explain the curriculum to the students, they are able to grasp, and comprehend the material, when collaborate with my co-teacher, I usually discuss the different ways that the material can be presented to the students so that they can understand.

GE teachers admit that they are able to cover the material, but maybe not as well for the students with special needs, as the SE co-teachers. SE teachers know up front what would benefit the students with special need in the inclusive classroom. Kim (SE) communicated,

I get pretty excited, because I realize that the many years that I attended school was not done in vain. I can actually share ideas, and explain different ways of doing things. When we collaborate, and are thinking along the same spectrum, the student benefits by being able to request and receive the same information from either one of us.

Candice (GE) stated,

together we benefit each other in all areas, Kim has definitely been a huge impact on my success this year, and I am very open minded to her. I truly feel that it's hard for one teacher to meet the needs of every single student in the classroom. There are ways that I can say something that my co-teacher can say better than me.

Co-teacher are capable of learning different strategies from each other. Working in the same classroom together open up opportunities for the team of teachers to see and experience different ways of presenting the curriculum. Departing from tightly held philosophies and having a change of mind can alleviate a lot of stress and time. Having two collaborating intellectual individuals in the classroom environment working together, and imparting knowledge can be extremely beneficial for students and teachers.

Conclusion

The 12 participants connected their perception of co-teaching collaboration with teacher relationships, the need for professional development, obstructions to overcome, and the positive outcomes of collaboration. Collaboration is highly recognized and valued, however, collaboration faces various challenges and constraints that limit the implementation of a successful inclusive programs. Teachers' perceptions pertaining to collaboration within the instructional setting play pivotal roles in establishing an environment for learner success.

It is essential to recognize that the role of both the general and special education teacher is crucial for ensuring the success of students with an academic learning disability.

Understanding the optimal conditions under which instructional collaboration can occur requires a variety of instructional procedures and training. It requires ongoing communication that will assist in establishing and maintaining teacher camaraderie. All of the general education teachers

communicated that there were several obstacles that prevented them from establishing effective communication with their co-teachers. Limited time for co-teachers to plan and prepare for instructional need was expressed throughout the co-teacher's interviews. Student growth is now a part of all teachers' evaluations in order to hold teachers more accountable. It is critical that teachers are effective in the classroom and students are learning from the instruction provided.

Another factor that effects collaboration between teachers was professional development. Many teachers felt that they could use additional professional development to help them better understand their students' services. Overall the elementary teachers are unique as they have already emerged as real teams, viewing the students as our kids. All 12 teachers are positive and not willing to give up, none of the teachers held negative beliefs about one another or the students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, and Recommendations

Discussion

Qualitative research is naturalistic; it attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural setting; it is particularly useful to study educational settings and processes. "...qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). The purpose of this basic interpretive qualitative study was to explore elementary grades (3-5) general and special education co-teacher's perceptions of collaboration. To answer the research question, data was collected through face to face, semi-structured interviews with six general and six special education teachers. I relied on the participants' perceptions of their co-teaching experiences on their respective campuses, and the impact they perceived their collaboration had on student achievement.

This chapter is divided into the following headings:

- A discussion of the central research questions, which includes the comparison of findings to the literature;
- A methodology review;
- Discussion of common themes and subthemes and how the theoretical framework relates to the findings;
- Implications which discuss a Model of Collaboration for co-teacher collaboration success;
- Recommendations for future research.

In addition, this chapter explains how the gap in the literature was filled and how the original contributions of this research produced valuable data to support co-teaching collaboration.

Central Research Question

The summary supports findings from previously published literature and extends the capacity of co-teaching collaboration literature, and the academic field. Both GE and SE teachers have voiced concerns about their roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching classroom. The primary research question used to guide the study was, “What factors promote, and hinder collaboration between GE and SE teachers in the elementary school settings?” The sub questions were: (a) What perceived skills, and training do general education, and special education teachers need to have in regards to co-teaching, and to the various models of co-teaching within the diverse settings? (b) How does the relationship between the collaborators affect the transformational nature of the collaboration? (c) How do the co-teachers measure the success of their collaboration efforts? To answer the research question, data were collected primarily through face-to-face, semi structured interviews with six GE teachers, and six SE teachers, who met the criteria of teaching years of experience.

I sought to learn, and understand the co-teacher’s experiences and what they perceived to be required to successfully collaborate. At the onset of the study I assumed that the study would be more complete with teacher participants from the different school campuses because the experiences of co-teachers from the same campus would be too similar and would limit the study’s results. As the study unfolded, my assumption was proven accurate. Each co-teacher described unique experiences from different campuses, the students that they served varied greatly, as did their student caseloads. Though not by design, all co-teachers served at economically disadvantaged Title One schools.

Research Question One

What factors promote and hinder collaboration between GE and SE teachers in the elementary school settings?

Promoting collaboration. I found that collaboration does not occur naturally in the classroom. Collaboration is jointly built upon the communication between the teachers. The most positive way teachers create a culture of effective collaboration was by combining their specialized training, sharing effective teaching practices, and arriving at a reciprocated understanding of their instructional beliefs. When teams of teachers collaborated effectively, they produced new ideas, and innovative strategies that met the needs or even surpassed the instructional objective of every student within the inclusive classroom. Effective collaboration in the classroom is a practice that is on-going and ever-changing, that requires building trust in an environment where communication is open and honest, and where the teachers are as supportive of each other's work as they are their own.

Trust. Within this study, one of the biggest challenges was the challenge of establishing trust for both teachers in the classroom. Trust was a critical ingredient of co-teaching and was expressed as a foundation for collaboration. The construction of trust was often seen as a prerequisite for the co-teachers to being willing to share their teaching with each other. Building a classroom culture of trust was an on-going process and generally took time to develop. Teacher who established trust and maintained it in every interaction and day to day felt free to share without feeling intimidated or embarrassed. In a classroom that fostered trust, the teachers were willing to take the risks that new transformational learning required. As a matter of fact, the teachers who experienced the value of this kind of collaboration, began to open up and use the

teaching strategies with their students. Co-teachers who experienced trusting relationship were also transparent about their concerns and was not afraid to offer constructive criticism and advice.

Sharing responsibilities. When working together to enact new and challenging pedagogies, sharing classroom practice was a key resource for the co teachers. It is challenging when GE and SE teachers are partnered together in a classroom to share the responsibilities of planning, instructing, and assessing students. In inclusive settings, co-teachers are considered equally responsible, and accountable for all students within the classroom. In the inclusive classroom that were successful, SE and GE teachers were jointly responsible and know as much as possible about each other's discipline, which achieved maximum results in the collaborative setting. Co-teacher should be cognitive as what to do as instruction is being presented in the classroom. Co-teacher who shared the classroom responsibilities promoted efficiency and clarified to their students what to expect from each teacher. An equitable division is sought because the paired teachers are equals in the classroom, in terms of the expectations placed on them by the administration and in ensuring engagement, learning, and progress of all students in the class. One common obstacle with co-teaching within the typical model of SE and GE teacher is how there can be a sense of ownership of the class and a negative attitude toward sharing a classroom (Scruggs et al., 2007). Within this study, I did not find these attitudes present in any of the co-taught classrooms. All teachers reported being equally responsible for all students. The environment was very much aligned with a team centered approach where all teachers were invested in the outcomes of the students.

