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The Power of Partnership: Understanding the Dynamic of Co-Teaching Pairs

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

December 2019

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December 2019

The Power of Partnership: Understanding the Dynamic of Co-Teaching Pairs

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To the participants of the study, thank you for being willing to openly share your stories and experience so others may learn from you. Finally, to all the co-teachers out there, may you continue to do the good work; keep learning, growing, and pushing forward.

ABSTRACT

The Power of Partnership: Understanding the Dynamic of Co-Teaching Pairs

by Amanda M. Lozolla

The co-teaching relationship is the foundational structure upon which a co-taught classroom is built. Co-teaching is often defined as a general education teacher and a special education teacher teaching a group of heterogeneous students together. Born from inclusion, co-teaching attempts to reach all learners. With this service delivery model comes challenges and a large learning curve, so a strong foundation is imperative. Literature and educational scholars have expressed that the foundation of co-teaching is the relationship between teachers. Authors in the literature have stressed the importance of the relationship however, little to no research exists studying the dynamics of the co-teaching partnership. Through a phenomenological approach, this study sought to understand the dynamics of the co-teaching partnership between a general education teacher and a special education teacher. Framed with collaborative professionalism and a thorough examination of the working partnership, this study was able to dive deep into the phenomenon of co-teaching, as was experienced by each teacher. By uncovering the authentic experiences of the co-teachers, the understanding of the co-teaching partnership increased, and educators and administrators were provided a different frame of understanding for future co-teaching implementation. By studying the co-teaching partnership and the phenomenon of the partnership, an authentic understanding was uncovered. Understanding the authentic experiences of co-teachers allows educators and administrators to better prepare and support the co-teaching practice.

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CHAPTER ONE—THE CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIP

Co-teaching is a partnership between a general education teacher and a special education teacher, in which the teachers come together to teach a group of heterogeneous students, including students with disabilities (Friend, 2008b; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Sims, 2008). According to Friend et al. (2010), co-teaching is founded on a belief that students with disabilities should be seen and treated as equal participants in their learning communities. Co-teaching, an inclusive practice, exists for goal of the inclusion of all learners (Ashton, 2014). The call for co-teaching as an inclusive practice, to address the educational needs of students with disabilities, is seen throughout the literature (Ashton, 2014; Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; L. Cook & Friend, 2010; Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2006; Walsh, 2012). Variations of co-teaching as a service delivery model and the call for a shared responsibility amongst educators can be traced back as far as the 1950s (Friend et al., 1993). Nearly 30 years have passed since Bauwens et al. (1989) laid a foundation for co-teaching and its importance. While not a new trend in education, the implementation of co-teaching as a practice is constantly evolving and changing, as educators learn what works and what does not work.

Co-teaching, though widely used, is an evolving process for educators (Beninghof, 2012). In the literature, researchers have expressed co-teaching serves as a call to include students with disabilities. There is significant potential with co-teaching to ensure all students, including those with disabilities, have access to high standards and a quality education (Friend, 2008a). The foundational premise for co-teaching, according to Friend (2014a), is to ensure that students with disabilities not only have a seat in the general education classroom but that their place in the

classroom is held to the same importance as all students, and they are provided with meaningful educational experiences.

Statement of the Problem

According to Friend et al. (2010), co-teaching research must increase both in quantity and quality; there is still significant room for more depth and breadth of research on co-teaching, and a greater understanding is needed. In addition to more research being needed on the co-teaching partnership, the research study was born from a personal desire to improve my own teaching practices and the understanding of the co-teaching partnership. The following section outlines my own experience as a special education teacher and why the power of the co-teaching partnership needs to be better understood.

Background

Fifteen years ago, I became a special education teacher. I was bright-eyed and eager, and my first classroom was at a public middle school in Southern California. I was hired as a resource specialist (RSP), but I taught a combination of RSP and special day class (SDC). Instead of a pull-out model, where students with disabilities are pulled out of the general education class, the school operated in a self-contained model. The self-contained model we had at our school meant that I had a classroom of students with disabilities, for a period of service.

Over the years, I have taught English, math, science, social skills, and study skills, for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. As student needs and staff have changed over 7 years, I have been teaching RSP courses, mainly in the areas of English and language arts. I have always had my own classroom and have taught students in that classroom. However, 5 years ago, during the spring semester, as the principal and the special education teachers, started talking about the schedules for the upcoming year, it was mentioned to our department that co-teaching classes

would be implemented the following year at our school. We were not asked; we were told the change was coming.

A few teachers were sent to a local training to learn about co-teaching and how to implement the change. I was paired with a general education teacher new to our school and new to the profession. The new teacher and I were told that the following year we would be teaching two class periods together. Over the summer and through the changes of scheduling, two periods of reading and language arts, jumped to four, and suddenly, I was spending more than half my day in someone else's classroom.

My new partner and I had 1 day of training and a few hours of planning. Many odds were stacked against us, and we were expected to merge our teaching, classroom expectations, behavior plans, and all classroom routines. Day by day, we trudged through the year. We worked hard to share our roles, for our duties to be equitable, and to really share the classroom. Our success was measured by student success and the vision the school had set forth for co-teaching. The service delivery model of co-teaching was new to our students and they struggled through the change, but surprised us both in the end with their hard work and resilience. The year had rough spots and learning curves, and had moments of frustration and challenges, but if asked, I would say overall the year was successful. My assumption was we would continue to work together the following year, but when the time came for scheduling, I was told I would be working with a different general education teacher. Again, I had no say in the partnership and pairing, but rather I was told the change would take place at the start of this school year.

During my second year of co-teaching, I was paired with a veteran teacher who had a significant number of years teaching under her belt. She was a strong educator with high expectations, a clear rigor, and a set classroom routine. Our partnership and our roles were

different from my previous experience, but expectations for success remained. It was expected we come together in one classroom and teach a group of diverse learners.

My second year of co-teaching was more of a struggle than the first. The teacher and I did not see eye to eye, and we did not share common goals and ideals on co-teaching. At the end of the year, once again, another change was made and I was paired with a new teacher. I was partnered with a new co-teacher at a new grade level. It was a priority to build a partnership, and we shared a common goal: student success. We worked to navigate what success looked like for our students and worked to align our priorities. Year four brought about several more changes, as I was given a split assignment between two schools and was asked to co-teach at both. While one of my co-teachers remained the same, I was paired with a math teacher for co-teaching. The day I walked into her classroom on the first day of school was the day we met. We made it through the year, and I would consider our time together a success because the students were the priority. With both of those teachers, no formal or informal trainings or supports occurred.

This year, I found myself at a new school and am paired again with two new teachers. Four years and six co-teachers later, my desire is to understand the intricacies of co-teaching and the co-teaching relationship. The past 4.5 years of my experiences and knowing schools are moving toward a co-teaching model have pushed me to examine current and historical literature related to co-teaching. In the literature, the importance of the co-teaching relationship is reiterated. Through my experiences over the past several years, I have seen how important the co-teaching partnership is; it is the very foundation upon which a co-taught classroom is built.

My personal experience and the literature (e.g., Friend, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Sims, 2008) support the importance of a strong relationship between co-teachers, and some have deemed the relationship the most important component (Solis, Vaughn,

Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). Danforth (2014) described the essence of co-teaching being the working relationship between the two teachers. It can be said with confidence that a positive working relationship between co-teachers is imperative (Beninhof, 2012; Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2007, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Leader-Janssen, Swain, Delkamiller, & Ritzman, 2012; Sims, 2008). In co-teaching, teachers are working together and the working relationship between the two teachers inevitably becomes the foundation (Friend, 2014a). Building that relationship and working together is ultimately what will lead to an effective learning environment for students (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Solis et al., 2012), but how can educators build this working relationship and what sustains the relationship?

While some recommendations regarding the partnership have been made in the literature (Simmons & Magiera, 2007), the literature rarely goes beyond the surface levels of the topic to an authentic place of understanding. Friend et al. (2010) stated:

Despite considerable enthusiasm expressed by those who write about co-teaching and those who implement it, co-teaching illustrates the complexity of conceptualizing and studying collaboration in special education. Most inquiry on co-teaching has emphasized co-teachers' roles and relationships or program logistics rather than demonstrating its impact on student achievement and other key outcomes, and far more literature exists describing co-teaching and offering advice about it than carefully studying it. (p. 9)

Authors have presented much literature on co-teaching that is detailed and prescriptive, but there is a call for more research and a greater understanding for the partnership. Friend et al. (2010) urged educators, practitioners, and researchers to go deeper and to carefully study co-teaching. Through the current study, I sought to gain an authentic understanding of the co-teaching partnership. Through a phenomenological methodology, I sought to understand the

phenomenon of the relationships of co-teachers, as experienced through several co-teaching pairs. This study expanded current understanding, providing teachers' experiences and perceptions, to truly understand relationship dynamics and the importance in a co-teaching partnership.

Purpose of the Study

Through this study, I explored co-teaching and working relationships between co-teachers. I sought to understand the dynamics of a co-teaching partnership through a phenomenological study. The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of experiences of co-teaching as experienced by teaching pairs at the middle-school level. As the researcher, I sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of general education and special education teachers currently sharing a co-teaching partnership by delving deeper into working relationships between general education teachers and special education teachers to understand the dynamic and partnership between the two.

Research Questions and Design

Using a phenomenological approach, I attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are perceptions and experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers who share co-teaching partnerships?
2. What are working relationships and dynamics between co-teachers?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching partnerships?

In using a qualitative approach, new understandings can be reached and new questions can be answered (Poplin, 2011). In this research study, new understandings were uncovered through a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology provides an understanding of a

phenomenon as it is experienced by an individual (Merriam, 2002), allowing researchers a unique opportunity to understand the essence of one's lived experience (Merriam, 2002; Schmidt, 2005). Researchers have called for an increase in research (Connor, Gallagher, & Ferri, 2011; McPhail, 1995; Poplin, 2011), encouraging educators and scholars to go beyond what is currently used. Educators, practitioners, and scholars have been urged to use qualitative research to delve deeper, to gain a rich understanding, and to answer questions that are still left unanswered (Connor et al., 2011; McPhail, 1995; Poplin, 2011).

Summary

Through this research, I sought an authentic understanding of the phenomenon of the co-teaching partnership and the partnership dynamic. The following chapter provides a detailed summary inclusion and co-teaching, and outlines the complexities of co-teaching. Current and historical literature will provide a framework for the importance of this study and the need for a greater understanding of the co-teaching relationship.

CHAPTER TWO—LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers are expected to meet the needs of all learners and to provide students with a quality education (Friend & Pope, 2005). While schools continue to become more diverse and full of varying learning needs and styles, inclusion continues to be a prevalent issue (Friend & Pope, 2005). Scholars have urged educators to move toward an educational system that is inclusive for all students (Danforth & Jones, 2015; Ferguson, 1995; Sailor, 2015).

Including students with disabilities has been a long-standing point of discussion among scholars, as the inclusion of students with disabilities in educational settings continues to be an evolving practice (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). In 1975, PL 94-142, the Education of Children with Disabilities Act was passed (Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015; McLeskey et al., 2012; Osgood, 2005), enacting changes to how students with disabilities would be educated. In 1990, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 2004) was authorized (Osgood 2005), mandating schools provide education to students with disabilities. In the 1990s, education saw a shift in conversation and a push toward inclusion (Danforth & Jones, 2015; Osgood, 2005). Policies were put in place to support the education of students with disabilities; an active push from the historical segregation to a more inclusive education system was needed (Osgood, 2005).

