

The Experience of Co-teaching Elementary School Teachers in a Rural Public  
School District

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## ABSTRACT

As a result of recent federal legislative changes affecting educational policies, co-teaching, which requires general and special educators to work together to provide instruction to students in inclusion classrooms, has been on the rise and is considered by some educators as a method for meeting mandates required by law. While co-teaching is an idea that should work in practice, teachers who implement co-teaching find themselves facing complex issues regarding their roles and responsibilities within the context of program logistics. This qualitative study was designed to help co-teaching partners and others to understand how co-teaching partnerships are formed, develop, and work in classrooms. This understanding may be helpful to others as they seek to overcome barriers and form relationships that facilitate successful co-teaching partnerships.

Elementary co-teachers in a rural school district were interviewed face-to-face, and a document analysis was conducted to examine how co-teachers experience co-teaching partnerships. Six general education co-teachers and six special education co-teachers were randomly selected for interviews, and they were asked to bring any literature that they had received on co-teaching to the interviews.

Results indicate that co-teachers thought compatibility was important when working as co-teachers. They expressed the need for a mutual planning time during the school day, and both general and special education co-teachers were concerned about the amount of uninterrupted time special education teachers could spend in inclusion classrooms. When co-teachers thought they had a compatible partnership, they were willing to make alternative planning arrangements, and they were accepting of the time special education co-teachers could spend in the classroom.

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

Co-teaching requires general and special education teachers to work together to provide instruction to students in inclusion classrooms. Co-teaching has been on the rise and is considered by some educators as a method for meeting mandates required by law. While co-teaching is an idea that should work in practice, teachers who are practicing co-teaching find themselves facing complex issues regarding their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. This study was designed to help co-teaching partners and others to understand how co-teaching partnerships are formed, develop, and work in classrooms. This understanding may be helpful to others as they seek to overcome barriers and form relationships that facilitate successful co-teaching partnerships.

Elementary co-teachers in a rural school district were interviewed face-to-face, and a document analysis of any literature co-teachers had received on co-teaching was conducted to examine how co-teachers experience co-teaching partnerships. Six general education co-teachers and six special education co-teachers were randomly selected for interviews, and they were asked to bring any literature that they had received on co-teaching to the interviews.

Results indicate that co-teachers thought compatibility, to be able to get along together, was important when working as co-teachers. They expressed the need for the same planning time during the school day, and both general and special education co-teachers were concerned about the amount of uninterrupted time special education teachers could spend in inclusion classrooms. When co-teachers thought they had a compatible partnership, they were willing to make alternative planning arrangements, and they were accepting of the time special education co-teachers could spend in the classroom.

## DEDICATION

Throughout the dissertation process I spent time in prayer because it is my belief that all things are possible with the Lord. So I first dedicate my dissertation to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and I am thankful for the help that He gave me through this process. He has never let me down! Yes, a relationship with the Lord is real, and the gift of salvation is open to all who accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior—John 3:16.

Secondly, I dedicate my dissertation to my brother Everett. My brother taught me so many things, and I have wonderful memories of things we used to do. He was always ahead of his time with the insight that I wish I had. He was always the smarter and the more gifted between us, and I will always look up to him with the greatest of admiration! I work harder and try harder because of my brother's positive influence!

Finally, I dedicate my dissertation to my family, relatives, friends, students and colleagues over the years, but there are three people that I especially want to mention because of their special interest in me. This dedication is to Susan, Joyce Ann, and Rudy for all of their never-ending love!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When Alfred Lord Tennyson wrote “I am a part of all that I have met” in his poem “Ulysses” he left us all with an inspiration to ponder. I first realized the pleasure of this quote when I graduated from high school in my green cap and gown. Green was not even our school color, but someone on the graduation committee thought we should all wear green. Later I discovered how the color green would overshadow significant events in my life—a motif as it is called in literature. So who am I a part of, or who is a part of me, and who has helped me become the person that I am to achieve what I have achieved?

I believe my desire to achieve academically started in high school when I made the cheerleading squad. I did not come to the squad as a traditional cheerleader at this school, but I quickly developed the same desire for success as the other girls who came from more affluent families. I am thankful for the exposure to these achievers, as I learned to work hard academically as well.

And then there were my parents who gave us the perfect life growing up. I wanted to achieve because I heard statements like, “Be the best you can be at whatever you do, and be number one at it” from my father. And from my mother I heard, “Anything worth having you have to work for, and you usually have to work harder than you thought.” Later, as an adult, they flattered me with statements like, “Backy (as my dad called me), you’re one in a million,” and “They don’t make ’em like Bec (as my mom called me) anymore.” Well, parents have a way with words, and I am very thankful for mine, despite their flattery, and for everything that they taught me.

Then I started the college years, and I met some pretty astounding educators who never gave up on me. I first developed an interest in research in Dr. Carter’s graduate research class at Radford University. After that class, she worked with me on a special project on inclusion in the school district where I graduated and where I would later work as a teacher. She stayed with me through the project, volunteering her time just because she wanted me to do well. She once told me that when others help you, then you want to give back by helping someone else. I never forgot that, and I asked Dr. Carter to be part of my doctoral committee at Virginia Tech.

When I was trying to solidify my committee, I asked to meet with Dr. Earthman. He gave me words of wisdom, explaining to me how important it is to work hard on a dissertation and that there are a lot of A.B.D.s [All But Dissertations] out there and few who actually finish.

I never forgot his words of wisdom; and once my committee was in place, I worked very hard.

So I finally landed on the perfect doctoral committee, the perfect project, and the perfect opportunity to find success. I guess timing is everything, and the time had come for me to move forward. I am so thankful for my doctoral committee, which consisted of Dr. Parks as my chair, Dr. Carter, Dr. Earthman, and Dr. Gratto. With the help of this committee, I was able to make it! In fact, I worked so hard with their help that I was awarded the Phillip R. Jones Scholarship by the School of Education. I am most grateful for this award and for those who thought I was the one who should receive it.

After a lot of hard work, I finally made it to the last few months of my dissertation. There was not much more to do, but I was starting to get tired and sometimes the last few hurdles are the hardest. Then, just at the right moment, another committee member came forth with more words of wisdom. My energy level increased when Dr. Gratto shared one of his treasured quotes with me. The quote was:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not: nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not: the world is full of educated derelicts.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. (Calvin Coolidge)

I always knew how important it was to finish a project, but sometimes that little bit of extra encouragement is needed at the right time, and I was thankful that Dr. Gratto took the time to show that he cared about me finishing my dissertation, along with the other committee members.

Through the dissertation process, one is truly on a journey; and my journey was facilitated by Dr. Parks, my committee chair. I first talked with Dr. Parks several years before he became my committee chair. Someone suggested that I talk with him about my dissertation topic, so I contacted him. He began talking about variables, and I now know that foreshadowing exists in real life, not just in literature. Time passed, and then I contacted Dr. Parks again. He allowed me to send him a copy of what I had completed on my own. At the time I was not the best writer. I had a lot to learn and would be a challenging student, even for Dr. Parks. Some more time passed, and then Dr. Parks agreed to chair my committee, and my committee agreed to commit to me.

Dr. Parks has taught me so much over the past couple of years. I cannot even begin to name all of the things I've learned from him academically, as well as learning to be a better student and better professional. I may be Dr. Parks's last doctoral student and have probably been the most challenging. But my life has been too busy with too many responsibilities, and working on a dissertation has not been an easy task with the many hats that I wear. Yet, beyond everything I've learned from Dr. Parks, there is something more to acknowledge about him. It is something that is hard to describe, but please allow me to try.

There are very few people that I have met who are able to look beyond their own needs and unselfishly devote their talents to helping someone else. Perhaps these are the people described by Abraham Maslow as those who have reached the top of the pyramid in the hierarchy of needs and have found self-actualization in their lives. Dr. Parks seems to be one of those people. Dr. Parks was able to bring out the talents in his students, as I saw from other dissertations that I read in which he served as the chair. Dr. Parks never seemed to mind devoting his time to help, as I experienced during so many Skype conferences about my project. His passion for helping his students is truly admirable and even seems to be rare in today's world. Thank you, Dr. Parks, for teaching me; but thank you more for modeling the passion of teaching!

Finally, there were others outside of my doctoral committee who stood along the sidelines as motivators along the way. To name a few, I am thankful for my Aunt Joyce who always encouraged me to go to school and to obtain a job in a profession that would give me retirement benefits—something I would come to appreciate later on in my career. I am thankful for my siblings who are there for me to model the rewards that come from hard work and to remind them how believing in someone as my brother believed in me makes all the difference in a person's life. I am thankful for Maxine, my friend, who dragged me into the doctoral program with her because she believed we could do it! And I am thankful for Roger who always took the time to listen to me and care about me and who encouraged me to get it done! He was the first person I called after passing my defense, and I believe he was the proudest! But most of all, I am thankful for my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and the Trinity that makes all things possible. Without the Lord, I can do nothing, but with Him all things are possible. He has never let me down!

So for the veteran teacher of 27 years sitting before her doctoral committee in her green dress, waiting to defend her dissertation, it was truly a day to remember and a day to reflect on a career well-spent in education. In my bedroom there remains that little bookshelf that my brother made for me years ago with the many gifts I received from my students over the years. The next addition to that bookshelf will be a copy of my dissertation to help me remember my students, my colleagues, and those wonderful teachers who helped me with my study. I am a part of those individuals and all the others who helped me along the way, and I know they will remain a part of me. With love, I will remember!

Dr. Rebecca Lee Yearout



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## CHAPTER 1

### THE CO-TEACHING PROBLEM

This chapter begins with a general discussion about co-teaching and the challenges it presents in moving the concept into effective classroom practices. A personal connection to co-teaching is described, and the context of co-teaching is developed. The purpose of the study is identified, and guiding questions are presented. Terms are defined, and limitations of the study are explored.

#### **The Co-teaching Problem**

Co-teaching, a recent form of instructional delivery that requires general and special educators sharing the instructional process, is problematic because of the difficulty in conceptualizing and studying collaboration in special education (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Cook and Friend (1995) explained that co-teaching involves professionals delivering substantive instruction together to diverse students in a single location. Sheehy (2007) explained that the concept of co-teaching is referred to as collaborative teaching and team teaching by the educational community. Regardless of how co-teaching is described, the process of bringing professionals together to communicate and coordinate instructional methods can be both challenging to implement, as well as challenging to examine through research.

Specifically, there are several factors that explain why co-teaching is problematic. In considering the research on co-teaching, Friend et al. (2010) presented factors that contribute to the co-teaching problem. The factors included: (a) the emerging understanding of implementing co-teaching as a special education service delivery, (b) inconsistencies in how co-teaching is implemented and defined, (c) the need for professional preparation, and (d) issues related to implementing co-teaching in supportive and collaborative school climates. Friend et al. (2010) stated that most of the literature on co-teaching has focused on giving advice about the practice and describing it rather than actually studying it. Additionally, of the studies that do exist on co-teaching, the majority focus on co-teachers' roles and relationships or on program logistics, rather than exploring the effect of co-teaching on student achievement and other important outcomes. Since co-teaching presents complications in how it is conceptualized among



educators, as well as how educators collaborate and combine their teaching skills, professionals might consider eliminating co-teaching in public schools altogether; yet, the opposite exists, with the phenomenon of co-teaching continuing to move forward.

A primary reason that co-teaching continues to move forward in public schools is because of legislative mandates that remain in force. Kloo and Zigmond (2008) stated that schools are facing tremendous pressure to show their effectiveness. Kohler-Evans (2006) explained that demands have been placed on school systems as a result of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 2004 (IDEA), resulting in soaring implementation of co-teaching. Schools must now use their resources more efficiently and more creatively; and co-teaching, as explained by Kohler-Evans (2006), has become a way of meeting mandates rather than being considered a valuable teaching technique used with other inclusion strategies for all students.

Co-teaching has been implemented as a solution to meet legislative mandates because of the concept behind the practice of co-teaching. The idea is that combining the skills of general and special educators in inclusion classes should enhance instruction, so that the needs of students with disabilities and those at-risk can be successfully met (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). The practice of co-teaching meets the legislative requirement of IDEA 2004 by allowing students with disabilities to be served (provided assistance from special educators) in general education classrooms. Through co-teaching, students with disabilities are served in their Least Restrictive Environments (LRE) with their peers. The practice meets the requirement of NCLB that students with disabilities must be taught by teachers who are highly-qualified in their subject areas. Students with disabilities are therefore ensured access to equivalent education as that received by their peers in the general education setting, meeting the Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) requirement outlined in both IDEA 2004 and NCLB. Thus, the practice of co-teaching, based on its concept, has become a solution to meet both legislative requirements.

While the issues of co-teaching continue to be examined by professionals, teachers who are participating in co-teaching partnerships are working to make their practices effective, even though it may be challenging to implement the co-teaching concept. As a co-teacher, for example, I am currently participating in several co-teaching partnerships. From my co-teaching experiences, it is apparent that more information stands to be gained on the topic of co-teaching.

I am especially interested in taking the concept of co-teaching, which should work in practice, and develop means for teachers to close the gap between practice and concept. In other words, I am seeking to find the missing links that are not, at this time, prevalent in the literature. Those links are the pragmatics of implementing the concept behind co-teaching and improving how it works in practice, since co-teaching has been promoted without much information on how to make it work. As a researcher-practitioner, I have the unique advantage of being able to study and explore co-teaching from a participant-observer stance, while being able to examine the pragmatics of the practices within classrooms. This bridge between researcher and practitioner makes examining co-teaching particularly interesting because the missing links between the idea of co-teaching and the practices that are implemented may be revealed through the roles of teacher and researcher together.

### **Context of the Problem**

Co-teaching issues and concerns continue to be discussed by educators. To examine co-teaching problems, theoretical and research perspectives on co-teaching will be discussed, followed by the researcher's personal connection to co-teaching. The last part of this section is a brief history of special education and a presentation of the challenges and changes of service delivery for students with disabilities over the years. Considering the educational experiences of students with disabilities in the past helps explain why services have cumulated into co-teaching practices today.

**Theoretical and research context.** Co-teaching remains problematic within the context of theory and research, as explained by several authors. For example, Volonino and Zigmond (2007) explained that co-teaching is an example of a practice embraced by theorists and practitioners as a solution to a problem within practice. Theorists and practitioners argue that co-teaching classrooms provide the best avenues for integrating complimentary skills of general and special educators. The idea is that combining their skills should enhance instruction so that the needs of students with disabilities and those at-risk can be successfully met (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). However, research addressing the effectiveness of co-teaching is still in its infancy (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Weiss & Brigham, 2000; Zigmond, 2003). Co-teaching continues to be problematic because research has not supported the

effectiveness of the practice on student outcome, yet the practice continues to be implemented with many challenges based on the belief that it should be effective.

**Personal context.** As a researcher, I have a special interest in the problematic nature of co-teaching. As a co-teacher, I experience the daily challenges of co-teaching. I participate in coordinated efforts between special education and general education teachers on a daily basis to deliver quality instruction to all students, not just students with disabilities, within general education classrooms. The school district in this discussion provides full inclusive services to students with disabilities. Therefore, all students are educated together in general education classrooms. General education and special education teachers work together within general classrooms to assist all students in the learning process. Teachers in my school generally provide instruction via one or two models of co-teaching (usually one teach-one assist) as described by Friend et al. (2010).

Friend et al. (2010) described the co-teaching models that are currently used in public schools, as well as the challenges of implementing co-teaching. The six models are: (a) one teach-one assist, in which one educator takes the lead in instruction, while the other monitors the classroom; (b) stations, in which instructional content is divided into two or more segments and presented separately in separate locations; (c) parallel teaching, in which teachers deliver instruction to a part of the class and do not exchange groups; (d) alternative teaching-small groups, in which one teacher works with a group of students who require instruction that is different from other class members; (e) team teaching, in which co-teachers share in the process of instructing all students; and (f) one teach-one observe, in which one teacher is walking around the room and is visibly present to students and at the same time is actively observing the other teacher and students in the learning environment. The co-teaching models seem simple to implement, but there are concerns and problems that develop in trying to effectively implement any model of co-teaching. From examining other studies, Friend et al. (2010) explained that the most frequently addressed issues relating to co-teaching are concerns about teachers' roles and responsibilities, co-teaching logistics, and student outcomes in co-teaching classrooms.

While co-teaching models provide some direction for teachers who must collaborate in instructional activities in my school district, there are many challenges to implementing co-teaching. One problem is the failure to implement more theoretical versions of co-teaching in this school district. For example, I continue to engage in the one teach-one assist model for the

majority of each school day. Most other co-teaching partners in this school district work the same way, often because of sparse planning time and the general education teachers' content specializations, even though there is a desire to do more team teaching by the teachers. Team teaching is often preferred by teachers because they can share more instructional responsibilities and have equal opportunities to teach all students.

In summary, I have experienced the same complications that other teachers experience in implementing co-teaching. Teachers have had to find their own ways to make it work, based on their interpretations. An analogy might be that teachers have been flying the plane as they are building it. As a researcher, I would like to stop flying the plane and build the structure that will make the plane fly a lot more efficiently. The problem, therefore, seems to be the absence of structure, direction, or pragmatics on how to make it work. The directions' manual just did not come with the package when it comes to co-teaching.

**Historical background context.** A brief history of special education services may be helpful in understanding co-teaching in the service delivery of students with disabilities. The present state of inclusive education and co-teaching in American schools may be understood by recapping major laws and legislation affecting special education over the past decades. This historical review is discussed from a neutral vantage point that co-teaching remains a phenomenon that has been implemented as part of the inclusion movement in American schools. While additional research is needed, co-teaching seems to remain an important part of inclusive services for students with disabilities, as more diverse learners penetrate general education classrooms and higher academic standards remain the status quo for all students (Jimenez, Graf, & Rose, 2007). This historical review has four key points, which have developed in the evolving process of inclusion and have thus promoted more co-teaching approaches to instruction in inclusive classrooms.

The key points emphasized in this historical review are: (1) More inclusive services have been implemented over the last few decades (Sheehy, 2007); (2) The inequalities related to special education have been ongoing (Skiba et al., 2008); (3) The acceptance of an appropriate/adequate education versus an education that maximizes students' potentials continues to be an idea that has been passed along from the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) to NCLB (LaNear & Frattura, 2009); (4) The increase of diverse learners in general education classrooms has continued over time (Jimenez et al., 2007). Thus,

this historical review is an exploration of these key points. The foundation for the rise of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms is present in this history.

***More inclusive services.*** The last few decades have seen a push toward inclusive education for students with disabilities. Sheehy (2007) explained that educators have been challenged to create various innovations to provide instruction to all students together, as the trend has been to serve students with disabilities in inclusive settings, according to the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA. The 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Report explained that between 1990 and 2000, the number of students with disabilities who were served in their special education classrooms for less than 21% of the school day increased by 87.1%. The decrease in percentage time in pull-out classes showed the trend toward inclusive services. By the year 2000, 47.3 % of students with disabilities were served outside of their pull-out classrooms for less than 21% of the school day, indicating a lower need for services (as cited in Sheehy, 2007, p. 18).

Jimenez et al. (2007) explained that because of NCLB's emphasis on more inclusive education for students with disabilities, more students have received their special education services in regular classes, based on information from the U.S. Department of Education's report in 2006. The report indicated that in 2005, approximately 54% of students receiving special education services spent 80% or more of the day in general education classrooms. Additionally, the 54% of students in this group included not only students with high incidence, mild to moderate disabilities, but also students with more severe cognitive disabilities (as cited in Jimenez et al., 2007). In relation to co-teaching, Sheehy (2007) described co-teaching as one strategy that fosters inclusive instruction in the service delivery of students with disabilities. Yet, the push toward inclusive services, and consequently co-teaching to foster inclusive instruction, has been a long, gradual process over time.

***Inequalities related to special education.*** Some authors have described the special education services that students with disabilities may have (or may not have) received in past decades. Hall (2002) explained that for most of U.S. history, schools in America could legally exclude (and often did exclude) some students, which was especially true for students with disabilities. Rothstein (2000) described the late 1800's when students with disabilities were placed in special, separate classes for the purpose of relieving stress on the general education teacher and the other students in the general classroom. The practice was maintained and later

justified on the basis that a separate setting would avoid stress on the students with disabilities, and yet many students with disabilities were never even enrolled in school.

Martin, Martin, and Terman (1996) discussed how students with disabilities received only minimal services throughout most of American school history. Of the services available to students, the discretion to enroll students with disabilities fell into the hands of local school districts. The students with disabilities who were allowed to attend public schools were either placed in general classrooms without services or were served in special programs that often had inadequate services.

Around this same time period, Friend and Cook (2007) noted that the students with disabilities who were allowed to attend school could also be removed from their educational environments without notifying parents or obtaining parental permission. Not until the mid-1970s were local school districts required to enroll students who were considered unable to be educated (Martin et al., 1996).

Efforts to educate some students with disabilities began to emerge when federal and state governments began considering the needs of students with disabilities. Martin et al. (1996) discussed early federal and state actions that were designed to assist students with disabilities. These authors explained that before the 1950s, there were few federal laws that enforced direct educational benefits to individuals with disabilities. For example, there were some grants in the mid-1800s that were provided to states for “asylums for the deaf and dumb” and to assist in the education of the blind. Then, after the National Defense Education Act of 1958, the federal government became involved in elementary and secondary education. This led to the passage of Public Law 85-926, which provided financial support to colleges and universities to help educate leadership personnel in teaching children with mental retardation. By the mid-1960s, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was passed to allow subsidized direct services to certain populations in public schools. Shortly after this law, Public Law 89-313 allowed students with disabilities in state-operated schools to be counted for entitlement purposes, and special Title 1 monies could be used to assist the small population of students in state programs (as cited in Martin et al., 1996, p.26).

Martin et al. (1996) further explained the development of more federal regulations for students with disabilities in the 1960s. Advocates for students with disabilities wanted a special administration for these students through the U.S. Office of Education. Thus, in 1966 Congress

mandated the Bureau for the Education of the Handicapped (BEH) under Title VI of the ESEA. Title VI was considered the first education of the handicapped act because it had a legislative title. Then from 1967 through 1975, when Public Law 94-142 was passed, the BEH promoted a number of federal programs for specific populations of students with disabilities. By 1970, the BEH suggested that the separate programs be combined into a more comprehensive Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA), which was passed by Congress of that same year (as cited in Martin et al., 1996, p.27).

As well as federal acts during the 1960s and 1970s, states were implementing assistance to students with disabilities. However, no state served all students with disabilities during this time period. As explained by Martin et al. (1996), states either turned some students away, or the states placed students with disabilities in inappropriate programs. The parents of students with disabilities responded by seeking mandatory laws. State laws then provided some funding while requiring local school districts to provide special education services. Despite the mandatory laws and supplemental funds, there still remained many children with disabilities who were not receiving services or who were not receiving the appropriate services. As a result, parents and advocates became frustrated and turned to Congress and the courts.

At this point, it is worth noting the propaganda of the time period regarding the education of students with disabilities. Skiba et al. (2008) discussed Dunn's famous article in 1968—*Special Education for the Mildly Retarded—Is Much of It Justifiable?*—noting the concerns of the time period. Dunn suggested that the overrepresentation of ethnic and language minority students placed in special education self-contained classes created concerns about the civil rights and education of these students (Dunn, 1968). Kavale and Forness (2000) explained that Dunn's article, which was considered lacking in scholarly rigor and had no empirical evidence, really focused the discussion on the justification of separate and special classes. In essence, Dunn set an idea into motion to eliminate special classes for students with disabilities.

Following Dunn's article, between 1971 through 1973, the federal courts became involved to make it clear that schools must provide equal protection of the law without discriminating on the basis of disabilities, just like the Supreme Court had ruled in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954 in regard to race (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 1954; Martin et al, 1996). Further, the historic case was based on the fourteenth amendment, which requires that states may not deprive anyone of "life, liberty, or property,

without the due process of law” nor deny anyone “equal protection of the laws” (Rothstein, 2000). Griffin (2009) explained that the *Brown* case recognized that Black students could no longer be separately educated, and disability advocates claimed that “separate but equal” was unequal for students with disabilities as well. To clarify, the doctrine of “separate but equal” became legitimate in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 1896), even though the education of minority students in a separated environment was by no means equal (Skiba et al, 2008). Additionally, the concept of mainstreaming students with disabilities was surfacing about the same time as when advocates for students with disabilities were expressing their dissatisfaction with unequal rights for such students (Griffin, 2009).

Following along with the Fourteenth Amendment were two critical cases in 1972 that boosted the rights of students with disabilities. The two cases were *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education*. In *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972), the state law had originally allowed school systems to deny services to any child not of a mental age of five years old at the time the child would normally enroll in first grade. However, the states did agree to provide full access to a free public education to all children who had mental retardation up to age 21. The case set the standard of appropriateness, so that each child would be offered an education appropriate to the child’s learning ability. Finally, the case set a clear preference for the least restrictive placement for each student as well (Martin et al., 1996).

The *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972) case advanced the rights of students with disabilities. In this case, seven students with various mental and behavioral disabilities brought suit against the District of Columbia public schools. The school system had denied enrollment to some students and expelled others only on the basis of their disabilities. The school system explained that around 12,340 students with disabilities within the district would not receive services during the 1971-72 year because of budget restrictions. However, the U.S. District Court stated that school districts could not constitutionally decide that they had insufficient resources to serve students with disabilities due to the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In other words, the Fourteenth Amendment would not allow the issue of inadequate resources to fall more on students with disabilities, as opposed to other students. The court’s ruling was vitally important for students with disabilities. The students now had an equal right to a meaningful public education. Additionally, whenever a school system considered a



change in the student's status or placement, the students were allowed full procedural protections. All protections were eventually written into Public Law 94-142 by Congress (Martin et al., 1996).

The *PARC* and *Mills* cases in 1972 ignited litigations to the point that by 1973 more than 30 federal cases had upheld the principles of *PARC* and *Mills* (Martin et al., 1996). However, these authors explained that despite federal cases and new state laws, millions of children with disabilities were still not educated in public schools in 1975, as states and local school districts were not prepared to meet the needs of all children with disabilities even though every school district had some kind of special education program in 1971-72.

More legislative reform was quickly implemented by 1973. Stainback and Stainback (1992) explained that the Rehabilitation Act, Section 504, of 1973, ensured the rights of individuals with handicaps in employment and in educational institutions receiving federal monies. By 1975, Public Law 94-142, known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), was passed and then implemented in 1977. Martin, et al. (1996) explained that this act mandated that all students with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education, and it allowed for funding to assist in providing such programs. Griffin (2009) explained that the EAHCA, an amendment to EHA, provided a foundation from the *Mills* case in 1972 for future policies. This meant that there were procedural safeguards to protect the rights of students with disabilities, while also allowing provisions for their integration, nondiscriminatory testing, and the evaluation of materials and procedures.

During the 1970s, advocates began promoting the rights of individuals with severe and profound disabilities (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). The push toward educating individuals with severe handicaps in neighborhood public schools was moving forward. By 1979, The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) accepted a resolution requiring that all students with severe disabilities be educated in regular neighborhood schools with their non-handicapped peers. However, it is worth noting that today TASH now stresses the need for ongoing support in inclusive settings specifically for individuals with severe disabilities (McDonnell, Hardman, & McDonnell, 2003).

With Public Law 94-142 in effect, placement considerations became a focus of discussions when considering the needs of students with disabilities in public schools.

Griffin (2009) explained that the LRE mandate emphasized that students with disabilities should have access to the general education curriculum. However, the mandate did not place emphasis on how to teach students with disabilities. Therefore, the resource room model, or “pull-out” approach, became the primary choice for educating students with disabilities. The idea of the resource room was to provide academic instruction to students with disabilities for specific amounts of time in separate classrooms for part of the school day. The remainder of the day would then be spent in general education classrooms. Additionally, if a student spent at least half of the day in a general education setting, then the student was considered to be mainstreamed.

The problem with the LRE was that it was never meant to be a single setting but rather a continuum of placements for students with disabilities. A continuum of settings was described by Deno in 1970 in the Cascade Model (Kavale, 2002). The Cascade Model was used to illustrate a range of service options for students with disabilities. The model was designed to provide flexibility and movement within the levels of the cascade (Deno, 1970). However, Merulla and McKinnon (1982) explained that children with disabilities often got stuck on levels of the cascade due to all the regulations that were developed for Public Law 94-142. In other words, it was not so easy to change the placements of students with disabilities because of the regulations that were created for implementing Public Law 94-142.

As more students with disabilities received academic instruction in resource rooms and were mainstreamed for the remainder of the day, concern developed about the quality of the pull-out programs in the resource rooms. As Griffin (2009) explained, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) of 1986 was initiated by Madeline Will at a keynote address by the Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Will based the REI on research that suggested that pull-out programs were not meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Will recommended that instead of having dual systems of general and special education, the two systems should merge into a unified system (Will, 1986).

There were five main arguments in support of the REI (Kavale, 2002). They were: (a) Special instruction was not required because students are more alike than different; (b) All students can be taught by good teachers; (c) All students can be given a good education without referring to traditional special education categories; (d) All students can be managed in the general education classroom without segregation; and (e) It was discriminatory and inequitable

to have a physically separate education. Despite arguments in support of the REI, there were debates in favor or against the initiative. Further, there were also issues among the REI proponents concerning who should be placed in general classrooms and whether all students should attend regular classes.

The history of special education services up to this point has revealed ongoing discussions and actions dealing with the inequalities related to special education. Some authors have equated the road traveled by students with disabilities to the road traveled by minority students on the quest for equality. For example, Stainback and Stainback (1992) described the process as: identify, categorize, separate, equalize, and integrate for both minority students and students with disabilities. However, there are still equality issues that continue today, which require educators working together to problem-solve such concerns. An example was described by Gravois and Rosenfield (2006) when discussing Instructional Consultation Teams that have been used to reduce disproportionate referrals and placements of minority students in special education.

The team model has operated on the concept that quality classroom instruction and management, paired with each student's assessed entry skills, will yield increased student success and will reduce the need for special education evaluations and placements (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). The Instructional Consultation Teams have performed similarly to co-teaching instructional approaches, which may also reduce referrals and placements when educators combine their individual expert areas in inclusive classrooms.

Friend et al. (2010) described co-teaching approaches. Two approaches that might be instrumental in helping to reduce special education referrals include *one teach, one observe* and *one teach, one assist*. According to Friend et al. (2010) in the *one teach, one observe* approach, one teacher leads the class while the other teacher collects observed data. Collecting data is important in the special education referral process. Similarly, in the *one teach, one assist* method, one teacher leads instruction while the other teacher assists students as needed. In this approach, all students have an opportunity to benefit from extra assistance, and students who may have been considered for referral may no longer need it when extra help is provided. Thus, co-teaching may reduce referrals and provide more equality in special education.

***Appropriate/adequate education versus education that maximizes potential.*** Just before the introduction of the Regular Education Initiative, when students were still being mainstreamed

for part of the day, the issue of an appropriate/adequate education versus an education that maximizes students' potentials surfaced in the U.S. Supreme Court. The Supreme Court decided the *Hendrick Hudson Central School District Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982) case. In this case, the attention shifted from the focus of special education placement, or location, to the quality of education that students with disabilities could obtain. LaNear and Frattura (2009) explained that in the *Rowley* case the Supreme Court decided that a free, appropriate public education is a right that is more than just access to the school building. However, these authors noted that the term "appropriate" from the court's ruling still remained undefined. The background of this case illustrates this point.

Amy Rowley was a student who was deaf and had enrolled in kindergarten in the public schools of New York. While in kindergarten, for a short time, Amy was allowed a sign language interpreter. However, the interpreter reported that Amy did not need the services. The next year, when Amy's Individualized Education Program (IEP) was developed, Amy's parents expressed objection to portions of the IEP. The IEP allowed for Amy to remain in the general education classroom but without an interpreter. Amy's parents, however, wanted Amy to have an interpreter instead of other forms of assistance stated in the IEP. School administrators, however, refused the Rowley's request, so Amy's parents requested review of their decision, based on EAHCA. The Rowley's argument was that Amy was being denied an appropriate education because she could only decode part of the oral language available to students with a hearing impairment. In other words, without the interpreter, she was not able to obtain all of the same information as her peers (LaNear & Frattura, 2009).