Communication. The open communication needs of teachers were essential for those co-teachers who experienced success. To those partners who experienced a successful co-teach relationship, usually blended their expertise by first openly discussing strengths they brought to

the teaching situation. Evidently participating co-teachers had access to many communication methods to include direct face-to-face communication, augmented with telephone (cell phone), letter, fax, email, and text messaging. With these different options available, co-teachers should be cognizant to identify with each other the preferred communication method for the specific purpose. Regular collaboration and team planning sessions are extremely valuable. Engaging in these practices has a positive impact on teacher effectiveness.

Respect. This study revealed that respectful relationships were central to teachers' collaborative activity. It's extremely important that both teachers felt respected and valued for their contributions. In-turn, students perceive each teacher as an equal, and valued participant in their education. The respect among the participants and a commitment to share decisions was an aspect that promoted teachers' open engagement in conversations about their practice. Each teacher brought with them a different set of skills and experience. Mutual respect in the classroom created an atmosphere that motivated increase interaction between that pair of teachers and the students.

Hindrance to collaboration. For all of its benefits, co-teaching also comes with multiple challenges, some of which could potentially impact collaboration. The most common hindrance with inclusive education is the lack of appropriate time for both teachers to plan for instruction in the classroom. A second problem identified by SE teachers was their schedule, A third hindrance that emerged from the data were the SE teacher number of students on their caseload.

Planning time. Perhaps the biggest challenge to collaboration was lack of planning time. The co-teachers have essential responsibilities for planning, instruction, and assessing student acquisition of the academic curriculum. In addition, they participate in grade-level and school wide meetings, parent conferences, and extra-curricular activities. During the study there were

37 instances when the amount of time to collaborate surfaced and was discussed as a hindrance to collaboration. All six GE teachers and all six SE teachers communicated that time was the number one obstacle that prevented them from establishing effective collaboration with their co-teachers. The data gathered from this study showed that the general education teachers emphasized that a lack of planning time for lessons, inadequate preparation for instruction, and not enough shared simultaneous training with their co-teachers were obstacles to collaboration. All six of the GE teachers stated that on many occasions they had to create the lesson plans by themselves because they never had an opportunity to meet with their co-teacher due to reasons beyond their control, such as unexpected meetings about topics that had nothing to do with collaborative planning. Not being able to meet collaboratively made it difficult to execute the plan in the instructional setting if the SE teacher was seeing the material for the first time on the actual day of execution.

According to the GE teachers, when administrative teams arrived to conduct a formal or informal observation of the team, it would look as if co-planning never took place. The appearance of insufficient planning time was an obstacle because both teachers were expected to plan and deliver the lesson together simultaneously but rarely received the opportunity to plan, for reasons out of their control. While it may seem obvious, for collaboration to occur teachers need dedicated structured time together. Time is one of teachers' most valuable commodities and without it, collaboration suffers.

Schedules and caseloads. SE teachers emphasized unmatched schedules, in conjunction with the large caseload of students were obstacles to collaboration. The data from this study specified that SE teachers share the same opinion, that making a master schedule is the trickiest part of the school year. It did not matter if the SE teacher was novice or seasoned, setting up a

master schedule to ensure servicing students with learning disabilities was very complicated and time consuming. Sometimes the co-teachers were able to sit down together, but other times due to conflicting schedules they had to proceed without setting up a schedule. In the beginning of the school year setting a schedule was attainable, but as the school year progressed and more students were added to the caseload, the schedule quickly spun out of control. Even when the schedule was created many factors evolved that took the SE teacher out of the classroom and disrupted co-teaching. Having multiple grade levels and being required by law to service students makes scheduling a logistical endeavor. In addition, SE teachers are assigned additional duties to include assisting with the behavioral students. Many of the SE teachers are pulled away from the classroom to attend to student outburst, and behavioral problems. General and special educators may also be separated by daily schedules, caseloads, duties, and physical location within a school.

Research Sub-Question A

What perceived skills, and training do general education, and special education teachers need to have in regard to co-teaching, and to the various models of co-teaching within the the diverse settings?

I discovered that GE, and SE teachers each bring their individual skills, training, and perspectives to the team. GE teachers generally have content knowledge, while SE teachers have expertise in identifying students' unique learning needs. Nevertheless, these resources need to be combined to strengthen teaching and learning opportunities for the students in the inclusive classroom. For co-teaching to be truly effective, both teachers must both have content knowledge in all areas of curriculum so that they can switch back and forth to support each other. Data exposed that SE teachers require training mainly in curriculum content knowledge and co-teaching

collaboration. It became apparent that when SE teachers possess content knowledge, trust became established, and they assumed greater levels of instructional responsibility. SE teachers needed training to comprehend their role as a co-teacher and collaboration overall. GE teachers requires skills in the ability to differentiate instruction, and how to modify and accommodate instruction for students who do not yet understand at grade level. There is a need, because this has long been the sole responsibility of the special education teacher. There are countless benefits to team teaching, but it is a complicated and complex process where two teachers must balance their partnership professionally.

Research Sub-Question B

How does the relationship between the collaborators affect the transformational nature of the collaboration?

The findings of this study demonstrate that a co-teaching relationship created a dynamic interaction that encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice and their skills. Co-teachers agreed that their on-going relationship was built on trust, which led to the pairs of teachers feeling comfortable in sharing with each other. Through communication and discussions on best practices, the relationship between the team of teachers solidified, both inside and outside of the classroom. Evidently transformational teaching manifested when teachers began to openly share and exchange knowledge to promote student learning and personal growth. From this perspective, the teachers were able to share a vision for their classroom.

All participants articulated that once the relationship was established, collaboration helped them to grow as teachers, providing them opportunities to reflect on and discuss ideas, perspectives, and approaches that a solo teaching assignment could not offer. Collaboration between teachers helped shape their pedagogical approaches through mentoring or co-learning. It

became obvious, that co-teaching collaboration offered benefits not only to students but also to those involved in the co-teaching relationship.

Through transformational learning, the team of teachers became more reflective and transformed their perspectives, and ways of thinking as they generated new beliefs and was able to justify a new course in teaching action. When the participants established relationships and leveled teams were on equal standing within the classroom, they described engaging in a co-learning process, where both grew commensurately as teachers. The co-teacher described the co-learning process as one of their primary motivations for preferring co-teaching to teaching alone. The findings of this study demonstrate that a co-teaching relationship created a dynamic interaction that encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice, skills and transforming teaching and learning.