Educating students with disabilities continues to be a point of discussion among educators and scholars, and the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings continues to be an often discussed ideal and practice (Artiles & Kozleski, 2007; Kurth et al., 2014; McLeskey et al., 2012). Conversations have continued on what practices best support students with disabilities.

As described in the following section of inclusive educational practices, educators are attempting to break structural barriers and to provide students with disabilities access to inclusive education. In desiring an inclusive education system should that works against exclusion and marginalization (Broderick, Mehta-Parekh, & Reid, 2005) toward a system that embraces the ideal that “*every child should have the opportunity to learn*” (Ferguson, 1995, p. 285, author’s emphasis), educators seek to move forward with inclusion and practices that best support every learner. This chapter includes a brief outline of the history of inclusion in education, followed by a description of co-teaching as an inclusive practice.

Defining Inclusion

Though the term *inclusion* is heard frequently in education, it has remained difficult to define due to its complexities (Chandler & Loncola, 2008; Florian, 1998; Sautner, 2008; Slee, 2011; P. Smith, 2010). Inclusion not only applies to education but society and is a prevalent topic of interest (Florian, 1998; P. Smith, 2010). For the purpose of this paper, inclusion will be defined in relation to education. Rogers (1993) defined inclusion as “a commitment to educate each child to the maximum extent appropriate” (p. 2). Another common definition seen in education literature is inclusion as the practice of having students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, & Cosier, 2011; Chandler & Loncola, 2008; Sautner, 2008). Inclusion can often be defined as students with disabilities being given a place in schools and classrooms (Ferguson, 1995). Inclusion and participation of students with disabilities should be automatic (Ferguson, 1995).

Some scholars have suggested inclusion goes beyond a place in the classroom to an issue of social justice and the equality for all students with disabilities (McMaster, 2012; Opertti, Brady, & Duncombe, 2009; Wah, 2010). Inclusion of students can be defined not only by

students' placement in the classroom but acceptance in the classroom (McMaster, 2012; Opettti et al., 2009; Wah, 2010). The foundation of inclusive education follows this same thread of thought. Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) believed inclusive education is when all barriers for students are removed. All students with their varying abilities should be provided authentic acceptance, support, and a genuine place in education (Danforth & Jones, 2015). Ferguson (1995) provided a comprehensive definition of inclusion aligned with the goal of inclusive education:

Inclusion is a process of meshing general and special education reform initiatives and strategies in order to achieve a unified system of public education that incorporates all children and youth as active, fully participating members of the school community; that views diversity as the norm; and that ensures a high quality of education for each student by providing meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports for each student. (p. 286)

While the definition is imperative to the world of inclusive education, the underlying premise for inclusion is that all students are able to be participating members of their school communities. This paper follows the position that all students should be given access and that access needs to be supported through inclusive practices.

Inclusive Practices

Inclusive practices in schools exist to ensure students with disabilities are included in school settings (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). Inclusive education and inclusive practices provide “meaningful access and participation in education” for all students, according to Waitoller and Kozleski (2013, p. 35). Rogers (1993) claimed effective inclusion is nearly invisible, implying

that it is not something seen but rather something done. Inclusive practices need to be done to support genuine inclusion. This paper will further examine co-teaching as an inclusive practice.

What Is Co-Teaching?

Co-teaching is defined as a partnership between a general education teacher and a special education teacher (education specialist) in which they come together to teach a group of heterogeneous students, including students with disabilities (Friend, 2008b; Friend et al., 2010; Friend et al., 1993; Sims, 2008). Through co-teaching, educators attempt to create environments where all students are seen as valued members of the learning community (Friend et al., 2010; Friend et al., 1993). Friend and Cook (2007) noted co-teaching can involve any two educational professionals working together to provide a quality education to a diverse group of students. Conderman, Bresnahan, Teacher, and Pederson (2009) emphasized four points regarding the definition of co-teaching: (a) co-teaching generally involves a general education teacher and a special education teacher, but it can stretch beyond the pair to include other professionals; (b) in co-teaching, both teachers are invested in delivering a quality education to all students; (c) a foundational premise of co-teaching is meeting the needs of unique learners in diverse classrooms; and (d) co-teaching operates under the directive that two teachers share space and work together.

Schools should strive for co-teaching classes where all students, including students with disabilities, receive a quality education, have access to grade level and content curriculum, and receive necessary supports (Conderman & Hedin, 2012). Broderick et al. (2005) contended that in a general education setting that is set up for success for all learners, “the goals and procedures are clearly articulated; the instruction is relevant, accessible, and responsive; and the tasks are interesting and challenging, but reachable with effort. Disabled students benefit from good

instruction, just as all students do” (p. 200). Co-teaching classes ensure all students are receiving a meaningful education.

General education teachers can lack knowledge and training for working with students with disabilities (B. G. Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; B. G. Cook, Tankersley, Cook, & Landrum, 2000); therefore, co-teaching is an ideal practice, as the general education teacher and special education teacher are paired. Generally, under the framework of co-teaching, a general education teacher is the content specialist, whereas the education specialist is well versed in individualizing instruction to various learners (Murawski, 2002). General education teachers are familiar with expected standards and rigor, while special education teachers bring an understanding of differentiation and specially designed instruction (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b). Each educator comes with a unique skillset, which ultimately serves the students.

Murawski (2002) provided a detailed synopsis of what co-teaching is and what it is not. In Table 1, key points from that synopsis are provided.

Models of Co-Teaching

In the practice of co-teaching, there are six models commonly used (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a; see Table 2). No one model is recommended above the rest; rather, Friend (2014a) recommended educators consider the models a starting point for co-teachers to work together to develop a successful co-teaching experience. The following six descriptions are a starting point and a framework for co-teaching (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008).

One Teach, One Observe

In *one teach, one observe*, the teachers are doing essentially that: observing and teaching (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a; Friend, 2008b; Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b; Sileo,

Table 1

What Co-Teaching Is vs What Co-Teaching Is Not...

Co-Teaching Is...	Co-Teaching Is Not...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two or more credentialed faculty working together • When both teachers plan for instruction together • When both teachers provide substantive instruction together • When both teachers assess and evaluate student progress together • When teachers maximize the benefits of two teachers, by having both teachers actively engaged with students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A teacher and an assistant, aide or paraprofessional • When the general education teacher is responsible for all lessons and the education specialist has no part in teaching or planning • When the specialist walks around the room all period as the general education teacher teaches the content • When the general education teacher grades “his” kids and the specialist grades “her” kids • When teachers take turns being “in charge” of the class so the other teacher can tend to grading, paperwork, IEP’s, etc.

Note. Adapted from “Demystifying Co-Teaching” by W.W. Murawski, 2002, *CARS+ Newsletter*, 22(3).

2011). Having two teachers in the classroom at the same time provides an extension as to what the teachers are able to accomplish. While one teacher is teaching the lesson, the other teacher will collect observational data, including behavioral, work completion, checking for understanding, etc. (Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a). Data can be taken on one student, a small group of students, or the entire class. Typically it is the general education teacher teaching and the special education teacher collecting data; however, the roles could easily be reversed, so both teachers could take turns teaching and collecting data (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011).

In education and schools, using data to make decisions is crucial. This model allows educators to gather the information they need to improve student learning (Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a; Sileo, 2011). By observing and using data, teachers are better able to differentiate and

Table 2

Models of Co-Teaching

Model	Description	Recommended Use
One Teach, One Observe	One teacher is responsible for the whole group instruction, while the other teacher collects data on academic, behavioral, and social skills.	Frequently, for brief periods of time.
Station Teaching	Students are divided into two or three equal groups and assigned tasks. Teachers are able to move through the different groups, allowing for a smaller student to teacher ratio.	Frequently
Parallel Teaching	Teachers divide the class in half, each teacher works with a group and the teachers simultaneously teach the same content. This model allows for differentiation and a smaller student to teacher ratio.	Frequently
Alternative Teaching or Grouping	One teacher takes a small group of students to re-teach lessons or reinforce the learning. This model allows for support of struggling learners.	Occasionally
Teaming, or Partnering	Both teachers deliver instruction simultaneously, and both teachers present content.	Occasionally
One Teach, One Assist	One teacher provides all the instruction, while the other teacher serves as an assistant to the students and the learning.	Seldom

Note. (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008)

plan according to student needs. It is recommended this model be used frequently, for brief periods of time (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

The co-teaching pair is able to take data and make modifications in the instruction accordingly (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b). Data could be relevant to student needs: behavioral, time-on-task, and work-completion data. However, a challenge is that many teachers, especially general education teachers, report they do not have experience with collecting data (Friend, 2014a).

Possible Variation

Once comfort is established between the teachers, time could be used to observe one another (Friend, 2014b). For example, teachers could document the questions used in class to ensure rigor, or they could examine teacher movements in the classroom to see if teacher attention is equitable among students (Friend, 2014b).

Station Teaching

In *station teaching*, stations are created throughout the classroom and students rotate through each station (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008; Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). This model has a significant amount of flexibility on how is implemented, depending on grade level and content. In some cases, students will be split into two groups, and one teacher will do an activity with one group, while the other teacher does another activity with the second group (Friend, 2008; Friend, 2014a). Eventually the groups switch, allowing students to work with both teachers. A third group may be added, and those students work independently while teachers work with the other two groups. The rotation can happen on the same day or different days. This model allows teachers to work with smaller groups of students and provides opportunities for variations (Friend, 2008a, 2008b).

Station teaching allows teachers to tailor instruction to meet student needs due the various groupings (Friend, 2014a). Typically, groups would be heterogeneous, providing diversity among the learners; however, sometimes grouping by skill is appropriate, as it lends for opportunities to work on specific skills with students that are struggling with learning or mastery. It is recommended this model be used frequently (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

In grouping, teachers are able to reach instructional goals and keep things interactive (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b). In addition, teachers are able to separate certain students from others to increase time on task. Some of the concerns about station teaching pertain to logistics, such as noise level and spacing to have the groupings spread around the room (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b).

Possible Variation

Elimination of the third group is an option. Teachers would then give their attention to their groups (Friend, 2014b).

Parallel Teaching

In *parallel teaching*, students benefit from an increased student-to-teacher ratio. The class is split in half, and one teacher goes with each group, delivering either the same content or addressing specific instructional objectives (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). While teachers need to be mindful to how they split the students, ensuring that each group has diverse learners, this model provides for opportunities to accommodate instruction and delivery as needed, and teachers can vary the learning experiences (Friend, 2014a, 2014b).

This model is different from station teaching, in that the groups do not switch at the end of the lesson (Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a; Sims, 2008). What takes place in this model is a high level of differentiation, or adaptation of the content and material. Teachers are able to accommodate the instruction and delivery to meet students' academic needs. It is recommended this model be used frequently (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

Similar to station teaching, parallel teaching allows for teachers to maximize student participation and interaction (Friend, 2014a, 2014b). A significant challenge for parallel teaching is ensuring both teachers teach to the same academic rigor and students are getting equal access to the content (Friend, 2014a, 2014b).