The district court and Court of Appeals agreed with the Rowley's request for an interpreter. However, the Supreme Court reversed the decision. The Supreme Court ruled that the state had met its obligation to provide an appropriate education to Amy because she would be receiving both personalized instruction and sufficient support services, which would allow her to benefit educationally from instruction. Additionally, the Court ruled that Amy benefitted educationally because she exhibited grade-to-grade progress, and therefore she had been receiving an appropriate education. Further, the Court expressed that the EAHCA did not require schools to maximize the potential of students with disabilities that corresponds with the opportunities provided to other children. The problems with the *Rowley* case as described are that the two courts disagreed on the correct outcome, and they did not agree on the central focus

of the case. The Court of Appeals stated that the case was about Amy, while the Supreme Court stated that the case was about statutory interpretation. Additionally, since the Supreme Court decided that the case was one of statutory interpretation, future cases would be viewed in the same way, based on precedent (LaNear & Frattura, 2009).

In examining the *Rowley* case, LaNear and Frattura (2009) pointed to a number of factors involving the case that affect students with disabilities today. First, these authors explained that Amy was not a typical student. Amy had above-average ability, and her mother was a deaf education teacher who spent time re-teaching the daily lessons to Amy. This is an important point because the additional out-of-class time from a specialized teacher most likely attributed to Amy making grade-to-grade progress. This may not have been the case otherwise. Second, while the school district provided Amy with an FM hearing aid as a support, the hearing aid did not accomplish what an interpreter could do, which was to translate the academic content into concepts, ideas, or meaning—instead of just amplifying the sounds from a hearing aid (LaNear & Frattura, 2009). Third, because most of the history of special education has been discussed through traditional means of describing the sequence of events in a positive manner, the *Rowley* case allows a closer look at how interpretations from the past have transcended into the present. For example, LaNear and Frattura (2009) suggested that the Supreme Court’s ruling regarding Amy’s “appropriate” services have been reflected in the language of NCLB today, which indicates “adequate” as a minimum requirement for success. The problem with terms such as “appropriate” and “adequate” is that this type of language only requires meeting the basic needs of students with disabilities without providing opportunities to maximize students’ potentials in a way similar to peers.

When considering an appropriate/adequate education versus an education that maximizes students’ potential in relation to inclusion and co-teaching, it is logical that co-teaching opportunities may facilitate maximizing the potential of all students in inclusive classrooms, especially students with disabilities, when educators work together to bring their specialty areas to general classrooms. Co-teaching may provide an opportunity for all students to gain content knowledge from the general education specialist, while also learning how to integrate and process information from the special education specialist. Further, co-teaching may facilitate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) gains for schools when more support is provided in inclusive classrooms (Hope, 2009).

Hope (2009) explained the effect of the Adequate Yearly Progress requirement in the NCLB act on special education programs. Although NCLB only requires an “adequate” education for students with disabilities, similarly to the “appropriate” education expressed in IDEA of 2004, the basic idea is that students with disabilities must meet at least a minimum standard. And even though legislation governing special education policies has not required educational programs to maximize students’ potentials, the idea of an appropriate/adequate education continues, historically following a path from EAHCA to NCLB today (LaNear & Frattura, 2009). In putting it all together, Hope (2009) explained the issues involved in addressing the requirements of NCLB in relation to IDEA of 2004, calling for more support in inclusion classes as a possible remedy to meet the demands of both statutes. This is examined in more detail.

Hope (2009) explained that the goal of meeting the requirements of NCLB and IDEA of 2004 is to eventually merge the two statutes. Presently, under NCLB schools are required to assess students on grade level content. Even when students are allowed an alternative assessment, based on disability needs, those students must have access to grade level content. Additionally, under the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, there is now a higher standard required of students with disabilities, which is a move from the *Rowley* standard of just obtaining access to an education. Therefore, with the expectation that students with disabilities are now more accountable to grade level content, the goal is to educate those students in general education classrooms, which will require bringing more supports and services to the general education setting. Likewise, as suggested by Hope (2009), IDEA has never been fully funded in the past. So to require more without providing the monetary support only sets up school systems for failure. Thus, in meeting the goal of aligning NCLB with IDEA of 2004, more supports and services will need to be part of general education classrooms for students with disabilities. Because of the need, co-teaching approaches to instruction may be helpful to students with disabilities, not only to help them make “adequate” progress in the general curriculum, as required by NCLB, but to help maximize their potentials through the higher standards employed in IDEA of 2004—a contrast to only receiving an “appropriate” education supported in *Rowley*.

***Increase of diverse learners in general education classrooms.*** After the REI debate, in the continuum of historical milestones, several laws prompted the shift toward inclusive education for all students with disabilities. In 1990, for example, the EAHCA was amended and

then renamed as the IDEA, which presented a broad mandate for services to all children with disabilities (Martin et al., 1996). Huefner (2000) explained that the IDEA ensured FAPE for students with disabilities and an individualized special education in the student's LRE. Thus, IDEA provided protection through procedural safeguards.

Following the renaming of IDEA in 1990, more legislation forced changes in public education. The passage of NCLB in 2001 marked specific changes for all students, including students with disabilities. Hope (2009) explained that the stated purpose of the NCLB act was to secure a fair and equal high-quality education for all children. Additionally, NCLB pushed for, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic standards and assessments for all students, including students with disabilities. Assessment of NCLB goals was established through AYP standards. While AYP was designed to measure yearly progress through states' standardized assessments, it was developed to result in continuous academic improvements for all students. Among all students, AYP was established to measure yearly progress of four distinct subgroups to include: a) financially disadvantaged students, b) students from major racial and ethnic groups, c) student with disabilities, and d) students with limited English proficiency. For any of the subgroups, it was noted that there must be a sufficient number of students to have statistically reliable information. Otherwise, the subgroup could not be counted. Additionally, graduation rates were established as an AYP indicator for secondary students. Thus, the emphasis on NCLB was on measuring all students through standardized assessments. To facilitate the achievement of students with disabilities in accountability standards, NCLB required that students with disabilities be taught by highly-qualified teachers (Friend et al., 2010). The legislation established in NCLB continues today in American public schools.

After NCLB, IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004), often referred to as IDEIA or IDEA 2004. As Griffin (2009) explained, the reauthorization mandated that IDEA regulations work along with NCLB in standards-based testing and highly-qualified staffing. IDEA, therefore, puts a greater emphasis on accountability for individuals with disabilities. However, as Cole (2006) explained, IDEA 2004 was designed to require individualized education plans for students with disabilities, which must have appropriate educational goals, services, assessments and accommodations. Yet, an individualized education may be considered conflicting to NCLB's concepts of universal content, achievement standards, and assessments. Cole further explained that while IDEA 2004

was developed to require state and local assessments for students with disabilities, using appropriate accommodations or alternative assessments, the legislation did not suggest AYP as a goal, nor did it use the term “highly-qualified” but rather “qualified personnel” when referring to individuals teaching students with disabilities. Thus, IDEA 2004 is not completely in line with NCLB. IDEA 2004 is, however, like NCLB in that its legislation is still in force today and does aim for increased accountability for students with disabilities.

As a result of NCLB and IDEA 2004, a greater need for inclusion has emerged, and consequently, co-teaching has become more important in providing services to students with disabilities in general education settings. As McGuire, Scott, and Shaw (2006) explained, major reform initiatives have resulted in greater integration of students with disabilities. The movement has progressed from the LRE to the REI to full inclusion and finally toward access to the regular education curriculum. While the need for a more inclusive education has resulted for students with disabilities, the need has not stopped with this population alone. The push toward inclusion and co-teaching for students with disabilities has opened the door to considering the needs of other students in general education classes as well. As Jimenez et al. (2007) explained, an important challenge to consider now is adequate access to the general education curriculum for a diverse group of learners in general education classrooms.

The last three decades have seen an emergence of students in need of additional assistance in general education classes. Jimenez et al. (2007) described an increasing population of students that is now learning academic content in general classes in a language they are only beginning to acquire. Students with diverse learning needs and those with linguistic backgrounds must learn core academic content and meet general education standards but with limited literacy and language skills. Jimenez et al. (2007), therefore, suggested looking beyond inclusive instruction for students with disabilities only and considering a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach that focuses instructional support for all learners in general classrooms. The UDL was designed to provide a framework for good teaching methods that teachers have already incorporated into general education inclusive classrooms. Co-teaching, therefore, may become more instrumental in meeting the needs of all students in general education classes, as the number of students with needs continues to grow.



## **A Theory Explaining the Quality of Co-teaching**

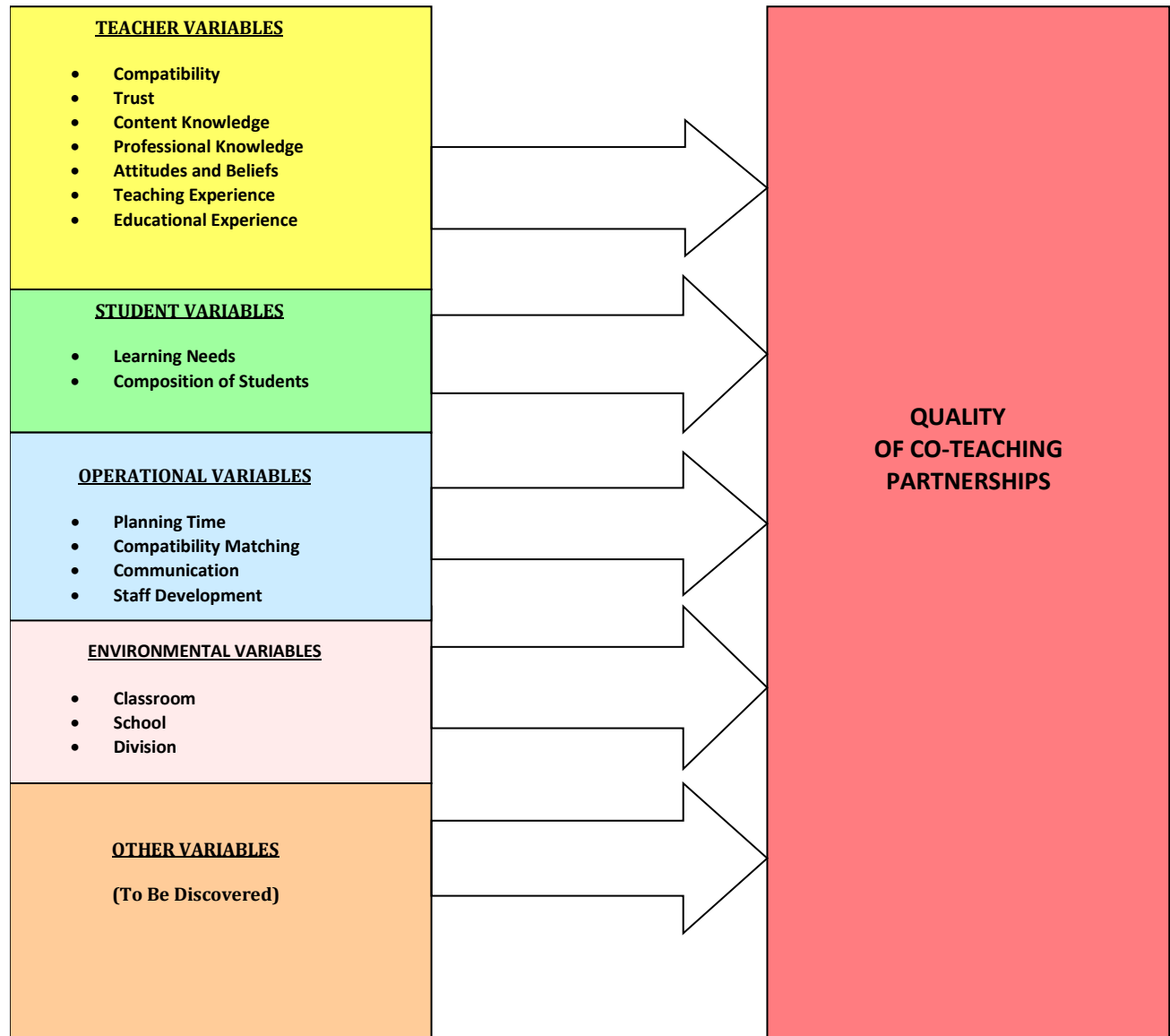
Several authors such as Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) and Malian and McRae (2010) have described co-teaching behaviors between teaching partners in inclusion programs, but more information is needed concerning the variables that affect the quality of co-teaching and how the quality of co-teaching affects student outcomes. The focus of this study is on the antecedents of the quality of co-teaching; that is, those variables that affect the quality of co-teaching (see Figure 1). The effects of co-teaching on student outcomes are not part of this study and have been omitted from the theory.

The nature of co-teaching partnerships has been described variously in the literature. For example, Friend et al. (2010) designed and labeled different co-teaching approaches as models that general and special education teachers implement to provide service delivery to students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. The six models of one-teach, one observe; one teach, one assist; alternative teaching; station teaching; parallel teaching; and teaming have frequently been used in the education community to illustrate the different levels of engagement between co-teaching partners. Other authors have described co-teaching using a different kind type of classification system. Nevin, Villa, and Thousand (2009) described four approaches to co-teaching: supportive, parallel, complimentary, and team teaching. These are similar to those of Friend et al. (2010). Regardless of how co-teaching models are described, teachers have to decide how they will coordinate their efforts for all students in inclusion classes. How they coordinate their efforts has the potential for affecting the quality of the partnership and ultimately the outcomes for students.

The various co-teaching models teachers have selected for their classrooms illustrates the complex nature of co-teaching and the uncertainty about the relative effectiveness of the models. Kilanowski-Press et al. (2010), for example, reported great variability among the inclusion practices used in classrooms across the state of New York. In a survey of 71 inclusion teachers, the authors noted that co-teaching was cited as the most beneficial, yet least-reportedly-used practice, suggesting that co-teaching may not be implemented as frequently because of the complexity in how it must be incorporated into the classroom. The consultant-teacher approach, on the other hand, was used most frequently among survey participants in this study.

Since the implementation of co-teaching models varies, the variables that affect co-teaching decisions and, hence, the quality of co-teaching partnerships must be considered. The

most commonly discussed variables in the literature are teacher variables (teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, and the teaching and educational experiences of teachers). Other variables that affect co-teaching decisions are student variables (learning needs and composition of students), operational variables of administrators (scheduling planning time, teacher-compatibility matching, communication, and staff development), along with the environmental variables that contribute to co-teaching (which includes variables in the classroom, school, and district). Finally, there are still other variables that may, and are not known at present, affect the quality of co-teaching. Some of these may be discovered in this study. The diagram in Figure 1 is an illustration of the relationships asserted in the theory explaining the quality of co-teaching partnerships.



*Figure 1.* A diagram illustrating the categories and subcategories of variables and their connections to the quality of co-teaching partnerships. Theoretically, the six categories of variables presented, along with the subcategories under each, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships and to the quality of these partnerships, along with other variables, affect student learning.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to help co-teachers develop productive partnerships to enhance learning for all students in inclusive classes. Theoretically, co-teaching should work, and the concept seems simple to implement. Yet, there are issues relating to each teacher's roles and responsibilities (who does what and who decides who is responsible for what part) in a co-teaching partnership, as well as issues relating to logistics (such as scheduling, planning time, and administrative support), and ultimately how students perform in co-taught classes (Friend et al., 2010). Therefore, this study was to describe how teachers experience co-teaching. The descriptions of the co-teaching partnerships were expected to produce information that could be used in interventions to address co-teaching problems, improve co-teaching partnerships, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

## **Guiding Questions**

There were several guiding questions that formed the framework for this study. The overarching questions were: How do teachers experience co-teaching in inclusive classrooms? What are the variables that affect the quality of the co-teaching experience in inclusive classrooms? Supportive questions under the main questions were:

1. How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
2. How do student variables, such as the learning needs of students and the composition of students, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
3. How do operational variables that are typically the responsibilities of administrators, such as scheduling planning times, matching teachers for co-teaching partnerships, facilitating communication, and arranging staff development, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
4. How do the environmental variables of the classroom, school, and district contribute to the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
5. What are other variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?

The conceptual definitions and operational definitions that I created are presented as they were used in the interview protocol (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Concepts, Conceptual Definitions, and Operational Definitions*

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Quality of co-teaching partnerships	The effectiveness of the relationships between special education and regular classroom teachers in inclusive classrooms	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about your work as a co-teacher in your classroom.</p> <p>How would you describe the quality of the relationship you have with your co-teacher?</p> <p>There may be times when your relationship seems to be especially good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.</p> <p>There may be times when your relationship seems to be not so good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.</p>
Teacher variables	The features of individual co-teachers that are brought into a co-teaching partnership	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What do you think makes your co-teaching partnership work? (What are the personal qualities that you bring to the relationship with your co-teacher?)</p>

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Teacher compatibility	The extent of agreeability that exists between co-teaching partners	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me how you and your co-teacher became partners.</p> <p>How would you describe the relationship you have with your co-teacher?</p>
Teacher trust	The extent of trust that develops between co-teaching partners as a result of following through on the responsibilities of the co-teaching relationship	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about a time when you relied on your co-teaching partner for completing a task.</p> <p>Describe how the completion of the task met (or did not meet) your expectations.</p> <p>Describe the confidence you have (or would like to have) in your co-teaching partner as it relates to co-teaching responsibilities.</p>
Teacher content knowledge	The level of knowledge a teacher has obtained in a specific subject area	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>When specific subjects are being taught in the classroom, who takes the lead (for science, math, reading, and for social studies)? Why does it work that way?</p>

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Teacher content knowledge	The level of knowledge a teacher has obtained in a specific subject area	<p>What roles do you and your partner typically take in the delivery of a co-taught lesson?</p> <p>On what basis do the two of you decide on how lessons will be taught?</p>
Teacher professional knowledge	The level of expertise a teacher has obtained in a specific learning process that is characteristic of a specific type of learner	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What would you consider to be your best teaching skills? How often do you get to use those skills in your classroom?</p> <p>How have you used your expertise as a special educator (or general educator) to carry out your responsibilities in your co-teaching classroom?</p> <p>What do you think general education teachers need to know about special education (or what special education teachers need to know about general education)?</p>

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about co-teaching in inclusive classrooms	The ideas and opinions that co-teachers have acquired individually about co-teaching and inclusion, which are manifested in each teacher's attitudes and beliefs and may be exhibited in their co-teaching relationships	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What are your thoughts about co-taught classrooms?</p> <p>What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in co-taught classes?</p> <p>What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in inclusion classes?</p>
Teaching experience	The number of years that a teacher has taught in a co-taught classroom	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>How many years have you spent in co-taught classes?</p>
Educational experience	The training that a teacher has received on co-teaching	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about your preparation for working in a co-teaching classroom.</p>
Student variables	Characteristics of students that may affect the co-teaching partnership in an inclusive classroom	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about the students in your classroom.</p>

(continued)



Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Learning needs of students	The learning needs of all students in a co-taught classroom	General and Special Education Teachers:  How have the students affected your instruction?  How have the students affected how you and your co-teacher work together?
Composition of students	The types of students who have been scheduled together in the same inclusion classroom	General and Special Education Teachers:  How do the students that you have in your classroom affect what you do as co-teachers?
Operational variables	Those areas that administrators must consider when assigning teachers to co-teaching partnerships	General and Special Education Teachers:  What supports do you have to have for your co-teaching partnership to work?
Planning time	The time that is scheduled for teachers to meet and plan for co-teaching activities	General and Special Education Teachers:  Take me through a typical day with your co-teacher.
Compatibility matching	The pairing of teachers in co-teaching partnerships based on each teacher's strengths, weaknesses, and disposition	General and Special Education Teachers:  How did you become co-teachers?

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Communication	The dialogue that occurs between co-teaching partners in implementing co-teaching within the classroom	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>How do you and your co-teaching partner work through conflicts when they arise? Tell me about how you and your co-teacher communicate during the day.</p> <p>On what topics do you communicate?</p> <p>How would you describe the quality of the communication between you and your co-teacher?</p> <p>How do you account for the ways that you and your co-teacher communicate?</p>
Staff development	The in-service that is provided to professional staff regarding co-teaching and its implementation	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about the staff development that you have participated in to help you with co-teaching.</p>
Environmental variables	The features within a setting (such as classroom, school, or district) that provide a foundation for the implementation of co-teaching partnerships	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Tell me about any conditions within your classroom, school, or school district that affect how you work as co-teachers.</p>

(continued)

Table 1 (cont.)

<b>Concept</b>	<b>Conceptual definition</b>	<b>Operational definition</b>
Classroom	Conditions within the classroom that may affect how the general and special education teachers work together	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>Describe your classroom as a working environment for co-teaching.</p> <p>How do you arrange your classroom? Why do you arrange it that way?</p> <p>How well does your classroom arrangement work?</p>
School	Conditions within the school that may affect how the general and special education teachers work together	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What conditions at the school level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?</p>
District	Conditions within the school district that may affect how the general and special education teachers work together	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What conditions at the district level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?</p>
Other “discovery” variables	Other variables that affect quality of co-teaching partnerships and are revealed during interviews with teachers	<p>General and Special Education Teachers:</p> <p>What are the things that you are most concerned about in your co-teaching partnership?</p> <p>If you could make changes in how you work as co-teachers, what would you do? Why?</p>

## **Limitations in the Design of the Study**

There were limitations in this study. First, the study was limited to one rural school district. The school district in this study practices full inclusion for all students with disabilities. It would be beneficial to investigate the co-teaching practices in school districts that offer partial inclusion for students with disabilities. Second, the study was piloted in the same school district as the original study. The reason the pilot study was done in the same school district is because of the uniqueness of this district's full-inclusion program, which is distinctly different from the majority of other inclusion programs. Third, this study was limited to teacher interviews. It would be beneficial to learn more about the perceptions of other staff, such as instructional assistants who also support inclusion classes. However, the study did fulfill the purpose of examining co-teachers' experiences of co-teaching at the elementary level.

## **Review of Chapter 1 and Overview of the Dissertation**

Chapter 1 was a discussion of the co-teaching problem. A theory explaining the quality of co-teaching was described. The purpose of the study, guiding questions, concepts and definitions, and the study's limitations were included. Chapter 2 explores the literature supporting the variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships, and Chapter 3 is a description of the methods used in the study. The data are reported in Chapter 4, and the conclusions, discussion, and implications for practice and further research are presented in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

This review of the literature explores the variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships. The literature review process is explained, and the variables affecting the quality of co-teaching are identified. Co-teaching theory, commentary, and research studies are discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary emphasizing the theory that is the foundation for this study.

#### **Literature Search and Review Process**

This literature review was conducted via university electronic search databases. ERIC, Education Research Complete, Teacher Reference Center, PsychInfo, and Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection were used in this review. Additionally, from the database, book references were selected. Terms used in the searches included co-teaching, collaboration, inclusion, elementary school, and rural. The selection of articles and books was based on the following criteria: (1) research that analyzed inclusion and co-teaching programs through co-teaching models, (2) research that explored the roles and responsibilities of teachers in specific co-teaching programs, and (3) research that discussed the variables that affect co-teaching arrangements. The search revealed few studies on student outcomes related to co-teaching programs; however, much discussion about co-teaching methods and models and the variables affecting co-teaching relations was presented throughout the research.

#### **The Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

Understanding the foundation of co-teaching begins by considering the quality of co-teaching partnerships. The quality of co-teaching is the effectiveness of the relationships between special education and general education teachers in inclusive classrooms. Co-teachers do not just acquire quality partnerships. There are a number of antecedents, or variables, that affect the quality. This review will explore the variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships as presented in the literature.

## **Variables Related to the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

There are five sets of variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships: teacher variables, student variables, operational variables, environmental variables, and other variables. Supportive literature is presented for each set.

### **Teacher Variables and the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

Teacher variables are the features of individual co-teachers that are brought into a co-teaching partnership. The teacher variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships are teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience.

**Teacher compatibility.** First, Kohler-Evans (2006) expressed the imperative need for co-teaching partners to communicate daily about their needs and concerns. When co-teachers communicate, they can grow and move forward in their relationship as co-teaching partners, thus helping them become more compatible as co-teaching partners.

**Teacher trust.** Second, the trust between co-teaching partners to follow through on responsibilities, which is part of teacher's roles and responsibilities, has an impact on the level of engagement co-teaching partners are willing to try. For example, Kohler-Evans (2006) explained that co-teaching partners should be careful not to overlook the small stuff. She explained that after training hundreds of teachers on how to become effective co-teachers, one message remains and that is that the small stuff can become big stuff and be just enough to jeopardize an entire co-teaching relationship. In other words, co-teachers need to realize their responsibilities to even small tasks and follow through on what they are designated to do, especially if they have stated they will attend to a given task. The idea of individuals maintaining trust may seem like basic common sense, but it does need to be recognized as significant in how co-teaching relations will remain between co-teaching partners.

**Teacher content knowledge.** Third, both the general and special education teachers need to be proficient in content knowledge in co-teaching partnerships. When both teachers are teaching, using one of the co-teaching models, then both teachers need to know what they are teaching. Malian and McRae (2010) discussed the problems that lack of content knowledge brings to a co-teaching relationship. Although experienced more on the secondary level (yet applicable to elementary levels), these authors explained that the lack of content knowledge

creates a limited role for the special education teacher. The general education teacher remains responsible for the general curriculum, planning, and large-group instruction because he or she knows the content material. The special education teacher is then left with the limited role of helping individual students and modifying assignments. Further, the authors explained that this division of labor creates more challenges in co-teaching relationships.

**Teacher professional knowledge.** Fourth, Friend et al. (2010) explained the importance of professional preparation and ongoing professional development. These authors explained that three groups of educators are affected by co-teaching. Special educators must learn how to use their knowledge and skills in co-teaching. General educators must also be trained as they are part of co-teaching partnerships, and co-teaching is very different from traditional teaching. Finally, administrators must be trained to lead teachers in the implementation process of co-teaching and continue to support them. For example, administrators must partner teachers, create schedules that allow for common planning times, and be able to facilitate co-teaching communication.

**Teacher attitudes and beliefs.** Fifth, how teachers feel about co-teaching and inclusive classrooms, along with each teacher's teaching and educational experiences of co-teaching, may impact the decisions that co-teachers make. As Wiebe Berry (2006) noted, each teacher brings his or her background into teaching and learning, which influences how the educator feels about educating students with disabilities. How teachers feel about educating students with disabilities can affect what teachers actually do in the classroom. For example, Rotter (2004) surveyed special education resource teachers to examine the frequency of how often teacher-made instructional materials were used in the general classroom setting, as well as how the materials might be modified to enhance student success. Findings indicated that teachers showed variable levels of willingness, as well as interests, in modifying instruction. It was noted, however, that teachers in this study were without knowledge on proper development of such materials.

### **Student Variables and the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

In addition to teacher variables, the learning needs and composition of students in inclusion classrooms must be considered when examining the quality of co-teaching partnerships. As Jimenez et al. (2007) explained, diverse learners compose inclusion classrooms today. Therefore, co-teachers must be able to work together to meet the learning needs of all

students in inclusion classrooms. Teachers must also be able to address the dynamics within inclusion classes, as the composition of students and how they interact together may affect the learning environment.

### **Operational Variables and the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

Not only do teacher variables and student variables affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships, but decisions made at the administrative level can play a role in co-teaching partnerships. Operational variables provide a structure for co-teaching partnerships to exist. How administrators provide planning time for co-teachers, how co-teachers are matched, and how communication and staff development are fostered may all contribute to the quality of effectiveness that co-teachers experience in their roles as co-teachers. Smith and Leonard (2005) explained that the school principal plays a key role in the collaborative process of co-teaching. Co-teachers, therefore, should receive staff development, and ongoing communication should be facilitated when co-teachers are paired and planning time scheduled.

Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) reported similar information from a qualitative meta-synthesis that they conducted on co-teaching. The authors reported that teachers expressed a need for more planning time, opportunities for student skill level, and for more training. Administrative support seemed to be the underlining factor in addressing the teachers' needs.

### **Environmental Variables and the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

Finally, environmental variables within the classroom, school, and district can set the tone for an inclusive community, which may encourage or discourage co-teaching partnerships. Idol (2006) discussed how various stages of inclusion development among several schools led to positive attitudes from faculty members at each school. Consideration was given to how students were supported within classrooms to the overall development toward inclusive education in each school. Idol also discussed positive test results at the state level as schools within the school system were being transformed into more inclusive special education services. Therefore, inclusion and co-teaching are not only classroom considerations but school and district concerns, as inclusive education continues to evolve.



## The Inclusion Movement

Considering how inclusion and co-teaching developed over time helps explain the complexity of environmental variables that affect co-teaching. A brief overview of the inclusion movement illustrates this point as follows.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes remains a topic of discussion in educational reform. Educators continue looking at their own practices and procedures for integrating inclusion services. Additionally, legislation creates a “legal presumption” that special education services will be provided in the general education classroom (Huefner, 2000). For some time, the inclusion movement has not only sparked a greater need for inclusive services, but it has ignited controversy. For example, King (1995) expressed the concerns of both proponents and opponents of inclusion through the past few decades.

Inclusion proponents often referred to legislation such as *Brown v. The Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), which ruled “separate is not equal” in referring to the placement of special education students. However, King (1995) noted that opponents of inclusion were especially concerned about such issues as the behaviors of students with special needs in general classes and the effects it would have on all students. So the controversy seemed to continue for two main reasons.

One reason inclusive education created controversy and still continues to be a focus of concern today is because research has not been conclusive about the effectiveness of special education placements in relation to student outcomes. Yet, over the years some researchers have summarized studies in an attempt to provide some conclusions, even though there is still little evidence on student performance in relation to placement of services.

Carlberg and Kavale (1980), for example, found that special classes were more effective than general classes for students with behavioral, emotional, and learning disabilities. In 1985, Wang and Baker found that students with disabilities who were mainstreamed performed better than those who were not mainstreamed in general classrooms. These authors also noted that more positive outcomes were found in mainstreamed programs that provided for student differences.

In the following decade, Manset and Semmel (1997) compared eight inclusive elementary programs for students with mild disabilities. They found that inclusive placement can be effective for some students with mild disabilities, and changes made within the general

classroom, as a result of inclusion, were positive for the achievement of students without disabilities.

More recently, Rhea, McLaughlin, and Walther-Thomas (2002) reported findings in a study that explained the relationship between placement in behavior and pull-out programs and academic and behavior outcomes for students with learning disabilities in eighth grade. Considering student demographics, two schools within the same district and their special education programs (one inclusive and the other pull-out) were examined through qualitative and quantitative methods. These authors reported significant differences in the two programs and indicated that students in inclusive settings earned higher grades and higher or comparable scores on standardized testing. They also reported that the students committed no more behavioral violations than students in the pull-out programs, and they attended school more frequently.

Another study also indicated a lack of significant gains in reading comprehension for students with learning disabilities who were receiving instruction in resource rooms (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes, & Fischer, 2000). The authors examined whole group, small groups, and individualized instruction in resource rooms. Implications from the study suggested that resource rooms are not completely responsible for the lack of progress. The authors explained that the teachers in this study were providing instruction to too many students, which made it difficult to provide individual assistance. However, the authors also agreed that full inclusion as it is often implemented is also not the solution.

Finally, a more current study examined inclusion for students with learning disabilities in secondary content-area classrooms. Fore, Hagan-Burke, Burke, Boon, & Smith (2008) found no statistically significant evidence to indicate that fifty-seven high school students with learning disabilities performed more successfully in an inclusive versus non-inclusive setting, other than in a literature class. These authors also explained that the effect of size was small in indicating better achievement in the inclusive literature classroom, thus affirming the idea that no one placement is better than another.