Research Sub-Question C

How do the co-teachers measure the success of their collaboration efforts?

This study found that elementary schools' co-teachers was not primarily concerned about students successfully passing a state examination. To the teams of teachers, student achievement was measured in terms of student growth. This is measured by how much academic progress a student has made between two points in time. This could be from the start of the year to the end of the year, or from Year 1 to Year 2. All teachers expressed it was about the student showing growth, which was the only thing that mattered. Co-teachers taught the students and gave them the tools to overcome obstacles and learn to their fullest potential.

The principle goal according to all participants was for all students to achieve their own highest level of success in inclusive classrooms. If a student was not able to add and they get down to the end of the year and now they can accomplish the task, that is success. According to

the co-teachers, it's called growth. The findings of this study conclude that the growing evidence base clearly demonstrates that when teams of teachers participate in a collaborative process that allows them to engage in joint-inquiry and capitalize upon the unique knowledge and skills of their colleagues that they can expect to experience meaningful shifts in their practice with their students becoming the beneficiaries.

Conclusion

Both the GE and SE teachers acknowledged that a solid foundational relationship is established prior to effective collaboration taking place. The data gathered from this study showed the teams of teachers' perceptions indicated collaboration can occur only if specific measures such as trust, shared responsibility communication, and respect for each other, were established. All six GE teachers felt that trust takes time, but once established, the co-teach relationship could be nurtured. All teams of teachers agreed there was no separation of which students belong to which teacher on paper or otherwise, but that all students within the classroom were considered a student of both teachers. The GE teachers did address that because of the different educational training received, SE teachers may not contain the necessary content knowledge. There were 30 instances where the discussion concerning content knowledge was addressed. Five of the six GE teachers discussed that both collaborative teachers must have a good working knowledge of the content to appear credible to each other.

Methodology Review

Study selection. I chose to study co-teacher collaboration because of his interest in learning and education. During the past decades, teacher collaboration has received increasing attention from both the research and the practice fields. Many official policies and education reforms around the world plead for more collaborative practices among teachers. This increased

academic, public, and state interest in teacher collaboration than previous generations, combined with my certification in both general and special education ignited his interest in how co-teacher collaboration impact student success.

Methodology selection. The constructivist basic interpretive qualitative methodology was chosen for this study because the inductive methodology was best suited to the intent of the study. The flexibility of the basic interpretive data analysis process was also a sound choice for this study. I kept involved with the data throughout the study through the use of the constant comparative process. The thorough analysis of the data through initial and focused coding began to lead theme to the model of collaboration that eventually emerged from the study. Though the basic interpretive was localized and dealt only with the real-world experiences of south Texas co-teachers interviewed, the model that emerged may be useful to other co-teachers who seek student academic achievement. The constructivist basic interpretive methodology was selected because the model derived from the data would potentially have implications for daily practice.

Participants

Eleven out of the twelve elementary school teachers who responded to the invitation to participate in the study were interviewed in their respective classrooms. These classrooms were located within five different elementary schools within a single school district. There was only one teacher that I had a difficult time meeting with due to conflicting schedules. I initially thought that she was unsure about the interview. We finally made arrangements and met at a neighborhood Starbucks. None of the teachers demonstrated any reservations in answering the interview questions. All of the teachers believe that co-teaching was the best delivery of service for the students in their classroom, but wanted the collaboration and teaching piece to operate more smoothly.

Interview Process

I developed a semi-structured interview schedule based on 10 guided open-ended questions. Using the interview guide (Appendix E) I conducted one-on-one interviews with each teacher. The focus of those questions varied to include teachers' perceptions on collaboration. Interviews took an average time of 45-60 minutes for each and were audio recorded for later transcription. Most of the interviews took place in the participants' classroom.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed by using the basic interpretive methodology. Qualitative data were coded by the researcher for emerging themes, following the description-reduction-interpretation method (Wolff, 2002), and procedures of sound qualitative research recommended by Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., & Richardson, V. (2005). I examined every participant response to ascertain patterns that could lead to general concepts. The data were coded into categories, with resulting similarities being analyzed to create themes. Quality indicators of sound qualitative data analysis for this study included triangulation of data, investigator triangulation, my discussion to describe and interpret data, and conclusions substantiated by sufficient quotations from participants' responses.

Common Themes

Through the constant comparison analysis (Hendricks, 2009; Mertler 2009; Phillips & Carr, 2010), four major common themes and subthemes emerged from the data including (1) teacher relationships, (2) the need for professional learning communities, (3) barriers to collaboration, and (4) positive outcomes of collaboration. These themes provide insight and understanding of how co-teachers perceived collaboration while working in an elementary

inclusive setting in a south Texas district. All themes were mutually interconnected (see Figure 2).

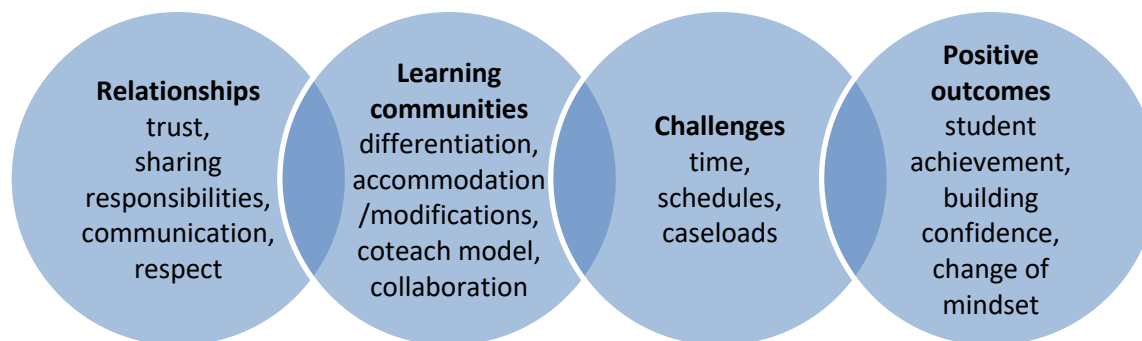


Figure 2. Emerged themes.

Theoretical Framework

As discussed in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework used for this basic interpretive study was the theory of transformational learning (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Transformational learning is defined as learning when change occurs within the learner, and these learning experiences, along with reflection and communication, shape the learner (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). The learning theory was used for understanding the conception that educational improvements do not occur for an educator in isolation, but require discourse (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010; Taylor, 2008). In facilitating the transformational learning experience, educators must expose adult learners to other perspectives within the context of a trusting environment, and encourage them to move beyond the relative safety of their own world views (Cranton, 2002; Taylor, 2000). In essence, DuFour, R., DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008) and Servage (2008) both alluded to the issue that transformation needs to occur with and within teachers before it is depicted by student's achievement. Mezirow argued that everyday perspectives or frames of reference can limit our understanding-thus, they can be faulty or restrictive (Kitchenham, 2008,

p. 107). In the completed study, transformative learning theory was used to provide the theoretical framework for exploring GE and SE teachers' perceptions of co-teaching comes by means of discussion and collaboration.