Possible Variation

Teachers are able to vary levels of complexity in the groupings to ensure skill deficits are addressed (Friend, 2014b).

Alternative Teaching or Grouping

In *alternative teaching or grouping*, teachers provide additional instruction to a small group of students who need it (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). In the case of students falling behind or struggling with content, alternative teaching and grouping gives students specialized attention. Teachers need to be mindful of grouping and should not pull out only special education students but rather any student who may be struggling (Friend, 2014a; Sims, 2008).

Teachers use this model for both remediation and reteaching (Friend, 2014b). Additional practice can be provided to enrich the learning. In addition, this model can also be used to introduce units and key vocabulary, ideas, and preteaching concepts and ideas. It is recommended this model be used occasionally (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

Alternative teaching allows for intense, small group instruction for students who are struggling and need individualized instruction (Friend, 2014a, 2014b). The challenge with this model is the potential that the small groups become equivalent to a pull-out program, where

students with learning struggles are being pulled away from the whole group (Friend, 2014a, 2014b).

Possible Variation

Small groups can be used to support behavioral or social needs (Friend, 2014b).

Teaming or Partnering

Teaming or partnering has been referred to as “one brain in two bodies” (Friend, 2014a).

This model requires teachers have a strong working relationship and that they are comfortable with each other (Friend, 2014a). Interaction needs to be fluid and comfortable.

This model allows for both teachers to share classroom instruction. Teachers concurrently deliver content, interact with another, play off of each other, and provide instant commentary on the other’s instruction (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). This model is often viewed as a “tag team,” where the teachers are constantly working together. It is recommended this model be used occasionally (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

Teaming brings energy to the classroom (Friend, 2014a, 2014b). Though the energy and engagement can increase with having two teachers leading the lesson, the approach of grouping for instructional purposes is lost (Friend, 2014a, 2014b). In addition, this model takes time to develop, as the teachers build their relationship (Friend, 2014b).

Possible Variation

Teachers have options to incorporate creativity in the partnering to increase student engagement, such as the teachers wearing costumes to teach about different characters (Friend, 2014b).

One Teach, One Assist

The *one teach, one assist* model is where one teacher, usually the general education teacher, delivers content while the other teacher provides support to students throughout the classroom (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a, 2014b; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). This partnership places the sole responsibility on one teacher, as the other teacher serves more as a helper or assistant. While the one teach, one assist model is not the preferred model (Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a), it is often the fallback method when teachers begin their partnerships, as they navigate the dynamics of co-teaching (Friend, 2014b). It is recommended this model be used seldomly (Friend, 2014b).

Benefits and Challenges

Classroom support is a benefit with this model (Friend, 2014b). The supporting teacher is able to maneuver around the classroom, help students discreetly, and ensure students are staying on task (Friend, 2014b). A challenge with this model is the disparity between the two teachers, as the general education teacher takes the lead, and the special education teacher is seen as a helper rather than an equal educator (Friend, 2014b).

Possible Variation

As this model is recommended for seldom use, there are no suggested variations (Friend, 2014b). However, if it is to be used on occasion, it is recommended teachers switch roles (Friend, 2014b).

In summary, the six models of co-teaching provide an imperative framework for the implementation of co-teaching (Friend, 2014a). The six models provide structure and guidance on how to co-teach, but the literature must move beyond a prescriptive nature to a place where co-teaching is being researched in new and dynamic ways. Educators and scholars must examine

the authentic experience of co-teaching, as it is presently being implemented in the classroom. The following section will provide brief accounts of the experience of co-teaching.

The Experience of Co-Teaching

It is imperative to understand the experiences of those that co-teach (Friend, 2008a). The conversation must go beyond the foundation of co-teaching and the prescriptions of its implementation to a place of understanding and experience (Friend, 2008a). In seeking to understand the experience the following articles provide unique experiences of educators who have either undergone the experience of co-teaching or recanted the experiences of those who have.

Their Classroom

Murdock, Finneran, and Theve (2016) outlined the experiences of two teachers who embarked on the journey of co-teaching. David and Kristin were two fourth-grade teachers who created a co-teaching classroom at their school. According to Murdock et al. (2016), the underlying goal was to create and foster positive experiences for all students, including students with disabilities. It was important for the teachers to embrace attitudes where everyone belongs and to “create a community that makes every student feel as though he or she belongs, that celebrates learning, and that challenges each student” (Murdock et al., 2016, p. 44). The endeavor was a joint effort, and all students were *their* students, and it became *their* class, not just his and hers (Murdock et al., 2016). What they ended up creating was an environment for all learners to be successful.

Feedback from parents and students was positive, and the teachers saw a positive learning community unfold in front of them. Students seemed to be comfortable and were open to flexible grouping (Murdock et al., 2016). There was an emphasis on community and individualized

learning, and all students had access to the learning (Murdock et al., 2016). In one of the authors' reflections, they noted one day, a student was in tears prior to a test. Upon asking her what was wrong, she expressed her excitement with being able take the test with everyone else, as she had never been allowed to do that before (Murdock et al., 2016).

An Array of Benefits

Keefe and Moore (2004) presented findings from high school co-teachers and found successes and benefits to co-teaching. Teachers reported seeing benefits for students with disabilities. Having students in a general education class seemed to reduce stigma typical of being in a special education class (Keefe & Moore, 2004). In addition, academic successes were seen (Keefe & Moore, 2004). The teachers reported all students benefited from individualized support provided by having two teachers in the classroom (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Though students benefited from the experience, there were mixed feelings from the teachers. One general education teacher reported how wonderful the experience was and that it was "very pleasant, happy and great..." (Keefe & Moore, 2004, p. 85), whereas a special education teacher reported, "Don't do it, unless you're absolutely sure what you're getting into" (Keefe & Moore, 2004, p. 85), conveying less enthusiasm toward co-teaching. Teacher preparedness. Both teachers need to be well versed: the special education teacher with content, and the general education teacher in working with students with disabilities (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Personal Reflection

A more reflective summation was provided by Sims (2008) with a presentation of a first-hand experience of co-teaching as a first year, special education teacher. Two accounts are summarized, as she was paired with two different teachers. The success of the co-teaching

directly correlated to the relationship that was formed between co-teachers (Sims, 2008). One relationship was positive and the teachers quickly fell into a routine of team-teaching and sharing the classroom. Sims (2008) expressed the teacher with whom they were paired was open to the process and eager to learn. The other relationship was more challenging, as the general education teacher was not prepared nor willing to co-teach, and Sims (2008) classified that experience as a failure. According to Sims (2008), for co-teaching to be a success, the teachers involved must not only be willing but prepared participants, equipped with the skills necessary co-teaching.

Partners Reflect

Lindeman and Magiera (2014) provided personal accounts of their experiences co-teaching. Their experiences were that successful co-teaching begins with an attitude of positivity toward co-teaching and the partnership. From the beginning, they went forth with high expectations for the students being included in general education. Three factors were crucial to the success of co-teaching: communication, professional respect, and high expectations (Lindeman & Magiera, 2014).

In this account, the co-teacher experience is a unique one because they were working with one particular student who was included in the general education class. The professionals collaborated and worked together to ensure this student's success in the general education environment. Co-teaching was spoken of highly in the article, and their experience was framed as a success (Lindeman & Magiera, 2014). The professionals noted how critical the working relationship was, and they were appreciative of the experiences each individual brought to the table (Lindeman & Magiera, 2014).

The Big Picture

Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) investigated of 32 co-teaching experiences. Scruggs et al. (2007) sought to summarize the findings from available qualitative research and to further examine the experiences of co-teaching. Despite the variety in grade levels, content, demographics, and students, Scruggs et al. (2007) drew four conclusions. First, among teachers, students, and administrators, co-teaching was viewed in a positive light and was seen as beneficial. Second, factors were identified as being imperative for success, planning time, compatibility, training, and thoughtful placement of students. Third, one teach, one assist was the model most commonly used. Generally, the special education teacher took a more subordinate role to the general education teacher, which led to a disparity in the co-teaching partnership (Scruggs et al., 2007). The fourth and final conclusion, which aligns closely to the third conclusion, is special education teachers took a subordinate role to the general education teacher (Scruggs et al., 2007). The special education teacher stepped into the role of being an assistant to students with disabilities and general education students, while general education teachers were responsible for whole group instruction, using little to no differentiation, which goes against the foundations of co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007).

An Overview

Table 3 provides a summation of the intersectionality of the studies and the emerging themes. Overall, though varying experiences were presented, co-teaching was viewed in a positive light. Inevitably though, co-teaching comes with its advantages and its challenges.

Advantages

Murdock et al. (2016) contended there are several distinct advantages to co-teaching. A higher level of differentiation is possible than if there were only one teacher. In addition,

Table 3

Emerging Themes

EmergEd Theme	Explanation	Study/Authors
Attitude of belonging	Believing students with disabilities have a place in the general education classroom allowed for an acceptance both by educators and by students. This sense of belonging is what drove the co-teaching experience.	Keefe & Moore, 2004; Lindeman & Magiera, 2014; Murdock, Finneran, & Theve, 2016; Sims, 2008
Good intentions, mixed results	While the initial goal was positive and proactive in nature, results often vary. Circumstances, support, training, and teacher willingness are all factors that directly impact the success of the co-teaching experience.	Keefe & Moore, 2004; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Sims, 2008
Supports needed	Each study emphasized the need for structural supports for co-teaching to be successful. Supports ranged from teacher training and preparation, to the support of administration.	Keefe & Moore, 2004; Lindeman & Magiera, 2014; Murdock et al., 2016; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sims, 2008

collaborating with another teacher allows co-planning and problem solving. Little instruction time is lost because there are two teachers in the classroom and a certain level of rigor can be maintained. With co-teaching, the partnership increases the student-teacher ratio and there is instantly more support provided (Friend, 2007). With this ratio comes the expertise that each teacher brings to the classroom, as each teacher ideally brings to the table their own skill set (Friend, 2007). Scholars have also reported a reduction in stigma for students with disabilities (Friend & Pope, 2005; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Lindeman & Magiera, 2014), and students were provided the option of more time in general education. Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2008) noted attitudes students have about themselves improve, along with increased progress in academic and social skills. In an ideal situation, a sense of community is built in the classroom that all individuals can benefit from, students and teachers included (Murdock et al., 2016).

In addition, Sweigart and Landrum (2015) relayed four changes that come with implementing the practice of co-teaching. First, with two teachers, there is the opportunity for more individual or group instruction (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015). Second, there are more opportunities for teachers to respond to students, as the teacher-to-student ratio is lowered (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015). Third, teachers provide more feedback to students (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015). Finally, closer monitoring is able to occur (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015).

Challenges

Co-teaching comes with challenges and difficulties. Most difficulties, challenges, and concerns were specific to situations as opposed to the premise of co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007); however, several challenges are seen in the literature.

First and foremost, logistics have been an ongoing struggle (Friend, 2008a). Planning time and teacher training are imperative and are quite often a concern (Sims, 2008). If co-teaching is to be done well, teachers must be adequately prepared (Villa et al., 2008). In addition, cohesiveness between teachers must be in place (Beninghof, 2012). Beninghof (2012) made a claim that if any separation exists in the partnership or if a disparity exists between the teachers, the co-teaching classroom will not be successful. Co-teachers must come together and work together for a common goal. In addition, it is imperative the working relationship demonstrate equity (Beninghof, 2012).