Also included in the discussion of student outcome in inclusive or pull-out programs is the issue of instructional effectiveness within such programs. Crockett and Kaufman (1998) explained that where students with disabilities are taught should not be the key focus but rather the instruction that they receive regardless of where they are placed. The authors also explained that there are various interpretations of inclusion, which differ significantly among settings. For

example, Fuchs and Fuchs (1994) discussed how the term “inclusion” means different things depending on the people who wish different things from it (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994).

However, this is not the case in full inclusion programs, as explained by Van Dyke, Stallings, and Colley (1995). The authors explained that students can be placed in inclusive settings and still receive instruction in needed areas when needed—such as the need for intense reading instruction, which can be provided in a small group or one-to-one setting.

When considering student outcome, Wiebe Berry (2006) explained that teacher beliefs influence teaching practices and ultimately influence the educational experiences of students. Despite the impact on students, teacher beliefs are often unexplored when considering student progress in inclusion classes.

Along the same lines, Rotter (2004) found when surveying special education resource teachers, only simple modifications were implemented for students with disabilities in general classrooms. Thus, levels of willingness and interest in modifying instruction among special educators were considered in relation to student achievement in inclusive settings.

Additionally, in a qualitative study, Paterson (2007) noted that educators should rethink their approaches to instruction in inclusion classrooms. He explained that instead of teachers focusing on student differences, they should focus on individual needs when developing instruction for students in inclusion settings.

King (2003) also elaborated on learner-center focus as a guide in making decisions in middle school inclusion classrooms, specifically focusing on Learner-Centered Psychological Principles in relating to teaching strategies in inclusion classrooms. Thus, more recent research has examined not just instructional approaches used in integrated classrooms but the thinking and beliefs beyond such practices.

In addition to the philosophy behind instructional decisions, research has been examining specific teaching practices of educators in inclusive classrooms. For example, Scruggs et al. (2007) explained their observations of 32 qualitative investigations of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. Their report indicated that the techniques special educators are trained to use in inclusion classrooms were infrequently observed in their study. Such techniques included strategy instruction, mnemonics, and study skills.

Kloo & Zigmond (2008) also discussed models of co-teaching today, as well as research-based practices of co-teaching. The authors argued that the possibilities of co-teaching have not

been fully realized by educators. They further discussed how co-teaching can be better implemented.

Administrators are now pressed to expect best practices from educators as a result of NCLB. Lipsky (2003) explained that not only does NCLB legislation require teachers to be highly-qualified teachers, but it also requires teachers to implement best practices in the classroom. Additionally, IDEA 2004 allows flexibility in the use of special education funding to service non-disabled students, well as students with disabilities, through the course of providing for the needs of students with disabilities.

Smyth (2008) also examined the effects of testing in relation to specific subgroups of learners negatively affected by NCLB. From Smyth's discussion, an area of concern was the need for schools to employ highly-qualified teachers to ensure higher standards.

Browder et al. (2007) also proposed some ideas to connect instruction and assessment to grade-level content, indicating that recent discussions promoted the need for closer examination of instructional practices when considering student outcome.

A study by Fore et al. (2008) examined the reading and math scores of 57 secondary students with specific learning disabilities in relation to their grade levels and the number of special and general education classes attended. The students were given a survey test that was used to help make decisions about student performance in reading and math. Results of the survey indicated no significant differences were found to indicate students' academic achievement in inclusive versus non-inclusive classes.

Regardless of the push toward inclusive classrooms, educators still seek best instructional practices for students. Idol (2006) examined four elementary and four secondary schools in an effort to examine the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes. It was determined that most educators in this study felt they had administrative support for inclusion and found that the presence of students with disabilities in general classes had not been negative to the test performance of general education students.

### **The Co-teaching Phenomenon**

Since inclusion and co-teaching have been around for several decades, most educators in public schools have experienced at least an element of the two concepts. Today, the most-commonly-described co-teaching models have been explained by Friend et al. (2010). The six

models include: (a) one teach-one assist, in which one educator takes the lead in instruction, while the other monitors the classroom; (b) stations, in which instructional content is divided into two or more segments and presented separately in separate locations; (c) parallel teaching, in which teachers deliver instruction to a part of the class and do not exchange groups; (d) alternative teaching-small groups, in which one teacher selects a group of students who require instruction that is different from other class members; (e) team teaching, in which co-teachers share in the process of instructing all students; and (f) one teach-one observe, in which one teacher is on his or her feet, visibly present to students and actively observing the other teacher and students in the learning environment.

Co-teaching is based on the idea that combining the strengths of both teachers, general and special educators, in inclusion classes will enhance the learning experiences of various learners in the general education setting (Hallahan & Kaufman, 2006). While the idea of co-teaching presents a logical concept that has become very popular in public schools to address legislative mandates, the research base for co-teaching practice continues to be very limited (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). However, more research studies are beginning to explore co-teaching. Friend, et al. (2010) discussed three major topics of co-teaching that are most commonly studied today. The topics include: (a) teachers' roles and relationships, (b) program logistic issues and concerns, and (c) the impact of co-teaching on students. While some information has been gained, most of co-teaching remains a phenomenon that awaits researchers who seek to understand a popular concept that continues to move forward, despite research-based criteria.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Special education services for students with disabilities have advanced from separated educational experiences to full integration within the general classroom setting. With legislative mandates holding all students accountable to the general curriculum, co-teaching approaches to instruction have soared. While the concept of co-teaching logically suggests that most students will benefit from the strengths of both general and special educators in inclusive classes, research continues to be needed on the popular phenomenon of co-teaching. Co-teaching remains a phenomenon because the co-teaching experience varies among educators, and there are variables that can affect co-teaching experiences. Studies must now examine how teachers experience co-

teaching to learn more about the practice in public schools. Only through the lens of teachers who implement co-teaching can educators begin to understand what affects the quality of co-teaching partnerships.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

The research methods applied in this study are presented in this chapter. The design of the research, the identification and description of the setting for the study, the population and sample selection procedures, and the data collection, management, and analysis procedures are described.

#### **The Design of the Research**

This study was designed to learn how teachers experience co-teaching in elementary school classrooms. Through interviews with special and general education teachers and a document analysis of information teachers received on co-teaching from their school district, insight into how teachers interpret and apply their knowledge of co-teaching was gained.

#### **Instruments**

Two instruments were used in this qualitative study. The first instrument was an interview protocol that was used with each teacher who was selected for a face-to-face interview. The second instrument was a document identification form that allowed the researcher to view and compare any documents that were provided by the interviewees regarding co-teacher implementation in their individual schools (see Appendix C). The purpose of assessing the documents was to identify the types of information co-teachers had been provided to assist them in the development of co-teaching partnerships. These documents identified antecedents that may have contributed to how co-teachers experienced their co-teaching partnerships.

#### **Development of Instruments**

Through a literature review process, several key issues were found among educators when discussing co-teaching. From a review of studies, Friend et al. (2010) explained that the primary discussions around co-teaching reflect issues relating to teachers' roles and responsibilities, co-teaching logistics, and student outcomes in co-taught classrooms. Along the same lines are issues relating to teachers' beliefs about co-teaching and students with disabilities when they are included in co-teaching inclusion classes (Wiebe Berry, 2006). Therefore, the interview protocol in this study was designed to ask those questions relating to key concerns

about co-teaching found in the literature. Questions were accompanied by prompts to assist the interviewees in beginning their discussions. Additionally, the questions in the protocol were designed to help answer the overarching research questions, presented at the beginning of this study, regarding the quality of co-teaching partnerships, along with the following subordinate questions.

1. How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
2. How do student variables, such as the learning needs of students and the composition of students, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
3. How do operational variables that are typically the responsibilities of administrators, such as scheduling planning times, matching teachers to co-teaching partnerships, facilitating communication, and arranging staff development, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
4. How do the environmental variables of the classroom, school, and district contribute to the quality of co-teaching partnerships?
5. What are other variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?



Table 2

*Research Questions, Domains, Protocol Questions, and Probes*

<b>Research questions</b>	<b>Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher</b>	<b>Protocol question(s)</b>	<b>Probe(s)</b>
<p>How do teachers experience co-teaching in inclusive classrooms?</p> <p>What are the variables that affect the quality of the co-teaching experience in inclusive classrooms?</p>	<p>Quality of co-teaching partnerships</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>Tell me about your work as a co-teacher in your classroom.</p> <p>How would you describe the quality of the relationship you have with your co-teacher?</p> <p>There may be times when your relationship seems to be especially good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.</p> <p>There may be times when your relationship seems to be not so good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.</p>	<p>What are some words that would describe your work as a co-teacher in your classroom? (Why that word for each?)</p> <p>Such as adjectives describing the quality</p> <p>When everything seems to be going smoothly</p> <p>When do things not go so well?</p>
<p>How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?</p>	<p>Teacher variables</p> <p>Teacher compatibility</p> <p>Teacher trust</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What do you think makes your co-teaching partnership work? (What are the personal qualities that you bring to the relationship with your co-teacher?)</p> <p>Tell me how you and your co-teacher became partners.</p> <p>How would you describe the relationship you have with your co-teacher?</p>	<p>Such as flexibility, open-mindedness, etc.</p> <p>When you first started working together</p> <p>Adjectives describing the relationship</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
<p>How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?</p>	<p>Teacher variables</p> <p>Teacher compatibility</p> <p>Teacher trust</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>Tell me about a time when you relied on your co-teaching partner for completing a task.</p> <p>Describe how the completion of the task met (or did not meet) your expectations.</p> <p>Describe the confidence you have (or would like to have) in your co-teaching partner as it relates to co-teaching responsibilities</p>	<p>Such as making copies or preparing part of a lesson</p> <p>How did your partner meet your request?</p> <p>How are things going with co-teaching responsibilities?</p>
	<p>Teacher variables</p> <p>Teacher content knowledge</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>When specific subjects are being taught in the classroom, who takes the lead (for science, math, reading, and for social studies)? Why does it work that way?</p> <p>What roles do you and your partner typically take in the delivery of a co-taught lesson?</p> <p>On what basis do the two of you decide on how lessons will be taught?</p>	<p>Such as who is best-suited to teach a specific subject</p> <p>Such as who does the most content teaching and who does the most individual assisting</p> <p>What criteria do you use to base your decision?</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
<p>How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?</p>	<p>Teacher variables</p> <p>Teacher professional knowledge</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What would you consider to be your best teaching skills? How often do you get to use those skills in your classroom?</p> <p>How have you used your expertise as a special educator (or general educator) to carry out your responsibilities in your co-teaching classroom?</p> <p>What do you think general education teachers need to know about special education (or what special education teachers need to know about general education)?</p>	<p>Tell me about that.</p> <p>What do you typically do in the classroom to assist students?</p> <p>Such as types of disabilities (for general teachers), or curriculum information (for special teachers)</p>
	<p>Teacher variables</p> <p>Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about co-teaching in inclusive classrooms</p> <p>Teaching experience</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What are your thoughts about co-taught classrooms?</p> <p>What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in co-taught classes?</p> <p>What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in inclusion classes?</p> <p>How many years have you spent in co-taught classes?</p>	<p>How do you feel about co-taught classrooms?</p> <p>Such as all students with disabilities being taught by both co-teachers</p> <p>Such as all students of various disabilities being served in the general classroom</p> <p>Teaching or participating as an educator in co-taught classes</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
How do teacher variables, such as teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?	Teacher variables  Educational experience	<i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i>  Tell me about your preparation for working in a co-teaching classroom.	What in-service training has been provided to you by the school, district, or other sources?
How do student variables, such as learning needs of students and the composition of students, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?	Student variables	<i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i>  Tell me about the students in your classroom.	Describe your students.
	Student variables  Learning needs of students	<i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i>  How have the students affected your instruction? How have the students affected how you and your co-teacher work together?	Such as the methods and strategies that you use
	Student variables  Composition of students	<i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i>  How do the students that you have in your classroom affect what you do as co-teachers?	Such as the types of students and their interactions

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
How do operational variables that are typically the responsibilities of administrators, such as scheduling planning times, matching teachers to co-teaching partnerships, facilitating communication, and arranging for staff development, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?	Operational variables	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What supports do you have to have for your co-teaching partnership to work?</p>	<p>What has to be in place for co-teaching to work with your partner?</p>
	<p>Operational variables</p> <p>Planning time</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>Take me through a typical day with your co-teacher.</p>	<p>Tell me about how you prepare for your instructional day.</p>
	<p>Operational variables</p> <p>Compatibility matching</p> <p>Communication</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>How did you become co-teachers?</p> <p>How do you and your co-teaching partner work through conflicts when they arise? Tell me about how you and your co-teacher communicate during the day</p> <p>On what topics do you communicate?</p>	<p>What do you think were the considerations in placing you as co-teachers?</p> <p>How do you resolve problems?</p> <p>Such as lesson plans, students, etc.</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
<p>How do operational variables that are typically the responsibilities of administrators, such as scheduling planning times, matching teachers to co-teaching partnerships, facilitating communication, and arranging for staff development, affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?</p>	<p>Operational variables</p> <p>Communication</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>How would you describe the quality of the communication between you and your co-teacher?</p> <p>How do you account for the ways that you and your co-teacher communicate?</p>	<p>Do you have clear understanding of discussions when you communicate?</p> <p>What is the most frequent types of communication the two of you use?</p>
	<p>Operational variables</p> <p>Staff development</p>	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>Tell me about the staff development that you have participated in to help you with co-teaching.</p>	<p>How helpful has this professional development been for you in working with your co-teacher?</p>

(continued)

Table 2 (cont.)

Research questions	Domains and sub-categories of information of interest to the researcher	Protocol question(s)	Probe(s)
How do the environmental variables of the classroom, school, and district affect the quality of co-teaching partnership?	Environmental variables  Classroom	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>Tell me about the conditions within your classroom, school, or school district that affect how you work as co-teachers.</p> <p>Describe your classroom as a working environment for co-teaching.</p> <p>How do you arrange your classroom? Why do you arrange it that way?</p> <p>How well does your classroom arrangement work?</p>	<p>Is your classroom, school, or school district a suitable place for co-teaching practice?</p> <p>How does your classroom facilitate co-teaching?</p> <p>Such as in straight rows or some other arrangement</p> <p>Are students productive learners in this arrangement?</p>
	School	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What conditions at the school level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?</p>	<p>Such as how inclusion is (or is not) promoted in your school</p>
	District	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What conditions at the district level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?</p>	<p>Such as how much co-teaching is encouraged district-wide</p>
What are other variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships?	Other “discovery” variables	<p><i>General and Special Education Teachers:</i></p> <p>What are the things that you are most concerned about in your co-teaching partnership?</p> <p>If you could make changes in how you work as co-teachers, what would you do? Why?</p>	<p>Such as any issues or concerns that you think might need to be resolved</p> <p>What would you recommend that might improve the quality of co-teaching partnerships?</p>

The second instrument in this study was the document identification form (see Appendix C) that was used to categorize the types of supportive information that teachers in this school district had been given to assist them in implementing co-teaching within their schools. Teachers who were selected for interviews were asked to provide a copy of any information that they received from the school district or their individual schools that provided them with some direction about implementing co-teaching in their schools. The identification form was designed to categorize information based on the type of information the document provided. Categories in the document were coded, like the information that was coded in the interviews, and were used as original and unique information that was cross-checked with information from the interviews.

### **Testing of Instruments**

The first step in testing the instruments in this study was to examine the protocol questions through content validation. A content validation instrument (see Appendix A) was designed to assess the development of questions for the interview protocol, which was used in interviewing elementary co-teachers in a rural school district. The questions for the interviews were designed to gather data on the variables that affect the quality of co-teaching relationships between general and special education teachers. First, the researchers completed the content validation instrument and made adjustments in content and clarity as needed. Next, four university faculty members who were knowledgeable about co-teaching completed the content validation instrument. Results from participants were used to make a second adjustment in content and clarity of the instrument.

Before implementing the two instruments in this study, both instruments were piloted to test for clarity, focus of content, and whether meaningful information related to the research questions was gathered. The instruments were piloted with two co-teachers in the same school district as the study site. After co-teacher participation, a debriefing session was held with each participant to discuss the instruments.

**Reliability of instruments.** The instruments in this study were piloted with two co-teachers in the same school district as the study site. The co-teachers practiced co-teaching using the same full inclusion model adopted by this school district. Therefore, if the instruments in this study prompted similar types of responses between the two interviewees participating in the pilot



of this study and within the context of practices used in co-teaching in this district, then the instruments were considered as reliable, or rather transferable from one situation the next. As Griffin (2009) explained, the reader must decide if results can be applied across the settings and participants.

**Validity.** As Rossman and Rallis (2003) explained, using several sources of data in a study increases not only the credibility but the rigor of a qualitative study as well. In this study categories of information were checked for accuracy among categories. Interviews were conducted and information was coded. Document analysis was used to identify types of information co-teachers had received on co-teaching. Interview information and document analysis were cross-checked. Additionally, the interviewer's major advisor did another check of the information that was obtained in the interview transcripts. The idea was to obtain valid information that would lead to an accurate account of how teachers experienced co-teaching.

### **Setting of the Study**

This study was conducted in a school district in Virginia. Graduates from colleges and universities in the area help support a workforce that is combined with high-tech, manufacturing, and retail services. The school district reflects diverse communities within the county, ranging from communities with plentiful retail centers to the rural communities that enlarge the county.

The school district serves students in grades K-12 in the county's four attendance areas. The school district has elementary, middle, and high school levels and has some alternative programs. The schools vary in size, and they are located across both urban and rural settings.

### **Population Studied**

In this school system, the elementary general and special education teachers who were engaged in co-teaching assignments within the elementary schools comprised the populations that were studied. Considering co-teachers on the elementary levels provided opportunities to explore the ideas of teachers from different schools, which were diverse within the county, but who also taught the same or similar grade levels. Additionally, the elementary schools comprised the largest number of same or similar grade-levels.

## **Selection Procedures**

Each elementary school in this school district had general and special education co-teachers. While it was not practical to do face-to-face interviews with 88 general or special education co-teachers, a selection procedure had to be in place. Therefore, a list of the names of all general and special education co-teachers in each elementary school was obtained from the lead special education teacher in each elementary school. The lead special education teacher in each school was the most knowledgeable individual in his or her school to provide the names of the co-teachers in his or her building because of the lead special education teacher's role in maintaining the current schedules of the co-teachers in his or her school. While there was the possibility of selection bias by the lead special education teacher in providing the names of the co-teachers in his or her building, the lead special education teacher was still the most suitable individual to provide the names because of the current information he or she had about the special education program in his or her school. General education co-teachers at the elementary schools were then listed together under the category of general education, and special education co-teachers at the elementary schools were listed together under the category of special education. Each teacher was given a number. Then, a pencil was randomly placed on a table of random numbers, and a selection of every fourth number was chosen by reading up, down, left, and right on the table. Five general education co-teachers and five special education co-teachers were randomly selected, resulting in 10 teachers for face-to-face interviews. Teachers who were selected for interviews were asked if they were willing to be interviewed. If a teacher from one category, either general or special education, chose not to participate, then the selection process was repeated from a table of random numbers until another teacher from that same category was selected.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection procedure consisted of three parts. The three parts were university approval and entry into the school system, administration of the instruments, and transcription and preparation of transcripts for analysis.

**University approval and entry into the school system.** Before conducting the study, approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) had to be obtained. Once permission was granted, the interview protocol was assessed for content validation. The pilot and

study had to be approved from the director of special education for the school district (see Appendix D and Appendix E). Following the director's approval of the pilot and study, co-teachers were then randomly selected and asked to participate in the interviews.

**Administering the instruments.** Before meeting for each interview, a mutual time and private location was confirmed with the interviewee. Additionally, each interviewee was asked in advance to bring to the interview any written material that related to information that he or she obtained from the school district regarding co-teaching.

Upon initial contact with the interviewee, an informed consent form, based on IRB requirements, was given to the interviewee to read (see Appendix B). Through informed consent, the interviewee was given an assurance of confidentiality that all of the information he or she provided during the interview would remain confidential. The interviewee was informed that he or she may withdraw from the interview at any time. The informed consent form granting permission to participate in the study was signed by the interviewee before the interview began.

When the interview began, the researcher, using appropriate professional etiquette, started the tape recorder with permission from the interviewee and began asking the questions from the interview protocol. A time limit was not imposed on the interviewee, as the idea was to give each individual as much time as possible to elaborate on his or her ideas. Upon conclusion of the interview, the interviewer asked the interviewee to present his or her co-teaching document that was given to him or her by the school district and discuss the document briefly.

**Transcription and preparation of transcripts for analysis.** The tape recordings from each interview were transcribed by the GMR Transcription Company. This company was chosen because it has provided professional transcription services since 2004. Guarantees of the company included the production of transcriptions expediently in a cost-efficient manner. After each interview, GMR transcribed the information from the tape. The researcher examined each transcript for reoccurring statements that connected to the identifying variables and other unknown variables that related to the quality of co-teaching partnerships. At the point when the same reoccurring statements, or themes of information, continued to occur after several interviews, then the information was deemed credible without further continuance.

## **Data Management Procedures**

A confidential researcher's log was used to keep track of all collection of data. Each piece of data was numbered and dated. The number, date, and a brief description of the piece of data were entered into the log as it was received. The researcher's log, reflective journal, and each piece of data were kept in a confidential file cabinet that was locked inside the researcher's locked office. Additionally, no interviewee's name appeared on any piece of confidential material. Only a fictitious first name, known to the researcher only, appeared on each piece of data, and the same fictitious name was recorded in the researcher's log and reflective journal. Procedures regarding confidentiality were outlined in the informed consent that was given to the interviewees, and all material was maintained under lock and key.

## **Data Analysis Procedures**

Creswell (2003) discussed the strategy of grounded theory as one approach to inquiry. The process uses multiple stages of data collection and involves the refining of interrelationships of categories of information. The strategy involves constant comparison of data with categories that emerge. The strategy allows the researcher to find, to the maximum extent, those similarities and differences in information. In this study, the use of grounded theory allowed the researcher to categorize, through levels of coding, information that teachers reported in face-to-face interviews.

Procedures using the constant comparative method as described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) were used to guide the data-analysis process in this study, as described below. The authors explained that the three-stage process begins with inductive category coding along with simultaneous comparisons of the units of meaning across categories. During the second phase of the process, the categories are refined before exploring the relationships and patterns across categories. The data is finally integrated during the final stage of the process to provide understanding of the topic that is the focus of the study.

The steps in the first stage of the Constant-Comparative Method were described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) and included the following, which were applied as the guided steps in this study.

1. Gather all materials together to begin the process of inductive category coding. The primary materials recommended in this process are unitized index cards (although this

researcher adapted this step by making a copy of the transcripts and cutting the units from the transcripts), a focus of inquiry sheet, and an initial discovery sheet of repeated words, concepts, and themes. The units from the transcripts are especially important because they are the chunks or units of meaning found in the data, which is a process coined as *unitizing* the data by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In addition to these items recommended by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the authors also recommended markers, tape, several 5" x 8" index cards, along with large sheets of paper, and a paper cutter.

2. Tape a large sheet of paper on the wall, which will be used as the working surface-and will ultimately become a record of the analysis. In the study, the researcher seeks to maintain the record of analysis for future researchers who wish to replicate this process.
3. Review the initial discovery sheet, which lists recurring concepts and themes. Combine ideas that overlap with each other. After combining overlapping ideas, pick a prominent idea from the sheet, and write the idea on an index card. The index card should be taped to the left side of the large paper, or working-surface area. This is now the first provisional coding category. In this study, a provisional coding category was teachers' roles and responsibilities, for example.
4. For the first provisional category, review the units of data that have been previously clipped to see if one or more units will fit under the category. One way to match the units with provisional categories is to use the look/feel-alike criteria promoted by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). These criteria give the researcher a means to help identify the data units, based on what appears or seems like a logical match to a provisional category. In this study, for example, a unit of data was the idea that shared lesson plans are an important part of co-teaching. Because lesson planning is part of the responsibilities of teaching, it looked and felt like an issue related to teachers' roles and responsibilities, which became a provisional coding category.
5. Continue linking the units of data to provisional categories until there are around 6-8 units of data in a category. Once obtained, write a "rule for inclusion" for additional cards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Writing rules for inclusion will be described in the second stage of this process. Three important notes were

mentioned by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) that should be considered in this process. First, through the process, some units of data may seem to fit into more than one category. Therefore, the units should be copied and taped under the suitable categories. Second, if information is remembered that can be considered as data but was never written down, then write it on a card and tape it under a category. Third, some data units may not seem to fit within the study. Put those units in a category labeled “miscellaneous” and review later.

The second stage of the constant-comparative method involves the refinement of categories, which will be explained here, as presented by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The goal in the refinement process is to pull out the meaning in the units of data and create a rule for including or excluding data units in the categories. The rules for inclusion should be written as proposition statements, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba in 1985 (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). The proposition statements provide meaning from the data units under a category, which will begin to reveal what is being learned about the phenomenon. This step is vital for the outcomes in a study. The authors also explained that rule writing is more than just restating a category but stating a fact to be proposed based on data. In other words, the idea is not just to name the units in a category but to create a statement that reflects the collective meaning in the units of a category. The authors noted that there may be a negative within a category of data units that does not fit in with the other cards. Therefore, the researcher must still come up with a statement from a large accumulation of positives. After the rule for inclusion has been written for a category, a code to mark the data units in a category must be created. The authors suggested using capital letters in parenthesis to code the units of data, which should be placed on the top of each data unit. This will make the category meaningful and provide a cue.

The third stage in the constant-comparative method described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) involves exploring the relationships and patterns across categories. In other words, the data are pulled together to create a harmony that is true and reflective of the information that has been obtained. The process begins by closely examining the many propositional statements. The authors noted that some propositions may stand on their own, or they may relate to others. The propositions that form salient relationships and patterns are called outcome propositions. Data collection and data analysis should conclude when no new or relevant information is

uncovered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) called this redundancy in the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Finally, the last step in the data analysis is to write about it all to provide a harmony in the data. The goal is to bring it all together in narrative form to make sense of the phenomenon that is being studied. Writing it all up is part of the analytic process. In this study, the goal was to describe the quality of co- teachers' experiences in co-teaching partnerships.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in eight sections, one for each of the main categories of data related to how elementary school teachers experience co-teaching in a rural school district. The eight categories are: (a) roles and responsibilities of teachers in co-teaching partnerships, (b) benefits of co-teaching for students, (c) professional characteristics and attitudes toward co-teaching, (d) teaching experiences and attitudes toward inclusion, (e) teacher relationships in co-teaching partnerships, (f) environmental support for co-teaching, (g) variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships, and (h) quality of co-teaching partnerships. A summary of the results follows at the conclusion of the chapter.

Direct quotations from the teachers who were interviewed are coded as in Table 3:

Table 3  
*Codes Used in Analyzing Interview and Document Data*

Code	Definition
T	Transcript
D	Document
A	Special education teacher in the pilot study
B	General education teacher in the pilot study
Numbers 2, 4, 5, 8, 9	Special education teachers in the main study
Numbers 1, 3, 6, 7, 10	General education teachers in the main study
G	General education teacher in the main study
S	Special education teacher in the main study
-Number	Page of the transcript or document

The T in the code stands for transcript, and the D in the code stands for document. Following the T or D are numbers ranging from 1-10, or the letters A or B representing the special education teacher or the general education teacher, respectively, in the pilot study. The G in the code represents general education teacher, and the S in the code represents special education teacher. After the teacher's code, the transcript page or document page is coded. For example, the code



(T/5G-7) means transcript for Teacher 5 (T/5), who is a general education teacher (G), and the quote from Teacher 5 comes from page 7 of the transcript (-7).

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers in Co-teaching Relationships**

Co-teachers reported roles and responsibilities in two subcategories: planning and instructional delivery.

#### **Planning as Co-teachers**

Planning involved planning as partners, roles of the co-teachers in planning, the process of planning, the content of planning, and restrictions on planning.

**Planning as partners.** Teacher planning varied in intensity, time, and importance.

**Intensity of planning.** The intensity of planning varied along a continuum from regularly scheduled planning sessions to brief planning to nearly continuous planning. Teacher 3, who reported regularly scheduled planning sessions, stated, “We would sit down usually the week before, and we would decide, okay, what division [of the lesson material], whatever we needed to teach next. And we would plan for how long that would take” (T/3G-2). Teacher 5, a special education teacher, described a variation in her regularly scheduled weekly planning arrangements with different general education teachers. She explained, “With one teacher we would plan together during joint planning time. With another we would meet every Tuesday morning and plan” (T/5S-3). Teacher 2, another special education teacher, explained that co-teaching can work with brief planning. She explained:

I know generally when you co-teach you would want the two people to plan together. And I’m just thinking—in most situations that probably is a good idea, but I really do think it works, based on your situation, not to have to really sit down together and plan. I think a lot of people feel like that’s the way you, in order to be successful, that you really have to sit down and plan together. I definitely think you need to communicate together. (T/2S-12)

Teacher 9, a special education teacher, reported nearly continuous planning by communicating with her general education co-teacher through a variety of means throughout the day to stay in touch regarding their co-teaching activities. She reported, “We email at the beginning or end of

the day—a good time to touch base. We call, text, put lesson plans out on Google Docs—not a lot of time—no common planning—no planning at lunch” (T/9S-3).

***Time for planning.*** Both special education and general education teachers expressed concerns about time for planning. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, expressed the desire to have more planning time. This teacher said, “I wish we had more time to plan so that she [the special education teacher] could teach more of the lessons instead of facilitating small groups” (T/1G-11). Teacher A reported that there are times when it is difficult to plan. She expressed, “Well, it all kinda starts back when you’re planning together, if you have that time to plan together” (T/A-2). Likewise, Teacher 1 expressed, “Did I say planning time? Have I mentioned there’s not enough time? It would be nice if somehow that could be worked into the schedules, hers [the special education teacher’s schedule] and mine [the general education teacher’s schedule], you know” (T/1G-11).

***Importance of planning.*** Teacher 4 discussed the importance of planning. She emphasized, “Well, we definitely had to work together before the lesson. We did a lot of conferencing together. We did a lot of planning together, the general education teachers and myself” (T/4S-2).

***Roles of co-teachers in planning.*** Teachers discussed their roles as general education teachers and special education teachers in the planning process as co-teachers.

***The role of the general education teacher in planning.*** The general education teacher usually takes the lead in planning and presenting the content material that is to be taught, based on the grade-level curriculum. Teacher 7 explained:

My role [general education teacher’s role], in all that, generally, it’s me planning, and if she pushes in, then it’s her [the special education teacher] kind of taking the role of the group that I assign her to, or something like that. I give her my lesson plans a week ahead of time. We share them on Google Docs with each other, and with our principal, so that she’s able to look at them ahead of time and see if there are things that she will need to do with them. But, as for planning of what’s going to happen, it generally is me when it’s in the classroom. (T/7G-2)

Teacher 1, a general education teacher, described her role in sharing lessons on Google Docs to support teachers and staff. She explained:

I send her [the special education teacher] the lesson plans on Google Docs. I've always sent some sort of plan or heads up to the special education people and the ESL [English as Second Language] and gifted [teachers], you know, so everyone knows what we're doing, but that has really helped because you can get on there [Google Docs]. You know, share it with the special education teacher.” (T/1G-3)

***The role of the special education teacher in planning.*** Special education teachers reported facilitating their co-teachers' lesson plans by bringing resources to their co-taught classes to accompany the lessons, by adapting or accommodating their co-teaching partners' plans, or by adding their own perspectives to the lessons.

*Facilitating the co-teachers' lesson plans with resources.* Special education teachers explained how they facilitated their co-teaching partners' lesson plans by bringing resources to their co-taught classrooms to accompany the lessons. For example, one special education teacher explained that she facilitated her co-teaching partner's lesson plans by bringing materials to classes to supplement the lessons. She reported, “She [the general education teacher] stops by here every day. We don't really plan together, but the materials that I'm responsible for she actually gets them together and brings them to me” (T/2S-5). Another special education teacher explained, “I [the special education teacher] always walk in [into the classroom] with her lessons [the general education teacher's lessons] and my [the special education teacher's] own resources [to work in groups]” (T/9S-1). Likewise, Teacher 1, a general education teacher, elaborated on how her co-teaching partner brought resources to classes. She said, “She [the special education teacher] sometimes brings a little baggy or a bag of items that she thinks she may [need]—she anticipates what the kids may need, based on what I put in my lesson plans” (T/1G-2).