Theme and Theoretical Discussion

The following section discuss each of the four major themes and subthemes. This section is based on two bodies of literature: transformative learning and collaborative research. As exhibited in Figure 1, there are four teacher relationship factors which promotes collaboration between GE and SE teachers in the elementary school settings; trust, sharing responsibilities, communication, and respect for each other.

Theme One: Relationships

The first theme encompassed participants' perceptions about the relationship between teams of teachers. It included a recognized need by the participants to create and maintain a successful co-teaching relationship. This theme focused on the value in building trust which is earned over time through merit and is based on actions. These actions include embracing the shared responsibility of pedagogy and philosophies on teaching. This cooperation perceived by the participants contributed to improvements in teaching and benefits every student in the inclusive classroom. Co-teaching is an on-going process that requires open communication and interpersonal skills, respect for one another, and cooperation.

Trust. Trust is having that reliable confidence in someone, and is a major contributor in the co-teaching relationship, as the co-teacher must trust his partner for collaboration to be successful. Once trust has been established between the teams of teachers, it reinforced the collaborative relationship for a positive inclusive classroom learning environment. The participants in the study stated that trust does takes time to establish and earn. The co-teachers

learned through collaborative practices the sometimes-difficult conversations needed to happen for to help strengthen trust. Difficult conversations are a part of the process, but more important was the respect for the role and expertise that each of the teachers brought to their partnership.

The teams of teachers perceive that relationship can only build when time is spent learning about each other's strengths and challenges in teaching a particular subject area. The GE teacher was usually the one that opens up to share the classroom with the SE teacher. Trust arbitrarily opened up avenues which allowed a co-teaching team to learn from one another and to reach student learning goals. The results from the studies showed that trust impacted collaboration and established a learning environment.

Sharing classroom roles and responsibilities. Both teachers should be viewed as equals within the inclusive classroom. Equality is accomplished when both teachers share roles and responsibilities within the classroom, both must be recognized as the classroom teachers. I discovered that it is important for equality to be established so all students' needs are met comfortably. Unfortunately, the majority of GE teachers mentioned that they developed the curriculum, planned lessons, and provided disciplinary procedures in the inclusive classroom, due to not having the time to collaborate with their partners. Occasionally, they consulted with the SE teacher about lesson plans, but it was difficult due to their conflicting schedules. Typically, it would be the primary responsibility of the SE teachers to provide instruction by adapting and developing materials to match the learning styles, strengths, and special needs of each of their students with disabilities. In a well-built co-teaching classroom equality did assist to create a positive learning environment where both teachers shared all of the responsibilities. A balanced division should be sought to place teachers as equals in the classroom.

Based on the interviews from all the teachers, the district did not present a set of responsibilities to each teacher in the inclusion classroom. It was assumed that the GE teachers would take primary responsibility, and the SE teachers would fit into the classroom activities. The SE teachers understood how to implement the co-teaching model, but general education teachers did not have the training to understand how it worked properly. SE teachers felt their roles changed constantly and there was no definitive framework for co-taught classrooms. These teachers used their “gut feelings” or instinct to decide what was needed for the day and what needed to be accomplished.

Communication. The results from the studies showed that communication shaped collaboration success. Communication skills were especially important for elementary co-teachers for the collaborative relationship. Communication allowed the teachers to establish personal biases and frames of reference and to understand the biases and frames of reference of others. Communication allowed teachers to discuss their teaching style, strengths and weaknesses, Individualized Education Plans and regular education goals, and formulate a plan of action to take as a unified team. Through open communication, paradigm shifts lead to solutions to the dilemma and produce more effective educational solutions. Communication that occurred between co-teaching partners was impacted by interactions both in and out of the classroom. Most participants who had successful co teaching partnerships had relationships that extended beyond the classroom; and were sometimes friends beyond work. To create a cohesive classroom, co-teachers should know each other’s strengths and weaknesses.

Respect. The relationship collaboration factor of respect was essential for a successful co-teaching relationship. Respect for each other helped to build communication styles, and trust to foster collaboration. When co-partner differences are respected, the environment opened up

channels of successful for a collaborative effort of taking team challenges. Understanding and accepting both the positive and negative characteristics of an individual requires respect. Collaboration was most effective when co-teachers respected one another and understood their co-partners' differences. Respect was present in the co-teaching relationships that consisted of communication and trust. Respect was expressed as an important factor in the relationship of the co teachers. Respect, communication, and understanding the co-partners contributed to establishing endurance in the co-teaching relationship. Respect for one another allowed co-teachers to understand their differences, and bridge the gaps.

Linking theoretical framework to theme one. It was clear from the findings that professional relationships played a key role in teachers' transformational learning. Numerous references to trust between the pair of teams emerged rather strongly. With trust established, the partners felt free to engage in meaningful conversations which allowed transformational learning to take place. In the presence of trustful relationships individuals feel free to be involved in discourse and share information to achieve consensual and mutual understanding (Forte & Flores 2014).

Teachers stated that they had to feel comfortable in letting the SE teachers lead their classroom in instruction. The relinquishing of the classroom by GE teachers took time to build up to. This was in part that the GE teachers had to see how the SE teachers performed when presenting the content material to the students. Pairs of teachers said that honesty towards team members was very important. One teacher noted that "when a problem arises, I prefer that the person come directly to me to talk about it, there are always two sides to a situation and if we can rectify it, it should be done immediately."

The four factors of trust, sharing responsibilities, communication, and respect for each other are relationship factors that strengthen co-teaching team success. The factors are interdependent because of the connectivity of the factors. In addition, if one relationship collaboration factor is weak, then the remaining factors will be influenced. Difficult conversations were a part of the process. Most important is respect for the role and expertise that each professional brings to the partnership. When co-teacher relationships had a successful balance of the four factors, the relationship collaboration needs are effectively maximized for student success in the inclusionary classroom.

Theme Two: Professional Learning Communities

The second theme that emerged from the data, was the need for professional learning communities. This theme gave consideration of the participants' perceptions of additional training requirements leading to effectively collaborate. The fact emerged that there was a continuous need to have both informal and formal engagement in an ongoing cycle that promotes deep team understanding and learning. During the study it became evident that co-teachers should know as much as possible about each other's discipline in order to achieve maximum results in the collaborative setting.

The idea forum designated to exchange teaching philosophies is professional learning communities (PLCs). These communities are scheduled collaboration meetings, where teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom instruction and practice. When teachers with different experiences jointly attend PLCs, and are open minded to accept information concerning teaching, transformational learning can take place. Some teachers stated that they were able to attend PLCs, while other expressed concerns about not able to attend because of their schedules. Additionally, those teachers that were able to attend PLCs complained that

topics directly addressing co-teaching collaboration should be on the agenda and discussed first and foremost.