The Co-Teaching Partnership

Throughout the literature, the partnership is a foundational component of co-teaching (Friend, 2008a, 2014a; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Solis et al., 2012). Literature has been prescriptive in nature, giving foundational ideas on what the partnership should look like and tricks of the trade (Friend, 2008a, 2014a; Friend et al., 2010; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sims,

2008; Solis et al., 2012). The following section explains the importance of a co-teaching partnership followed by a call for a deeper understanding.

Building a Partnership

Kohler-Evans (2006) provided the following ideas, which will serve to build the relationships between co-teachers. First, it is recommended schools ask for volunteers (Kohler-Evans, 2006). If teachers are willing to co-teach, versus being forced to co-teach, a more positive foundation is already in place. Second, schools must recognize the importance of co-teaching as an inclusive practice (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Recognizing the value provides a positive foundation and a solid place for co-teachers to work together. Next, educators are encouraged to plan together, and they are encouraged to have fun in the process (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Teachers need to be able to plan together to build the relationship. Common planning time is imperative to build a solid framework. Similarly, having fun and enjoying the adventure together can be beneficial. In addition, it is essential to recognize the importance of both educators (Kohler-Evans, 2006). There are two teachers in the classroom, and though they may serve different roles, there needs to be a sense of equality in their partnership. Co-teachers are encouraged to be honest in their communication (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Working together is bolstered by communication. For example, it is recommended to talk through the little things, from sharpened pencils to classroom procedures to behavior expectations (Sims, 2008). Communication is an imperative factor in relationship building between co-teachers. In communications, educators should try to be more cognizant of what is working, both with the students and in the partnership (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Both educators bring to the table a unique skillset, and it is those varying skillsets that will lend to different perspectives. Differing

perspectives allow for varying vantage points to not only see things but also talk them through together (Kohler-Evans, 2006).

Sustaining a Partnership

Throughout the literature, the importance of a working relationship is emphasized (Friend, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sims, 2008). Leader-Janssen et al. (2012) stressed it is not just about working together but how professionals work together. Scholars have compared the working relationship of co-teachers to a marriage, due to the critical importance of compatibility and communication between partners (Scruggs et al., 2007; Sileo, 2011). Sileo (2011) made the comparison between a marriage and co-teaching, saying they have a number of commonalities. It is imperative to foster the relationship and continue to build communication. Work is required to build and strengthen the relationship, and similar to marriage, the key to success in co-teaching is compromise and collaboration (Sileo, 2011).

The relationship of the co-teachers serves as a foundational structure for the success of co-teaching. Kohler-Evans (2006) claimed the partnership of co-teaching allows for a unique experience for educators and students. In the partnership, there is another educator with whom to bounce ideas and plan, and each partner brings something unique to the table (Kohler-Evans, 2006). It is important to continue to strengthen the relationship over time for continued success for the students and the teachers (Sileo, 2011).

A significant amount of educational literature stresses the importance of the co-teaching relationship and the foundational structure that must be in place (Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). The literature is prescriptive in

nature, providing details about what to teach and what partners need to do to have a good relationship, (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Ploessl et al., 2010) but it must go beyond that to implementation and a greater understanding.

The True Foundation

With avenues of educational literature pointing toward the importance of co-teaching and the foundational support of the working relationship (Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Ploessl et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008), it is important educators, practitioners, and scholars understand the co-teaching partnership. Caron and McLaughlin (2002) recognized the underlying foundation of co-teaching being an attitude of collaboration. Naraian (2010) agreed, indicating a collaborative environment leads to increased access for students with disabilities, which is the goal in inclusive education.

Through a collaborative environment, educators are able to work together with the common goal of supporting all learners (Naraian, 2010). Developing this collaborative relationship is not an easy task, and it requires work from both the general education teacher and the special education teacher (Caron & McLaughlin, 2002; Naraian, 2010; Pratt, 2014; Rytivaara, 2012; Rytivaara & Kershner, 2012; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). To come together as a collaborative entity, Pratt (2014) contended educators must learn to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and use them to strengthen the working relationship. Moving forward as scholars, practitioners, and educators, if a co-teaching classroom is desired, it is imperative an authentic dynamic of collaboration be obtained (Pratt, 2014). Educators must move beyond the prescriptions for co-teaching, and truly embrace a collaborative working relationship.

Conclusion

Given the importance of the co-teaching partnership, research on the partnership should be adequately represented in the literature, but it is not. Research on co-teaching and the partnership must increase (Friend et al., 2010). The purpose of this study was to go deeper and gain insight into the co-teaching partnership. Through a phenomenological approach, I delved into the working relationship between co-teachers. The following chapter provides an overview of the phenomenological approach, research methods, and theoretical framework used to gain an in-depth understanding of co-teaching.

CHAPTER THREE—RESEARCH METHODS

Phenomenology tells a story (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Derived from Greek, phenomenology, meaning *to bring into the light*, allows for a deeper glimpse into the world of what is researched (Pringle, Hendry, & McLafferty, 2011). It allows researchers to go beyond what they already know to a place where life experiences are authentically examined (Pringle et al., 2011). This study went beyond the existing literature into the experiences of co-teachers and the dynamics of their partnerships and included an examination of the authentic experiences of the co-teaching relationship between three co-teaching pairs and provided a detailed summation of the co-teaching partnership framed around the tenets of collaborative professionalism.

Theoretical Frameworks

This chapter provides an in-depth look at phenomenology and collaborative professionalism. This chapter has an outline of phenomenology as a research practice, and accounts for its place in educational research, specifically in relation to inclusive education. *Collaborative professionalism* is explained and used as a framework for analysis. In addition, the research methods of the study are outlined in this chapter.

Phenomenology as a Qualitative Research Practice

Phenomenology begins with wonder, and through the exploration of a phenomenon, as it is experienced, researchers are able to unearth the meaning of one's experience (Van Manen, 2014). The phenomenon and the factors central to its core experience is sought to be understood from within the individual (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009; Van Manen, 2014).

Qualitative inquiry. Phenomenology is encompassed in the overarching social inquiry of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Schwandt, 2015). Widely speaking, the intention of qualitative research is to understand meaning (Bailey, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Schwandt, 2015).

Merriam (2002) presented a more specific description of qualitative research, in that the “the key to understanding qualitative research lies in the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). The world is not a fixed entity, and how it is interpreted is a foundational tenet of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002).

Qualitative research generally falls into an interpretive approach or a critical approach (Merriam, 2002). An *interpretive* approach is used to uncover how individuals experience and interact with the world around them (Merriam, 2002). For example, if an individual is interested in studying the inclusion of students with disabilities, the researcher could focus on understanding the experience from the perspective of the child, the teacher, the administration, or all three. A *critical* approach allows the researcher to examine how individuals construct reality from larger contextual factors (Merriam, 2002). In the example of inclusion, the researcher would focus on the larger structural factors, such as the institution, examining the roles of power, privilege, and oppression.

Key characteristics of qualitative research. In qualitative research, a researcher approaches their investigation from a number of philosophical or theoretical approaches (Merriam, 2002). There is flexibility in the research design; however, there are several key characteristics that cut across the various interpretive research designs (Merriam, 2002).

Understand the meaning. In interpretive research, researchers strive to understand the meaning people construct about their experiences and the world around them (Merriam, 2002; Paul, Kleinhammer-Tramill, & Fowler, 2009; Schwandt, 2015). In qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand situations in their uniqueness and what those experiences mean for the participants involved (Merriam, 2002). The researcher strives for a “depth of understanding” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5).

Researcher is the primary instrument. The second characteristic of qualitative research is that the researcher conducts all data collection and analysis; they are the primary instrument (Merriam, 2002). With the researcher as the primary instrument, the researcher is able to immediately respond and adapt as needed; they can immediately summarize and clarify any information necessary (Merriam, 2002).

Inductive. In qualitative research, the process is inductive, and researchers gather data to build theories, concepts, and hypotheses (Merriam, 2002). Through observations and information from the field, researchers build theory, and findings are inductively derived and often presented in the form of themes, concepts, categories, and theory (Merriam, 2002).

Richly descriptive. The final characteristic of qualitative research is that the end product of the research is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Instead of numbers, descriptive words and detailed pictures are used to relay what the researcher has learned (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research is descriptive in nature, and the findings and end product depict the descriptive nature (Merriam, 2002).

Phenomenological ideologies are seen throughout qualitative research methods (Merriam, 2002). However, phenomenology is set apart from other types of inquiry because of its unique techniques (Merriam, 2002). In phenomenology, the researcher examines experiences from the point of view of the subject (Schwandt, 2015), and it focuses on the essence or structure of an experience (Merriam, 2002). Researchers use phenomenology to develop meaning from direct experience and uncovers what an experience means to an individual (Merriam, 2002).

History of phenomenology. Phenomenology is rooted in the practice of philosophy (Dall’Alba, 2009a; Husserl, 1931/2002; Moran, 2000; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009; Van Manen, 2014), and its origins date back over a century, to the iconic works of various

philosophers, including Husserl and Schutz (Dall’Alba, 2009a; Husserl, 1931/2002; Moustakas, 1994; & Van Manen, 2014). In a movement led by Husserl, phenomenology was presented as a new vantage point of philosophy, encouraging scholars to work toward a better understanding of the lived experience (Husserl, 1931/2002; Moran, 2000). Husserl (as described by Moran, 2000) sought to “reinvigorate philosophy by returning it to the life of the living human subject” (p. 5), which became a foundational principle of phenomenology.

Through time, phenomenology moved beyond the field of philosophy and was seen in other fields, such as anthropology, education, feminist studies, linguistics, politics, psychology, and sociology (Dall’Alba, 2009a; Moran, 2000). It challenged assumptions and attempted to provide a method for understanding (Dall’Alba, 2009a; Moran, 2000, Moustakas, 1994). In phenomenology, researchers seek to bring new insights and understanding to one’s conscious experience in the world (Dall’Alba, 2009a; Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Definition of phenomenology. Broadly defined, *phenomenology* is a practice researchers use to greater understand a phenomenon experienced by an individual or individuals (Moran, 2000). The researchers seek to find the truth in one’s lived experience and how that experience manifests itself in one’s consciousness (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009) defined phenomenology as a philosophical, epistemological, and methodological perspective that is used to explore and interpret the essence of a phenomenon as perceived by the experiencer. Drawing on one’s experiences, phenomenology can be used to explain things as they are experienced by an individual (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

While there is a freedom in phenomenology to research a range of topics, phenomenology centers on the lived experience of individuals (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith &

Fowler, 2009). M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009) contended there are four fundamental principles of phenomenological inquiry that summarize its foundation. The four principles are (a) nature of conscious experience, (b) intentionality of directed action, (3) person in context, and (d) situated human experience.

Conscious experience. One of the most crucial elements of phenomenology is the conscious experience (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Van Manen (1990) defined *consciousness* as an awareness of the world. One's conscious experience is defined as one's interactions with the world around them (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Phenomenology can be used to understand these dynamic and nuanced interactions with the world.