*Adapting/accommodating co-teaching partners' plans.* One special education teacher discussed how she added students' accommodations to her co-teaching partners' lesson plans. She said:

They send me a copy of their printed-out lesson plans, and I take their lesson plans and type accommodations at the bottom of it. And then I can make a copy of it to have in my binder; therefore, I can prepare myself before I go to class, and I know what's gonna be taught. (T/A-9)

A general education teacher explained how she relied on her special education partner to prepare remediation lessons for students with disabilities. She explained, “I counted on her to remediate. She had to compile remediation lessons to meet expectations” (T/6-2). Another general education teacher explained how her co-teaching partner, a special educator, modified tests to meet the needs of a student with a disability in a general education classroom. She said:

Now, I would give her tests ahead of time so that she could take them. She would sometimes cut them apart, make them smaller, and chunk them up into days and things like that. But that was a situation where she was going to be pulling the boys out for that, so I would give it to her ahead of time, so she could decide what she wanted to do with it. (T/7G-12)

*Bringing in the special educators’ perspectives into the lessons.* Some teachers discussed how the special education teachers added to the lessons by bringing in another perspective or idea for learning a concept or by explaining another strategy or method that could be used in the lesson. For example, one special education teacher discussed how she added to the lessons in her co-teaching classroom. She said:

While she’s teaching, if there’s things that I want to say, I just interject and vice versa. So if I think of a different way for the kids to maybe remember something, then I’ll interject and let her know that I thought that might be a good way for them to learn it. (T/2S-1)

Another special education teacher reported adding to the lessons by providing some different ways of teaching some concepts. She described the importance of planning in being able to provide additional strategies for learning. She explained:

Planning is important. Showing different strategies on a hard concept, different ways to do things, letting the kids see that there’s—especially with math, and math is my only thing that I really [teach]—there’s different ways to work a problem. In this strategy you do not quite get this way, then let’s talk about this way that might be a little easier for you to do. And sometimes I’ve had to say okay, this is easier, the shortcut way instead of going around and around. Some of them don’t get all the complicated steps, but then I know I can go from point one to point two and [it’s] a little bit easier for them. (T/A-9)

***Mutual roles of special and general education teachers in planning.*** Some teachers share weekly planning. Teacher 3 described a shared approach, explaining:

We would plan for how long that [the lesson] would take, and then we would kinda just look at it and say, okay, I feel more comfortable telling about this part. She would feel more comfortable introducing this part. And we would just have that relationship where we would just sit down and talk it out and plan. (T/3G-2)

Teacher B described a mutual approach to planning lessons together, stating, “We plan together, and we talk about what areas we’re going to work on, and decide what the assignments will be ” (T/B-1).

**Process of planning.** Teachers reported how lesson planning was coordinated between partners and described their routines in the planning process. The planning process ranged from a few planning steps to several planning steps or was based on specific situations.

***Few planning steps.*** Teacher A explained, “And then because we all turn our lesson plans in by Sunday evening, I get a copy of their [the general education teachers’] lesson plans” (T/A-8). She further explained, “They send me a copy of their printed-out lesson plans, and I take their lesson plans and type accommodations at the bottom [of their lesson plans]” (T/A-9).

***Several planning steps.*** One teacher, Teacher 1, discussed several steps that were involved in planning for lessons with her partner. Teacher 1 explained:

We touch base in the morning sometimes, not all the time, but usually it’s just when I see her, you know, at lunch or in the hallway. I do send her all of my lesson plans on Google Docs, so she knows in advance what SOLs or skills we’re going to be doing. She sometimes brings a little baggy or a bag of items that she thinks the kids may need, based on what I put in my lesson plans. (T/1G-2)

***Specific situations in the planning process.*** Planning may focus on the needs of specific students in the classroom. A special education teacher described how planning took place based on the specific needs of a student in her co-teaching classroom. She explained:

We would meet beforehand and talk about a specific student that I [the special education teacher] was working with in the classroom and whether or not based on his skill set we thought he could, sort of, hang with what the class was doing. And if he could, then she

[the general education teacher] and I [the special education teacher] would sit down and look at the materials for the next couple of weeks, and I would decide that I was going to stay in and support instead of doing a pull out. And, then, if he [the student] couldn't, I would plan an alternative lesson in a pull-out setting. (T/8S-1)

Another special education teacher discussed how specific situations required specialized planning in the form of a behavioral plan or crisis plan that might need to be implemented for a student with a disability during specified times. She said:

I [the special education teacher] had a co-teacher [a general education teacher] who worked really well with a student with a behavior plan. Probably, I had a better relationship [with the general education teacher] than I had with the student, and so this co-teacher [a general education teacher] this year, one of them [general education teachers] I work with this year—she was really good at following through with the plan, the crisis plan, and then filling me in if I was busy somewhere else. (T/5S-12)

A general education teacher discussed how planning took place in advance at her school when specific situations were considered in the planning process. She explained:

Basically, we get a class list some time a couple weeks before school starts. We come back to school a week before school starts, and we will have a meeting right away with the special education teacher if we have children who are identified in our class, so that we can start to formulate a game plan. In past years, if we were getting a special education student who was pretty high profile with pretty severe needs, you would even know before you got out of school. There would be opportunity that the special education teacher and I would set up that that child could come visit my classroom a couple of times or come visit me, so we start to build a relationship before—willy-nilly, cold turkey, here you go! That was pretty much for the child's comfort level, but it also gave us an opportunity to start talking to each other about what we saw, a plan for the upcoming year. (T/7G-16)

Another general education teacher explained that it is important to seek assistance when planning for students with certain disabilities. She stated:

When you know you're going to have a child with a certain disability, you find out what you need to know about that disability. You find out what you need to know about that disability and how to teach that child. And you either reach out, and you go find the answers, or someone comes and helps you. I remember with my very first one, I didn't know what to do, and people came and helped. And there were several different specialists that came because of the severe disabilities [that the student had]. (T/1G-7)

**Content of planning.** General education teachers based the content of planning on the Standards of Learning (SOL) curriculum and used pacing guides to assist in teaching the SOLs. They used data to guide the selection of content for their plans. Special education teachers tied the goals from students' Individual Education Programs (IEPs) into the lessons created for students with disabilities. Special education teachers gave general education teachers a brief summary of the IEP for each student with disabilities who was in their classrooms. Both general and special education teachers discussed the content of their plans from their specialty areas and how they worked together to plan content.

**General education teachers and the content of planning.** General education teachers used data and students' IEPs to select content for lessons. A general education teacher described the importance of using data in planning content and how it assisted both co-teachers. She explained:

Data, lots and lots of data. I [the general education teacher] generally analyze the data, and point out to her [the special education teacher] problems or low spots, so to speak, and then she helps with that. We follow the school district's pacing guide. So we follow that and of course the SOLs. (T/1G-1)

Another general education teacher discussed using the IEP to help plan for lessons for students with disabilities in her class. She said:

But always, we [the general and special education teachers] get together that week before school starts. They [the special education teachers] share an IEP at a glance with us. There's an opportunity to touch base with the classroom teacher from the year before, and whatnot, to start collaborating on what kind of things we see that are going to need to happen. A lot of times, our special education teachers have followed children, so they

may have worked with second grade this year, so they may work with third grade next year because then they are more familiar with the kids. (T/7G-16)

***Special education teachers and the content of planning.*** Special education teachers discussed the sources of content when planning for students with disabilities. The district’s pacing guide for teaching SOLs and the students’ IEPs were reported as sources of content.

Teacher A, a special education teacher, referred to the pacing guide [for teaching the SOLs] used by her general education co-teacher. She said, “Well, the regular ed. teacher keeps the district’s pacing guide, and then we talk about the lessons” (T/AS-2).

Teacher 4, a special education teacher, discussed using students’ IEPs when planning with her general education co-teacher. She described incorporating the IEPs into the lessons for students with disabilities. She said:

A lot of times, for small groups, I would have a lot of my students with IEPs because they were generally on the same level. And I would get them in small groups so I could make sure that I was on their level in what they need to do specifically as far as what their IEPs were concerned with. The general education teacher definitely knew exactly what to do for them as well, having their IEPs at a glance, and us conferencing together. (T/4S-2)

***Restrictions on planning.*** Teachers reported that there are restrictions on planning that affect the planning that co-teachers can do. Teachers explained that not having enough time to plan, not having the same planning time, or the changing needs of planning all influence how co-teachers plan.

***Not having enough time to plan.*** Both general education and special education teachers discussed how it is difficult to plan when there is not enough time to plan together as co-teachers.

***General education teachers reported not having enough time to plan as co-teachers.*** General education teachers reported concerns about the lack of planning time with their co-teaching partners. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, said, “You know, we always have so much time to plan, not. Time is a problem that inhibits a lot. We would plan more and do more together if there was more time, you know that” (T/1G-2). Another general education teacher elaborated about how special education teachers do not have enough time to plan as co-teachers because of other responsibilities. She explained:



There are times that our special education teachers, especially through the spring, are inundated with IEP meetings, and eligibility meetings, and things like that, and helping with SOLs. And them being available to us is harder, just because they've got so many other things going on. So that can affect everything, whether it's her services with the boys or us having a time to sit down and talk to each other. I would say that's the biggest thing, if you're not available, then it makes it hard to communicate to plan, to do anything." (T/7G-13)

*Special education teachers reported not having enough time to plan as co-teachers.*

Special education teachers reported that there are restrictions on co-teaching because of lack of planning time with their co-teaching partners. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained that when teachers feel that they do not have enough time to plan together, then they feel that they cannot co-teach together. She said, "Sometimes I fear that people don't co-teach because they think they don't have the time to plan" (T/2S-12). Another special education teacher reported that not having enough planning time results in not being prepared enough for class. She stated, "Probably, a week that you didn't have enough planning time together and you didn't really have everything set and ready [would influence co-teaching]" (T/5S-11).

Other special education teachers discussed the time restrictions on planning as co-teachers during the school day, specifically. Teacher 8, a special education teacher, said the following, "There are time restraints on how long you can plan with a classroom teacher, what their schedule looks like versus what your schedule looks like, and especially trying to fit it in the school day" (T/8S-11). Another special education teacher reported, "Unfortunately, we didn't have time during the school day [to plan together]. We had to meet after school. So having that time during the day would have been nice. But, sometimes, time just doesn't allow" (T/4S-4).

*Not having the same planning time.* Some general education teachers discussed how planning with their co-teaching partners was restricted as a result of not having the same planning times during the school day. For example, one general education teacher explained:

Definitely having time to spend together [affects how you work as co-teachers]. Our planning time was not at the same time, so that was kinda [difficult]. We had to find other times either before school or after school. But, like I said, the principal's very

willing to help in however she could. She actually came and did an observation on both of us co-teaching together because she wanted to see [co-teaching]. (T/3G-15)

Another general education teacher reported that she did not have shared planning time with her co-teaching partner during the school day. She said:

No shared planning time [during a typical day with her co-teaching partner]. We did not have integrated roles and had to plan before or after school. It was not full co-teaching as I envisioned it. It works, but it is not integrated. (T/6G-1)

Teacher 7 reported that having a common planning time helps create a better co-teaching situation. She explained:

As I said, we don't have a common planning time. We don't have [common planning]—it's before school and after school and whenever you can find each other kind of thing, so that can make it difficult. But, I would say anytime you can work those things out, you're gonna have a better situation [co-teaching situation]. (T/7G-22)

***Changing conditions of planning.*** Some teachers reported that planning can be restricted because of the changing conditions of planning. Two conditions were reported: pacing guides and student needs.

Teacher A, a special education teacher, discussed how the district's pacing guide affected how teachers plan and implement lessons. She explained:

Time limits, the pacing—are you trying to rush through the topic? Do you have plenty of time... to explain the concept, or are you rushing through the concept? Because you're on that [district's] pacing guide, and I know you've got to hurry up and finish things like that. (T/A-6)

Another teacher discussed how planning becomes restricted as co-teachers because the needs of some students change so quickly and require teachers to frequently address new problems. Teacher 7, a general education teacher, reported:

Like I said, every month we sat down, and we looked at what was coming up. We always talked about the positives that we had seen and things we saw that were problems. But for them [students with disabilities who have lesser needs], from the get go, it was a little easier to plan what they were going to need because it wasn't that things looked

different every week. There are some special education kids that we work with that it's new problems every week, and with these kids [those with fewer needs], it wasn't really like that. (T/7G-18)

### **Instruction as Co-teachers**

Instruction involved the role of the general education teacher in co-teaching, the role of the special education teacher in co-teaching, the simultaneous interactive co-teaching activities of the co-teachers, and the restrictions on the co-teaching partners.

**The role of the general education teacher in co-teaching.** The general education teacher in the co-teaching partnership assumed the role of being the curricular leader for the co-teaching partners and was usually the lead teacher during instruction.

*Curricular leader.* The general education teacher was portrayed as the curricular leader in the co-teaching partnership because of her knowledge of the general education curriculum, because of her knowledge of the district's pacing guide for presenting the curriculum, and because of her knowledge of the data used to support curriculum decisions.

*Knowledge of the general education curriculum.* Teachers reported that the general education teacher was the most knowledgeable about the grade-level curriculum. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained that her general education co-teacher had more training in the curriculum. She said, "I think it works that way because she [the general education teacher] has more training in the curriculum, and it is her classroom" (T/2S-2). Likewise, another special education teacher reported, "Well, she's [the general education teacher] got the knowledge of the curriculum" (T/A-4). A general education teacher reported that the curriculum is followed as new skills are introduced. She said, "We follow the curriculum—the regular education teacher introduces new skills" (T/10-1). Another general education teacher explained that she took the lead in presenting new material because of her knowledge of the curriculum. She explained, "If there's a new lesson to be taught that day, I [the general education teacher] will start the lesson, and she [the special education teacher] will assist with any other knowledge that may be needed" (T/B-2).

*Knowledge of the district's pacing guide.* The general education teacher was described as knowledgeable of the district's pacing guide in presenting the curriculum. A special education teacher explained, "She's [the general education teacher] got the knowledge of the [district's]

pacing guide. So she keeps up to date with all that” (T/A-4). Teacher 1, a general education teacher, reported using the district’s pacing guide to present the material. She said, “We follow the [district’s] pacing guide. So we follow that and of course the SOL’s” (T/1-1).

*Knowledge of the data used to support curricular decisions.* The general education teacher was reported as the teacher who kept track of the data in the partnership. A general education teacher explained, “I [the general education teacher] generally analyze the data and point out to her [the special education teacher] problems or low spots, so to speak, and then she helps with that” (T/1-1).

*Lead teacher during instruction.* Both general and special education teachers reported that the general education teacher usually took the lead during instruction. Teacher 5, a special education teacher said, “I’m with one teacher who pretty much likes to have complete control of her classroom, so I—I’m more of a support as a small-group teacher” (T/5S-3). Another special education teacher reported a similar scenario. Teacher 8, a special education teacher explained:

The classroom teacher typically took the lead, and I will say, at least with this particular teacher, she has 23 years of experience teaching second grade, so it was all in her hands, and I was fine with that. She would, kind of, bounce off of me sometimes, though, if it was a particular thing where we needed to [be] partners...(T/8S-2).

A general education teacher reported that she mostly took the lead when specific subjects were taught at the beginning of the year. Teacher 3 said, “Usually, mainly me [the general education teacher, -took the lead] towards the beginning of the year. And then after a couple months in, we kinda got to know each other, the special education teacher and I” (T/3G-2).

**The role of the special education teacher in co-teaching.** Special education teachers participated in co-taught classes through various roles. These roles were supporting the general education teacher while she teaches; teaching students directly in an inclusive setting through small-group instruction, centers, or team teaching with the general education teacher; or teaching students directly in a resource setting when needed.

*Supporting the general education teacher while she teaches.* Special education teachers supported the general education teachers in a number of ways while the general education teachers were teaching. Special education teachers observed, helped students academically

during class, attended to behavioral issues, and served as resources to the general education teachers.

*Observing.* Special education teachers sometimes observe general education classes to gain information about the content or students to assist the general education teacher in teaching. Teacher A, a special education teacher, described this role. She said:

When the teacher [the general education teacher] goes into the general lesson where everybody's listening and taking notes and all, I... [the special education teacher] find a spot to sit. And, I ...carry a notebook to every class, and I take notes just like the kids do so that when I'm re-teaching in another spot, then I can re-teach the same way the regular education teacher taught. So I sit and just listen. And then when we do individual class work, then I'm up and about again. (T/A-3)

*Helping students academically during class.* Special education teachers help students academically in the general education classrooms. Teacher 8, a special education teacher, explained this role during instruction. She stated:

As she [the general education teacher] was teaching the whole-group lesson, I [the special education teacher] would, sort of, walk around. I kept more of an eye on my kid that was in there, but,... walked around and made sure that everybody was,...getting the material. (T/8S-3)

Teacher 2, another special education teacher, discussed her role as student helper. She said, "...so as soon as I get in there, I'm kind of just rotating, trying to help the kids focus..." (T/2S-2).

*Attending to behavioral issues.* Special education teachers assisted with behavioral issues in general education classrooms when assistance was needed. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, described her role in assisting with behavior. She explained:

There are times when there are behavior issues in the classroom, and those are times that, instead of asking me, "Would you mind to take care of that problem?" it's kind of like, "Students, you need to go with Ms. X." But I guess it's kind of like I'm expected to handle the behavior problems. And I don't mind to, but I just sometimes would like to be asked instead of told. (T/2S-5)

Another special education teacher explained that she assisted with classroom behavior as well. Teacher 8 said:

We have pretty similar behavior management styles, so she and I haven't had any conflicts this year. But if there's a conflict in the classroom, one of us will usually handle it and then tell the other one, "Hey, just so you know this [a behavioral issue] happened." So if they try to pit us against each other—because the kids will do that, especially in second grade [then we know what happened]. They're little guys. (T/8S-7)

*Resources to the general education teacher.* There were times when the general education teachers needed resources or information from special education teachers so that they could continue with instruction in the classroom. Teacher 4, a special education teacher, gave an example of a time when she needed to consult with the general education teacher to provide information about her students. She explained:

She [the general education teacher] would come to me if there were concerns with other content areas that I wasn't in the room for, like science and social studies. We would also collaborate on writing. And we just sat down...[and] talked about each of the students and what was going on. (T/4-7)

A general education teacher explained how her co-teaching partner, a special education teacher, found resources for the lessons. She explained:

She was wonderful this year. She would actually go out and look for a lot of resources in her planning time. If we knew we had a unit coming up on a certain topic, she would spend a little bit of her time... searching for materials and resources, so it wasn't just me looking for things or having the resources. (T/3G-6)

Another general education teacher reported similar information about a resource brought to the lesson from her co-teaching partner. She said:

We were trying to figure out, you know, like a gram is a paperclip. Well, then what's a kilogram? You know, and I'm like: "Well, a thousand." I don't know. So she [the special education teacher] had taught fifth grade, and she knew that there was a gram weight kit in fifth grade. So she stepped out, went and got it, and brought it back. So she

[the special education teacher] has been at the school and taught. She knows where resources are. (T/1G-4)

***Teaching students directly in an inclusive setting.*** There were times when special education teachers conducted their own small-group instruction in the general education setting or instructed students during center activities in the classroom. And, sometimes special education teachers team taught with their general education co-teachers in the general education setting.

*Small-group instruction in the general education classroom.* Special education teachers provided small-group instruction in the general education classroom. One special education teacher explained, “If we were doing a whole grouper, we would take small groups and work with them individually. For reading, it was mainly just small groups. And I didn’t work with science or social studies” (T/4S-1). Another special education teacher reported teaching small groups in the general classroom. She explained:

I would go in during morning meeting time with my plans that we had planned together and then we would begin... the writing instruction. And, after the instruction, that’s the time I could typically pull my small groups or work individually at the back table to work on their accommodations. (T/5S-5)

A general education teacher explained how small-group teaching worked in her classroom with her co-teaching partner. She said:

Then a lot of times we would break up and do groups, especially in math. And she [the special education teacher] would have a group and I would have a group, and we would hit different topics. And maybe one of us would do some re-teaching, maybe the other do a new lesson. Or sometimes we would introduce and then practice with the other person. So that’s a lot of what we do. (T/1G-1)

*Centers in the general education classroom.* Sometimes small-group instruction in the general education classroom took the form of centers. One special educator explained her experience of directly teaching students in center activities in the general classroom. She explained, “We [the class] were constantly regrouping. We would split into four groups and usually have four rotations [of centers]” (T/9S-3). A general education teacher also explained

her experience of doing center activities in her classroom with her co-teacher, the special education teacher. She explained:

Oh, it's busy. Everybody is busy. The kids say there's never nothing to do. I know that's not proper English, but that's what they say. There's always something to do. So with centers and 25 years worth of stuff, and then my co-teacher has, you know, 39 years worth of stuff, then there's always something to do—things going on—busy, busy, busy. (T/1G-8)

*Team teaching in the general education classroom.* There are times when special education teachers and general education teachers team teach in the general education classroom. Teacher 8, a special education teacher, explained how she team taught with her co-teaching partner, the general education teacher. She said:

I [the special education teacher] would typically go in at the beginning of their math lesson, and, sort of, facilitate the review at the beginning [of the lesson] and here's what we learned yesterday. And then as she [the general education teacher] was teaching the whole group lesson, I [the special education teacher] would, sort of, walk around. (T/8S-3)

Another special education teacher discussed how she engaged in team teaching with her general education co-teacher. She explained:

There are days when we [the special education teacher and general education teacher] will take turns leading the lesson, or some days the regular teacher will lead, and I'll support. And there have been times when I will lead and she will support. (T/5S-2)

A general education teacher explained her experience of team teaching with her partner, a special education teacher. She stated, "The special education teacher comes in to math with her kids. She helps to support a small group or she takes over [the lesson] and I observe fourth grade" (T/6G-1)

*Teaching students directly in a resource setting.* Teachers reported that there were times when students with disabilities need to be pulled out for instruction in a resource setting. The resource setting may be another classroom or location that is outside of the general education classroom. Special education teachers provide direct instruction to students with disabilities in



resource settings. Teacher 4, a special education teacher, reported on the need for occasional pull-out instruction for students with disabilities. She explained:

I [the special education teacher] know sometimes it [being in the general education classroom] can be challenging for those students with behavior problems because if they also have academic needs, they may be a little more embarrassed to be in the general education setting. So I [the special education teacher] think there are times when those students [students with disabilities] may need to be pulled out to do more one-on-one or small groups in a different area. (T/4S-9)

Another special education teacher explained that there are times when pull-out instruction is needed for students with disabilities. She discussed her experience with one such student. She said:

We [the special education teacher and general education teacher] would meet beforehand and talk about the specific student that I was working with in the classroom and whether or not, based on his skill set, we thought he could, sort of, hang with what the class was doing. And if he could, then she and I would sit down and look at the materials for the next couple of weeks. And we [the special education teacher and general education teacher] decided if I was going to stay in and, sort of, support instead of doing a pull out. And then if he [the student with a disability] couldn't [grasp the material in the general classroom], then I would plan an alternative lesson in a pull-out setting. (T/8S-1)

A general education teacher reported on several times when pull-out instruction was needed for students with disabilities in her classroom. She explained that pull-out instruction to a resource setting was based on the needs of each student, and there were times when pull out was specifically needed when tests had to be adapted for students and when students needed help with reading. She discussed those times:

It [the role of the special education co-teacher] is tricky because it depends on the year. It depends on the students. Depending on the needs of the special education children in my classroom, sometimes it's more of a pull-out situation. Sometimes it's a push-in situation. So it really depends on the student. (T/7G-1)

When tests had to be adapted, she explained another pull-out scenario:

I would give her tests ahead of time so that she could take them. She would sometimes cut them apart, make them smaller, and chunk them up into days and things like that. But that was a situation where she was going to be pulling the boys out for that, so I would give it to her ahead of time, so she could decide what she wanted to do with it. (T/7G-12)

When students with disabilities needed assistance with reading, one special education teacher pulled the students out to a resource setting, as described by a general education teacher:

At 10:00 she would come in and pull my two young men who both have reading disabilities. She would pull them from 10:00 to 11:00; again I said they were my children who were pre-readers, pretty much, [within second grade] at the beginning of the year. So they needed intensive support at that point. (T/7G-5)

**The simultaneous interactive co-teaching activities of the co-teachers.** There are times when both teachers are simultaneously worked together to deliver a lesson in an inclusive classroom. Teachers reported interactive teaching when both teachers contributed to the lesson as it was being taught. The interactive co-teaching, at times, took the form of impromptu discussions between co-teachers. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, discussed her experience of interactively teaching with her co-teaching partner, which at times became an impromptu discussion. She said:

While she's teaching, if there's things that I want to say, then I just interject and vice versa. So if I think of a different way for the kids to maybe remember something, then I'll interject and let her know that I thought that might be a good way for them to learn it. (T/2S-1)

Another special education teacher reported interactive teaching with her co-teaching partner. She explained:

Well, I would say my best experience during the day is during my first period math. That's with the newest teacher. We bounce off of each other. If I have something to say, she does not care. And so we just join together. There have been times when visitors come in, and they really can't pick out the special education kids because of the way this teacher and I work together. We help everybody. We don't single out different kids, so I guess that's the ideal situation. (T/A-5)

General education teachers also reported simultaneous interactive teaching with their co-teaching partners. Teacher 10, a general education teacher, explained:

I [the general education teacher] only have someone in my classroom for math. The regular education teacher does the new content [during math class], and the special education teacher adds from the special education perspective. She does the review. We learn from each other. (T/10G-1)

Another general education teacher reported that her special education co-teacher helps her explain information to her students. She said, “Sometimes she has a better way of doing something. She can explain it to the kids, and it helps me when she jumps in with those comments” (T/B-1).

### **Benefits of Co-teaching for Students**

Co-teachers reported benefits of co-teaching for students. Benefits are classified in five subcategories: the benefit of having more than one teacher’s instruction; the benefit of meeting the needs of all students; the benefit of providing students with more assistance; the benefit of meeting the social needs of students; and the benefit to students in co-teaching certain classes or subjects.

#### **The Benefit of Having More than One Teacher’s Instruction**

The benefit of having more than one teacher’s instruction in inclusive classrooms was reported by both special education and general education teachers. Teacher A, a special education teacher, stated, “I think it [having more than one teacher] is good for the kids. I think it’s good for them to hear two different voices in the classroom sometimes” (T/A-7). Another special education teacher expressed the same idea. Teacher 4 stated:

Well, it’s important to have two different perspectives to teaching a certain strategy. If one teacher was doing it one way, and some of the students were having difficulty understanding that strategy, the other teacher could come in and have a different way of teaching it that some of the kids maybe understood better. So it was just good to have two different perspectives on teaching the same topic. (T/4S-1)

General education teachers reported the benefit of having more than one teacher's instruction in inclusive classrooms. Teacher 3 stated:

So it's really helpful [to students] to have two people. And she [the special education teacher] could [teach]. We could both [the general education teacher and special education teacher] teach at the same time a small group and then meet back together and review. Or, she [the special education teacher] could re-teach something and I [the general education teacher] could be doing something else. And I feel like the kids really enjoyed having both of us this year. And it was a good year. (T/3G-11)

Another general education teacher reported on the benefits of having another teacher in an inclusive classroom. Teacher 7 stated:

Well, [another teacher] always [has] new ideas, [and] new perspectives. I [the general education teacher] mean, really, anything that somebody can bring to the table as a resource is a wonderful thing. I guess that would be a good way of looking at it. They [the special education teachers] come with resources that I may or may not have. Whether it's another person, whether its materials, whether it's anything, it's more resources to bring to the table for that child that I may not have within the four walls of my classroom. (T/7G-9)

### **The Benefit of Meeting the Needs of All Students**

General and special education teachers expressed the benefit of meeting the needs of all students in inclusive classrooms when both co-teachers are involve in the classroom. General education teachers expressed confidence in the skills of their special education co-teachers in meeting the needs of all students in the classroom, while special education teachers described the benefit of having two teachers working together in the classroom to meet the needs of all students.

General education teachers reported the benefit of meeting all students' needs. Teacher 7 reported, "All of her [the special education teacher's] expertise about working with kids with special needs [is brought into the inclusive classroom by the special education teacher]" (T/7G-9). Teacher 7 elaborated on the benefits of the special education teacher in helping to meet the needs of all students in her inclusive classroom. She said:

In my setting things up, when that person comes into my classroom, she's not just there to work with the three kids who have labels. She is another adult in my classroom, and I set it up from the beginning that "When you're finished [when the students are finished], you [the students] can show me your work or you can show her [the special education teacher] your work." So all of the kids just view that person as another teacher in our classroom. It's not student X's person, but it's just another person. Kids are intuitive. They know when that person [the special education teacher] comes in, who she's there for. But they also know very quickly... [that the special education teacher can help them too]. I mean they're second graders, and they love everybody. They see that that's attention from another adult. Its help from another adult, and it's not like they can't go to that person because she is here for student X kind of situation. (T/7G-19)

Another general education teacher expressed confidence in her co-teaching partner in meeting the needs of all students in the inclusive classroom. She stated:

I have full confidence in her. She knows the math, and she is not a person who would just look at the problem and say, "Hey kids, do it." She works every problem out herself before she comes to class. She knows what to teach. She knows how to teach it, and she knows how to work with the kids. (T/B-4)

Special education teachers expressed the benefit of meeting all students' needs in inclusive classrooms. Teacher A said, "And it would be hard to meet the needs of every other child that's in there [if only one teacher was in the classroom]" (T/A-3). She discussed the benefit of meeting the needs of all students in the classroom when she is involved in instruction. She said:

And sometimes I [the special education teacher] have had to say, "Okay, this is easier, the shortcut way, instead of going around and around. Some of them don't get all the complicated steps, but then I know I can go from point one to point two and make it a little bit easier for them [all students in the classroom]. (T/A-9)

Another special education teacher discussed the benefit of meeting the needs of all students. Teacher 2 explained:

I don't think you have to co-teach for kids to learn, but it allows you the opportunity to remediate the students based on what they specifically need because you can put them in small groups or individualize instruction. So I definitely think it benefits them [all].

(T/2S-7)

### **The Benefit of Providing Students with More Assistance**

General education teachers and special education teachers reported that students, especially students with disabilities, received more assistance in inclusive classrooms when the co-teachers create alternative learning arrangements in addition to providing the traditional whole-group instruction delivered by one teacher. Teachers discussed the benefit of providing students with more assistance when alternative learning formats are incorporated into inclusive classrooms by co-teachers. When two teachers are involved in instruction, teachers reported that students received more assistance through five methods that were used to enhance learning. These methods were dividing the class into two groups, using centers or smaller groups to implement learning opportunities, pulling students aside to provide more individual help, providing individual assistance to students during the whole-group instruction, and having one teacher observe and assess students' needs during the lesson so that follow-up with the students can be implemented to improve learning.

***Dividing into two groups.*** The opportunity for both co-teachers to be engaged in instruction at the same time was described by one special education teacher. Teacher 4 described how she taught part of the class and her co-teacher taught the other part of the class. She said:

Well, I would start off my day in the morning in one fourth-grade classroom. And I would do small-group reading, and she would have her small-group reading. And then I would switch to my other co-teaching class. And it was the same thing with two small-group reading groups going on. In the afternoon, for math, we would work together. We would either be teaching a whole-group lesson, and we would kind of piggyback off of one another, or we'd break off and do small groups in which we're each teaching a skill, and then we would switch. (T/4S-3)

***Using centers or smaller groups.*** General education teachers and special education teachers described how using centers in the classroom or how breaking students into smaller

groups allowed for better learning opportunities when both co-teachers were available to facilitate the centers or small groups.