Many of the teachers agreed that PLCs should serve as the forum where there is an exchange of educational ideas that will benefit not only the teachers, but the student learning disabilities within the classroom as well. Teachers who realized that they were weak in co-teaching, differentiating instruction, content knowledge, and understanding the collaboration piece felt that they could obtain valuable knowledge thru PLCs. Participants identified that by attending PLCs, they could get the support required to move beyond “One Teach, One Assist” in order to maximize student learning. Teachers were very aware that attending PLCs had numerous benefits, but a problem identified by teachers was that their schedule occasionally did not permit them to attend PLCs during scheduled times.

During the interview, I asked the question, whether GE teachers receive the necessary training to be able to provide modifications and accommodations? Norma SE stated, “not formally, not an official training, I kind of tell them this is what I do, and this is what the students are used to, but it all varies.” Additionally, GE teachers declared SE ineffectiveness in classrooms is directly associated to a lack of content knowledge. SE teachers claim that GE teachers should be able to identify with the terms “accommodation and modification”, and to identify the conditions surrounding its implementation as an inclusive strategy.

Research findings supported this issue, for example, Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) reported that GE teachers felt less prepared in areas related to curriculum and assessment, such as making accommodation and modifications to the curriculum, using individualized assessment and monitoring student progress; meanwhile, SE teachers felt more prepared than GE teachers in areas associated with planning instruction, pacing lessons, evaluating assignments,

adapting course content, monitoring student progress, providing individualizing instruction, having appropriate expectations of students and participating in a team.

Understanding the six different co-teaching models. It would be beneficial that co-teachers familiarize themselves with the six different co-teach models. It is not a matter of being able to memorize each of the six different instructional models. As an alternative, teachers should be able to determine the particular instructional model dependent upon the curriculum to be taught and understand that one approach is not more appropriate than the other. Knowing and understanding when to apply alternative models can directly contribute to student success at different academic levels.

The data from the study indicated that teams of teachers were not sure what co-teaching model that they were using. Often due to the lack of planning time, teachers would come into the classroom and jump into teaching wherever they saw fit. Most participants admitted to not possessing effective knowledge of the six co-teaching models during the interview. There were mixed responses as to whether participants understood how and why each model is beneficial for specific learning needs. Additionally, the district did not mandate any particular co-teach model to use.

More often teachers were using one teach, one assist, or station teaching. Together, co-teachers need to establish which co-teaching model they will use most frequently and which co-teaching model they will use the least. There should be an understanding of which model or combination of models are most effective for the working co-teaching relationship, and most importantly an understanding of the model's ability to maximize student learning outcomes. Ideally, ensuring that teachers know how to implement co-teaching models successfully requires

district-wide training at the very least. Teams of teachers should comprehend the different models of co-teaching and how to engage students in one of the six models.

Collaboration. Although collaboration and co-teaching has been around for decades, evidence in the study, indicated a lack of training in the essential skill of collaboration. The pairs of teachers were unsure how to effectively collaborate with each other and indicated there was a need for this area to be developed. It is recommended that the co-teachers attend specific training and practice and learn how to work, communicate, and collaborate with each other. It is easy to assume that placing two teachers in a classroom and expecting them to work together is an easy task, however it does take training. Elementary teachers need ample opportunities to develop the deep understandings of how to collaborate effectively, it should be noted that little attention was paid to developing collaboration in their professional preparation. The ability to collaborate was identified as an essential skill for current and future teachers. Learning to effectively collaborate will provide an avenue to share effective teaching practices, which in turn benefits the students. Learning to collaborate should be addressed in the form of professional learning communities (PLC). Teachers can attend scheduled PLCs, which will assist them to decisively analyze, and evaluate their practices. PLCs will explain to teachers how to work together on common goals within their co-teaching partnership.

Linking theoretical framework to theme two. The second theme of attending professional learning committees (PLCs) is supported through literature when analyzing additional training requirements. The understanding of co-teach models, differentiation, content knowledge and collaboration, cannot be underestimated when it comes to teaching, and student achievement. Teachers that require additional exposure and training concerning classroom improvement understand that knowledge could be absorbed in the company of teachers striving

to improve the teaching practices. At the center of transformative learning is the central concept that teachers are learners with the same needs as all learners, to be a part of a learning community (Eun, 2008).

Participants admitted that they can benefit when trained together with experienced teachers, that have a deep rich understanding of classroom strategies, activities and operations. Teams of teachers expressed that interaction with more knowledgeable or capable teachers in PLCs would enhance their classroom environment significantly and impact their view in understanding classroom circumstances. Eun (2008) posited that PLCs are the means with which theory, specifically learning and development theories, become transformed into visible entities of practice. PLCs embrace the social nature origin of individual development while recognizing the importance of continuous, ongoing, school-based collaborations among all the members of teaching and learning process designed to make a transformative change based on a common goal (DuFour et al., 2008). This common goal is the improved learning for all students, which is also the ultimate goal of all transformative learning.

Theme Three: Challenges to Collaboration

The third theme, Challenges to Collaboration personified obstacles the participants perceived as obstruction to collaboration. These critical issues for teachers clustered around three major areas: planning time, schedules, and caseloads. This category further embodied participants recognized need to carve out time for teachers to collaborate by “freeing up” some of the teachers’ time spent on routine duties. The existing daily schedule or caseload does not change; instead, schedules can be arranged in ways to facilitate the delivery of instruction.

It also indicates that teachers are committed to improve teaching and learning practices: they value time to co-plan with colleagues to create new lessons or instructional strategies and to

analyze how their students are developing and what they can do together to advance progress. All teachers felt a lack of planning time for collaboration was a major concern. They stated that the much-needed time to collaborate is the key for vital student achievement.

All teachers felt a planning time empowered them to educate all the students in the co-taught classroom. They expressed that the existing daily schedule or caseload does not change; instead, schedules can be arranged in ways to facilitate the delivery of instruction. Teachers stated that lack of planning time can lead to territorialism. Without time to plan for a good balance of content and individualization, a GE teacher may become protective of their subject matter or may become protective of his students.

When I asked the teachers to list their concerns related to co-teaching, most participants identified lack of time as significantly hindering the working relationship and the effectiveness of the partnership in ensuring student success. Most co-teachers would like a planning session every day, or at least every week. Scruggs et al. (2007) researched that common planning time between participating teachers is essential to the successful implementation of co-teaching. Similarly, Burstein et al. (2004) reported that collaborative planning time was considered an integral factor for perceived success in all co-teaching endeavors. Teachers interviewed in the study stated that the increased planning time would facilitate sustained implementation of inclusive practices.