One's conscious experience can function on multiple levels and how one experiences a phenomenon is fluid (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Researchers must understand that one's conscious experience contains a number of components and varying facets that represent the participant's experienced truth (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). For example, if a participant is sharing a narrative with the researcher on their experience, what they share is just as important as what they choose not to share, or rather, why they choose to share that *particular* narrative. A participant can have multiple levels of consciousness and it is imperative a researcher be cognizant of the complexity of one's conscious experience (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Intentionality. Intentionality aligns with consciousness in that it refers to the experience of being conscious of something (Moustakas, 1994). Intentionality, as presented by Husserl (1931/2002), is the second principle of phenomenology (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Intentionality is used to connect to the world and the recognition that the world and human experience are interrelated (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Individuals share an inseparable connection to the world, and being aware of that connection is an imperative component of phenomenology.

Intentionality is where the *noema* and *noesis* are found (Husserl, 1931/2002; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), the noema is the phenomenon, not the object: it is the appearance of the tree, not the tree itself. The noema is the perception of what is presented to the experiencer, not the thing that is presented (Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). According to Moustakas (1994), the noesis is the meaning that must be drawn out of the phenomenon. It is the act of perceiving, thinking, feeling, and remembering that is in one's consciousness. The noema is that which is experienced, and the noesis is the perception of what is experienced (Ihde, 1977; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). To truly understand an experience, the noema and noesis must come together and be unified; one cannot be found without the other, a fundamental tenant of intentionality (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Individual context. The third principle of phenomenology, according to M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009), is the importance of the individual context. Context can be defined as “a culturally and historically situated place and time” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 9). Understanding an individual's context, where one situates themselves, plays an important role in phenomenology and conducting research (Hebert & Beardsley, 2002).

Considerations of context are crucial in phenomenology to understand the conscious experience of phenomenon (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009, Van der Mescht, 2004). What a participant does not share can be as equally important as what they choose to share. In phenomenology, it is necessary to understand all potential contexts, including individual contexts and meanings created in a context (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997; M. D. Smith & Fowler,

2009; Van der Mescht, 2004). Details and nuances are more likely to be unearthed when a researcher is cognizant of all potential contexts and how they relate to their participant(s; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Human experience. The *situatedness of the human experience* is the final principle of phenomenology (Pollio et al., 1997; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Pollio et al. (1997) contended a human experience is ultimately characterized by how that situation is experienced by an individual. Understanding how an individual experiences a situation is the foundational premise of phenomenology. The information gathered through phenomenology can be used to explore the person and the meanings found in their experience (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

In summary, each of these principles, understanding the conscious experience, intentionality, context, and the human experience, allow for an understanding of the definition of phenomenology (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Phenomenology is designed to “capture life as it is lived” (Moran, 2000, p. 26). The following section moves beyond the definition of phenomenology to an understanding of phenomenology as a research practice.

Phenomenological research. Phenomenology as a research practice allows the researcher a unique point of view to explore experiences of the participants (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). It is a method of questioning rather than answering (Van Maren, 2014). Researchers use phenomenology when they seek to understand a phenomenon experienced by an individual or individuals and find the truth in one’s lived experience (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Merriam (2002) presented, “the defining characteristic of phenomenological research is its focus on describing the *essence* of a phenomenon from the perspectives of those who have experienced it” (p. 93). The focus is not only on the human but rather their interaction with the world around them (Merriam, 2002; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Sampling. Once a researcher conceptualizes a study, the attention must then move to finding participants (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). According to M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009), a researcher must make a purposeful decision about participants, seeking individuals who can share their rich experiences with the researcher. It is recommended researchers develop criteria for participation and narrow down the sample by finding participants that meet the specified criteria (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Creswell (2013) recommended researchers include between six to 10 participants in the study, but fewer could be used if the researcher favors a more in-depth experience with the participants (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Ultimately, the sample that is chosen to participate in the research study needs to be able to provide sufficient insight into their experience of the phenomena (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Phenomenological interviewing. According to Merriam (2002), phenomenological interviewing is the primary method for data collection, used to uncover the conscious experience of the participant. Inquiry must be conducted in a way that allows participants multiple opportunities to explain the nuances of their experience (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). The interview should be structured enough to obtain sufficient information on the experienced phenomenon, but it should also be flexible and open to allow for the participant to share additional, relevant information (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009) urged researchers to explore the experiences of participants to great depths to obtain accurate accounts of their experiences and avoid shallow narratives. To obtain in-depth accounts through interviews, scholars have recommended three facets to illicit sufficient information from the participant during an interview: (a) a focused life history, (b) details of the experience, and (c) reflection on meaning (Seidman, 2013; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Open-ended interviews and semi-structured interviews are also used with

success, and researchers are able to access the necessary narratives (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). No matter the structure, phenomenological interviewing is viewed as an essential component in phenomenological research. Its importance has been emphasized by scholars for obtaining rigorous accounts of individuals' experiences with phenomena (Merriam, 2002; Pollio et al., 1997; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Bracketing. In phenomenological research, it is necessary the researcher explore their own experiences in relation to the phenomenon to be cognizant of any pre-existing prejudices, assumptions, and conflicting viewpoints (Merriam, 2002; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Any assumptions or prejudices of the researcher are set aside, or *bracketed*, so that they do not influence the research process. Referred to as the process of *epoche*, bracketing allows the researcher to remove preconceived notions and biases, maintaining the integrity of the research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Pollio et al., 1997; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Analysis. In phenomenology, data can be analyzed in different ways (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Through data analysis in phenomenology, the researcher works in the words of the participants, analyzes transcripts, identifies themes, and synthesizes key units, attempting to find the richest possible description of the phenomenon under study (Speraw, 2009).

Engaging in phenomenological research, working to unearth that truth in an experience, can be a powerful and edifying process (Schmidt, 2005). Phenomenology as a research practice, under the framework of qualitative inquiry offers a unique perspective for the researcher involved (Schmidt, 2005). The following section examines phenomenology in education, and the role it plays as a research practice to unearth truths in educational experiences.

Phenomenology in education. Phenomenology is an important tenet of educational research (Bolton, 1979; Dall'Alba, 2009a; Dall'Alba, 2009b; Van der Mescht, 2004). It is a

foundational discipline, and researchers are able to provide insights into educational questions and practices (Bolton, 1979; Dall’Alba, 2009a; Van der Mescht, 2004). Phenomenological researchers in education seek to provide an understanding of the possibilities of experience (Bolton, 1979) and is an appropriate research practice in education (Van der Mescht, 2004). Van der Mescht (2004) argued phenomenological research is a powerful way to make sense of educational practices and it can lead to new insights in learning, teaching, and education.

Phenomenology in educational literature. Examples of phenomenology in educational literature vary by topic. Each study represents a unique sector in education, and the variances demonstrate how phenomenological research can be used in different contexts and through a broad range of educational issues and practices (Dall’Alba, 2009a). For example, phenomenological studies have been conducted to unearth the lived experience of various individuals, including but not limited to (a) young adults with Asperger’s and their educational experiences compared to their typical peers (McPhail, 1993), (b) older adults attending college at the age of 60 or older (Bratrud, 1999), (c) parents of students with disabilities seeking a formal religious education (Speraw, 2009), and (d) young adults with intellectual disabilities and their experience with social inclusion (Hall, 2010).

The common theme seen in each example of phenomenological research in education is that researchers seek an understanding of the experiences of their participants (Bratrud, 1999; Carrington, Papinczak, & Templeton, 2003; Hall, 2010; Speraw, 2009; Van der Mescht, 2004). Researchers attempt to gain insight into educational issues through the use of phenomenological research, demonstrating the depth and breadth of phenomenology as an educational research practice (Bratrud, 1999; Carrington et al., 2003; Dall’Alba, 2009a; Dall’Alba, 2009b; Hall, 2010;

Speraw, 2009; Van der Mescht, 2004). That in-depth understanding is needed in the framework of inclusive education.

Phenomenology and inclusive education. Phenomenology has a definitive place in educational research (Bratrud, 1999; Carrington et al., 2003; Dall’Alba, 2009a; Dall’Alba, 2009b; Hall, 2010; Speraw, 2009; Van der Mescht, 2004). While there is a wide spectrum of educational issues studied through phenomenological research methods, there is a gap in the literature on the education of individuals with disabilities, specifically in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities, studied from a phenomenological perspective (McPhail, 1995). New levels of understanding need to be reached, and new questions must be answered (Poplin, 2011).

A shift in inquiry. Historically, quantitative research and qualitative research have been seen as conflicting paradigms (Firestone, 1987; Iano, 1986; Paul et al., 2009; J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). The disagreements between the two frames of inquiry have been in relation to a foundational discussion of what constitutes reliable and valid research (Paul et al., 2009). The quantitative tradition has been viewed as a realist orientation, while the qualitative tradition has been viewed as an idealist orientation (J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Firestone (1987) contended quantitative researchers seek to explain, while qualitative researchers seek to understand, a fundamental reason for the tension between the two frames of inquiry.

Educational research has primarily gravitated toward quantitative methods, maintaining a strong preference for the structure that quantitative inquiry was thought to provide (Firestone, 1987; Paul et al., 2009; J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Researchers have been caught between the two frames of research (J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). In an attempt to bridge the divide between the two methods of inquiry, researchers have encountered the dilemma to ensure

qualitative inquiry has sufficient criteria and procedures to ensure its validity (J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986).

As researchers worked over the last several decades to bridge the divide between quantitative research and qualitative research, a level of acceptance has been accomplished (J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). What was once seen as a great divide is no longer a significant conflict, according to J. K. Smith and Heshusius (1986). Qualitative inquiry, though it continues to gain momentum in education, its place in special education, and the research relevant to individuals with disabilities, was steps behind (Connor et al., 2011; Paul et al., 2009). Connor et al. (2011) argued greater momentum is needed in the area of qualitative research and provided a call for increasing diversified forms of research in both special education and disability research.

Educational scholars have not called for the elimination or replacement of quantitative research in education; however, they have called for an active increase in qualitative research (Connor et al., 2011; Dudley-Marling, 2011; Iano, 1986; McPhail, 1995; Paul et al., 2009; Poplin, 2011; J. K. Smith & Heshusius, 1986). Poplin (2011) contended qualitative research could provide new answers and new understandings to already existing questions in educational research. Qualitative research, specifically in special education and disability research, provides scholars with crucial knowledge that has previously been missed in research (Connor et al., 2011). Expanding the methodological framework to encompass qualitative inquiry will ultimately enhance understanding for educators and scholars, providing detailed insight into “what works, how it works, and for whom” (Dudley-Marling, 2011, p. 148). By using qualitative research in education, and in this study in particular, a story can be told, an understanding can be gained, and a phenomenon is explained.

Benefits of phenomenology in inclusion research. Phenomenology is a tenet of qualitative research (Merriam, 2002; Schwandt, 2015). Phenomenological researchers seek a deep understanding of a phenomenon, and understanding a specific phenomenon or experience can be invaluable for educators and scholars (Creswell, 2013; McPhail, 1995). Scholars have contended this deeper understanding is often missing from disability research (Connor et al., 2011; Poplin, 2011). While phenomenology is not the only research inquiry to provide researchers with an in-depth understanding, it is unique in that it focuses on the essence of an experience (Merriam, 2002).