Special education teachers discussed using centers or small groups in the classroom to facilitate learning activities for students. Teacher 9 described how centers were used in her inclusive classroom. She said, “We used desks for peer support and small-group clusters with two or three teaching tables. We... constantly regrouped and split [the class] into four groups and usually had four rotations” (T/9S-3). Teacher 5 explained how she used small-group instruction in her inclusive classroom. She explained, “After instruction, that’s the time I could typically pull my small groups or work individually at the back table to work on their accommodations” (T/5S-5). Teacher 4 elaborated on addressing students’ needs in small groups to maximize student achievement. She explained:

I think knowing your students and where they are on their levels [will maximize student achievement in co-teaching classrooms]. And if you wanna break off and do small groups and teach skills, know which kids need to be in which groups and the skills that they need to learn. So definitely,...all students [will achieve more in groups]. (T/4S-10)

General education teachers explained how using centers or breaking students into smaller groups, by implementing the instruction from both co-teachers, allowed students to receive more academic assistance in class. Teacher 7 discussed using centers in her classroom. She explained:

Any time there can be another grownup in the room during language arts, it’s helpful because we do centers, and we’re doing reading groups, and you can’t be in every place at once. So if there is another adult in the room who can teach a center or who can teach a reading group, especially with second graders...[then it is very helpful]. They’re seven and eight years old, so the more adults we can have in the room, the better. (T7G-3)

Teacher 1 reported that her special education co-teacher provided individual or small-group instruction in her inclusive classroom to provide more assistance to students. She explained:

I wish we had more time to plan, so that she could teach more of the lessons, instead of facilitating small groups because that’s pretty much her role right now, which is working

one on one with someone who is struggling, or facilitating a group after I've taught the whole lesson. (T/1G-11)

Teacher 6 explained how her special education co-teacher occasionally switched roles in her inclusive classroom to provide more assistance to students, including using group work. She said, "The special education teacher comes into math with her special education kids, and she helps to support small groups, or she takes over and I [the general education teacher] observe fourth grade" (T/6G-1). Teacher B explained that her special education co-teacher could work with various groups in her inclusive classroom to provide more assistance to all students. She stated, "With co-teaching, with my special education teacher who co-teaches, she can take a group of the high learners or the low learners, and she can work with them as well as I can" (T/B-6).

***Pulling students aside.*** General and special education teachers reported that occasionally some students, especially students with disabilities, may need to be pulled aside within the general education classroom or temporarily pulled aside outside of the general education classroom to receive more individualized assistance. This may involve pulling one student or several students to have tests read aloud, to work on specific skills, or to address behavior that is interfering with learning.

***Tests read aloud.*** Sometimes students with disabilities need to have tests read aloud to them in a quiet setting because of the difficulties they experience in reading. Teacher B explained that sometimes her special education co-teacher needed to pull students from her inclusive classroom to have a test read aloud to them. She explained:

Sometimes we do have to take the kids out for testing. She [the special education teacher] takes the kids out for testing, and there's no stigma there. The kids don't feel bad about that. The kids who don't leave don't think twice about those kids leaving. But I think they all work together, and they all cooperate. (T/B-6)

***Specific skills.*** General education and special education teachers reported that sometimes students may need more assistance with specific skills that are best met in a pull-out setting. Teacher 7, a general education teacher, discussed how there are times when kids need more help in the area of reading. She explained:



Of-course, some of the times that she pulls the kids out, she is doing something completely different. I had a child in my classroom this year who was reading on a Level A. I don't know if you're aware of Fountas and Pinnell, but that's what we use. He's on a Level C now, but at the beginning of the year he was reading on Level A. Well, in second grade, you generally enter second grade reading on a Level J. So when she pulled him out for reading, she was not doing what we were doing in the classroom because he was still basically a pre-reader. (T/7G-2)

Teacher 8, a special education teacher, reported that there are reading programs that are best implemented in a pull-out setting, requiring students to occasionally be pulled for more assistance. She stated:

Those are programs [Wilson, System 44, and Read 180] that are, I think, difficult to implement and—especially Wilson. It's [the Wilson program] supposed to be 40 minutes of one-on-one instruction, and some kids do need that intensive, pull-out instruction. (T/8S-10)

*Behavior interfering with learning.* General education and special education teachers explained that there are times when some students have behavioral concerns that impede learning in inclusive classrooms. Addressing the behavior may require pulling the student aside.

Teacher 10, a general education teacher, explained that general education and special education co-teachers should have agreement on classroom management. She said, “We [the general education and special education co-teachers] need agreement on classroom management, consistent management [to maximize student achievement in co-teaching classrooms]” (T/10G-2).

Special education teachers reported that there are times when students need to be pulled aside because of behavioral issues that affect co-teaching and learning in inclusive classrooms. Teacher 2 reported this concern. She said:

The children with the behavior problems definitely give you a challenge because you would like to go in and just teach and everything go perfectly well. But sometimes one of the teachers does have to step out [with the student or students] to take care of the behavioral issues. That's probably the biggest thing [affecting co-teaching]. (T/2S-9)

Another special education teacher reported occasionally pulling students aside to address behavioral concerns so that learning continues for all students in inclusive classrooms. Teacher 5 explained:

There's a small number of students who need to be in a different setting for different reasons, and I would say mainly if it's behavioral things that would actually keep the teacher from teaching and the classroom learning. I think there's situations that are so disruptive [that the student or students need to be removed from the class]. (T/5S-14)

***Providing individual assistance to students during the whole-group instruction.***

General and special education teachers explained that students receive more assistance during instruction when another teacher is in the classroom assisting students as needed.

Teacher 7, a general education teacher, explained that when her special education co-teacher came to her classroom, students received more support. She explained:

With the children that I had in my class this year, I did not have any 100 percent assistance [for students from a teacher assistant in the classroom]. So she [the special education teacher] would come in for an hour during math. Rather than send an aide, the special education teacher herself came in for that hour. We don't do a lot of the special education teacher coming in and teaching the class. They come in here at School X in more of a supportive role. They will do anything [to assist students]. (T/7G-3)

Teacher 2, a special education teacher, discussed her perspective of supporting students during instruction. She said, "I think they [administrators] definitely don't want us to be "glorified aides." They don't want us just to do the supportive part" (T/2S-10). She described how students receive support from both teachers when two teachers are present in the classroom and how she can do more than support students. She said:

She [the general education teacher] has already started class, and when I get in there, I'm relieving one of the aides. So as soon as I get in there, I'm kind of just rotating, trying to help the kids focus. Then we have them fill out their agenda books, and then we switch and I become the teacher, and she becomes more of the support person. (T/2S-2)

***Observing to assess students' needs during the lesson.*** Special education teachers reported how students receive more assistance when two teachers are in the classroom and one

teacher can observe and assess the students' needs. Teacher A explained that she takes notes when her general education co-teacher is teaching math so that when she re-teaches the material in another setting, she can present the material in the same way. She said, "I carry a notebook to every class, and I take notes just like the kids do so that when I'm re-teaching in another spot, then I can re-teach the same way the regular education teacher taught" (T/A-3). Another special education teacher reported that she can adapt for the students who have the most significant disabilities when she knows what the other students are doing in class. She explained, "You can have them [the students with the most significant disabilities] working on planets [for example] when the class is doing their unit on planets" (T/8-11).

### **The Benefit of Meeting the Social Needs of Students**

The benefit of meeting the social needs of students in classes with co-teachers was discussed by special and general education teachers. Teachers reported that students, especially students with disabilities, benefitted from being in the general education classroom with their peers and co-teachers.

Teacher 4, a special education teacher, discussed her views on the social benefit of co-taught classes for all students. She explained:

I think co-teaching is great for all students to be a part of, especially kids with IEPs [Individual Education Programs]. I think it's helpful for them to be in the classroom environment with all different levels. I came from another county that was very much into pulling students out of the classroom, which you can get with them [the students] on more of their levels, and one-on-one is great for certain students. But I think for the general population, it's really helpful for them [students with disabilities] to be in an inclusive setting and have that general education teacher and special education teacher as well, and be in the environment with all of their classmates. I think it's very helpful for their learning. (T/4S-8)

General education teachers reported the benefit of meeting the social needs of students in co-taught classes. Teacher 6 explained, "It is a benefit to all students [to be served in co-taught classes]. Students learn patience and acceptance, and everyone has a positive [strength]" (T/6G-3). Teacher B reported a similar response. She said:

I've had students who were in wheelchairs and with very low cognitive ability, and they're in that classroom [co-taught classroom], and they're treated just like the other kids even though they can't learn what the other kids are learning, and the kids [general education students] treat them with such respect. (T/B-5)

Teacher 3 reported that her general education students liked it when the special education co-teacher worked with them, and that helped the students with disabilities in her classroom feel more accepted. She explained:

The students were great! A lot of times my students [the general education students] would want to know if they were getting to work with Ms. X [the special education co-teacher] today. They would say that they wanted to do math so that they could see Ms. X. They had a love for her just like they did for me. And I feel like that kind of helped, especially with my special education group, to feel more like they're not the only ones who get to see Ms. X. It's everybody, and then we get to see Ms. XX [the general education teacher] too. So it was just kind of nice for them to be included in everything. (T/3G-14)

Teacher 10 reported that she arranged her classroom so that everyone in the room was involved. She said, "Kids usually sit where desks are arranged for partnerships. They help each other, and all are involved. The co-teacher [special education teacher] could see who needed help" (T/10G-2).

### **The Benefit to Students in Co-teaching Certain Classes or Subjects**

The benefit to students in co-teaching certain classes or subjects was discussed by special education and general education teachers. Teachers identified math and reading as the two most important subject areas or classes for co-teaching that benefit students the most.

***Co-teaching in math.*** Math was discussed by special education and general education teachers as an important class to co-teach for students. Teachers explained that there are times when teaching math that more individual assistance is required, and having two teachers in the classroom is beneficial in helping students learn the concepts in math.

Special education teachers discussed the need for co-teaching in math class to provide more assistance to students. Teacher A said, "I think math is important [to co-teach] because

there's a lot of time in the classroom when you need to have that one on one" (T/A-2). Teacher 8 said, "With the differentiation involved in math, I think it's probably the most helpful [to co-teach] in math" (T/8S-3).

General education teachers explained that math seems to be the subject area that is most important for students to have extra assistance through co-teaching. Teacher 3 said, "I think math would be one of the most important [subjects in which it is necessary to use co-teaching]" (T/3G-2). Teacher 1 explained that some students really struggle with math. She said, "Sometimes students are not identified... in math, and there are really some kids who struggle with math. And then each year the gaps just get bigger and bigger. And, you know, as they get older it's even harder [to learn math]" (T/1G-1).

***Co-teaching in reading.*** Special and general education teachers explained that students benefit when two teachers are in the classroom during reading instruction.

Teacher 4, a special education teacher, discussed how two teachers were needed during reading time so that small groups could be used during instruction. She said, "For reading, I see more of small, group-wise [instruction]. I think it is important to have two teachers involved in reading. I didn't do a whole lot of whole-group reading this year" (T/4S-3).

General education teachers explained that more assistance is needed during reading instruction for small groups to benefit students. Teacher 6 said, "It is beneficial [to co-teach] in all [subjects]—reading especially for small groups" (T/6G-1). Teacher 7 discussed the benefit to students in having two teachers in the classroom during reading instruction so that students can learn in small groups. She said:

Any time there can be another grownup in the room during language arts it's helpful because we do centers, and we're doing reading groups. And, you can't be in every place at once. So if there is another adult in the room who can teach a center or who can teach a reading group, especially with our second graders...[then it is very helpful]. They're seven and eight years old, so the more adults we can have in the room the better. (T/7G-3)

### **Professional Characteristics and Attitudes toward Co-teaching**

Co-teachers discussed their attitudes about co-teaching. The professional characteristics of the co-teachers, such as the number of years they had spent in teaching and their preparations

for co-teaching were included in the discussions. Teachers were divided into two groups to include those who had taught 1-5 years and those who had taught over 5 years. They were further divided into three sub-categories to include those who had preparation for co-teaching at the school level, the district level, or both the school and the district levels. From the twelve teachers who were interviewed, three teachers reported having 1-5 years of teaching experience while the other nine teachers reported having over 5 years of experience.

### **Teachers with 1-5 Years of Teaching Experience**

Three of the twelve teachers who were interviewed reported having 1-5 years of teaching experience. Two of the three teachers in this category reported having some preparation for co-teaching at the school level, while one teacher reported having some preparation for co-teaching at both the school and district levels. All three teachers discussed co-teaching as a favorable approach to helping students learn in inclusive classrooms.

**Preparation at the school level and attitude toward co-teaching.** Teachers 3 and 8 with 1-5 years of teaching experience explained that they had some preparation for co-teaching at the school level. Both teachers discussed their attitudes toward co-teaching.

**Teacher 3.** Teacher 3, a general education teacher, explained that she attended a workshop on co-teaching that was arranged by her principal at her school. She said:

When I was at X University, I did not [have any classes on co-teaching]. But, like I said, at the beginning of the year we [the general education and special education co-teachers at this school] did have the class [workshop] that teacher X and I went to together. That was really the first class that I had about co-teaching. (T/3G-13)

When Teacher 3 was asked how she felt about co-teaching, she said:

Well, this year it [co-teaching] was just very beneficial for the children—I think. She [the special education co-teacher] and I both had the same kinda style, and we both worked well together and planned together. We were kinda going toward the same endpoint. And I think the kids really benefitted from that. (T/3G-7)

**Teacher 8.** Teacher 8, a special education teacher, reported some preparation for co-teaching at the school level. She said, “Most of the preparation I would do would be to just sit down with her [the general education co-teacher]. Every now and then she would give me the

teacher's manual" (T/8S-11). Teacher 8 explained her thoughts about co-teaching. She stated, "I think in theory it [co-teaching] is beneficial across the board because any time you have two people with two different areas of expertise, they're bringing a lot to the table that can be useful for the students in the classroom" (T/8S-9).

**Preparation at the school and district levels and attitude toward co-teaching.**

Teacher 4, a special education teacher with 1-5 years of teaching experience, explained that she was prepared for co-teaching at the school and district levels. Teacher 4 discussed her attitude about co-teaching.

**Teacher 4.** Teacher 4 explained that she had been prepared for co-teaching at both the school and district levels. At the school level, she explained that her principal sent her to a workshop on co-teaching and was very supportive of it. She said, "Well, the principal was very supportive and very onboard [with co-teaching], which is important. She [the principal] was all for co-teaching" (T/4S-12). Teacher 4 shared information from the workshop she attended on co-teaching by providing a copy of the workshop handout, which she expressed as being very helpful. The handout was a short article titled "Co-Teaching Strategies to Improve Student Outcomes" by Marilyn Friend. The article discussed co-teaching basics, professional partnerships, co-teaching approaches to instruction, instruction in co-taught classrooms, and shared planning for co-teachers. (D/4S).

At the district level, Teacher 4 explained that her school district was a pioneer in inclusion and helped prepare co-teachers by supporting them in their co-teaching endeavors. She reported:

Definitely we need support from the school division on co-teaching and them wanting that to be how we're working with students with IEPs [Individual Education Plans]. And this [school] division has been wonderful about that. They're the pioneers, I think, as far as inclusion goes. I know because I worked in X City Schools, and it was very different there. Most of my students were in my self-contained room. (T/4S-13)

Teacher 4 discussed how she felt about co-teaching for students. She explained that co-teaching is beneficial for all students. She stated:

I think co-teaching is great for all students to be a part of, especially kids with IEPs [Individual Education Plans]. I think it's helpful for them to be in the classroom

environment with all different levels. I came from another county that was very much into pulling students out of the classroom, which you can get with them on more of their levels and one on one is great for certain students. But I think for the general population, it's really helpful for them to be in an inclusive setting, having that general education teacher, having the special education teacher as well, and being in the environment with all of their classmates. I think it's very helpful for their learning. (T/4S-8)

### **Teachers with More than 5 Years of Teaching Experience**

Nine of the twelve teachers who were interviewed reported having more than 5 years of teaching experience. Of the nine teachers in this category, one teacher reported having preparation for co-teaching at the school level, three teachers reported having preparation for co-teaching at the district level, and five teachers reported having preparation for co-teaching at both the school and district levels. Teachers in this category expressed their thoughts about co-teaching. Teachers in this category expressed overall positive attitudes toward co-teaching.

**Preparation at the school level and attitude toward co-teaching.** Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained how she was prepared at the school level for co-teaching, and she discussed her thoughts about co-teaching. At the school level, she explained that teachers were prepared for co-teaching by first understanding the needs of the students in their inclusion classes. She said, "We [the special education teachers] provide the teachers [general and special education teachers] with a Program-At-A-Glance [a summary explaining the needs of a student who has a disability] [for each student who has a disability]" (T/2S-9).

In discussing her thoughts about co-teaching, Teacher 2 explained:

I don't think you have to co-teach for kids to learn, but it allows you the opportunity to remediate the students based on what they specifically need because you can put them in a small group or individualize instruction. I definitely think it benefits them. (T/2S-7)

**Preparation at the district level and attitude toward co-teaching.** Three of the nine co-teachers in this category explained that they had some preparation for co-teaching at the district level. Teacher A, Teacher 1, and Teacher 6 discussed how they were prepared for co-teaching at the district level, and they discussed how they felt about co-teaching.



**Teacher A.** Teacher A, a special education teacher, reported that she was prepared at the district level for co-teaching through support that was offered to her when needed. She said:

I've never had any problems with anybody [at the district level]. I think the support's there [from district administrators]. I don't have any problems, but if I have a question [about co-teaching], then I can usually find someone to help me get through what I'm struggling with. (T/A-10)

When asked how she felt about co-teaching, Teacher A explained that it was good for the kids because they could hear two different voices in the classroom. She stated:

I think it's good [co-teaching] for them to hear two different voices in the classroom sometimes. I have intervened when I knew that a teacher's getting very frustrated and not being able to get the concept across, or they just can't see they need it [understanding the concept]. So sometimes I'll just say guys—and I did the other day. I said, “Guys, let's all stop and take a deep breath, and let's try again.” And it just settled everybody down, and I could do that by being in the classroom with the regular ed. teacher. (T/A-7)

**Teacher 1.** Teacher 1, a general education teacher, reported that she was prepared for co-teaching at the district level years ago when her school district embraced full inclusion for students with disabilities. Teacher 1 shared an article that was written by educators in this school district. She explained that the article was very helpful because it discussed the inclusion philosophy and the roles and responsibilities of co-teachers involved in the process (D/1G).

When asked how she felt about co-teaching, Teacher 1 said, “I think they're wonderful [co-taught classes]. As the regular ed. teacher, I do [like co-teaching]. I like having other adults in the room” (T/1G-6).

**Teacher 6.** Teacher 6, a general education teacher, reported that she had specialized classes on inclusion at the school level but did not elaborate about the classes. She did report that the classes discussed how to utilize the other person in the classroom.

Teacher 6 discussed her thoughts about co-teaching. She said, “It's a benefit to all [a class that is co-taught]. Students learn patience and acceptance, and everyone has a positive [experience]. Students see strengths and weaknesses” (T/6G-2).

**Preparation at the school and district levels.** Five teachers with over 5 years of teaching experience reported having some preparation for co-teaching at both the school and

district levels. Of the five teachers in this category, three teachers were general education teachers, and two teachers were special education teachers. Teachers in this category expressed their thoughts about co-teaching.

**Teacher B.** Teacher B, a general education teacher, explained that she had attended a lot of in-services and trainings over the years at the school and district levels with her co-teaching partner. She said, “We’re friends. We’re similar in age. We’ve had similar experiences, and we’ve attended a lot of in-services and trainings [on co-teaching] together over the years” (T/B-4).

When asked about co-teaching, Teacher B reported positive experiences with co-teaching, especially working with her co-teaching partner. She said:

I think they’re great [co-taught classes]. I wish I could co-teach in every class. I think having that extra help there, extra assistance, and someone there—and I love bouncing ideas back and forth; that’s what we do. I’ll say, “X, what do you see when we do this?” She will say, “Well, this is the experience I’ve had.” We bounce back and forth. I think everybody needs that so the students know that it’s not just one person who’s trying to tell them something; that’s something that we can both explain in different ways. (T/B-4)

**Teacher 7.** Teacher 7, a general education teacher, discussed her training for co-teaching at both the school and district levels. She explained how she felt about co-teaching.

At the school level, Teacher 7 explained that she prepared for co-teaching by first learning about the needs of the children with disabilities in her classroom. She used the Program-At-A-Glance document that the special education teachers gave her at the beginning of the school year. She said, “They [the special education teachers] share an IEP at a glance with us [Individual Education Program-At-A-Glance document]. There’s an opportunity to touch base with the classroom teacher from the year before, and whatnot” (T/7G-16).

At the district level, Teacher 7 explained in detail that she was prepared for co-teaching when she obtained the support she needed from the central office staff, when it was needed. However, she reported that she had not always received that support in the past. She explained:

In the past, I have not always felt support from the division. I mean we’re looking at over 20 years I’ve been doing this [co-teaching], and co-teaching was brand new when I started teaching. Back in the day, we didn’t have radios in our classroom. We didn’t

have phones in our classroom. We didn't have walky-talkies. You were in that room, and you were by yourself, and you were on your own. It was hard, and it was traumatic sometimes. People didn't want to hear it. They wanted everything to be wonderful, and they wanted everybody to think everything was wonderful, but it wasn't. I think we've come a long way. (T/7G-20)

In sharing her thoughts about co-teaching, Teacher 7 stated that teachers needed to do more co-teaching, and that it would be helpful if there were more special education staff, so that the staff could do more co-teaching without having to spread themselves thin across locations. She explained:

Well, I don't think we co-teach nearly enough. With our special education staff it would be awesome if we had more people, so that you had opportunities to co-teach. As it is, like I had her this year, she come in for this little bit of time and this little bit of time. But I found it wonderful because I've always said the more people you can have in there, the better you are and the better your children are. Then it isn't 19 children who are waiting to have a turn with me. There are two adults, or there are three adults, so there's more attention and more opportunity for children to get to interact with an adult. (T/7G-14)

**Teacher 10.** Teacher 10, a general education teacher, briefly discussed her experiences with preparation for co-teaching at the school and district levels, and she discussed her thoughts about co-teaching.

At the school level, Teacher 10 did not report any specific training on co-teaching in her school, but she did explain that she knew it was important [from working with the special education department in her school] to provide her co-teacher with lesson plans ahead of time. She explained there was not a lot of time to plan together, so she had to send her co-teacher lesson plans in advance. She said, "We don't plan a lot together, but I send plans to her. She answers the [math] problems ahead of time [to prepare for class]" (T/10G-2).

At the district level, Teacher 10 did not report any specific training that she received on co-teaching; rather, she stated that she was prepared for co-teaching in her classroom based on the extent of staffing that the district could provide and especially the amount of time a special education teacher and teacher assistant could be available to work in her classroom—regardless of training. She said, "It's the amount of time the special education teachers or aides are in the

classrooms [as to the extent that co-teaching can be implemented and not just the training on co-teaching]” (T/10G-3).

In discussing her thoughts about co-teaching, Teacher 10 explained that co-teaching is good because another person in the room brings another delivery of the lesson to students. She stated, “It’s a good thing [co-teaching]. For math it would be boring to hear the same person, so another person gives another delivery [of the lesson]” (T/10G-2).

**Teacher 5.** Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained her preparation for co-teaching at the school and district levels, and she elaborated her thoughts on co-teaching.

Teacher 5 reported that she was prepared for co-teaching at the school level from preschool workdays. She said, “A school where I used to teach would have actual preschool workdays with a couple of presenters on co-teaching” (T/5S-6).

In discussing her preparation at the district level, Teacher 5 spoke favorably of professional development. She stated, “I think it’s good to offer professional development. I know this county has offered a lot” (T/5S-6).

Teacher 5 elaborated her thoughts on co-teaching stating that co-teaching can be effective when there are sufficient resources. She explained:

I think that an effective co-teaching relationship always benefits students. I think that when you have students with different needs in the classroom, you have to have support. And I feel like when this county first started with the push for inclusion there was assumed to be a lot more funding for the IAs [instructional assistants] and for everybody to have a role in the room. And sometimes I feel like now the expectations are even higher and maybe the resources are less. (T/5S-13)

**Teacher 9.** Teacher 9, a special education teacher, discussed her experiences on co-teaching training at both the school and district levels, and she expressed her thoughts on co-teaching.

At the school level, Teacher 9 did not report any specific training on co-teaching in her school, but she explained that she was prepared to meet her students’ needs [based on the expectations of how special education worked in her school between co-teaching partners rather than any training] by following the weekly lesson plans that she received from her co-teaching partner, the general education teacher. She said, “Every week I have a master sheet, a matrix,

which is the weekly lesson plans that I can pull to reinforce things [skills]. It is plenty for a few days” (T/9S-2).

At the district level, Teacher 9 did not report any specific training on co-teaching, but she explained that co-teaching at the district level was more about the number of staff that were provided in the division [rather than the amount of training on co-teaching at the district level]. She explained, “More personnel are needed [for co-teaching]. Teachers and aides don’t need to be spread thin, and the schedule should not be so tight that teachers can’t plan [for co-teaching]” (T/9S-2).

Teacher 9 briefly stated her thoughts about co-teaching. She said, “It [co-teaching] is a good practice for all teaching, and every kid has a right to learn [in a co-taught class]” (T/9S-2).

### **Teaching Experience and Attitudes toward Inclusion**

Co-teachers worked together in inclusive classrooms, and they expressed their thoughts about inclusion. Their attitudes toward inclusion were considered with the number of years they had spent in teaching and included two categories: Teachers with 1-5 years of Teaching Experience and Teachers with More Than 5 Years of Teaching Experience.

#### **Teachers with 1-5 Years of Teaching Experience**

Three of the twelve teachers who were interviewed reported having 1-5 years of teaching experience. In this category, one teacher was a general education teacher, and two teachers were special education teachers. All three teachers had favorable opinions about teaching students in inclusive settings.

**General education teacher with 1-5 years of teaching experience.** Teacher 3 reported having 1-5 years of teaching experience as a general education teacher.

Teacher 3 thought that inclusion is a good idea because the general education teacher can get to know all of the students in the classroom. She said:

I think it’s [inclusion] a good idea for the most part. I mean I know there’s other students that maybe require a little bit more—maybe if they’re nonverbal or things like that, or in severe cases when being pulled out is OK. But for the most part I enjoy inclusion, and it gives me more of a chance [to get to know all of the students]. I’ve worked in other counties where they pull out your special education group and take them to another room.

Then you feel like you don't get to know them as well and get to work with them as much. So from the regular ed. teacher's point of view, it's helpful to just have your class all day and then get to know all of them. (T/3G-12)

**Special education teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience.** Two of the three teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience were special education teachers. Teachers in this category described inclusion as being a positive environment for students.

Teacher 8 expressed that inclusion is the best practice for students. She explained, "I think that's best practice [inclusion]. Even for kids with the most significant disabilities, kids who are on an alternative assessment, you can still adapt classroom materials [when the students are in the general classroom]" (T/8S-11).

Teacher 4 stated that she agrees with inclusion because all students need to be in an inclusive classroom. She said, "I agree with it [inclusion]. I think they all [students] need to be in an inclusive classroom. I think we've definitely grown out of the age where they're put into another room and they're not part of the general curriculum" (T/4S-9).

### **Teachers with More Than 5 Years of Teaching Experience**

Nine of the twelve teachers who were interviewed reported having more than 5 years of teaching experience. Of the nine teachers in this category, five teachers were general education teachers, and four teachers were special education teachers. Teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience were favorable toward inclusion overall, but some concerns were expressed by some teachers.

**General education teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience.** In this category five of the nine teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience were general education teachers. Teachers in this category expressed their thoughts about inclusion. One general education teacher was favorable toward inclusion, and she did not express any concerns about it. While the other four general education teachers were not completely opposed to inclusion, they did express some concerns about it.

**General education teacher and favorable opinion about inclusion.** Teacher B stated that she loved inclusion and would not want to go back to the days when there were no inclusive classrooms. She explained:

I love it [inclusion]. I've been teaching 34 years, and I taught when there was no inclusion, and I do not want to go back to that. Inclusion is the best, and the co-teaching with it is superior! These children [children with disabilities] have so much more confidence. They feel like they belong to the school group. There's not a stigma. They feel just as important as anybody else, and I'm going to cry thinking about this. I think it is wonderful to have inclusion in co-teaching. I would never go back to any [other] way of teaching. (T/B-5)

***General education teachers and some concerns about inclusion.*** Four general education teachers in this category did not express complete opposition to inclusion, but they did express some concerns about it. The concerns ranged from considering what is best for the majority of students and meeting the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom to inclusion not being right for all students and for those times when inclusion does not work at all.

Teacher 1 explained that teaching in inclusive classes has been great; but as a general education teacher, she felt that she needed to consider what's best for everyone. She explained her thoughts in more detail. She said:

I think as a regular ed. teacher, I have to consider what's best for everyone. And I think that least restrictive environments vary for students—student to student, classroom to classroom. And I've had so many different children with different labels, from Learning Disabled to Emotionally Disturbed to Down syndrome, and they've all been wonderful experiences. They have—I mean some days are rough, but it's been great. (T/1G-7)

Teacher 6 explained that she believes in inclusion as long as it meets the students' needs. She said, "I believe in inclusion classes as long as they meet the needs of all students, and there are higher expectations in inclusion classes" (T/6G-2).

Teacher 10 stated that inclusion may not be for all students. She explained, "Inclusion is not right for all [students]. Co-teaching may not even help in other classes if there are behavioral concerns and it is a low class [academically]" (T/10G-2).

Teacher 7 described the need for a backup plan when inclusion is not working well for a student. She said, "Again, it [inclusion] can be a wonderful experience, but sometimes it's not. And so, again, for 23 years this has been my answer. There needs to be a backup plan for when it's not working" (T/7G-15).

**Special education teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience.** In this category four of the nine teachers with more than 5 years of teaching experience were special education teachers. They thought that inclusive classrooms provided support to students, helped students build relationships, and worked as long as instructional decisions were individualized. Those teachers with concerns thought that some students required alternative settings because of their disabilities, and that inclusion may have negative effects on some children in the classroom.

***Special education teachers and favorable opinions about inclusion.*** Two of the four special education teachers in this category expressed favorable opinions about inclusion.

Teacher A explained that inclusion means not being in a self-contained classroom [away from students without disabilities]. She said, “We [the school district] do that [have inclusion] because those kids [with disabilities] need support, and we don’t have self-contained [classrooms]. So that is inclusion. In my idea, that’s inclusion” (T/A-8).

Teacher 2 stated that inclusion should be a student-by-student decision based on the needs of each student individually and that each student should be with non-disabled peers as much as possible. She said:

I think that it [the decision to place a student in an inclusive classroom] should be a student-by-student decision just because it is difficult for some students to be in the classroom 100 percent of the time. So I do feel like kids should be in the classroom as much as possible, but I don’t think you should say that 100 percent of the time each student is in the classroom and that’s it. (T/2S-8)

***Special education teachers and some concerns about inclusion.*** Two of the four special education teachers in this category expressed some concerns about inclusion.

Teacher 5 described the need for an alternative setting for just a few students who may not benefit from inclusion. She stated, “I think most students can be served in inclusive classrooms, but there’s always—it seems to be—just a couple [of students] in a school that maybe might benefit from an alternative setting” (T/5S-15).

Teacher 9 expressed her concern about inclusion, but she did state that inclusion helps build relationships as well. She said, “It is a safety issue that should not be jeopardized, causing anxiety to other kids. But severe kids make real friends, and all are accepted. It can be wonderful like the real world in building relationships” (T/9S-2).



## Teacher Relationships in Co-teaching Partnerships

Teachers discussed their relationships with their co-teaching partners. Teachers described the compatibility that they felt they had in working with their partners, whether they were new partners or partners with longevity; and they discussed the trust, communication, and conflict that existed in the partnerships.