Linking theoretical framework to theme three. An important part of transformative learning is for teachers to change their frames of reference. This change is accomplished when teachers critically reflect on their assumptions and beliefs, and consciously make and implements plans that bring about new ways of defining classroom instruction. Learning that is transformative in nature takes time to take root

and flourish, because it is not just additional information that is acquired; it is a new perspective, or frame of reference, through which teacher experiences are filtered, evaluation is conducted, and action occurs.

For teachers to effectively engage in a learning experience that is transformational in nature, time, I found that critical reflection and communication is essential. Participants stated that they needed planning time to grasp concepts, set aside biases, and share and evaluate the new anticipated experiences. This process requires a learning environment that is challenging, safe, and empowering while fostering collaboration, feedback and respect among adult learners (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1997). According to Mezirow's transformational learning, time is needed for change to take place.

It took time for the teachers to change, especially when they felt comfortable with their own beliefs about teaching. When their beliefs are challenged, it can feel uncomfortable or perceived as threatening. Many teachers may not want to consider alternatives and therefore may not engage in reflection or consideration of alternative points of view. Even if the co-teachers created an environment that will support transformative learning, the 10 phases of learning associated with transformative learning required teachers to spend time together to critically reflect.

Theme Four: Positive Outcomes of Collaboration

The fourth theme, positive outcomes of collaboration captured participants' perceptions on individual growth, change of mindset, building confidence, and student achievement. The participants perceived their individual growth as a positive aspect and implication of their co-teaching experience in an inclusive classroom. Transformative learning transpired as participants discovered increased levels of confidence, self-sufficiency, self-reliance, assertiveness, maturity,

and understanding of others and themselves. This collectively contributed to transformation in teachers' frame of reference and mindsets. Teachers deduced that their co-teaching experience gave them an opportunity to learn and enhance student success.

Overall, participants perceived that co-teaching provided a desirable educational experience for students and provided a more in-depth exploration of content knowledge. Many participants acknowledged the positive changes in their classroom practice that resulted from sharing their practices. Participants also referred to the expansion of their teaching repertoire in relation to a specific content area. Moreover, one teacher saw the sharing of practices as an opportunity to measure her "personal success against that of team members" in order to improve her own practice.

Shirley (SE) stated that co-teaching acts as an important driving force for her to put more effort into teaching students. According to Melinda (GE), co-teachers bring different ideas and perspectives about a subject, and this diversity can be very productive for the students. Participants felt they were often able to develop a better course through their combined teaching experiences with partners of differing expertise and perspectives. They were able to explain topics differently and interact more with students, benefitting student learning. Wendy (GE) stated, "The advantage, I would say, is a diversity of perspectives, and not just perspectives, but ideas, another creative person bringing their energy, skills, and time to deliver a really good product."

Furthermore, mentoring and co-learning relationships were an advantage for many participants. Co-teaching provided opportunities for participants to improve their teaching skills and schedule flexibility. All participants expressed happiness with at least one co-teaching experience, and some said that they preferred co-teaching over teaching alone. All participants

described co-teaching as helping them to grow as instructors, providing them opportunities to reflect on and discuss ideas, perspectives, and approaches that a solo teaching assignment may not offer.

Participants felt they were often able to develop a better course through their combined teaching experiences with partners of differing expertise and perspectives. They were able to explain topics differently and interact more with students, benefitting student learning. Susan (GE) stated, “One benefit of collaboration is the ability to instill confidence in our students. Realistically they get the support that they need, and it helps them to boost their confidence level.” Moreover, mentoring and co-learning relationships were an advantage for many participants. Co-teaching provided opportunities for participants to improve their teaching skills and schedule flexibility. All participants expressed happiness with at least one co-teaching experience, and some said that they preferred co-teaching over teaching alone.

Linking theoretical framework to theme four. The ultimate goal of collaboration is to increase students’ achievement; teachers are required to work collaboratively within inclusive settings to strengthen academic performance of children with special needs, so to close the gap between high and low achieving students (Smith & Leonard, 2005). Without professional collaboration, there can be no growth; no advancement; no development; no refinement; no synergy. This particular study relates to the stated issue that improved student achievement is an outcome of transformed teacher behavior (Anderson & Larson, 2009) and transformed teacher behavior and feelings is a result of PLC implementation (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Borko et al., 2009).

Mezirow (1997) viewed transformative learning as a rational process of learning within awareness [and] is a metacognitive application of critical thinking that transforms an acquired

frame of reference—a mind-set or worldview of orienting assumptions and expectations involving values, beliefs, and concepts—by assessing its epistemic assumptions. (Dirkx, Mezirow, & Cranton, 2006, p. 125)

Discussion on the Co-Teaching Collaboration Model

The model of co-teaching collaboration emerged for the data collected from the participants' interviews. When creating a highly collaborative classroom, there is a need for teachers to communicate to establish a solid relationship built upon trust. Conversations allow for teachers to be introduced to new perspectives that may lead to transformational learning if there is a level of trust and respect within the PLC. When there is a level of respect and admiration for the other. It is recommended that teachers further their understanding of collaboration. There will be some challenges that the teachers may have to overcome, such as schedule, caseloads, and time set aside for collaboration to occur. The end result when these challenging interconnected obstacles are faced and confronted is student achievement. It is a positive environment when teachers are given the freedom to challenge each other's thoughts and behavior in a safe space. This type of collaboration can encourage flexibility in thinking, openness to new information, trust, risk-taking behavior and thoughtful adaptability. The introduction of different perspectives into collegial conversations promotes a mindful attention and allows for further transformational growth (Dirkx, 2006).