Using phenomenology as a research practice in inclusion research allows educators and scholars to better understand the educational experiences of students with disabilities (McPhail, 1995). Incorporating phenomenology allows for questions and issues that have not yet been addressed to be better understood (McPhail, 1995). Altering the research to include phenomenology could potentially advance the knowledge and understanding for educators and provide valuable insight into the phenomenon of inclusive education (McPhail, 1995).

Bringing phenomenology into inclusion research allows researchers opportunities to deal with experiences that have yet to be uncovered (Merriam, 2002). Uncovering unanswered questions is one of the distinct benefits to the work of phenomenology (McPhail, 1995). Phenomenological research is unique in that it is not used to seek fact, rather, it is used to seek meaning (Schmidt, 2005). It allows the researchers to seek knowledge and understand the importance of the whole and true essence of phenomena.

Phenomenology allows for the researcher to engage in research that is important to the researcher and the researched (Merriam, 2002; McPhail, 1995; Schmidt, 2005). In phenomenology, the researcher is required to be cognizant of the place of self and have an

awareness of the location held by the researcher throughout the meaning-making process (Schmidt, 2005). This awareness allows the researcher to be embedded in the process, striving to understand the phenomena. Schmidt (2005) stated phenomenology is the ideal research practice to use when the researcher wants to truly understand that which is meaningful to the researcher.

In addition, phenomenology allows for outsiders to see the way meanings are constructed in certain contexts (McPhail, 1995). It provides an opportunity for those not engaged in the phenomenon to see how the meanings of the experience are interpreted (McPhail, 1995). For example, educators, scholars, administrators are provided with a holistic picture of the experiences that are being studied, specifically in relation to inclusive education.

A call for phenomenology in inclusion research. Keeping in mind the framework of phenomenology and its benefits, the place for phenomenology in inclusion research appears to be without argument. Phenomenology as an inclusive education research practice allows researchers to understand the experiences of those involved. Researchers are able to uncover the essence of the experience from whomever experiences it (Merriam, 2002; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). New levels of understanding can be reached by broadening the scope of the research (Poplin, 2011).

Phenomenological researchers seek to find the truth in an experience (Moran, 2000; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009), and uncovering those truths of lived experiences in inclusive education could provide powerful insights for researchers, educators, and scholars. M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009) presented that if researchers seek what is at the core of one's experience, then phenomenological research must be used.

Collaborative Professionalism

Just as researchers within phenomenology seek to gain a deeper understanding, collaborative professionalism is defined as going beyond the traditional understanding of collaboration to transform teaching and learning. Collaboration typically refers to how individuals work together in their professions, but it is often not deliberate or effective (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b). According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), collaboration can be positive or negative and effective or ineffective, and not all methods of collaboration are appropriate. Collaborative professionalism bridges the gap between positive or negative and effective or ineffective by striving to determine how people can collaborate in professionally (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). It exists to create stronger and better professional practices, and in education, it provides the framework for how educators can truly transform education.

The term *collaborative professionalism* originated from teachers and administrators seeking to do collaboration differently (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018c; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Hargreaves and O'Connor did the work of advancing the theory, and various examples of collaborative professionalism throughout the world have been closely examined through case studies (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b). While each of the case studies varied in design, the commonality was “a solid, rigorous approach to school improvement with efforts to cultivate solidarity among members of collaborative teams” (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b, p. 22). Through the continued research and development of collaborative professionalism, 10 tenets emerged, and these tenets provide a foundation for the theory, setting it apart from collaboration (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018b). The following

section outlines the 10 tenets and will present 10 questions (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a) to allow educators to reflect on their implementation of collaborative professionalism.

Tenets of collaborative professionalism. The 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism are what set it apart from collaboration as is commonly known (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). The tenets provide tools, structure, and protocols to improve the work educators need to do together (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018c; Sommers & Zimmerman, 2018). The tenets lead to stronger relationships, trust, growth, and practical action that transforms learning and education (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The tenets, as developed by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), are (a) collective autonomy, (b) collective efficacy, (c) collaborative inquiry, (d) collective responsibility, (e) collective initiative, (f) mutual dialogue, (g) joint work, (h) common meaning and purpose, (i) collaborating with students, and (j) big-picture thinking for all.

Collective autonomy. In *collective autonomy*, teachers, as a collective, are given the authority (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Educators are not tied down to “top-down” directives, and they are valued as professionals. They separate themselves from the authority and come together as educators to work in an open forum. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provide the following question for analysis: “Are you able and willing to make significant professional judgments together?” (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p. 118)

Collective efficacy. *Collective efficacy* is the belief that together, educators can make a difference with students, no matter what (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). The view is embraced by all, and teachers share the belief that together they can do better and have a greater impact on students. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for

analysis: “Do you truly believe that all your students can develop and succeed, and are you prepared to make sure that they do?” (p. 118)

Collaborative inquiry. Teachers work together to solve problems, improve learning, and alter what they are doing. With *collaborative inquiry*, educators delve deeper into problems before rushing to solutions (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). It is not considered a separate practice in their teaching, but rather, teachers ingrain reflective practices into their work, working together to improve or transform what they are doing. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you ask questions about your own and others’ practice on a regular basis, with a view toward acting on the answers?” (p. 118)

Collective responsibility. *Collective responsibility* is the idea that teachers work together to become better. There is a mutual obligation to work together and help one another. Educators also work collectively to serve and support students. Collective responsibility requires a shift in mindset from *my* students to *our* students (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you feel almost as responsible for the other children in your school or community as you do for your own, and do you take responsibility with others to help them?” (p. 118)

Collective initiative. *Collective initiative* requires the teachers to step forward and take initiative. It is the idea that a community of educators are committed to growth, helping one another, and learning from each other (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Teachers take steps that spur them to a place of growth and true community. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you seize initiative and step forward to innovate, make a change, or help a colleague in need before you are asked?” (p. 118)

Mutual dialogue. Conversation is a foundational element of collaborative professionalism, but mutual dialogue goes beyond the surface. *Mutual dialogue* is open and honest communication. The conversations are genuine, no matter the differences (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Hard conversations are had and teachers work together to navigate through them. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you get into deep dialogue or even heated debate with colleagues about ideas, plans, politics, or the best way to help struggling children who need another way to move forward?" (p. 118)

Joint work. *Joint work* goes beyond a joint responsibility to a true partnership in labor and work. Teaching, planning, and actions are shared among the team. It not only includes the day-to-day work, such as grading papers and planning lessons, but it also involves conversations on growth and improvement for students (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you have other colleagues you do truly fulfilling work with—inside or outside your school—in terms of planning, teaching, reviewing, or giving feedback, for example?" (p. 119)

Common meaning and purpose. Collaborative professionalism is designed to elicit a common purpose and goal among educators (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Educators work together to help students grow, learn, and flourish. The work between individuals is a true uniting of forces. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Is your teaching and your own learning imbued with meaning and a deep sense of moral purpose, and do you use your influence and authority to help young people find genuine meaning and purpose in their lives also?" (p. 119)

Collaborating with students. In collaborative professionalism, students become part of the team and hold a stake in their learning (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Students and

teachers actively engage together to improve learning. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you collaborate *with* your students sometimes and *for* them?" (p. 119)

Big picture thinking for all. The final tenet is the idea of the big picture and embracing the vision of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you get the big picture of your organization, understand how everything is connected to everything else, and take responsibility for your own part in all of that?" (p. 119)

Collaborative professionalism and co-teaching. Collaborative professionalism is rooted deeply in relationships (Hargreaves, 2018c). Educational scholars have made the same claim for co-teaching: The co-teaching relationship is foundational in the educational practice (Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008a; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Ploessl et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). Educational literature on co-teaching is often prescriptive in nature (Friend, 2008a, 2014a; Friend et al., 2010; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sims, 2008; Solis et al., 2012) and provides an argument for the importance of co-teaching, but an in-depth understanding of the relationship is missing. A deeper understanding of the co-teaching relationship is imperative, and collaborative professionalism allows this gap to be bridged.

In this study, aligning co-teaching with the theoretical orientation of collaborative professionalism allowed for an in-depth look at the working relationship of co-teachers. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) contended no profession, education included, can function well without collaboration and working together. The question to ask is "*how* and *how well* teachers and other educators collaborate" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p. 4). Using

collaborative professionalism as the theoretical orientation to study the co-teaching relationship allowed for the opportunity to examine *how* and *how well* co-teachers work together. The following section will provide a summation of collaborative professionalism as the theoretical orientation and will explain how it was used in the analysis of the study.

Collaborative professionalism as the theoretical orientation. Hargreaves (2000) contended that historically, educators have worked from a place of individualism. They have worked independently, isolated in their own classrooms. Individually, they have been responsible for the education of students and interactions between teachers have been minimal (Hargreaves, 2000). When teachers have interacted, it has been done on a superficial level, on things such as materials, discipline, and student concerns, rather than educational goals, behavior needs and supports, and student learning (Hargreaves, 2000; Little, 1990; Lortie, 1975). Recognizing that education is no longer an individual effort, collaboration has become paramount (Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, & Reeves, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hargreaves, 2000).

In education, collaboration has become an essential tenet to support students and their learning. Educators work and plan together to address the “growing diversity of . . . classrooms and of students’ learning needs” (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 157). Duchardt et al. (1999) contended, “No longer can a teacher in a classroom of diverse learners meet all the educational, social, and emotional needs of his or her students” (p. 189). While collaboration is widely accepted and practiced, in their work with collaborative professionalism, Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a; 2018b) sought to take the working relationship of educators to the next level. Their work of collaborative professionalism, is deeply rooted in the foundational structure of working relationships, addresses the need for educators to work differently together and make education a joint effort (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a, 2018b; Little, 1990).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the authentic experience of co-teaching, as experienced by teaching pairs at the middle-school level. In this study, I sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers sharing a co-teaching partnership. As the researcher, I delved deeper into the working relationship between general education teachers and special education teachers to understand the dynamic and partnership.

Research Questions

In this study, I attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers sharing a co-teaching partnership?
2. What is the working relationship and dynamic between co-teachers?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of a co-teaching partnership?

Design and Methods

According to M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009), phenomenology provides a perspective in which the researcher is able to uncover and interpret the essence of an individual's experience. As the purpose of the study was to understand the essence of the working relationship and the partnership between the teachers and to authentically understand their experience of co-teaching, a phenomenological approach was used.

A phenomenological study allowed for the opportunity to authentically understand the conscious experience of the participants (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Moran (2000) contended phenomenology seeks to find the truth, and in this study, I sought to uncover the truth of the educators' lived experiences of co-teaching partnerships through the methodology of

phenomenology. A deeper understanding of a phenomenon can be invaluable to educators (Creswell, 2013; McPhail, 1995). Through the use of a phenomenological approach in this study, a deeper understanding of the co-teaching relationship was obtained. In this study, I examined the authentic experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers sharing co-taught classrooms. The study emerged from the research questions, with a desire to gain understanding and insight (Creswell, 2013).