### Co-teacher Compatibility

Teachers in this study expressed feeling compatible in working with their co-teaching partners, whether they were paired to work together by an administrator or they were asked via survey of their interests to co-teach with a partner. General education teachers reported their compatibility with their special education partners as meshing, getting along well, and working nicely. Special education teachers reported their compatibility with their general education teachers as friendly and professional.

***General education teachers and co-teacher compatibility.*** General education teachers reported feeling compatible with their special education co-teaching partners. They explained that they got along well together.

Two general education teachers described “meshing” with their special education co-teaching partners. Teacher B said, “I don’t have any concerns. We mesh. If she were to be transferred to another school, it would probably be like starting all over again. We’ve just been together so long that we feel like we’re one person” (T/B-7). Teacher B further described her partnership with her co-teacher. She said, “We’re friends. We’re similar in age. We’ve had similar experiences. We’ve attended a lot of in-services together and trainings over the years, so we’ve spent a lot of time together” (T/B-4). Teacher 7 described meshing with her co-teaching partner as well. She explained:

So she was assigned to teach second grade. Again, they do the grade-level model here at X school, so different special ed. teachers each take a grade level, and she was ours. So we already knew each other. We were already comfortable. She already had spent a whole year in my classroom [as an instructional assistant], so she knew how I did things. She knew my way of teaching, and she knew my way of doing things. We just mesh together really well. (T/7G-6)

Teacher 7 reported that she got along well with her teaching partner. She said, “We get along well. She started out as an aide in my classroom, so I’ve seen her evolve in her excitement for what she found in life that she wants to do” (T/7G-10).

***Special education teachers and co-teacher compatibility.*** Special education teachers reported positive compatibility with their general education co-teachers and described it as friendly and professional.

Teacher 8 explained that she had a friendship with her general education co-teacher, but they were professionals as well. She said:

We’re friends but professional. It’s not like we go in there and goof off. We’re respectful of each other, especially in front of students. And we both, sort of, know each other’s strengths and I think each other’s limits, and that helps a lot. (T/8S-5)

Teacher 2 reported that she felt she had a working relationship with her co-teaching partner, which was positive most of the time. She stated, “For the most part I just feel like we have a working relationship, and for the most part I would say that being a co-teacher in her classroom has been good 90 percent [of the time]” (T/2S-5).

Teacher 5 described very positive partnerships with her general education co-teachers. She said, “We have very positive relationships, and I think that we accept-the ones I work with—that it’s okay if you make a mistake” (T/5S-9).

***Pairing co-teachers and teacher compatibility.*** Teachers discussed how they were paired with their co-teaching partners and how pairing affected teacher compatibility. Teachers reported being paired by their principals or by alternative means such as teacher surveys.

Teacher 3 discussed the positive partnership she experienced with her special education co-teacher as a result of her principal pairing them together during her first year of teaching. She said:

This past year it was kinda nice that she [the principal] paired us. I don’t know, you know, not knowing anybody at the school if we would’ve picked each other—that kind of thing. And it just kinda seemed to work out nicely. But I think it may be okay if we were to pick each other in the future. But I also like how the administrator kinda has a say, and they kinda know everyone’s personality and what works best. (T/3G-5)

Teacher 2 and Teacher 5 discussed alternative ways of pairing co-teachers as partners, aside from the pairing done by an administrator. Teacher 2 explained:

Well, if you have a large number of special education teachers to choose from, it might be nice to do some sort of inventory as to what grades people feel comfortable teaching, and this is as far as special ed. goes, and what curriculum they feel most comfortable teaching and maybe knowing the personalities of the teachers. I don't know that we have that liberty though. (T/2S-3)

Teacher 5 discussed how pairing was done at her school and how she felt about it. She said:

It started out as just a schedule put together by the principal at the time, and I do believe at that time the principal would send around a survey to ask the teachers who was willing—who had a preference for working with inclusion and who had a preference for working with students with gifted and talented labels. But I think it went to a take-turns type thing, and now I think teachers can, kind of, express their preferences more. But mainly through experience was how the relationship [she had] was built. (T/5S-6)

However, Teacher 5 stated that she felt pairing co-teachers should be left to administrators. She explained her thoughts about pairing. She said:

I really think that it [pairing co-teachers] should be assigned by administrators because it can become cliquish. It has before. And I think also when co-teachers become [partners], you automatically become friends with some. But then sometimes it can lead to a little bit of unprofessionalism as people become too comfortable with each other. They [administrators] would know about the teachers, and they could probably think who would work well together, who would not work so well together. But I think as special educators, you and general educators have to be willing to work well with others. That's the main thing, and I think the administrators should have to choose. (T/5S-7)

### **Co-teacher Trust**

General and special education teachers discussed the trust they felt for their co-teaching partners in following through with co-teaching responsibilities.

*General education teachers and co-teacher trust.* General education teachers discussed the trust they felt for their special education co-teachers in following through with their

responsibilities as co-teachers; however, they expressed their concerns about relying on their co-teachers to be in class each day as scheduled. Their concerns were based on other demands on the special education teachers, who may be pulled away from class for other responsibilities; however, they conveyed that they trusted their partners individually.

Teacher 7 and Teacher 1 reported that they felt trust for their special education co-teachers, but they were concerned about their co-teachers being pulled from class to take care of other responsibilities. Teacher 7 said:

Those [the times when special education teachers are pulled from the general education teacher's classroom] are probably the times when she comes to the room and says, "Look, nobody's coming to your room today. You're on your own." Those are hard and stressful times. They're not about our relationship, but those are the times I don't want to see her walk into my room to bring me bad news. It's because you count on that person. You build your plans around the fact that there's gonna be another person in that room. And when there's not, it's hard. And when you have fellows who are non-readers, then knowing that person's not going to be in there to help you out, and you have 19 children in your room. It just makes it stressful. It's not anybody's fault, but it just makes it stressful. (T/7S-11)

Teacher 1 expressed respect for her co-teaching partner but was concerned about her partner being pulled away from her classroom to take care of other responsibilities. She explained:

Yeah, we respect each other. You have to have respect. I know she's a good person. I know she's a good teacher. And hopefully she feels that way about me, and we just respect each other. Well, she gets pulled sometimes to deal with emergencies, or to cover other aides or teachers. So that's disappointing on my end, and frustrating. You know, when we plan something or she says she's gonna do something and then can't do it [then it is difficult]. But that's the nature of her job and her responsibilities. (T/1G-6)

***Special education teachers and co-teacher trust.*** Special education teachers explained they felt trust in their co-teaching partners' skills to accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities in their classes.

Teacher 2 and Teacher 8 reported that they felt trust for their co-teaching partners and believed their partners could accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities in their inclusion classes. Teacher 2 said:

We have mutual respect for each other, and we've been together long enough to have that. I do think she trusts me with all the kids, and I trust her to also make sure that the special ed. kids are meeting the goals that they're working toward. So basically I do feel like we trust and respect each other. Sometimes I would like to be in there more, part of the day, so it would seem like we are more of an equal partnership. I think it's very, very close, but there are times that I definitely think that she has more control over what happens in the classroom. (T/2S-4)

Teacher 8 expressed the trust she has for her co-teaching partner to accommodate the needs of the students with disabilities in their inclusion classroom. She explained:

She's very organized. She's very good at differentiating. I really don't have much to do beyond saying, "Oh, I think that activity would work for him" because she has such a wealth of knowledge and experience, and resources. Yeah, it really helps to have the second person in there [in the classroom], but she's fully capable of doing it without me in there. (T/8S-5)

### **Co-teacher Communication**

General and special education teachers discussed the communication that they shared with their partners. Teachers conveyed the importance of having good communication in their co-teaching partnerships.

***General education teachers and co-teacher communication.*** General education teachers discussed the importance of communicating with their partners, and they discussed various means of communicating in their co-teaching partnerships.

Teacher B explained that it is important to listen, to be respectful, and to be open to new ideas suggested by co-teaching partners. She stated, "Listen to each other, be respectful, and try different methods. Maybe you don't agree with a method, but try that method and see if it works; be respectful" (T/B-5).

Teacher 1 and Teacher 7 discussed the importance of communication with their co-teaching partners, as well as how they communicated together. Teacher 1 said:

I don't mean to sound like its ideal and perfect every day, but we work well together. And sometimes we text each other at night, you know, if something [comes up]. If we decide yeah [let's do this]. We've talked [taught] together the whole time that I've been at school, for 22 years, so we have that kind of relationship where I can call her or text her with ideas as well. (T/1G-2)

Teacher 7 reported excellent communication with her co-teaching partner, and she discussed how and when she communicated with her co-teaching partner. She said, "I would say our communication is excellent. We text. We email, like I said. We pretty much touch base every morning. I don't have any reservations about going to her about anything, and it's a very friendly rapport" (T/7G-11).

***Special education teachers and co-teacher communication.*** Special education teachers discussed the importance of communicating with their co-teaching partners.

Teacher 5 explained how and when she communicated with her co-teaching partner. She explained, "Well, we communicate about the plans, and we usually do that. We usually talk in person. We text. We email. We call each other at different times, even at night and on weekends" (T/5S-10).

Teacher 4 and Teacher 2 discussed the importance of communication in relation to planning with their co-teaching partners. Teacher 4 stated:

I definitely think both teachers need to want the same thing. It's hard for them [general education teachers] to maybe hand over the reins to another teacher in their classroom, especially with test scores and things like that. It's very important and high anxiety. But teachers wanting to work together need to want the same thing. And then there's personalities and...making sure communication and planning time [are in place]. (T/4S-4)

Teacher 2 explained that teachers can still co-teach without having to actually sit down and plan together as long as they communicate together. She stated, "I really do think it [co-teaching] works based on your [particular] situation. I think a lot of people feel like in order to be

successful, you really have to sit down and plan together. I definitely think you need to communicate together” (T/S2-12).

### **Co-teacher Conflict**

General and special education teachers in this school district did not report experiencing much conflict in their co-teaching partnerships, but some teachers did reported that they occasionally had different ideas than their partners on how to handle tasks in their inclusive classrooms.

*General education teachers and co-teacher conflict.* General education teachers reported that they tried to work through problems to avoid conflict before it occurred.

Teacher 3 and Teacher 7 explained how they worked with their co-workers to solve problems, to be flexible, and to respect others to avoid conflicts. Teacher 3 explained:

We didn't really experience any conflict between the two of us [the general and special education co-teachers], but sometimes there would be aides in the room. And there might be some conflict with maybe how they handled an issue or that kinda thing. And so basically both of us kinda stepped back and said, “Okay, what can we do to fix this? What can we do to make it better?” (T/3G-9)

Teacher 7 explained that in her teaching career she has had to work with various professionals, and she has learned that everyone has to be flexible to avoid conflict. She elaborated on flexibility by stating:

You work with a lot of people in a day. And when you have special ed. kids, you often work with speech, and you often work with OT [occupational therapists] and PT [physical therapists], and the special ed. [teachers] and the aides. You definitely have to be flexible. You do have to be respectful of each other's teaching styles, and feelings, and his or her way of doing things because it isn't always gonna be the same. I think at X school, all the other special ed. people on our teams that I've worked with are very respectful of this being my classroom, and they're coming into my classroom. And they very much try, I think, to try to do things the way that we would do them, instead of coming in and trying to do something completely different. Sometimes we have kids

who need something different, so we do have to be flexible and work with each other that way. (T/7G-7)

***Special education teachers and co- teacher conflict.*** Special education teachers reported that they tried to work through any teacher conflict that might occur with their general education co-teachers, but occasionally co-teachers were not on the same page about how to complete a given task in the general education setting. Special education teachers reported that they had different ideas from their general education partners on issues involving discipline, student expectations, equal roles in the classroom, and changes in routines.

*Discipline.* Teacher 2 explained that she felt that because she was the special education teacher in the co-teaching partnership, she was expected to take care of any discipline issue in the classroom. She said:

I really wouldn't say that we've had any conflicts that I would think that I need to address. I might be annoyed, like I said, from the behavior thing on occasion, but I'm definitely a person who can just wipe the slate clean. It's not like I hold grudges or anything. I'm just thinking of kids with behavioral issues. Again, if she's having an issue with a child, the child is usually told to come with me and let me deal with it. (T/2S-6)

*Student expectations.* Teacher 8 discussed having different expectations than her general education co-teacher when it came to certain students. She explained:

I would say there have been times in the classroom when I wanted to push a student a little bit further than she did in terms of what he could achieve, and we had to, sort of, have that conversation of "Well, let's get him to try. Let's see what happens, and then if it doesn't go well, we'll switch it up." We really don't have to deal with that very much though. (T/8S-6)

*Equal roles in the classroom.* Teacher 9 reported that sometimes she is not regarded as an equal educator in the classroom by her general education co-teaching partner. She said:

[The times when my relationship is not so good with my partner are] when I'm not regarded as an equal [in the general classroom] or when I have kids that I am helping and



I'm corrected in front of the class. Or, it is when the general education teacher thinks the kid should have done better and becomes angry. (T/9-2)

*Changes in routines.* Teacher 5 reported that sometimes there are changes in everyday routines that cause some conflicts between co-teachers. She explained:

I know with conflicts between us [between the co-teachers] I've had to go and apologize when I've been short. I've made a statement about a schedule change that I didn't know about or a program that maybe one of my students wasn't allowed to use anymore. With conflicts with students I think sometimes special ed. teachers and general ed. teachers sometimes disagree on how it should be handled. And I think that's something we just have to work through and talk through and actually just get through the conflict because that will happen. (T/5S-11)

### **Environmental Support for Co-teaching**

General and special education teachers discussed the environmental support for co-teaching that they had or needed at the classroom, school, and district levels.

#### **Classroom Support**

Participants discussed classroom support for co-teaching in relation to the classroom structures in the classroom that were conducive to co-teaching activities, a classroom procedure for co-teaching activities, and the support staff who assisted in the general education classrooms.

**Classroom structures for co-teaching.** General education teachers described the classroom structures that they were able to arrange in their inclusive classrooms that were conducive to co-teaching, while one special education teacher described some classroom structures that make co-teaching more effective.

**General education teachers and classroom structures.** General education teachers explained how their classrooms were arranged to support co-teaching and student interactive activities. Teacher B, Teacher 1, and Teacher 10 explained how their classrooms were equipped with furniture that could be arranged for student and adult interactions. Teacher B explained:

We have the room set up with tables. I have two tables pushed together with four chairs so that all students can face the front of the room [and], the teaching smart board. There

are six different groups, and they're always grouped. Now, this was not done prior to this year, but they're all [students with disabilities] in that group, and they're assigned to different groups periodically. (T/B-6)

Teacher 1 explained how her classroom was arranged for student and adult interactions among all students. She described:

Well, on one side—I guess the front of the room you would call it—there's not really a front or a back because I use both. You know, that's what I'm trying to say, like I have a Smart Board on one wall and then on the opposite wall is a white board, and I use both. So I have them in groups of four, so that they can see both the Smart Board and the white board. That's what I primarily use. And I mix them up. I don't have, you know, all special ed. kids in one place. I try to mix them ability-wise. I mix them by ethnicities. (T/1G-9)

Teacher 10 reported that her students were grouped in pairs and arranged so that the co-teacher could see who needed help. She said, "Kids usually sat where desks were arranged for partnerships. Total participation techniques were used with the white board. Students helped each other, and all were involved. The co-teacher could see who needed help" (T/10-2).

***Special education teacher and classroom structures.*** One special education teacher discussed some classroom structures that would make co-teaching more effective for teachers. Teacher 5 described the structures in her inclusive classroom that promoted co-teaching activities:

I think in the best classroom [where I co-teach] I'll describe right now—the one I think is most effective. Each adult, kind of, has a place for his or her belongings, and there's different things like stations around the room—and maybe you could find—and this is where I can find the whiteboard. This is where I can lead my small group. And I think it's important to have work areas available for either the teacher, the aide, or the special education teacher to actually sit down and work with the students. (T/5S-19)

***Special education teacher and classroom procedure for co-teaching activities.*** One special education teacher described the procedure that she used when she traveled to different classrooms. Teacher A explained:

I just pick up my binder and go to class. I don't have a desk or a spot in every classroom, but I do have my own classroom. So I have like a home base and then I go to their classes. So I don't really have a desk or anything like that [in the general education classrooms]. I just carry my binders and go to their classes, and then I just go back and forth that way. (T/A-10)

**Classroom support staff.** General education teachers described the support staff that are in co-taught classes for students with disabilities. Support staff included specialized staff members who assisted students with disabilities such as speech therapists and occupational therapists, or they were school volunteers— adults helping in the classroom beyond the special education teachers and teacher assistants who were already scheduled in the co-taught classes.

Two general education teachers described the support staff for certain students in co-taught classes. Teacher 1 explained her classroom arrangement when extra help comes into her classroom. She said:

But I have learned one trick. I do like to put the special ed. kids on the outside of these groupings, and not on the inside, so that when the adults come to help them, they're not blocking the view of other students. And then they're not lifting chairs up and over, and trying to get themselves comfortable, so that they can help. I'd go out and recruit. I get lots of help for my kids. So sometimes there are three adults in the room. We're close to X Tech [a university], so we also have X Tech students who want to volunteer. Yeah, I have to manage them sometimes in limited space, so that everybody can see. (T/1G-10)

Teacher 7 reported that when teachers have students with disabilities in their classrooms, they work with a lot of different people who support them. She explained:

In this school—I'd say our size—we're not huge, but you work with a lot of people in a day. And when you have special ed. kids, you often work with speech, and you often work with OT [occupational therapist] and PT [physical therapist], and the special ed. [teachers] and the aides. You definitely have to be flexible. (T/7G-7)

## **School Support**

General education and special education teachers discussed the level of support that they felt they had for co-teaching in their individual schools. Teachers generally equated co-teaching

support at the school level with administrative involvement in either promoting co-teaching among teachers or allowing teachers to implement co-teaching independently. School support for co-teaching fell into two categories: administrative involvement in co-teaching and teachers implementing co-teaching independently.

**Administrative involvement in co-teaching.** General and special education teachers in some schools reported that their administrators were involved in promoting co-teaching in their schools. Administrative involvement resulted in co-teachers at one school participating in staff development on co-teaching, and administrative involvement was reflective in pairing co-teachers and scheduling staff and students for co-teaching opportunities.

**Staff development on co-teaching.** Co-teachers discussed how the administrator in one school helped them get training on co-teaching as part of staff development. Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 described the training they received on co-teaching that was arranged by their principal. Teacher 3, a general education teacher, explained how her principal was supportive of co-teaching. She said:

The principal was very willing to help in however she could. She actually came and did an observation on both of us co-teaching together because she wanted to see some co-teaching in action after we went to our workshop. So, that was nice just feeling like you're being supported by the other staff. (T/3G-15)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, discussed the training she experienced on co-teaching in her school. She explained:

We even had a reading coach come in a couple years ago who also brought in co-teaching information. I know X [at the university] has done some workshops, and they've also actually come into this school, and they did a project a few years ago on co-teaching. (T/5S-16)

**Pairing teachers.** General and special education teachers discussed how administrators in their schools were involved in pairing teachers to work as co-teachers. Teachers explained that administrators in their schools either paired teachers themselves or they asked teachers for their preferences in selecting co-teaching partners. Teacher 6, Teacher 3, and Teacher 5 explained how they were paired as co-teachers in their schools. Teacher 6, a general education teacher, said, "We [co-teachers] were told who will support us in IEP classes [classes with

students who have disabilities]” (T/6G-1). Teacher 3, a general education teacher, stated that it was helpful to be paired by her principal as a new teacher in her school. She said:

This past year it was kind of nice that they [the principal and consulting teacher] paired us. I don’t know, you know, not knowing anybody at the school if we would’ve pick each other—that kind of thing. And it just kind of seemed to work out nicely. And our principal actually sent us to a co-teaching workshop this year, and she went with us. And so I feel like she kind of understands that it needs to be the kind of personalities that get along well and to benefit the children. I think most administrators would make a wise decision in that aspect. (T/3G-5)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that her principal surveyed teachers in her school to see who wanted to co-teach or work with students with specific needs. She explained:

It started out as just a schedule put together by the principal at the time, and I do believe at that time the principal would send around a survey to ask the teachers who was willing [to co-teach]—who had a preference for working with inclusion and who had a preference type thing, and now I think teachers can express their preferences more. (T/5S-6)

**Scheduling.** Teachers reported that the administrators in their schools usually provided the scheduling for both students and teachers. In some cases the principal assigned the consulting teacher in the building to schedule co-teachers and students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. Teachers discussed student scheduling and teacher scheduling.

*Student scheduling.* Teacher B, a general education teacher, reported that her inclusion class consisted of students of various abilities who had been scheduled together in her room by the administrator in her school. She explained:

The students [in my class] are from varied abilities. I have high learners to low learners. When we [the general and special education teachers] group, we kind of group the high and the low together, and we have the kids working to tutor each other. I’ve had students who were in wheelchairs and with very low cognitive ability, and they’re in that classroom. (T/B-5)

*Teacher scheduling.* Teachers reported that co-teachers were scheduled for classes in their schools by the principal or the consulting teacher in each school. Participants explained

that principals and consulting teachers did their best to plan the schedules. However, some teachers wanted more planning time as co-teachers. Teacher 3, a general education teacher, wanted common planning time with her co-teacher, and she reported that her principal was willing in any way possible. She said:

Our planning time was not at the same time, so that was kind of [difficult]. We had to find other times, either before school or after school. But, like I said, the principal was very willing to help in however she could. She actually came and did an observation on both of us co-teaching together because she wanted to see [us co-teaching]. (T/3G-15)

Teacher 1, a general education teacher, explained that the consulting teacher in her building was involved in scheduling the special education personnel in the classes with the students with disabilities. She stated:

I give the special education consulting teacher our schedule. We team teach in my grade, so we all have the same schedule. I will give that schedule to the consulting teacher at the beginning of the school year during the work week. And then from there she [the consulting teacher] decides her personnel, where they go, and with whom. (T/1G-3)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, said that the consulting teacher in her building did the scheduling and made it the best that it could be. She stated, “I feel like everyone is stretched so thin to meet the IEP [Individual Education Plan] hours—service hours. But our consulting teacher does a great job with scheduling so that it can be the best that it can be” (T/5S-22)

**Teachers implementing co-teaching independently.** Teachers in some schools reported that they implemented co-teaching independently as teachers without much involvement from the administrators in their schools. Teachers either felt that co-teaching did not make a difference in the school environment, or they felt free to implement co-teaching the way they wanted it to be, while other teachers expressed the desire for more administrative support in co-teaching activities.

**Teachers making co-teaching decisions independently.** Teacher 2, a special education teacher, stated that her school would be the same with or without co-teaching. She said, “I don’t think this school would be any different whether there was co-teaching or not” (T/2S-10).

Teacher 7, a general education teacher, explained that she always felt free to implement co-teaching the way she wanted it to be. She explained:

Luckily, at X school, we don't get mandated on a lot of things. We are allowed, for the most part, to construct things the way that works best for us. So if I want to invite my co-teacher into math with me to co-teach with me, then I can—whereas another person may say that he or she wants the co-teacher for the resources. We've always been open, and we've always been welcome to work out with special education what we see fit. (T/7G-20)

***Teachers wanting more administrative support for co-teaching in their schools.*** Some teachers expressed the desire to have more administrative involvement in co-teaching at their schools. Teacher 8 and Teacher 10 expressed the need for more administrative support for co-teaching in their schools. Teacher 8, a special education teacher, said:

There are a few teachers here who are very good at implementing a co-teaching model. If it's something that we are going to look at on the whole as a school, I think we need a lot of professional development. I think it [co-teaching] varies from school to school and different administrators have different expectations as far as that is concerned. And I think you have to have the support of an administrator to effectively implement it. (T/8S-13)

Teacher 10, a general education teacher, expressed the need for more administrative support for co-teaching. She stated, "I would like to have administrative support. With scheduling, it would be nice to have a co-teacher for math and science. There is no mandate [in the school] on how to co-teach" (T/10G-3).

### **District Support**

Participants in this school district discussed the support that they felt they had for co-teaching at the district level. Most participants reported positive support for co-teaching at the district level, and some reported support for co-teaching at the district level with some concerns. District support for co-teaching fell into two categories: positive support for co-teaching at the district level and support for co-teaching at the district level with some concerns.

**Positive support for co-teaching at the district level.** Most participants expressed positive support for co-teaching at the district level. Teacher 4, Teacher B, Teacher 3, and Teacher 1 expressed their thoughts about the district-level support for co-teaching. Teacher 4, a

special education teacher, explained that her school district started inclusion [with co-teaching], and the district has always supported it. She said:

Definitely we need support from the school district on co-teaching and them wanting that to be how we're working with students with IEPs [Individual Education Plans]. And this district has been wonderful about that. They're the pioneers, I think, as far as inclusion goes [and co-teaching]. I know because I worked in X City, and it was very different there. Most of my students were in my self-contained room. (T/4S-13)

Teacher B, a general education teacher, said that co-teaching is encouraged by the county, and she would like to visit other schools to see how they co-teach. She stated:

It's [co-teaching] encouraged by the county. What I would really like to do is to visit other schools to see how they co-teach, and that's something that we are not privileged to do. That would be a good idea. I'd never thought about that until now. I never thought about the county, but that would be something good to look into. (T/B-7)

Teacher 3, a general education teacher, explained that inclusion and co-teaching are supported county-wide, so that all students in the county have the same opportunity to participate in the general-education setting. She explained:

I know X County, compared to other counties where I've worked, like the inclusion [and co-teaching], and they support it county-wide, which I think is great. That way all the students that are being served are having the same opportunity and are getting to work in their classrooms and feeling more included and more valuable I think. So that's really nice too. (T/3G-16)

Teacher 1 reported that co-teaching is supported in the county and is expected. She said, "They [central office administrators] support it [co-teaching], and I mean encourage is not even strong enough of a word. I mean it's more than encourage. It's expected—I think" (T/1G-10).

**Positive support for co-teaching at the district level with some concerns.** Some teachers explained that there was support for co-teaching at the district level, but they noted the following concerns about its implementation: the time that support personnel are in the classroom, support in solving classroom problems, and funding. Teacher 6, Teacher 10, Teacher 7, and Teacher 5 expressed their thoughts about support for co-teaching at the district level.

Teacher 6, a general education teacher, stated that the school district strives to have inclusion and co-teaching but that it still needs some work. She said, "X county tries to have inclusion [and co-



teaching]. They [staff at the district level] strive for it, but it still needs work” (T/6G-3). Teacher 10, a general education teacher, stated, “There’s not anything county-wide [that impacts co-teaching] except for the amount of time special education teachers or aides are in the classroom” (T/10G-3).

Teacher 7, a general education teacher, elaborated on the need for more district support when more assistance is needed. She explained:

I think we’ve come a long way. I know, building-wise, our concerns are heard. I know we all try to support each other and make the best of any situation that we can. I don’t always feel that support, still yet, from the district; but I think a lot of that comes from the fact that those people don’t see what you’re doing every single day. That’s always been the scenario with any central office—that you’re out of the classroom, you’re out of the situation, and you’re not living it every single day. And when you’re living it every single day and things are not going well, you need to be heard; and you need solutions, and you need real tangible things that feel like somebody’s trying to help. And that doesn’t always happen. (T/7G-21)

When discussing support from the district level, Teacher 5, a special education teacher, elaborated on district funding for inclusion and co-teaching. She explained:

I think that when you have students with different needs in the classroom, you have to have support. And I feel like when this county first started with the push for inclusion, there was assumed to be a lot more funding for the IAs [instructional assistants], for everybody to have a role in the room. (T/5S-13)

Teacher 5 reported that this school district is probably more supportive of inclusive education and co-teaching than other school districts in the state, but funding is still a problem. She said:

I think that this division is probably more supportive than most in the state for inclusive education and co-teaching, and I do think that the funding continues to be an issue. I think staff and materials [are affected by funding]. Just like this year we had a paper shortage, and general education teachers got paper every week; and the special education teachers had to go ask for it and beg for it. Little things like that add up. I think both teacher assistants and teachers are affected [by the funding decisions] because I know

because of the budget that it has to be tighter. But it makes it harder for the people at the schools to do what they need to do. (T/5S-21)

### **Variables Affecting the Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

From the twelve teachers who were interviewed for this study, three main variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships were repeatedly interwoven in the data. The variables, presented in the order of importance, are: (a) teacher relationships, (b) time in the classroom, and (c) planning. Teacher relationships were discussed mostly from the vantage point of teacher compatibility. If teachers were compatible partners, then adjustments to the time spent in the classroom and the lack of planning opportunities could be better accepted by co-teachers than when teachers were not compatible partners and had not formed a positive partnership. Time in the classroom was an “undiscovered” variable that involved teachers’ concerns, both general and special education teachers, about special education co-teachers not being able to be in the general classrooms for the entire lessons. At times special education teachers needed to enter classes late or leave early due to other responsibilities, or they were pulled from class because of changes in the schedule, to cover somewhere else, or because of an emergency. Special education teachers were described by participants as being spread thin to take care of all responsibilities. Finally, teacher planning was a variable affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships, especially as it related to having a common planning time during the school day, as well as just time in general for planning purposes. However, when co-teachers established a positive partnership, teachers described alternative planning opportunities, such as using Google Docs, sending text messages, or making phone calls to each other after school hours. Teachers described the variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships.

### **Teacher Relationships**

Co-teachers discussed teacher relationships in relation to teacher compatibility. Teachers reported teacher compatibility as a most important part of a positive co-teaching partnership. Teachers explained how positive teacher compatibility makes teachers feel good about co-teaching; and they discussed compatibility in long-term partnerships and compatibility in new partnership, as well as how teachers should be paired as co-teachers.

**Positive teacher compatibility.** Co-teachers discussed how positive teacher compatibility made them feel about co-teaching. Teacher 9, a special education teacher, compared teacher compatibility to a marriage. She said, “It’s been 15 years since I’ve had a bad experience, and I can’t turn around. My relationship now is 95 percent positive, and it’s like a marriage—once in a while there are changes” (T/9S-1). Teacher A, a special education teacher, reported feeling happy with her co-teaching partners. She said, “I think we do pretty good. I don’t really have a whole lot of concerns with the people that I work with. I’m happy with the three people that I work with at the school” (T/A-10). Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that teachers have to be willing to work together. She stated, “I think as special educators that you—and general educators—have to be willing to work well with others. That’s the main thing” (T/5S-8). Teacher 5 stated that teachers must be flexible and focus on the students as well. She said, “I think that both types of teachers [general and special education teachers] just really need to be flexible and understanding and keep the focus on those students” (T/5S-24). Teacher 6, a general education teacher, said that her partnership is especially good when she is on the same page with her co-teaching partner. She said, “When we’re on the same page and really supporting each other [the partnership is especially good]. We know each other” (T/6G-1).