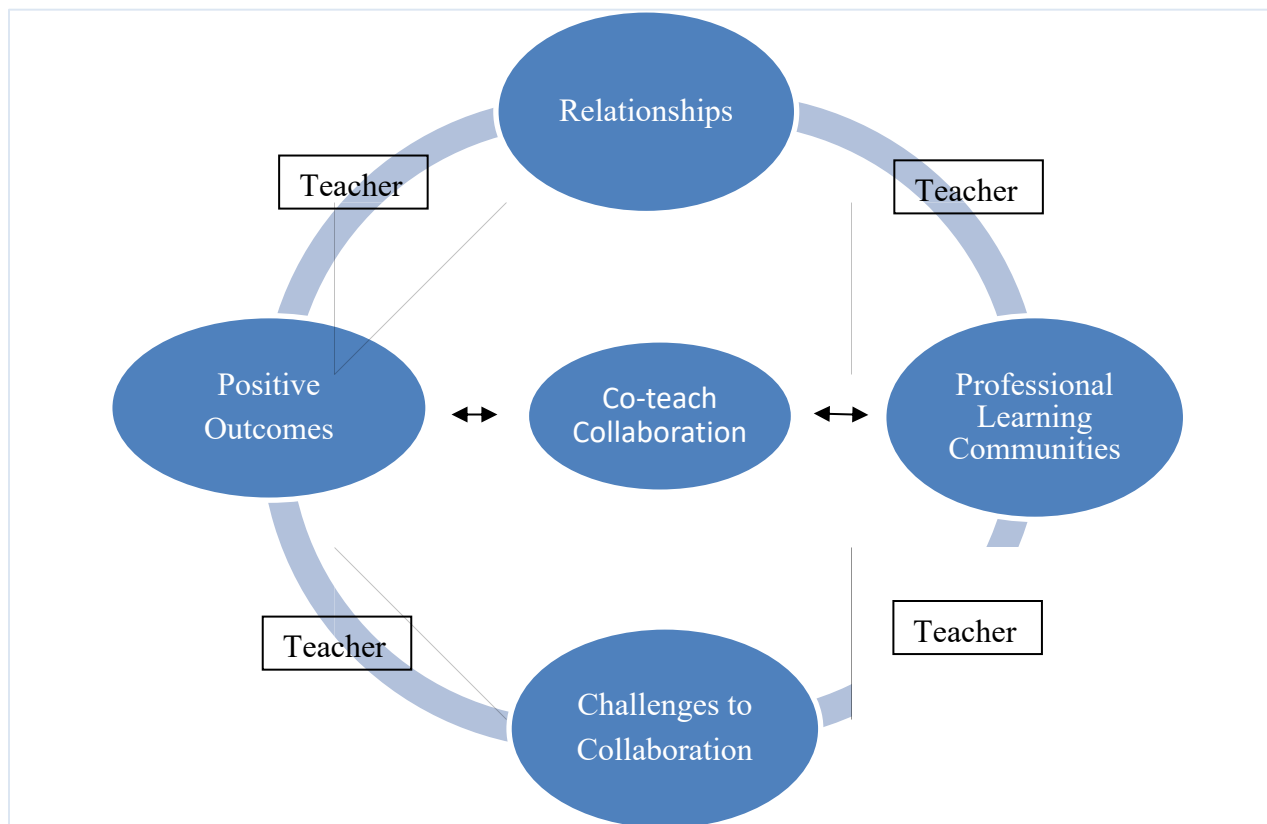


Figure 3. The co-teaching collaboration model. This model includes all four common themes derives from data. The interrelated concepts provide the foundation for collaboration that will support teachers and increase student achievement. A collaborative model is recommended for use in inclusive classrooms. The continued development of these concepts is essential and will support co-teachers.

Recommendations for Future Research

The study has implications for further research on issues to meet the increasing needs for effective co-teaching classrooms. It is recommended that qualitative research be conducted at the elementary level looking at special education student achievement both before and after the implementation of co-teaching. A second productive area for future research would be on the issue of professional learning communities and open communication between special and general education teachers. There should be a forum available to discuss and resolve grievances between special and general education teachers.

A final area for future research would be studies on the credentialing process. Such research could involve the existence of stigma or prejudice on the issue. As such, it would be advisable to include classes and studies at the credentialing programs on issues such as collaboration between special and general education programs, special education foundation principles for general education teachers and multiple subject classes for special education teachers. Such a credentialing curriculum would allow the issue of collaboration to be addressed at the initial levels of the teaching profession. There continues to be a need, though, for research to specify just what the elements are, that are included when teacher educators claim that teachers should collaborate.

Recommendations for administration. It is recommended to administration who wants to increase the chances of co-teaching success to apply these important choices to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the GE environment. Administration should ask for and allow GE and SE teachers to volunteer to co-teach and have a voice in their partnerships. Pairing of teachers are often a result of teacher availability rather than designed matches. Unfortunately, teachers have been scheduled to co-teach by administrators but didn't have much advance notice. Co-teaching and collaboration are challenging, it requires teachers to stretch out of their comfort zones and embrace an initiative that they may have had no say in. Many teachers are forced into co-teaching and find themselves paired with another teacher in the classroom without any training in the people skills part of the process. It is recommended that prior to assigning a pair of teachers to engage in a co-teach assignment, teachers are interviewed about their inclusion philosophy. It is recommended that teachers also are required to attend mandatory training to get a better understanding of what all co-teaching entails. Administration should also provide professional development for all faculty regarding what co-teaching is and is not. Administration

should create a schedule that ensures there is time for common planning and that teachers do not have too many partners. Administration should ensure that caseloads are equally divided, and that schedules do not overlap. Administration should continually observe and provide feedback to help co-teachers grow as teams. Administrators who provide scheduled instructional planning opportunities for co-teaching teams demonstrate commitment to this process.

Recommendations for teachers. It is recommended to teachers to seek out a compatible partner that they are willing to establish a solid relationship with. It is recommended that teachers meet with and market themselves as a professional who brings a great deal of expertise to the table. It is important that from the very beginning teachers establish a professional and personal relationships built on trust, a sharing of ideas, responsibility, goals, and accountability, and that they get to genuinely know each other. It is of importance that co-teachers realize that the success of the class depends on the strength of the co-teaching relationship. It is recommended that teachers should strive to schedule common co-teach planning meetings, and commit to them. The co-teachers should attend prepared meetings with an agenda to maximize co-planning time. They should commit to campus professional learning communities, district and educational servicing centers professional development training on co-teach collaboration and content knowledge. It is recommended that teachers diligently seek buy-in from administration by expressing any concerns about planning time, scheduling and caseloads to gain administration support.

Conclusion

This qualitative research study added to the body of research that examines the perceptions of GE and SE teachers toward co-teaching collaboration. Themes emerged in response to the research questions based upon an analysis of the data. The emergent themes

described the need for GE and SE teachers to have a solid relationship, collaboration, adequate and on-going professional learning committee, to overcome any collaboration obstacles. These themes relate to the difference in experience and perceptions. These emergent themes define what is necessary for successful co-teaching. The results of this qualitative study are positive. The impacts of co-teaching given the supports of expectations, time, professional learning committees, and collaboration teachers embrace co-teaching. Successful co-teach collaboration takes commitment and training at several different levels, success will not occur on its own. Administration must analyze, align, and make use of schedules wisely, to assist in the efforts of building strong and solid collaboration. Co-teachers must continuously seek training on content, co teaching, and collaboration. I encourage future researchers to expand on how co-teaching can have a positive impact on teachers, and students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

University of the Incarnate Word
Dreeben School of Education (2017)
Informed Consent for Participants

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Lawrence White, a doctoral student at the University of Incarnate Word, inviting you to participate in research involving elementary co-teachers working in this Independent School District. The purpose of the research is to examine general, and special education co-teachers perceptions about their collaboration. You are being asked to participate because you are working as part of a collaborative team. The research will take place over a 3 month period in total. I will conduct 45-60 minute interviews to collect the data. I may follow-up with you for clarification on any of your statements. If it is better for you, the follow-up can take place in your home or a neutral location. No one else but the investigator will be present.