The phenomenon of the co-teaching relationship was studied through interviews with three pairs of middle-school teachers sharing co-taught classrooms. In-depth interviews, individual and pairs, took place over the course of a school year. Upon completion of the interviews, analysis using the 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism took place using a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). The process included an initial coding, locating significant statements from the interviews that explained the meaning of the teachers' experiences (Creswell, 2013; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). Upon the initial coding, significant statements were framed with the theoretical orientation of collaborative professionalism. The 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism were used to analyze the interview data to gain a better understanding of the dynamic of the co-teaching pairs and their working relationships. The following sections outline in further detail the participants and the procedures used.

Participants

This study included six participants, three pairs of co-teachers. The criteria for participation was limited to current, middle school educators who had a co-taught classroom at the time of the study. As the study sought to understand the dynamic of the co-teaching relationship, both educators in the partnership needed to be willing to participate. A requirement

was not needed for how many years they had been co-teaching, as the study benefited from an array of experiences in regard to the number of years teaching together.

The three pairs of participants were Roger and Anna, Connor and Danielle, and Darren and Jaiden. All three pairs were working as middle school educators in Southern California schools and had co-taught classrooms as a part of their educational assignments during the study. All participants were over the age of 18.

Convenience sampling and purposeful sampling were used to garner participants. As the researcher, I drew on pre-existing relationships with educators and administrators to connect with potential participants. In addition, local school administrators were contacted to obtain interested pairings. Several attempts were made to connect with local administration and local teachers through the convenience sampling (see Appendix A), to no avail. As the researcher, I had to rely further on my personal connections as an educator with various administrators and educators. Once interest in participation was expressed by the participants, they were contacted and a further explanation of the study was provided. At this point in the sampling, teachers were unable to commit due to the foreseen time commitment and longevity of the process. However, over time, I was able to build connections with three sets of willing participants; consent was given (see Appendix B), and interviews were arranged.

Roger and Anna

Upon initiation of the study, Roger and Anna had been teaching in a sixth-grade math class together for a year and a half. Roger was a special education teacher and Anna was a general education teacher. Anna was in her seventh year of teaching, and Roger was in his third year of teaching. Anna was in her fifth year of teaching and Roger was in his first year. The two began co-teaching together since Roger's first year and were still teaching together.

Connor and Danielle

Connor and Danielle had been teaching math together for 1 year. Connor was a special education teacher and had been teaching for 17 years, whereas Danielle, the general education teacher, was a first-year teacher. While they were new to their partnership, they had known each other for 8 years and had a pre-existing professional relationship. The partnership was created when Connor approached Danielle and asked if he could bring some of the special education students into Danielle's eighth-grade math class. They co-taught together during the year interviews took place but, by this writing, were no longer co-teaching together due to a change in scheduling.

Darren and Jaiden

Upon initiation of the study, Darren and Jaiden had been co-teaching together for a year and a half. They were paired together to teach a sixth-grade English and reading core class. Darren was a special education teacher and had been teaching for 18 years, and Jaiden was a general education teacher in her third year of teaching. They co-taught together for 3 years, but, at the time of this writing, were no longer co-teaching together as Darren moved to a different school site.

Data Collection

This study took place over a 10-month period—one school year. Initially, four interviews were anticipated: one initial partner interview, two individual interviews, and one final partner interview. However, over the course of the school year and throughout the period of analysis, additional follow up interviews were conducted with two pairs to obtain additional information and clarification. Interviews were conducted with individual participants and together with their co-teaching partners to ensure collection of significant, in-depth information. Over the course of

the 10-month period, the six participants (three pairs of teachers) were interviewed with several weeks to a month in between interviews to follow their lived experiences over the course of several months. The first interview was with the co-teaching pair, followed by individual interviews, and a final interview. See Table 4 for interview frequency.

Interviews were conducted in agreed-upon locations, in places secure and conducive to audio interviews, typically the classrooms of the participants. The interviews were semi-structured, covering a range of preplanned topics, but also flexible and open to allow for participants to share additional relevant information (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). An interview guide (see Appendix C) outlining preplanned topics and questions was used for the first partner interview and the first individual interview. The essence of the initial interviews pertained to the participants histories as they related to education, inclusion, co-teaching, details of the participants lived experiences of co-teaching, and the history of the specific co-teaching pair. The second set of interviews served as a follow up, to see progression over time, and used the same interview guide (see Appendix C). In addition, the second and third interviews touched upon additional topics pertaining to the participants' lived experiences as questions emerged

Table 4

Interview Frequency

Participants	Initial Partner Interview	Individual Interview	Final Partner Interview	Follow-up Interview	Total Number of Interviews
Roger & Anna	As partners	Roger (1) Anna (1)	As partners	Roger (1)	Five
Connor & Danielle	As partners	Connor (1) Danielle (1)	As partners	No follow-up interview	Four
Darren & Jaiden	As partners	Darren (1) Jaiden (1)	As partners	Darren (1) Jaiden (1)	Six

from the first interviews. For example, in the first interview, participants were asked if they had received any co-teaching training. Roger and Anna expressed they had not had any formal training, and Anna did not realize that was an available resource. In the follow-up interview, I asked Anna if she had followed up on her desire to attend a training. The second and third interviews provided an opportunity to see how the relationships were progressing and to see any significant changes over time. The final interview served as a reflection of the process and discussing any changes over time. In addition, the final interview served as a reflection of the participants meaning of the experience. Additional topics were listed in the interview guide (see Appendix D), but questions emerged through conversation and dialogue. Participants were asked to expand on their responses and provide additional information.

Interviews were audio recorded, and field notes were written. Field notes primarily included desired follow up questions to include in the following interviews. Also included in the field notes were bracketing notes completed by the researcher. Bracketing allowed for me to remove by own biases and assumptions. It was a continual process to not insert my own opinions; however, my experience as a co-teacher did allow for significant background knowledge to derive further questions. Upon completion of each interview, the recordings were transcribed through a transcription company and checked for accuracy by the researcher. All measures of data used pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. No names or identifying information were placed in the data records. All mention of participants in this paper are pseudonyms. All data has remain locked in a secure location at the researcher's home. Any electronic portable devices used to store data have been password protected and de-identified.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phenomenological data analysis includes the following steps: (a) coding, (b) thematic analysis, (c) interpretation of individual participant experiences, and (d) development of the phenomenon's essence (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). The purpose of a phenomenological analysis is to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied. In this particular study, an authentic understanding of the co-teaching relationship was desired.

Following a phenomenological approach, an initial, broad coding allowed for continued meaning to emerge and for an understanding of participants' experiences (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). The initial coding and review of the data took place after the first partner interviews and the first individual interviews. This broad coding, to gain an initial understanding of the lived experience, allowed for further questions to emerge in the final partner interviews and follow-up interviews. After the initial, broad coding, significant statements from the interviews were identified and assembled for further analysis and review. The significant statements related directly to the research questions and the participants experiences.

Upon completion of this process, the data derived from the partner and individual interviews were framed against the theoretical framework of collaborative professionalism. In collaborative professionalism, the 10 tenets pose questions for reflection. Questions for analysis (see Appendix E), developed by Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), were used for further analysis.

Framing the significant statements from the interviews with the 10 tenets allowed for a reflection on the experience of co-teaching and the partnership. The theoretical framework of collaborative professionalism, rooted in working relationships (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, 2018b), allowed for an authentic understanding of the co-teaching relationship. Analysis of each

pair led to a deeper understanding of the co-teaching partnership and the factors supporting and inhibiting its success, allowing for the essence of the phenomenon of the experience to be uncovered (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009).

Conclusion

Phenomenological researchers seek to authentically understand an individual's conscious experience (M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009). In this study, I examined the experience of three pairs of co-teachers through a phenomenological approach, the analysis was framed with the 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism. The following chapter provides an analysis of each co-teaching pair to the tenets of collaborative professionalism and provides a summation of the co-teachers experience.

CHAPTER FOUR—DATA CHAPTER

As Merriam (2002) indicated, researchers use phenomenology to understand a phenomenon as an individual experiences it. The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenon of the co-teaching partnership and the teachers' authentic lived experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted with three pairs of co-teachers over the course of 10 months, with individuals and as partners, to gain an accurate summation of their co-teaching partner experiences. The information from the interviews was then framed with the theoretical framework of collaborative professionalism to better understand the dynamic of the co-teaching relationship, as experienced by the co-teaching pairs.

To explore the authentic experience of the teachers participating in the study, three research questions were used:

1. What are the perceptions and experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers, sharing a co-teaching partnership?
2. What is the working relationship and dynamic like between the pair of co-teachers?
3. What are the perceived benefits and challenges of a co-teaching partnership?

The following section provides participant descriptions and context to provide understanding of the participants and school demographics. The chapter continues with an analysis of each pair with each of the 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism to provide an in-depth understanding of the working relationship and partner dynamics. The 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism were used as a tool of analysis to understand the working partnership. The chapter concludes with individual, relational, and school-level factors that lead to success in co-teaching as derived from the analysis, based on the benefits and challenges of co-teaching.

Participant Descriptions and Context

Over the course of 10 months, six co-teachers participated in this study. The participants were part of a co-teaching pair, working together during school days. Participants were general education teachers and special education teachers who taught at the middle-school level in two different school districts in Southern California. The three pairs participated in in-depth interviews, part of a study where I, as the researcher, sought to understand the lived experiences of their co-teaching partnerships. The three pairs were Darren and Jaiden, Roger and Anna, and Connor and Danielle. This section provides context in relation to the individuals, their school sites, and the initiation of their co-teaching partnerships.

Darren and Jaiden

At the start of the study, Darren and Jaiden were in their second year of co-teaching. They worked together for a total of 3 years before Darren moved school sites. The following sections outline information specific to their teacher backgrounds and school information.

Darren. Darren is a special education teacher and has a education specialist moderate/severe credential. Darren had been teaching for 18 years. He was teaching at the elementary level in various programs (e.g., autism program, resource K-3, special day class 4-6, and co-teaching 5th grade) for the first part of his career. He had been at the middle school for 2 years, co-teaching both years. Though he had spanned programs and grade levels, Darren had worked in the same district for the duration of his career. Darren was familiar with co-teaching when he began working with Jaiden, as Darren had started co-teaching at the elementary level. At the start of the interviews, Darren and Jaiden were co-teaching for two periods a day. The rest of the day, Darren taught a sixth-grade, self-contained, English and language arts class and an

eighth-grade, co-taught, English and language arts class with another teacher. Darren had been to several formal teacher trainings on co-teaching.

Jaiden. Jaiden is a general education English teacher. She has a multiple subject credential, a reading authorization, and a masters in reading instruction. Jaiden was in her third year of teaching at the middle school. She had been working at the same school all 3 years. Her schedule consisted of one general education English and language arts core, one honors English and language arts core, and one co-taught English and language arts core, all at the sixth-grade level. Jaiden had been to one training on co-teaching with Darren.

School demographics. Darren and Jaiden taught at a suburban middle school in Southern California. According to their School Accountability Report Card (i.e., school demographic and performance information), the total enrollment at the school was 1,130 students. The three primary racial groups were White students, approximately 48% of their enrolled students, Latino students, approximately 30%, and Asian students, approximately 8%. Thirteen percent of the student population was considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. English learners represented 2% of their population. Students with disabilities represented 5% of the school population. When asked why the representation of students with disabilities was so low, it was explained that at the school, there was not a moderate-severe special education program. The majority of special education students at the school would have the classification of mild-moderate disabilities, making the population significantly smaller.