**Compatibility in long-term partnerships and new partnerships.** Teachers described the compatibility that developed over time in long-term partnerships, and one teacher described how new partnerships with new teachers were often easier for co-teaching compatibility. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained that her partnership was one of mutual respect that developed over time. She said, “We do have a mutual respect for each other, and we have been together long enough to have that” (T/2S-4). Teacher B, a general education teacher, described having an excellent relationship with her co-teacher because they had worked together for about 10 years. She said, “I have an excellent relationship with my co-teacher. We’ve worked together for probably 10 years or more. Before we started co-teaching, I’d worked with her maybe five years before that, but then she became a co-teacher later” (T/B-3). Teacher A reported that working with newer teachers is sometimes easier than working with experienced teachers in a co-teaching partnership. She explained:

I find that most of the time the newer teachers that I’ve worked with, who are just new to the profession, accept co-teaching a little bit easier than a teacher that’s been teaching 20

years already. If they [experienced teachers] have never had a co-teacher, it's hard to walk into their classrooms and be part of their classrooms. They're so used to that 100 percent control over everything, whereas the newer teachers respect what I say and things like that, so it's kind of different depending on the teacher. (T/A-4)

**How co- teachers should be paired.** In considering the importance of teacher compatibility in co-teaching partnerships, teachers discussed how co-teachers should be paired. Teachers explained that administrators usually know which teachers would work best together and should pair teachers accordingly, or teachers should be allowed to pick their co-teaching partners. Teacher 3, a general education teacher, said that as a new teacher at her school she was glad her administrators paired her with her co-teacher. She said:

This past year it was kind of nice that they [administrators] paired us. I don't know if we would have picked each other—not knowing anyone at the school. I like how the administrator has a say, and they [administrators] kind of know everybody's personalities and what works best. (T/3G-5)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that administrators know which students are in each class, and they use their knowledge to decide which teachers would work well together for the students in each class. She explained:

I think just as administrators choose grade levels for classroom teachers, they would use their knowledge about which students are in each classroom; and they would probably think about who [teachers] would work well together and who would not work so well together. But I think you have to be willing to work well with others. That's the main thing, and administrators should have to choose. (T/5S-7)

Teacher 5 further stated, "Assigning co-teaching partners should be by an administrator because it could become cliquish in a school. It has before" (T/5S-7). Teacher A stated that teachers usually feel whether they can or cannot work well with another teacher. She said, "Usually, you can get a feel of whether you can work well together or not. I guess in bigger schools you would have that choice" (T/A-4). In allowing teachers to pick their partners, Teacher 5 explained how her principal surveyed teachers to see if they had a preference for inclusion classes. She explained:

Well it mainly started out as just a schedule put together by the principal at the time. The principal would send around a survey to ask teachers who had a preference for working with inclusion and who had a preference for working with students with gifted-and-talented labels. But then I think it went to a kind of take-turns type of thing. Now, I think teachers can, kind of, express their preferences more. But mainly through experience was how the relationships were built. (T/5S-6)

### **Time in the Classroom**

An undiscovered variable that was repeatedly interwoven in the interviews was time in the classroom. In discussing time in the classroom, both general and special education teachers reported their concerns about special education co-teachers not being able to be in the general classrooms for the entire length of the lessons. Teachers reported that special education teachers often attended classes late or had to leave early to take care of other responsibilities. Special education teachers were pulled from classes to handle other issues that came up with other students, to handle emergencies, or when there were schedule changes—such as needing to fill in for instructional assistants or other special education teachers who were out. Teachers expressed concerns about special education teachers not being able to be in the classrooms for the entire lessons because they felt they could not maximize their work as co-teachers for the benefit of all students in inclusion classes. Teachers expressed their thoughts about time in the classroom as it related to being pulled from class, changes in schedule, and time to follow through on class activities.

**Being pulled from class.** General education teachers discussed how pulling special education teachers from class impacted co-teaching activities. Teacher 6 said, “It was up and down this year. She [the special education teacher] had a complex child and was called out of class” (T/6G-2). Teacher 7 explained how pulling the special education teacher from class impacted her reading groups. She explained:

Like I said, those are probably the times when she has to come in the room and say, “Look, nobody’s coming to your room today. You’re on your own.” Those are hard and stressful times. They’re not about our relationship, but those are the times I don’t want to see her walk into my room to bring me bad news. It’s because you count on that person.

You build your plans around the fact that there's gonna be another person in that room. And when there's not, it's hard. And when you have fellows who are non-readers, then knowing that person's not going to be in there to help you out, and you have 19 children in your room, it just makes it stressful. It's not anybody's fault, but it just makes it stressful. (T/7G-11)

Teacher 1 expressed her concern about trying to conduct center activities when her co-teaching partner gets pulled. She explained:

She [the special education teacher] may not be there for a part of the lesson. I mean, she always ends up there, but if we've planned on centers, or an activity, and then she has to go somewhere to take care of something else, then that's a concern. (T/1G-11)

One special education teacher discussed her perspective of being pulled from class.

Teacher 4 explained that even though she would be pulled from class, she still met expectations regarding her responsibilities as a co-teacher. She said:

Well, there were definitely times when I needed to leave the room to go possibly deal with another student, and I couldn't maybe finish a whole-group lesson. And the general education teacher, if it was a small group, she would give them something to finish, or she would just continue with the whole-group lesson without me. And everything always went as best as it could. There were never any issues that expectations were not met. (T/4S-8)

**Changes in schedule.** Teachers explained how changes in the schedule impacted co-teaching activities in the classroom. Teacher 6, a general education teacher, explained that she was concerned about planning and changes in the staff scheduling as the most important concerns relating to her co-teaching partnership. She said, "No planning time for the most benefit [of co-teaching] and changes in staff scheduling [concerned her most about co-teaching]" (T/6G-3). Teacher 1, a general education teacher, said that changes in the staff schedule meant changes in the plans she had previously given to her special education co-teacher, which had to be frustrating for her co-teaching partner. She said:

Sometimes I will forget to tell her about a schedule change, an assembly, or anything like that which changes what I put in my plans that she's expecting—you know. That has got

to be disappointing and frustrating. It has to be for her. Well, she gets pulled sometimes to deal with emergencies, or to cover other aides or teachers, so that's disappointing on my end and frustrating. (T/1G-6)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that general education teachers may not understand when special education teachers are pulled for important reasons, especially because of changes in the schedule. She explained:

I know that when special education teachers are pulled to different schedules for testing or for when they are covering kids when instructional assistants are out, there are some general education teachers who may not understand that there has to be a change in the schedule for an important reason. (T/5S-10)

**Time to follow through on class activities.** Teachers explained that time out of the classroom did not allow them enough time to follow through on needed class activities as co-teachers. Teacher 2 and Teacher 5, special education teachers, explained how they did not always have enough time to follow through as co-teachers because they could not be in the classroom for the entire class session. Teacher 2 explained:

If you have time to be in there the whole time the way she and I do co-teaching—it's only one way, and we do it every day. But I feel like if you could be in that classroom from the time the period started to the time it ended, I think it would definitely be beneficial to the kids because they would get that small-group instruction. (T/2S-7)

Teacher 5 stated, "I think the main change I would make is to have more time in each classroom to be able to follow through with everything—to have the time to follow through on everything that is planned" (T/5S-23).

### **Teacher Planning**

Co-teachers discussed teacher planning as a variable that affected the quality of co-teaching partnerships. Teachers were concerned about having a common planning time together during the school day, as well as having time in general to plan for co-teaching activities for the benefit of all of their students. Teachers reported alternative means of planning when there was not a common planning time nor enough time to plan during the school day, such as providing lesson plans to each other on Google Docs, text messaging, and phone calls after school hours.

The opportunity to participate in alternative means of planning was best evident when co-teachers were compatible partners, especially when the co-teachers had formed a bond and were friends. Co-teachers shared their thoughts about having little planning time and using alternative means for planning. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, said that teachers would do more if they could plan more. She said, “Time is a problem that inhibits a lot. We would plan and do more together if there was more time” (T/1G-1). Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that planning influences co-teaching. She said, “It [when co-teaching is affected] is probably a week that you didn’t have enough planning time together, and you didn’t really have everything set and ready” (T/5S-11).

Teachers discussed alternative means of planning when they did not have enough time at school for planning. Teacher 1 reported using Google Docs as a way to send her lesson plans to her special education co-teaching partner. She said, “I do send her all of my lesson plans on Google Docs, so she knows in advance what objective or skills we’re going to be doing” (T/1G-2). Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained alternative methods of planning as co-teachers. She said, “We usually talk in person; we text; we email; we call each other at different times, even at night and on weekends” (T/5S-10).

### **Quality of Co-teaching Partnerships**

Co-teachers discussed the quality of co-teaching partnerships and described what made co-teaching a good partnership. Teachers explained that when co-teachers have a good quality partnership, then the results benefit all students in co-taught classes. One teacher gave an analogy of a good quality partnership as one that is similar to a marriage between partners. The idea is that when adults function well together, then the kids benefit just like in a marriage. When adults have conflict, then the kids get caught in the middle. Teacher 9, a special education teacher, explained, “[Co-teaching] should be assigned by personality matches. Teachers may be friends even if they are opposites. It is like a marriage” (T/9S-1).

Teacher 4, a special education teacher, explained that co-teaching is a partnership with teachers working toward the same goals, communicating, and all students benefitting from the partnership. She explained:



It's good to have that communication, to have the same goal as the general education teacher and want the same things for the students. Having a teacher that's flexible and understands the students with IEPs [Individual Education Plans] and their needs that they have [is important]. There's definitely a partnership rather than one person being more than the other person. And I was the other teacher in the room, and the kids without IEPs saw that as well. So all the kids were willing [to let me work with them]. I worked with every kid in the classrooms—IEP or no IEP. (T/4S-6)

Teacher 7, a general education teacher, discussed the importance of working together, communicating, and sharing as partners in a good quality co-teaching partnership. She explained:

Definitely work together, communicate, share. I said share—share your plans, share your activities, and share anything that you can. Be open to new ideas because I said that they're [the special education teachers] are going to come with a different wealth of knowledge and a different perspective than what you as a classroom teacher have. Being open to those ideas and just gaining any information from that person that you possibly can if he or she already knows that child well, especially [is important to do]. (T/7G-17)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that an effective co-teaching partnership benefits the students. She stated, “I think that an effective co-teaching relationship always benefits students” (T/5S-13).

Teacher 3, a general education teacher, reported that her co-teaching partnership benefitted all of the children in her classroom because in her partnership both co-teachers were going toward the same endpoint, which was meeting the students' needs of all students. She elaborated:

Well, this year it was very beneficial for the children—I think. She and I both had the same kind of style, and we both worked well together. And we planned together. We were kind of going toward the same endpoint there. And I think the kids really benefitted from that. They could tell that we got along. (T/3G-7)

## **Summary**

Results of this study were presented in this chapter. An analysis of the results revealed eight categories of data related to how elementary school teachers experience co-teaching in a

rural school district. The eight categories included: (a) roles and responsibilities of teachers in co-teaching partnerships, (b) advantages of co-teaching for students, (c) professional characteristics and attitudes toward co-teaching, (d) teaching experience and attitudes toward inclusion, (e) teacher relationships in co-teaching partnerships, (f) environmental support for co-teaching, (g) variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships, and (h) quality of co-teaching partnerships. The main variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships were revealed throughout the teacher interviews. They were teacher compatibility, time in the classroom, and teacher planning. Teachers described the quality of co-teaching partnerships and reported that the most positive partnerships were those in which teachers worked together as compatible partners toward the same goals. Positive partnerships were reflected by the benefits students obtained in inclusive classrooms.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE, LIMITATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

This chapter concludes this study with a final discussion of the research project and will be presented in six sections to include: (a) summary, (b) conclusions, (c) discussion, (d) recommendations for research and practice, (e) limitations, and (f) reflections.

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to learn more about co-teaching in a rural school district to help co-teachers develop productive partnerships to enhance learning for all students in inclusive classes. Two instruments were used in this qualitative study. The first instrument was an interview protocol that was used with each teacher who was randomly selected for a face-to-face interview. The second instrument was a document identification form that allowed the researcher to view and compare any documents that were provided by the interviewees regarding co-teaching. Co-teachers shared documents about co-teaching models, issues in co-teaching, and inclusion communities. Using the constant comparative method of analysis described by Maykut and Morehouse (1994), the main variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships in this school district were revealed. The main variables were teacher compatibility, time in the classroom, and teacher planning. Teachers described the quality of co-teaching partnerships as well and reported that the most positive partnerships were those in which teachers worked together as compatible partners toward the same goals. Positive partnerships were reflected by the benefits students obtained in inclusive classrooms.

#### Conclusions

The conclusions of this study are presented in light of the research questions that were developed in the initial phases of this study. Research questions addressed five categories of variables that were theorized as the variables that impact the quality of co-teaching partnerships. The variables were: (a) teacher variables, (b) student variables, (c) operational variables, (d) environmental variables, and (e) other variables to be discovered. The variables that affect co-teaching partnerships and the quality of co-teaching partnerships will be discussed. Then the

variables that were repeatedly discussed the most by co-teachers as those influencing co-teaching partnerships will be examined in consideration of the quality of co-teaching partnerships.

**Teacher variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** The teacher variables that were initially considered as those that affected the quality of co-teaching partnerships were teacher compatibility, trust, content knowledge, professional knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, teaching experience, and educational experience. The main variable that teachers in this study described as the variable that most affected the quality of their co-teaching partnerships was teacher compatibility. Teacher trust was considered to be important as well and developed through compatible partnerships. Content knowledge and professional knowledge were considered to be important to the quality of co-teaching partnerships but were not described as much as teacher compatibility. Finally, all of the co-teachers in this study regardless of their teaching experiences and educational experiences were positive about co-teaching and inclusion as long as the needs of students were met in inclusive classrooms.

***Co-teacher compatibility.*** Both new and experienced co-teachers reported that teacher compatibility was the most important factor in maintaining productive partnerships for the benefit of students. Teacher 3, a first-year general education teacher, for example, reported that her principal paired her with her special education co-teacher. She said, “I feel like she [the principal] understands that it [pairing of co-teachers] needs to be the kind of personalities that get along well and benefit the children” (T/3G-5). Teacher B, an experienced general education co-teacher, explained that she had worked with her special education co-teacher for ten years or more in her school and then co-taught with her partner for at least five years. She described the importance of having a good partnership with a compatible partner. She said:

We were assigned to teach together; and we developed a good relationship, a positive relationship. I think you need a positive relationship. You have to care about each other. You have to care about the feelings of that teacher and the students because if you don't have a relationship that works the kids are going to know it. (T/B-2)

***Co-teacher trust.*** Co-teachers in this study discussed trust as being important in their co-teaching partnerships, which developed between compatible partners. Two experienced co-teachers described the importance of teacher trust. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, talked about her friendship and trust with her co-teaching partner. She explained:

We started teaching together 22 years ago. She has been in special education for the last five years. So we were friends and co-workers as regular education teachers first. So that friendship and that trust, you know, the loyalty that we had as co-workers who taught together was there when she moved to special education. (T/1G-3)

Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained the importance of building trust as co-teachers. She said:

If you have a number of people to choose from, then it might be nice to ask [for a specific person to be your co-teacher] because you would feel comfortable with that person and you could build trust. I think those are things [feeling comfortable and having trust for your co-teaching partner] that you have to have to be a good team. (T/2S-3)

***Co-teachers' content knowledge and professional knowledge.*** To a lesser extent than teacher compatibility and trust, co-teachers in this study reported the importance of co-teachers' content knowledge and professional knowledge in co-teaching partnerships. First, co-teachers recognized their partners' content knowledge and expressed reliance upon those skills in the classroom. Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained that her general education co-teacher brought knowledge of the curriculum to their partnership. She said, "She definitely brings the knowledge of the curriculum [to the partnership]. And she is extremely organized, so it keeps the class flowing" (T/2S-4). Teacher B, a general education teacher, reported that her special education co-teacher understood the math content, which made it easier for her to co-teach with her partner. She explained:

I think they [special education co-teachers] have to be an expert in the area. My co-teacher is a math specialist. She knows math. I've had other co-teachers in the past who did not know math. I had to teach them math, and that's harder for them because they're learning too, and they make mistakes when they go to help kids and don't know they're making mistakes. (T/B-2)

Second, co-teachers recognized and relied upon their co-teaching partners' professional skills, whether those skills were the skills needed to establish or maintain co-teaching partnerships, or they were the professional skills needed to address conflict between co-teachers. Teacher 7, a general education teacher, described the professional skills that some special

education teachers had, which were considered in meeting the needs of students and when pairing the co-teachers for those students. She explained:

Some of our special education teachers are trained in Wilson Reading. Some of them have been trained to work with children with autism by the county, and so I know that's one of the things they [administrators] look at when they're deciding which grade levels different people are going to work with. (T/7G-8)

Teacher A, a special education teacher, explained that when she was paired with new teachers, they relied on her skills to guide their co-teaching partnerships. She explained:

I find that most of the time the newer teachers that I've worked with are just new to the profession. They accept co-teaching a little bit easier than teachers who have been teaching 20 years already. If they [experienced teachers] have never had a co-teacher, it's hard to walk into their classrooms and be part of their classrooms. They [experienced teachers] are so use to that 100 percent control over everything, whereas the newer teachers respect what I say and things like that. (T/A-4)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, reported that there were times when she needed to handle conflict in a professional manner to maintain a positive partnership. She explained:

With conflicts between us [co-teachers], I've had to go and apologize when I've been short. I made a statement about a schedule change that I didn't know about or a program that maybe one of my students wasn't allowed to use anymore. With conflicts with students, I think sometimes general education teachers disagree on how it should be handled. And I think that's something we just have to work through and talk through and actually get through the conflict because that will happen. You have to be able to work through it in a professional way. (T/5S-11)

***Co-teachers' attitudes and beliefs about co-teaching and inclusion.*** Finally, co-teachers' attitudes and beliefs about co-teaching and inclusion were discussed with little discrepancy among the co-teachers in this study. All of the co-teachers in this study were positive toward co-teaching and inclusion as long as the needs of students were met, regardless of their teaching experiences or educational experiences in relation to co-teaching.

**Student variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** The student variables that were considered as those that affected the quality of co-teaching partnerships were the learning needs of students and the composition of students who were placed in inclusive classrooms together. Co-teachers in this study did not describe the composition of students in their inclusive classrooms, nor did they report on how the composition of students affected their co-teaching partnerships. Co-teachers did, however, discuss the learning needs of students and how those needs influenced the roles of the co-teachers in their classrooms. Teacher 8, a special education teacher, explained that her role as the special education co-teacher was defined by the needs of a student who was placed in her co-teaching classroom. She explained:

We would meet beforehand and talk about the specific student that I was working with in the classroom and whether based on his skill set we thought he could hang with what the class was doing. And if he could, then she [the general education co-teacher] and I would sit down and look at the materials for the next couple of weeks. We decided that I was going to stay in [the general classroom] and support instead of doing a pull out. And if he couldn't [stay in the general classroom], then I would plan an alternative lesson in a pull-out setting. (T/8S-1)

Teacher 7, a general education co-teacher, explained that the role of each co-teacher in her classroom depended on the needs of the children with disabilities in her classroom each year. She said:

It's tricky [the roles of the co-teachers] because it depends on the year. It depends on the students. Depending on the needs of the special education children in my classroom, sometimes it's more of a pull-out situation. Sometimes it's a push-in situation. So it really depends on the students. We give pre-tests. We determine whether the children are going to be able to function with the grade-level material. In that case, she [the special education co-teacher] pushes in. If it seems that the children are really behind and won't benefit from being in the classroom, then it's a pull-out situation. My role in all of that, generally, is me planning. If she [the special education co-teacher] pushes in, then it's her taking the role of the group that I assign her to, or something like that. (T/7G-2)

**Operational variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** The role of the administrator was considered in operational variables that affected the quality of co-teaching

partnerships. The operational variables that were initially considered as those affecting partnerships were planning time, compatibility matching, communication, and staff development. Co-teachers discussed their concerns about needing a common planning time scheduled during the school day, and they emphasized the importance of being matched with a compatible co-teacher. Less frequently discussed by co-teachers was communication and staff development in their schools. Other than scheduling, compatibility matching, and one principal's involvement in co-teaching training, co-teachers in this study did not describe administrative involvement in their co-teaching partnerships. Instead, co-teachers discussed how they managed their partnerships themselves, especially when it involved planning time.

*Planning time.* Co-teachers in this study discussed their concerns about needing a common planning time scheduled during the school day, but they described the alternative means that they developed themselves to accommodate their planning needs.

*Planning concerns.* Co-teachers in this study expressed a need for more planning time as co-teachers during the school day. Co-teachers were concerned about being able to plan together during a common planning time that they wanted their administrators to schedule for them. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, explained that there was not enough time to plan together. She said, "You know we always have so much time to plan, not. Time is a problem that inhibits a lot. We would plan more and do more together if there was more time" (T/1G-2). She further explained that it would be helpful if common planning time could be worked into the co-teachers' schedules. She stated, "Did I say planning time? Have I mentioned there's not enough time? It would be nice if somehow that [planning] could be worked into the schedules, hers [the special education co-teacher] and mine" (T/1G-11). Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that planning time influenced co-teaching. She said, "There is probably a week that you didn't have enough planning time together and you didn't really have everything set and ready [so co-teaching activities were influenced by not being able to plan together]" (T/5S-11). Teacher 4, a special education teacher, described the importance of planning together. She said, "Having planning time together is essential. Unfortunately, we didn't have time during the school day" (T/4S-4).

*Planning opportunities developed by co-teachers.* Co-teachers described alternative ways to plan together due to lack of common planning time during the school day. Co-teachers discussed using Google Docs to post lesson plans for each other, planning in the hallway or



during lunch time together, and using technology such as texting, emailing, and calling on the phone to plan after school hours. Teacher 1, a general education teacher, described how she used Google Docs to post lesson plans and described how she touched base with her co-teacher. She said:

We touch base in the morning sometimes, not all the time, but it's just when I see her, you know, at lunch or in the hallway. I do send her all of my lesson plans on Google Docs, so she knows in advance what SOLs or skills we're going to be doing. (T/1G-2)

Teacher A, a special education teacher, explained that she had a regular planning time with her co-teacher, but there were times when they briefly planned in the hallway at school. She explained:

We have regular planning times set up now. And then a lot of times we're stopping in the middle of the hall saying I decided to do this, or I decided to do that. So we keep each other up-to-date all the time as to what's going on. (T/A-6)

Teacher 8, a special education teacher, reported that there were times when she used emails or text messages with her co-teaching partner for planning. She said:

I know I'm not going to be in the room for math for whatever reason, so I'll email her [the general education co-teacher] a couple of days in advance and ask her what she feels I need to leave to support my kiddo. (T/8S-7)

Teacher 2, a special education teacher, explained that while she did not sit down and plan with her co-teacher, she did communicate with her co-teacher daily and the communication was a form of planning. She stated:

I fear that people don't co-teach because they think they don't have the time to plan. But I think it can work out even when you don't sit down side-by-side and plan. And I guess in some ways we do plan a little bit because we do communicate with each other daily. (T/2S-12)

**Compatibility Matching.** Co-teachers discussed the importance of administrators matching teachers who are compatible to work together as co-teaching partners. Teacher 3, a first-year general education teacher, reported that her administrator knew the personalities of the

teachers in her school and was able to pair her with a compatible co-teaching partner. She explained:

This past year it was kinda nice that they paired us. I don't know, not knowing anybody at the school, if we would've picked each other. It just kinda seemed to work out nicely. But I think it may be okay if we were to pick each other in the future. But I also like how the administrator kinda has a say, and they kinda know everybody's personalities and what works best. (T/3G-5)

Teacher 5, a special educator teacher, explained that she had worked with a principal who surveyed teachers to see who had an interest in co-teaching, but it seemed to work best when the principal paired the co-teachers. She explained:

I really think that it [matching co-teachers] should be assigned by administrators because it could become like a clique in a school. It has before. I think just like administrators choose grade levels for classroom teachers, they would use their knowledge about which students are in each classroom and would know about the teachers. They would probably think who would work well together and who would not work so well together. As special educators, you and general educators have to be willing to work well with others. That's the main thing, and I think administrators should have to choose. (T/5S-8)

**Communication.** Co-teachers in this study stressed the need for good communication between co-teaching partners; but they did not describe their administrators as facilitators for communication, but rather the co-teachers themselves strived for good communication. Teacher 3, a general education teacher, stated that she and her partner relied on their communication to support each other. She said:

And definitely from just having that open line of communication I think she knew, as well as I, that if I had a question or needed to talk to her about something we were there for each other to kind of rely on and ask questions if we needed to. (T/3G-9)

Teacher 4, a special education teacher, stated that communication is the key to everything in a co-teaching partnership. She said, "It helps to have a partner who will roll with things and who you can speak with and plan with. And communication is definitely key, and we had a lot of that the entire school year" (T/4S-4).

**Staff development.** Co-teachers in this study did not describe principal involvement in staff development other than one principal who promoted co-teaching training. Teacher 3, a general education teacher, stated, “Our principal actually sent us to a co-teaching workshop this year, and she went with us” (T/3G-5).

**Environmental variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** The environmental variables that were considered as those affecting co-teaching were classroom, school, and district support. Co-teachers in this study discussed each environmental variable and explained how each variable influenced the quality of co-teaching.

**Classroom.** Teacher 1, a general education teacher, explained that the classroom arrangement and the support staff who assisted in the classroom helped support co-teaching activities. Teacher 1 described her classroom and explained why it was arranged to support co-teaching activities. She said:

I have a Smart Board on one wall and then on the opposite wall is a white board, and I use both. So I have them in groups of four, so that they can see both the Smart Board and the white board. That’s what I primarily use. And I mix them up. I don’t have, you know, all special ed. kids in one place. I try to mix them ability-wise. I mix them by ethnicities. (T/1G-9)

Teacher 1 described how she arranged students for support staff to assist them. She explained:

But I have learned one trick. I do like to put the special ed. kids on the outside of these groupings, and not on the inside, so that when the adults come to help them, they’re not blocking the view of other students. And then they’re not lifting chairs up and over, and trying to get themselves comfortable, so that they can help. I’d go out and recruit. I get lots of help for my kids. So sometimes there are three adults in the room. We’re close to X Tech [a university], so we also have X Tech students who want to volunteer. Yeah, I have to manage them sometimes in limited space, so that everybody can see. (T/1G-10)

**School.** Co-teachers in some schools reported that their administrators were involved in promoting co-teaching in their schools and their involvement enhanced the quality of co-teaching, while other co-teachers reported that they managed co-teaching themselves and described this experience as being positive or as needing more administrative support.

*Administrative involvement in co-teaching.* Teacher 3, a first-year general education teacher, reported that administrative involvement in co-teaching training enhanced the quality of her co-teaching partnership because she felt supported as a co-teacher. She explained:

The principal was very willing to help in however she could. She actually came and did an observation on both of us co-teaching together because she wanted to see some co-teaching in action after we went to our workshop. So, that was nice just feeling like you're being supported by the other staff. (T/3G-15)

Teacher 3 further explained that it was helpful to be paired with her co-teacher by her principal because she was a new teacher, and her principal's involvement lead to a good partnership. She said:

This past year it was kind of nice that they [the principal and consulting teacher] paired us. I don't know, you know, not knowing anybody at the school if we would've picked each other—that kind of thing. And it just kind of seemed to work out nicely. (T/3G-5)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that her principal paired co-teachers by surveying them to see who wanted to co-teach to facilitate better partnerships. She said:

It started out as just a schedule put together by the principal at the time, and I do believe at that time the principal would send around a survey to ask the teachers who was willing [to co-teach]—who had a preference for working with inclusion and who had a preference type thing, and now I think teachers can express their preferences more. (T/5S-6)

*Teachers implementing co-teaching independently.* Some co-teachers explained they implemented co-teaching independently with little help from their administrators; and they reported that implementing co-teaching independently was a positive experience or they expressed a need for more support. Teacher 7, a general education teacher, explained that she always felt free to implement co-teaching the way she wanted it to be. She explained:

Luckily, at X school we don't get mandated on a lot of things. We are allowed, for the most part, to construct things the way that works best for us. So if I want to invite my co-teacher into math with me to co-teach, then I can. (T/7G-20)

Teacher 10, a general education teacher, however, expressed the need for more administrative support for co-teaching in her school. She stated, “I would like to have administrative support. With scheduling, it would be nice to have a co-teacher for math and science. There is no mandate [in the school] on how to co-teach” (T/10G-3).

**District.** Most co-teachers in this study reported positive support for co-teaching at the district level, and some reported support but with some concerns. Teacher 4, a special education teacher, explained that the school district supported co-teaching, and it was great. She said, “Definitely we need support from the school district on co-teaching and them wanting that to be how we’re working with students with IEPs [Individual Education Plans]. And this district has been wonderful about that” (T/4S-13). Teacher 1, a general education teacher, explained that co-teaching was supported in this school district because it was expected. She said, “They [central office administrators] support it [co-teaching], and I mean encourage is not even strong enough of a word. I mean it’s more than encourage. It’s expected—I think” (T/1G-10). Teacher 7, a general education teacher, however, expressed the need for more district support even though she felt that the school district had come a long way. She said:

I think we’ve come a long way. I know, building-wise, our concerns are heard. I know we all try to support each other and make the best of any situation that we can. I don’t always feel that support, still yet, from the district; but I think a lot of that comes from the fact that those people don’t see what you’re doing every single day. (T/7G-21)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, reported that this school district is probably more supportive toward inclusive education and co-teaching than other school districts in the state, but funding is still a problem. She stated, “I think that this division is probably more supportive than most in the state for inclusive education and co-teaching, and I do think that the funding continues to be an issue. I think staff and materials [are affected by funding]” (T/5S-21).

**Other variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** This study revealed two variables that were not theorized in the beginning of this study as variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships. The discovered variables were co-teaching models that were being implemented in this school district that were additional to the standard co-teaching models described in the literature, as well as the variable of time special education teachers spent in the classrooms as co-teachers.

*Co-teaching models in this school district.* In this study it was discovered that the six co-teaching models frequently described by Friend et al. (2010) were incorporated into inclusive classrooms in this school district, but two additional co-teaching models were discovered as well.

The first additional co-teaching model that was discovered in this school district might well be described as an “impromptu” form of co-teaching. This type of co-teaching occurs when one teacher, usually the general education teacher, is delivering instruction to the whole class while the other teacher, usually the special education teacher, is monitoring and assisting students as needed but is also listening to the instruction and adding to it when opportunities become available by rephrasing what the teacher is discussing or by adding additional information to the discussion. The purpose of this type of co-teaching is to interject an idea that goes along with the teacher’s presentation to assist students in having a better understanding of what is being taught. This can occur either by rephrasing information for clarity or providing another means of looking at the same concept. It is impromptu because the additional information that the assisting teacher adds to the lesson has not been rehearsed or planned in advance but becomes appropriate and useful at the time when opportunities become available to interject such thoughts.

Two special education co-teachers described how they applied the impromptu model in the classroom. Teacher 2 stated:

She [the general education teacher] does more of the instruction of the new material and then I’m kind of the one who picks up and does the remediation, the review. While she’s teaching, if there’s things that I want to say I just interject and vice versa. So if I think of a different way for the kids to maybe remember something, then I’ll interject and let her know that I thought that might be a good way for them to learn it. (T/2S-1)

Teacher A described a similar scenario. She said:

So I also have times when I might interject things that might help the students. Sometimes I might go up to the board during certain parts of the lesson and say maybe if I explained it this way, this child would understand it. If they’re having problems understanding, I might show a different strategy for learning the lesson. (T/A-1)

It is important to note that co-teachers should have a positive partnership in order to use an impromptu form of co-teaching; otherwise, interjecting additional information could foster conflict if it is considered an interruption to class instruction.

The second co-teaching model that was discovered in this school district was what might be termed an interactive inclusion and pull-out model. In this school district, teachers described students with disabilities and those at-risk as students who were included in inclusive classrooms but who occasionally needed to be pulled aside in the classroom or pulled outside of the classroom for reinforcement of skills or to have a test read to them. This especially occurred when students were exposed to the grade-level curriculum but needed a reduced or broken-down version of the content on their individual levels after whole-group instruction. While some educators may argue that any form of pull-out outside of the general education classroom becomes a resource service and not an inclusion service, it was apparent from teachers in this school district that an interactive inclusion and pull-out delivery of instruction was a form of co-teaching. Perhaps the idea that this type of model is considered co-teaching can be justified on the fact that the students are required to participate in the general curriculum and generally do so at the beginning of class or for the majority of the school day. However, because some students may need an adapted version of the content on their levels or need accommodations to facilitate their learning, then the pulling out from the general classroom just becomes an extension of the general curriculum, similar to differentiating instruction of the same lesson to those students who need differentiation. Thus, the need to pull students outside of the general classroom became part of the differentiation of the lesson.