The information recorded is confidential and no one else except my Faculty Supervisor Dr. Hartzell, and myself will access to the information documented. The discussion is based on the opinions of teaching practices, policies and community beliefs, and in general no personal information is sought. There is a minimal risk that you may share some personal or confidential information by chance, or that you may feel uncomfortable about some of the topics. However I do not wish for this to happen. You do not have to answer any questions or take part in the interview if you feel the questions are too personal or if talking about them makes you feel uncomfortable. You may also feel uncomfortable and experience stress after you thoughtfully analyze your collaboration efforts. It is my hope that you will use this realization as a catalyst to enhance your collaborative relationships if this does occur, however this may not happen.

There is no compensation or direct benefit to you, but your participation is likely to help us find out more about general, and special education teachers perceptions, concerning collaborative practices. We will not be sharing information about you to anyone outside of the research team. The information that I collect from this research study will be kept confidential. Any information about you will have a number on it instead of your name. Only Dr. Stephanie Hartzell, and myself will know what your number, and this information will be kept under lock and key. Each participant will receive a summary of the results. We will publish the results so that stakeholders may learn from the research.

You do not have to take part in this research study if you do not wish to, it's strictly voluntary, and choosing to participate will not affect your job related evaluations in any way. If you wish to ask questions later, you may contact the Principal Investigator Lawrence White at telephone number (210) 365-0952, or email lawwhite1@uiwtx.edu, or contact my Faculty Supervisor Dr. Hartzell at telephone number: (210) 829-3171, or email hartzell@uiwtx.edu. This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the University of Incarnate Word IRB, which is a committee whose task it is to make sure that research participants are protected from harm. If you wish to find out more about the IRB contact: University of the Incarnate Word Office of Research Development at (210) 805-3036 or wandless@uiwtx.edu, and reference project #17-12-003.

University of the Incarnate Word
IRB Approved
Application #: <u>17-12-003</u>
Date Approved: <u>12/13/17</u>

I have read the foregoing information, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to participate as a participant in this research.

Print Name of Participant _____

Signature of Participant _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

Print Name of Principal Investigator/person taking the consent _____

Signature of Principal Investigator /person taking the consent _____

Date _____

Day/month/year

University of the Incarnate Word IRB Approved Application #: <u>17-12-003</u> Date Approved: <u>12/13/17</u>

Appendix B: IRB Approval Continuation Letter



October 18, 2019

PI: Mr. Lawrence White

Protocol title: A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers

Lawrence:

Your request for continued review of Exempt protocol 17-12-003 titled "A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers" was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 10/18/2019.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Mary Jo Bilicek
Research Compliance Coordinator
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3565
mbilicek@uiwtx.edu

Appendix C: IRB Approval Continuation Letter



November 6 2018

PI: Mr Lawrence White

Protocol title: A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers

Lawrence:

Your request for continued review of Exempt protocol 17-12-003 titled "A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers" was approved. This approval will expire **one year** from 11/06/2018.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request** form.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request** form.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol. Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UJW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA

Ana Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
 Director, Office of Research and Sponsored Projects Operations
 University of the Incarnate Word
 (210) 805-3036
wandless@uiwtx.edu

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



December 13 2017

PI: Mr Lawrence White

Protocol title: A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers

Lawrence:

Your request to conduct the study titled "A Basic Interpretive Study of Co-Teaching Perceptions: Collaboration of General and Special Education Elementary School Teachers" was approved by Exempt review on 12/13/2017. Your IRB approval number is 17-12-003. Any written communication with potential subjects or subjects must be approved and include the IRB approval number.

Please keep in mind these additional IRB requirements:

- This approval will expire **one year** from 12/13/2017.
- Request for continuing review must be completed for projects extending past one year. Use the **IRB Continuing Review Request form**.
- Changes in protocol procedures must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Use the **IRB Amendment Request form**.
- Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others must be reported immediately.

Approved protocols are filed by their number. Please refer to this number when communicating about this protocol.

Approval may be suspended or terminated if there is evidence of a) noncompliance with federal regulations or university policy or b) any aberration from the current, approved protocol.

Congratulations and best wishes for successful completion of your research. If you need any assistance, please contact the UIW IRB representative for your college/school or the Office of Research Development.

Sincerely,

Ana Wandless Hagendorf, PhD, CPRA
Research Officer, Office of Research Development
University of the Incarnate Word
(210) 805-3036
wandless@uiwvs.edu

Appendix E: Interview Guide (Teachers)

1. Please share your job responsibilities within the district.
2. How did you initially prepare for your co-teaching assignment?
3. What knowledge and skills is beneficial to assist students with academic learning disabilities in inclusive settings.
4. What challenges would you report as obstructing collaboration in the school environment?
5. How would you describe student success resulting from the collaborative relationship?
6. What are some collaborative actions you would recommend to special and general education teachers to ensure their success?
7. In terms of your experience, what are the noteworthy benefits of co-teaching for the teachers?
8. In terms of your experience, what are the considerable benefits of co-teaching for students?
9. In terms of your experience, what are the barriers you have faced in implementing co-teaching?
10. In what way does teacher collaboration help you to adapt your instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities?

Appendix F: CITI Completion

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)**COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS***

* NOTE: Scores on this Requirements Report reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. See list below for details. See separate Transcript Report for more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

- **Name:** Lawrence White (ID: 2133760)
- **Institution Affiliation:** University of the Incarnate Word (ID: 2014)
- **Institution Email:** lawwhite1@uiw.tx.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Department of Education

- **Curriculum Group:** Dreeben School of Education
- **Course Learner Group:** Same as Curriculum Group
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 21979870
- **Completion Date:** 18-Apr-2017
- **Expiration Date:** 17-Apr-2020
- **Minimum Passing:** 85
- **Reported Score*:** 92

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY

	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Belmont Report and Its Principles (ID: 1127)	18-Apr-2017	2/3 (67%)
Students in Research (ID: 1321)	18-Apr-2017	4/5 (80%)
History and Ethical Principles - SBE (ID: 490)	18-Apr-2017	2/5 (40%)
Defining Research with Human Subjects - SBE (ID: 491)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
The Federal Regulations - SBE (ID: 502)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Assessing Risk - SBE (ID: 503)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Informed Consent - SBE (ID: 504)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Privacy and Confidentiality - SBE (ID: 505)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Research with Children - SBE (ID: 507)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Research in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools - SBE (ID: 508)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Internet-Based Research - SBE (ID: 510)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
Vulnerable Subjects - Research Involving Workers/Employees (ID: 483)	18-Apr-2017	4/4 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest in Research Involving Human Subjects (ID: 488)	18-Apr-2017	5/5 (100%)
University of the Incarnate Word (ID: 14285)	18-Apr-2017	No Quiz

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

Verify at: www.citiprogram.org/verify/?ka05ed911-eaca-4595-976a-3d55e25b66f6-21979870

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)

Email: support@citiprogram.org

Phone: 888-529-5929

Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>