Special education co-teachers described how students with disabilities participated in whole-group instruction and small-group instruction interchangeably. Teacher 5 described a typical writing class in this way. She said:

I would go in during morning meeting time with my plans that we had planned together and then we would begin writing, the writing instruction. And after the instruction, that's the time I could typically pull my small groups or work individually at the back table to work on their accommodations. (T/5S-5)

Teacher 8 explained that there were times when her student with special needs participated with the class, and there were times when the student needed more individual assistance. She stated:

Based on his skill set [the student with a disability], we [the general and special education co-teachers] thought if he could hang with what the class was doing, we would sit down and look at the materials for the next couple of weeks, and I was going to stay in and support instead of doing a pull out. If he couldn't, I would plan an alternative lesson in a pull-out setting. (T/8S-1)

***Time in the classroom.*** An undiscovered variable that was repeatedly interwoven in the interviews was time in the classroom. In discussing time in the classroom, both general and special education teachers reported their concerns about special education co-teachers not being able to be in the general classrooms for the entire length of the lessons. Teachers reported that special education teachers often attended classes late or had to leave early to take care of other responsibilities. Special education teachers were pulled from classes to handle other issues that came up with other students, to handle emergencies, or when there were schedule changes—such as needing to fill in for instructional assistants or other special education teachers who were out. Teachers expressed concerns about special education teachers not being able to be in the classrooms for the entire lessons because they felt they could not maximize their work as co-teachers for the benefit of all students in inclusion classes. Teachers expressed their thoughts about time in the classroom as it related to being pulled from class, changes in schedule, and time to follow through on class activities.

***Being pulled from class.*** General education teachers discussed how pulling special education teachers from class impacted co-teaching activities. Teacher 6 said, “It was up and down this year. She [the special education teacher] had a complex child and was called out of class” (T/6G-2). Teacher 7 explained how pulling the special education teacher from class impacted her reading groups. She explained:

Like I said, those are probably the times when she has to come in the room and say, “Look, nobody’s coming to your room today. You’re on your own.” Those are hard and stressful times. They’re not about our relationship, but those are the times I don’t want to see her walk into my room to bring me bad news. It’s because you count on that person. You build your plans around the fact that there’s gonna be another person in that room. And when there’s not, it’s hard. (T/7G-11)



Teacher 1 expressed her concern about trying to conduct center activities when her co-teaching partner gets pulled. She explained:

She [the special education teacher] may not be there for a part of the lesson. I mean, she always ends up there, but if we've planned on centers, or an activity, and then she has to go somewhere to take care of something else, then that's a concern. (T/1G-11)

*Changes in schedule.* Co-teachers explained how changes in the schedule impacted co-teaching activities in the classroom. Teacher 6, a general education teacher, explained that she was concerned about planning and changes in the staff scheduling as the most important concerns relating to her co-teaching partnership. She said, "No planning time for the most benefit [of co-teaching] and changes in staff scheduling [concerned her the most about co-teaching]" (T/6G-3). Teacher 1, a general education teacher, said that changes in the staff schedule meant changes in the plans she had previously given to her special education co-teacher, which had to be frustrating for her co-teaching partner. She said:

Sometimes I will forget to tell her about a schedule change, an assembly, or anything like that which changes what I put in my plans that she's expecting—you know. That has got to be disappointing and frustrating. It has to be for her. Well, she gets pulled sometimes to deal with emergencies, or to cover other aides or teachers, so that's disappointing on my end and frustrating. (T/1G-6)

Teacher 5, a special education teacher, explained that general education teachers may not understand when special education teachers are pulled for important reasons, especially because of changes in the schedule. She explained:

I know that when special education teachers are pulled to different schedules for testing or for when they are covering kids when instructional assistants are out, there are some general education teachers who may not understand that there has to be a change in the schedule for an important reason. (T/5S-10)

*Time to follow through on class activities.* Teachers explained that time out of the classroom did not allow them enough time to follow through on needed class activities as co-teachers. Teacher 2 and Teacher 5, special education teachers, explained how they did not

always have enough time to follow through as co-teachers because they could not be in the classroom for the entire class session. Teacher 2 explained:

If you have time to be in there the whole time the way she and I do co-teaching—it's only one way, and we do it every day. But I feel like if you could be in that classroom from the time the period started to the time it ended, I think it would definitely be beneficial to the kids because they would get that small-group instruction. (T/2S-7)

Teacher 5 stated, “I think the main change I would make is to have more time in each classroom to be able to follow through with everything—to have the time to follow through on everything that is planned” (T/5S-23).

**Main variables affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships.** From all of the variables that were considered in this study, three variables were repeatedly discussed the most by co-teachers as being the main variables influencing the quality of co-teaching partnerships in this school district. Teachers described, in the order of importance, teacher compatibility, time in the classroom, and planning time as key variables that impacted the quality of their co-teaching partnerships. However, if teachers were compatible partners, then the adjustments to the time spent in the classroom and the lack of planning opportunities could be better accepted by co-teachers than when teachers were not compatible partners and had not formed a positive bond in their partnerships. This was revealed in how co-teachers described their partnerships and the statements that they made about their concerns. Time in the classroom was an undiscovered variable that involved teachers' concerns, both general and special education teachers, about special education co-teachers not being able to be in the general classrooms for the entire lessons— such as needing to enter classes late or leave early due to other responsibilities, being pulled from class because of changes in the schedule, being required to cover somewhere else, being pulled because of an emergency, and basically being spread thin to take care of all responsibilities. Finally, teacher planning was a variable affecting the quality of co-teaching partnerships, especially as it related to having a common planning time during the school day as well as time in general. However, when co-teachers were compatible partners, they found alternative means of planning, such as using text messages, calls after school hours, and Google Docs to post lesson plans.

It is important to add that quality co-teaching partnerships were described as those that were similar to a marriage between partners in which co-teachers worked together toward the same goals. The measure of quality co-teaching partnerships was found in the learning opportunities students gained in inclusive classrooms when co-teachers successfully worked together as partners and incorporated co-teaching models to meet the same goals for students. When co-teachers could practice co-teaching models, then students could receive the learning benefits of having two teachers working together in the same classroom. This does not, however, necessarily mean that co-teaching improves student outcomes but rather improves the learning opportunities in the classroom.

## **Discussion**

This discussion will review the variables that affected the quality of co-teaching partnerships in this school district and will consider these variables in light of the literature that supports them.

**Teacher variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** In considering the teacher variables that affected the quality of co-teaching partnerships, the variable most discussed by co-teachers was teacher compatibility. Integrated with teacher compatibility was the importance of communication between co-teachers. Teachers discussed their partnerships and often described them as moving in the same direction or having the same goals as their partners in positive partnerships. The importance of teacher compatibility is cited in the literature on co-teaching. Kohler-Evans (2006), for example, expressed the imperative for co-teaching partners to communicate daily about their needs and concerns. When co-teachers communicate, they can grow and move forward in their relationship as co-teaching partners, thus helping them become more compatible as co-teaching partners.

**Student variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** In discussing the learning needs of students in relation to co-teaching, teachers in this study often described having a variety of learners in their inclusive classrooms; and the diverse learning needs of these students often required the skills of both co-teaching partners. While co-teachers in this study discussed the learning needs of students and the impact it had on co-teaching partnerships, they did not discuss the interrelationships of students in the classroom, which created the composition of the class and was initially considered as affecting co-teaching partnerships. Literature on student

variables and co-teaching partnerships has been discussed by Jimenez et al. (2007) in explaining how diverse learners compose inclusion classrooms today. Therefore, co-teachers must be able to work together to meet the learning needs of all students in inclusion classrooms. Further, teachers must be able to address the dynamics within inclusion classes, as the composition of students and how they interact together may affect the learning environment.

**Operational variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** Operational variables are those variables that are related to the decisions made at the administrative level. In this study, co-teachers often discussed how they were paired as partners by their principals, and they discussed the ongoing need for scheduled planning time together during the school day. Several authors have discussed the role of the administrator in co-teaching. Smith and Leonard (2005) explained that the school principal plays a key role in the collaborative process of co-teaching. Co-teachers, therefore, should receive staff development, and ongoing communication should be facilitated when co-teachers are paired and planning time scheduled. Scruggs et al. (2007) reported similar information from a qualitative meta-synthesis that they conducted on co-teaching. The authors reported that teachers expressed a need for more planning time, opportunities for student skill level, and for more training. Administrative support seemed to be the underlining factor in addressing the teachers' needs.

**Environmental variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** Environmental variables were considered at the classroom, school, and district levels in this study. Idol (2006) discussed how various stages of inclusion development among several schools led to positive attitudes from faculty members at each school. Consideration was given to how students were supported within classrooms to the overall development toward inclusive education in each school. Idol also discussed the positive test results at the state level as schools within the school system were being transformed into more inclusive special education services. Therefore, inclusion and co-teaching are not only classroom considerations but school and district concerns, as inclusive education continues to evolve. In this study, co-teachers' responses to their co-teaching environments ranged from little support to a lot of support for co-teaching. In some cases, teachers explained that administrators allowed them to implement co-teaching independently in their schools, while other administrators wanted to take a more active role in co-teaching. Some teachers expressed the need for more division support and linked division support to staffing and funding for inclusive education.

**Other variables and quality of co-teaching partnerships.** In this study two variables were discovered that were not initially theorized as variables that impact the quality of co-teaching partnerships. One discovered variable was the presence of additional co-teaching models that were used in this school district in addition to the six standard co-teaching models described in the literature by Friend et al. (2010). While the six standard models of co-teaching were present in this school district, two additional forms of co-teaching were recognized in this study as new models of co-teaching. The time special education teachers could spend in the classrooms as co-teachers was another variable that was discovered in this study and was one that was very important to both general and special education teachers.

***Additional teaching models.*** In the literature, Friend et al. (2010) described six co-teaching models that are currently used in public schools, which are expected to increase the learning opportunities for students when co-teachers pull their strengths together. A review of the models include: (a) one teach-one assist, in which one educator takes the lead in instruction, while the other monitors the classroom; (b) stations, in which instructional content is divided into two or more segments and presented separately in separate locations; (c) parallel teaching, in which teachers deliver instruction to a part of the class and do not exchange groups; (d) alternative teaching-small groups, in which one teacher works with a group of students who require instruction that is different from other class members; (e) team teaching, in which co-teachers share in the process of instructing students; and (f) one teach-one observe, in which one teacher is walking around the room and is visibly present to students and at the same time is actively observing the other teacher and students in the learning environment.

In this study, as previously discussed, the first additional co-teaching model that was discovered in this school district was an “impromptu” form of co-teaching. This type of co-teaching occurs when one teacher, usually the general education teacher, is delivering instruction to the whole class while the other teacher, usually the special education teacher, is monitoring and assisting students but is also listening to the instruction and adding to it when opportunities become available by rephrasing what the teacher is discussing or by adding additional information to the discussion. The purpose of this type of co-teaching is to interject an idea that goes along with the teacher’s presentation to assist students in having a better understanding of what is being taught. This can occur either by rephrasing information for clarity or providing another means of looking at the same concept. It is impromptu because the additional

information that the assisting teacher adds to the lesson has not been rehearsed or planned in advance but becomes appropriate and useful at the time when opportunities become available to interject such thoughts. It is important to note that co-teachers should have a positive partnership in order to use an impromptu form of co-teaching; otherwise, interjecting additional information could foster conflict if it is considered an interruption to class instruction.

The second co-teaching model that was discovered in this school district was what might be termed an interactive and pull-out model. In this school district, teachers described students with disabilities and those at-risk as students who were included in inclusive classrooms but who occasionally needed to be pulled aside in the classroom or pulled outside of the classroom for reinforcement of skills or to have a test read to them. This especially occurred when students were exposed to the grade-level curriculum but yet needed a reduced or broken-down version of the content on their individual levels after whole-group instruction. While some educators may argue that any form of pull out outside of the general education classroom becomes a resource service and not an inclusion service, it was apparent from teachers in this school district that an interactive inclusion and pull-out delivery of instruction was a form of co-teaching. Perhaps the idea that this type of model is considered co-teaching can be justified on the fact that the students are required to participate in the general curriculum and generally do so at the beginning of class or for the majority of the school day. However, because some students may need an adapted version of the content on their levels or need accommodations to facilitate their learning, then the pulling out from the general classroom just becomes an extension of the general curriculum, similar to differentiating instruction of the same lesson to those students who need differentiation. Thus, the need to pull students outside of the general classroom became part of the differentiation of the lesson.

***Time in the classroom.*** Another undiscovered variable that was repeatedly interwoven in the interviews was time in the classroom. Both general education and special education co-teachers discussed their concerns about special education teachers not being able to be in the general classrooms for the entire length of the lessons. Teachers described changes in the schedule, special education teachers being pulled, or special education teachers having to enter classes late or leave early due to other responsibilities as being barriers that affected the productivity of their co-teaching partnerships. Teachers reported that special education teachers often attended classes late or had to leave early to take care of other responsibilities. Special

education teachers were pulled from classes to handle other issues that came up with other students, to handle emergencies, or when there were schedule changes—such as needing to fill in for instructional assistants or other special education teachers who were out. Teachers expressed concerns about special education teachers not being able to be in the classrooms for the entire lessons because they felt they could not maximize their work as co-teachers for the benefit of all students in inclusion classes.

### **Recommendations for Research and Practice**

From this research, a few recommendations for research and practice emerged that might improve co-teaching efforts in this inclusive school district.

First, although co-teachers expressed having many positive partnerships as well as expressing similar needs and concerns, it is important to add that some teachers discussed implementing co-teaching independently in this school district. With the variation of support among the schools and across the county, co-teachers might benefit from a resource manual or guidance document on implementing and maintaining co-teaching in this school district. The document would serve as a guide for co-teachers on such topics as the roles and responsibilities of each co-teacher, ways to plan together as co-teaching partners, how to address and resolve conflicts when they arise, how to evaluate co-teaching partners, and how to successfully implement the various co-teaching models for student success for all students in inclusive classes. Additionally, the guidance document would provide a foundation and some continuity for co-teaching practice across the county.

Second, it might be helpful to obtain some research on how to match co-teaching partners, whether that occurs by teacher survey or by administrators selecting co-teaching partners. Compatibility matching was a key variable that co-teachers described in this study for forming good quality partnerships. Guidance in how to match partners would be another resource to consider in forming such partnerships.

Finally, time in the classroom was a concern among both general and special education teachers in this study. Additionally, funding was mentioned in relation to the implementation of inclusion in this school district as some teachers expressed that more funding, including staffing, seemed to be available for inclusion in the past. Should funding for special education programs decrease in the future, then alternative, creative means of delivering co-teaching should be

considered, since co-teaching is currently the expected norm for serving students with disabilities in today's educational reform of special education programs.

### **Limitations**

This study had three main limitations. First, the study was limited to one rural school district. The school district in this study practices full inclusion for all students with disabilities. It would be beneficial to investigate the co-teaching practices in school districts that offer partial inclusion for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who attend inclusive classes in districts practicing partial inclusion attend inclusive classes when they reach a readiness to participate in such settings with their non-disabled peers. Full-inclusion programs, however, allow all students to attend inclusion classes together so that students learn to interact and help each other in a similar way as a community—the idea is that students will learn to interact and function when they are around non-disabled peers. Regardless of which approach best defines a student's LRE, the point is that there are different approaches to inclusion delivery and not all schools operate the same way. In researching co-teaching practices, it is important to consider the level of inclusion that is being used in each school district because the level of inclusion programming can influence how co-teachers operate as partners. This is especially evident in staffing co-taught classrooms and the availability of co-teachers to carry out co-teaching activities. Thus, in some ways co-teaching and inclusion are inseparable, yet they are not completely the same.

The second limitation is that the pilot study in this research project was done in the same school district as the original study except that it was implemented with co-teachers who taught 6<sup>th</sup> graders at the middle school level in this district. The reason the pilot study was done in the same school district is because of the uniqueness of this district's full-inclusion program, which is distinctly different from the majority of other inclusion programs. The benefit of piloting in the same school district was the similarity in questions that specifically addressed the work of co-teachers in this specialized setting. Had the protocol been piloted in another school district that did not have the same type of inclusion program, the interview questions would not have been as relevant to the full-inclusion program of this particular district. Therefore, the protocol could not have been accurately validated. On the other hand, with the benefit of piloting in the



same school district came the limitation of again only using one school district to pilot and conduct the actual study.

The third limitation of this study is that only teachers were interviewed. It would be beneficial to learn more about the perceptions of other staff, such as instructional assistants who also support inclusion classes, and how they view co-teaching and the instructional delivery that is given to students. Additionally, it would be beneficial to understand how administrators at the school and central office levels view co-teaching in this school district. The purpose of this study, however, was to specifically understand how co-teachers at the elementary level felt about co-teaching. It would be helpful to see how teachers across all grade levels perceived co-teaching in this school district; but co-teaching at the high school level, for example, will be implemented differently from the elementary level due to other factors such as scheduling and teacher specialty areas. Therefore, to obtain some consistency as to the variables that affect the quality of co-teaching partnerships, it was beneficial to look at elementary general and special education co-teachers first. Additional research, however, might investigate co-teachers' perceptions at the high school level in comparison to co-teachers' perceptions at the elementary level.

## **Reflections**

When I reflect on this project, several thoughts come to mind. I would like to discuss my four main reflections in this section.

First, I found that working on a research project and specifically a dissertation is truly a journey of which I had heard so many times. It is a journey that requires much perseverance, never ending faith that it will happen and come together in the end, and surrender from leading others to allowing others to lead me and show me the way—those who have experience and are masters of research.

Second, I learned the importance of thoroughly following procedures and making sure I was covering everything correctly. I learned to take ownership in checking to make sure I was on the right path. But I learned, especially when I began analyzing the results of this research, the importance of making sure I had covered everything to the best of my ability—not because it needed to be done but because I was doing it and it had to be right. And I knew it was not right until I felt it was right—when I knew I had covered everything as it was presented regardless of

how long it took me to do it. Now I love famous quotes, and I often sat with one quote in front of me as an inspiration while I worked on this project. The quote is by the Swedish diplomat Dag Hammarskjöld who said, “Pray that your loneliness may spur you into finding something to live for, great enough to die for.” While I know that completing a dissertation may not be something to die for—or should not be something to die for—it is, however, something to live for. While there are many other important things in life as well, completing the dissertation and contributing to the research is certainly an accomplishment. And I now know why few find it.

Third, I often thought about my topic as I was working on this project. I always had a special interest in inclusion and co-teaching, but I did not know why I was attracted to the topic. Then I finally realized one day that while my interest in co-teaching was certainly from an educational perspective, it was also from a psychological perspective. I wanted to know why people do what they do and why they make the decisions that they make. My interest in co-teaching really took me back to my freshman year in college when I planned to be a psychologist. I tossed the idea around and finally decided that I might not be able to stay in school long enough to get a doctoral degree in psychology, and I may not be able to work full time in that profession to earn a substantial living. So I happily chose the field of special education because I had a knack in that similar field as well. But my passion in psychology never left me, and I cannot say that I have been the best special education co-teacher myself. Introverted teachers like me sometimes struggle with situations that work best between extroverted personalities. Such can be the case with co-teaching. It is truly important to match teachers appropriately so that they can form good partnerships. And good partnerships often develop over time between teachers that often become good friends. While the variables that affect quality partnerships are presented in this study from an educational stance, there are probably many other considerations involved in how people connect, which comes more from a psychological investigation. While my project was not designed to measure psychological variables, completing this project helped me form some personal conclusions about personalities and why some people may connect better than with others.

Finally, completing this dissertation, in my opinion, is one more step toward ending up where I always needed to be. I believe my career will be similar to the story of Jonah and the Whale. While Jonah resisted going to Ninivah, he ended up there anyway—he just took the long way around. How much control does man really have toward his or her destiny? I believe I was

always meant to counsel and help people help themselves resolve their problems. There are many students, parents, and teachers who need someone to help guide them with the many challenges that students face in school today. Completing this project has provided me with wisdom and the promotion to better serve those who face challenging issues in education. As a final thought, like Jonah, I may end up serving as a mediator or advisor in helping those with disabilities, while at the same time obtaining some counseling skills to do a better job in that endeavor. Professional students like me do that sometimes—they go to school as a hobby, for the love of learning!

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**APPENDIX A**  
**CONTENT VALIDATION**  
**LETTER AND INSTRUMENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

October 20, 2014

Dear Committee Member:

Co-teaching is a form of instructional delivery that requires general and special educators to share in the instructional process in inclusive classrooms. The process of bringing professionals together to communicate and coordinate instructional methods in co-teaching arrangements can be both challenging to implement and challenging to examine through research. As you know, we are conducting research regarding the variables that influence co-teaching partnerships. The perceptions of how co-teachers view the quality of their partnerships is of critical importance in this study.

We would appreciate your assistance in conducting a content validation of an interview protocol. Please download the content validation instrument that is attached to this email. After you have completed the instrument, please scan it and return it to Rebecca Yearout via email at [ryearout@vt.edu](mailto:ryearout@vt.edu). The information you provide will be helpful in making revisions that may be needed to the interview protocol.

Preceding the content validation instrument is an informed consent document. Please read the informed consent document and note that by completing the instrument, you are giving your informed consent to participate in this part of the study.

We are happy to answer any questions that you have, and your assistance is sincerely appreciated. Thank you.

Gratefully,

Rebecca L. Yearout  
Consulting Teacher

Content Validation Instrument for the Interview Protocol for Co-teachers  
Educators Knowledgeable of Co-teaching

Introduction

The purpose of this content validation instrument is to assist the researcher with the development of questions for an interview protocol to be used in interviewing elementary co-teachers in a rural school system. The questions for the interview are designed to gather data on the variables that affect co-teaching relationships between general and special education teachers.

Instructions

Step 1. Please review the items and circle the most appropriate domain for each item. The domain and definitions are:

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Definition</b>
1. Teacher Variables	The features of individual co-teachers that are brought into a co-teaching partnership
2. Student Variables	The specific characteristics and learning needs of individual students in inclusive classrooms
3. Environmental Variables	Those factors in the classroom and school that relate to the implementation of co-teaching
4. Operational Variables	Those areas that administrators must consider when assigning teachers to co-teaching partnerships
5. Other “discovery” Variables	Other variables that affect quality of co-teaching partnerships
6. Quality of co-teaching partnerships	The effectiveness of the relationships between special education and regular classroom teachers in inclusive classrooms

Association Ratings

Step 2. Please indicate how strongly you feel the question or statement is associated with the domain you have selected by circling the number of your response in the column that is labeled “Association.” Please use the following scale:

- (1) Very Weak                      (2) Weak                              (3) Strong                              (4) Very Strong

### Clarity Rating

Step 3. In the column labeled “Clarity,” please indicate how clear you think the question statement is as it is stated. Please use the following scale:

(1) Not clear

(2) Somewhat clear

(3) Very clear

Question	Domain	Association	Clarity
1. Tell me about your work as a co-teacher in your classroom.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
2. How would you describe the quality of the relationship you have with your co-teacher?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
3. There may be times when your relationship seems to be especially good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
4. There may be times when your relationship seems to be not so good with your co-teacher. Tell me about some of those times.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
5. What do you think makes your co-teaching partnership work? (What are the personal qualities that you bring to the relationship with your co-teacher?)	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
6. Tell me how you and your co-teacher became partners.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
7. How would you describe the relationship you have with your co-teacher?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
8. Tell me about a time when you relied on your co-teaching partner for completing a task.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
9. Describe how the completion of the task met (or did not meet) your expectations	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
10. Describe the confidence you have (or would like to have) in your co-teaching partnership as it relates to co-teaching responsibilities.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

<b>Question</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Association</b>	<b>Clarity</b>
11. When specific subjects are being taught in the classroom, who takes the lead (for science, math, reading, and social studies)? Why does it work that way?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
12. What roles do you and your partner typically take in the delivery of a co-taught lesson?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
13. On what basis do the two of you decide on how lessons will be taught?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
14. What would you consider to be your best teaching skills? How often do you get to use those skills in your classroom?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
15. How have you used your expertise as a special educator (or general educator) to carry out your responsibilities in your co-teaching classroom?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
16. What do you think general education teachers need to know about special education (or what special education teachers need to know about general education)?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
17. What are your thoughts about co-taught classes?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
18. What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in co-taught classes?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
19. What do you think about all students with disabilities being served in inclusion classes?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
20. How many years have you spent in co-taught classes?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
21. Tell me about your preparation for working in a co-teaching classroom.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
22. Tell me about the students in your classroom.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
23. How have the students affected your instruction? How have the students affected how you and your co-teacher work together?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
24. How do the students that you have in your classroom affect what you do as co-teachers?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
25. What supports do you have to have for your co-teaching partnership to work?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

<b>Question</b>	<b>Domain</b>	<b>Association</b>	<b>Clarity</b>
26. Take me through a typical day with your co-teacher.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
27. How did you become co-teachers?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
28. How do you and your co-teaching partner work through conflicts when they arise?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
29. On what topics do you communicate?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
30. How would you describe the quality of the communication between you and your co-teacher?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
31. How do you account for the ways that you and your co-teacher communicate?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
32. Tell me about the staff development that you have participated in to help you with co-teaching.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
33. Tell me about your conditions within your classroom, school, or school district that affects how you work as co-teachers.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
34. Describe your classroom as a working environment for co-teaching.	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
35. How do you arrange your classroom? Why do you arrange it that way?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
36. How well does your classroom arrangement work?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
37. What conditions at the school level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
38. What conditions at the district level affect what you do in your classroom as co-teachers?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
39. What are the things that you are most concerned about in your co-teaching partnership?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3
40. If you could make changes in how you work as co-teachers, What would you do? Why?	1 2 3 4 5 6	1 2 3 4	1 2 3

**APPENDIX B**  
**INFORMED CONSENT**

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

**Title of Project:** The Experience of Co-teaching Elementary School Teachers in a Rural Public School District

**Investigator(s):** Dr. David Parks, Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech, [parks@vt.edu](mailto:parks@vt.edu), (540)231-9709

Rebecca L. Yearout, Doctoral Student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech, [ryearout@vt.edu](mailto:ryearout@vt.edu), (540) 206-5630

**I. What is the purpose of this research study?**

The purpose of this research is to study co-teaching as viewed through the daily relationships of elementary co-teaching partners in a rural public school district. The research will contribute to the understanding of the influences that affect the quality of co-teaching relationships.

**II. What will I be expected to do if I choose to be in this study?**

Should you agree, you will be asked to participate in a 60 minute (approximately) personal interview. I will interview you at a location that is convenient for you. You will be asked to bring to the interview any information on co-teaching that has been provided to you by your school system that you would like to share with me. During the interview, I will have some specific questions, but it is hoped that you will elaborate on your perspectives about your role and responsibilities as a co-teaching partner in your classroom. You will be recorded. The audio recording will be used only for memory purposes to assist me in ensuring the accuracy of the data. The audio recording will be destroyed once it transcribed. You do not have to be recorded if you choose not to be. You may also stop the recording at any time and talk without the recording.

**III. What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

The risks of your participation in this study are no greater than the risks encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological exams or tests. The breach of confidentiality is a risk and safeguards will be used to minimize this risk as described in the confidentiality section below.

**IV. Are there any benefits to participating in this study?**

There are no tangible benefits to you for your participation in this study, and no promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate. The benefits of participating in this study may be the excitement of being selected to participate in a research project in your school district. It may also bring you satisfaction to contribute to information that may enhance the effectiveness of co-teaching relationships in your school system.

**V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

The data collected during the interviews will remain confidential, as the information will not contain any identifiers. At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent.

The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study’s data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research.

*Note: in some situations, it may be necessary for an investigator to break confidentiality. If a researcher has reason to suspect that a child is abused or neglected, or that a person poses a threat of harm to others or him/herself, the researcher is required by Virginia State law to notify the appropriate authorities. If applicable to this study, the conditions under which the investigator must break confidentiality must be described.*

**VI. Compensation**

There is no monetary compensation for participation in this study. However, each participant should have the satisfaction of knowing that his or her contribution will contribute to the research that will be used as a foundation for forming better-quality co-teaching partnerships.

**VII. Subject's Consent**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_

Subject printed name



### **VIII. Freedom to Withdraw**

It is important for you to know that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any questions that you choose or respond to what is being asked of you without penalty.

Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that a subject should not continue as a subject.

Should you withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation, you will be compensated for the portion of the project completed in accordance with the Compensation section of this document.

### **IX. Questions or Concerns**

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

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Copy given to the participant.

**APPENDIX C**  
**DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION**

Title of Project \_\_\_\_\_

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

1. Document Number \_\_\_\_\_
2. Type of Document (such as email, in-service handout, letter, article) \_\_\_\_\_
3. How does the document relate to co-teaching? Check one.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Teacher Concerns  
\_\_\_\_\_ Student-Related Concerns  
\_\_\_\_\_ Operational Concerns, usually addressed by administrators  
\_\_\_\_\_ Environmental Concerns (relating to the classroom, school, and division)  
\_\_\_\_\_ Other concerns not mentioned above, which are \_\_\_\_\_
4. How helpful was the information in the document that you received?  
\_\_\_\_\_ Very Helpful  
\_\_\_\_\_ Partially Helpful  
\_\_\_\_\_ Not Very Helpful
5. What kind of information would you like to receive on co-teaching?

**APPENDIX D**  
**LETTER REQUESTING PILOT**

February 24, 2015

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech conducting research on the variables that affect co-teaching partnerships in inclusive classrooms. As you know, I am also a consulting teacher for your special education program. I am asking for your approval to conduct a pilot study with some middle school teachers in \_\_\_\_\_ County Public School and then proceeding, following a review of the pilot, with interviewing elementary general and special education teachers in co-teaching partnerships in \_\_\_\_\_ County Public Schools.

I have developed a draft of the interview protocol. Participation would be minimal: I would like to interview two middle school teachers for the pilot-one general education teacher and one special education teacher. The teachers may or may not be partners with one another. They just have to be middle school teachers in any co-teaching partnership. After the interviews, the teachers would be asked to participate in a short debriefing session to evaluate the interview process and the quality of the interview questions.

For the study, I would like to randomly pick five general education teachers and five special education teachers who are co-teachers in co-teaching partnerships. Again, the teachers may or may not be partners with one another. They just have to be elementary school teachers in any form of a co-teaching partnership. I would randomly pick five of each type and contact them. If a teacher does not agree to participate, a replacement would be selected from the lists. Replacement would continue until five of each type agreed to participate. I would make the arrangements directly with the teachers for the interviews, and the interviews would be conducted after school hours so that there would be no disruptions in classroom instruction.

A copy of the Interview protocol is attached. All responses would remain confidential, and neither the participants nor the school division would be identified in any reports. The study has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board and has been approved at the district level of \_\_\_\_\_ County Public Schools.

I would like to conduct the test interviews as soon as I receive your approval, and I would be pleased to arrange a conference to discuss my study. Please let me know if permission is granted to pilot the interview questions and proceed with the study. Thank you for your assistance with this request. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Yearout,  
Consulting Teacher

**APPENDIX E**  
**LETTER REQUESTING STUDY**

February 24, 2015

Dear Dr. \_\_\_\_\_,

I am a doctoral candidate at Virginia Tech conducting research on the variables that affect co-teaching partnerships in inclusive classrooms. As you know, I am also a consulting teacher for your special education program. I am asking for your approval to conduct a pilot study with some middle school teachers in \_\_\_\_\_ County Public School and then proceeding, following a review of the pilot, with interviewing elementary general and special education teachers in co-teaching partnerships in \_\_\_\_\_ County Public Schools.

I have developed a draft of the interview protocol. Participation would be minimal: I would like to interview two middle school teachers for the pilot-one general education teacher and one special education teacher. The teachers may or may not be partners with one another. They just have to be middle school teachers in any co-teaching partnership. After the interviews, the teachers would be asked to participate in a short debriefing session to evaluate the interview process and the quality of the interview questions.

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Sincerely,

Rebecca L. Yearout,  
Consulting Teacher