One hundred percent of the teachers were considered highly qualified and had their full credential. The Schools Accountability Report Card emphasized the importance of providing a strong learning environment, instilling a desire for life-long learning.

There were three special education teachers. Each of those teachers had at least one period of co-teaching throughout the day. The school had been implementing co-teaching for 3 years. Co-teaching was a district wide initiative and was implemented at each school in the district, as one of their district goals was to ensure success for all students and to promote inclusive environments.

Roger and Anna

At the time of the interviews, Roger and Anna were nearing the end of their first year co-teaching together. Interviews took place over their first and second year, and they were still co-teaching together. The following sections outline information specific to their individual teacher backgrounds and school information.

Roger. Roger is a special education teacher with his education specialist mild/moderate credential. Roger was in his second year of teaching. However, he had started part way through the previous year, and so he was in his first full year of teaching. During the day, he co-taught for two different periods with Anna, and the rest of his day he taught self-contained, special education classes. His co-taught classes were both sixth-grade math classes. The rest of his day he taught special education math, special education reading and language arts, and a special education study skills course.

When Roger started co-teaching, he was fresh out of his credential program where co-teaching was presented as a best practice. He knew when he got a job that co-teaching was something he wanted to implement. He was nervous to step forward into co-teaching but was grateful for the opportunity to try it when the opportunity arose at his school. Aside from his credentialing program, Roger had not received any formal training on co-teaching prior to being paired with Anna.

Anna. Anna is a general education math teacher. She has her single subject credential in the area of mathematics. At the start of the interviews, Anna was in her fifth year of teaching. All 5 years had been at her current school, teaching the same subject. Her schedule was general education math all day long, and two of those periods were co-taught with Roger. Anna had not heard about co-teaching prior to her partnership with Roger and had not had any formal training.

School demographics. Roger and Anna taught at a rural middle school in a semi-agricultural area of Southern California. The school was sixth to eighth grades and had an approximate enrollment of 1,133 students. The top three racial groups were Latino students, representing 45% of the population, White students (39%), and Black or African American students (5%). Approximately 46% of the student population was considered socioeconomically disadvantaged. Six percent of the student population were English learners. Students with disabilities represented 12% of the schools population.

There were 44 teachers at this middle school, and all but one teacher had their full credential. One hundred percent of the teachers were considered highly qualified and were teaching in their subject competence area. According to the schools mission statement, it was the school's priority to partner with parents. It was their desire to provide a standards-based education and ensure the environment is safe for students. They worked to promote self-discipline, motivation, and excellence.

There were six special education teachers at the middle school where Roger and Anna taught. All of the special education teachers co-taught for at least one period during their school day. The school has been implementing the practice of co-teaching for the last 5-6 years.

Connor and Danielle

At the time of interviews, Connor and Danielle were in their first year of co-teaching. They only taught together for that 1 year due to a change in teaching assignments. The following sections outline information specific to their teacher backgrounds and school information.

Connor. Connor is a special education teacher with his education specialist credential. He had been teaching for 17 years. Three years were in a nonpublic school, and 14 years had been in the public school setting. Connor taught 3 years of elementary school but the rest had been at middle school at his current site. He co-taught with Danielle for one period of seventh-grade math and co-taught with another teacher for eighth-grade reading and language arts. During the rest of the day, he taught a self-contained special education math class and a self-contained special education reading and language arts class. Connor stated he had been “pushing-in” with general education teachers for 5-6 years. According to Connor, the push-in model that was implemented at his school meant he would go into the general education class with four to five special education students, but his only job was a supportive role to those students; he was not seen as an equal teacher in the class. It was only in the last 3-4 years where the term co-teaching had been used, and Connor started truly co-teaching. Connor had never received any formal training or teacher support on co-teaching.

Danielle. Danielle is a general education math teacher with her single subject credential and a master’s in math instruction. She taught seventh- and eighth0grade math all day. It was Danielle’s first year as a teacher. She had previously worked at the same school as an instructional aide for 8 years. She was aware of what co-teaching was when she started but had not had any formal training or introduction to it when she started with Connor.

School demographics. Connor and Danielle taught at the same middle school as Roger and Anna. The school demographic information is the same as mentioned previously.

Data Analysis Through Phenomenology

As the researcher, my goal was to understand the co-teaching partnership, as it was experienced by the participants. I desired to hear their stories and the impact of co-teaching. Relevant to the research questions, I wanted to better understand the participants' perceptions and experiences, their working relationships and dynamics, and the benefits and challenges of co-teaching. Table 5 outlines examples of relevant and significant statements pertaining to each of these areas, gathered from the broad coding. These statements will be discussed further in the analysis with the collaborative professionalism tenets.

Data Analysis of Collaborative Professionalism Tenets

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) revealed how educators work together to transform teaching and learning through collaborative professionalism. It "is about how people collaborate more professionally and also how they work as a profession in a more collaborative way" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p. 4). As the purpose of this study was to examine co-teaching partnerships between general education teachers and special education teachers to gain a deeper understanding of partner dynamics, the tenets of collaborative professionalism were used as a framework to analyze the co-teaching partnerships, specifically in relation to working relationships and partner dynamics. The information in the following section provides an analysis of the three pairs of co-teachers against each tenet, followed by a summary analysis of the three pairs. Each section provides a collaborative professionalism framework question relevant to the tenets, presented in the previous chapter.

Table 5

Examples of Significant Statements

Partnership	Perception and Experience	Working Relationship and Dynamic	Benefits and Challenges
Darren and Jaiden	<p>“All for one.” (Darren)</p> <p>“It made us feel like, okay, we can do this. We need to just figure it out.” (Jaiden)</p> <p>“I’m always up for a challenge or something new.” (Jaiden)</p>	<p>“We have a great relationship. . . . It is really strong, and I think because our relationship is strong, it shows the kids that we’re one unit.” (Darren)</p> <p>“I think there’s a really strong trust factor there.” (Jaiden)</p> <p>“We have a great relationship, but it’s not perfect, and we’re definitely trying to work on it. We spend a lot of time saying should we? Should we not? Should we do this? Should we do that?” (Darren)</p>	<p>“I think connecting with the student was a huge thing.” (Jaiden)</p> <p>“The biggest challenge really, in the end, is always time and having time to do everything we know needs to be done.” (Darren)</p> <p>“Have an extra set of eyes.” (Jaiden)</p>
Roger and Anna	<p>“No one told us how to do this. We, well, I wanted to do it, and Anna was okay with it. So we did it. I guess that’s how we ended up here. We never really had any direction on how to do this or what to do. We’ve been making it up as we go.” (Roger)</p> <p>“My concern is how the class is so heavily infiltrated with [special education] students, and it makes me nervous as a teacher. . . . because I have so many kids I’m responsible for.” (Anna)</p> <p>“If the two people who are trying to co-teach together aren’t trying to achieve the same thing, or aren’t willing. . . . then they’re not going to work together.” (Roger)</p>	<p>“This [relationship] really isn’t as great as it used to be, so we’ve tried to give ourselves more time to plan together.” (Roger)</p> <p>“We both know what we are doing now. I know the units and know what we are getting into. I can be ready with supports and the things kids will be needing.” (Roger)</p> <p>“I didn’t even know we were co-teaching until somebody slapped that name on it. I just thought he’s here for support.” (Anna)</p> <p>“The stronger relationship you have with the person you’re working with. . . . I’m going to do a better job working with that person.” (Roger)</p>	<p>“I feel like it’s more of a shared responsibility.” (Anna)</p> <p>“The extra support with him.” (Anna)</p> <p>“Blended classroom.” (Roger)</p> <p>“We’ve come up with a few strategies to work with the high students and the struggling students. The main one that we have liked using is doing stations when we can. It really is about breaking them up into smaller groups.” (Roger)</p>
Connor and Danielle	<p>“Work with students step by step.” (Connor)</p> <p>“Having two of us permits us to support varying learners.” (Danielle)</p> <p>“Nothing sticks around forever.” (Connor)</p>	<p>“I usually already have it planned out and just give it to him.” (Danielle)</p> <p>“I’m here to help you, so we can do this together.” (Connor)</p> <p>“We’re on the same team here.” (Connor)</p>	<p>“We organize our own classroom and make it how we want it.” (Danielle)</p> <p>“Two teachers is better than one.” (Danielle)</p> <p>“It is great to try different strategies and ideas and then collaborate about the results.” (Danielle)</p>

Collective autonomy. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Are you able and willing to make significant professional judgments together?" (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. Traditionally, in educational structures, decisions filter through the top-down implementation, but the description of collective autonomy includes an outline of partnerships where partners are accountable to one another rather than the school system (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). When Darren and Jaiden began working together 3 years ago, they were nearly strangers. Their principal paired them together, because she thought their personalities might work together well. Jaiden was new to the school, and she felt that was part of the reason why administration turned to her to be part of the partnership. Their relationship stemmed from a top-down mentality, with their administration making a judgment call about the pairing, but they have sought to take authority in their partnership and be accountable to one another.

Throughout the interviews, Darren's and Jaiden's accountability to one another was evident in two ways. The first element of their accountability was in the logistics of their planning. Both Darren and Jaiden expressed the importance of planning together and "being on the same page." They planned together weekly and had mini-conferences all day, according to Darren. Jaiden spoke about how at the beginning of their partnership, Darren was faithful in joining her grade-level team each week for their planning sessions, building his knowledge base and his confidence with the content. Having time together to plan was imperative for their accountability.

In addition to planning together, building their relationship had been an imperative component of their partnership. Over the course of their teaching together, they strived to build

the relationship and make it a priority to support one another. Darren indicated, “We have a great relationship. . . . It is really strong and I think because our relationship is strong, it shows the kids that we’re one unit.” Throughout their interviews, both participants expressed how their partnership and teamwork was of the utmost priority. When interviewing Darren individually, he jokingly referred to Jaiden as his “work wife.” He expressed how trusting one another, being confident in each other, and supporting one another is what made their partnership as strong as it was. Jaiden also indicated how foundational trust was in their relationship—“I think there’s a really strong trust factor there”—and talked about how they had built a friendship.

Planning together and building their relationship were the foundational elements that made Darren’s and Jaiden’s partnership strong. It made them accountable to one another, resistant to the pressures of administration. Darren and Jaiden recognized their partnership was what needed to be a priority and solidified collective autonomy in their partnership.

Roger and Anna. Roger and Anna began their co-teaching through an informal directive from administration, as it was “the direction special education is trying to go in our district” (Roger). According to Roger, it was decided that as the special education teacher, he needed to be co-teaching; however, since he was new to teaching, he knew very few teachers at the school. Administration informed him he would need to “pick a teacher,” so he chose Anna. Roger chose Anna because he had heard positive things about her teaching and his classroom was near to hers. Anna expressed how when she was approached by Roger, she said she had previously had the support of instructional aides in her classroom, so she was open to Roger. In the initial interview with the pair, Anna admitted she did not realize they were co-teaching and did not have a grasp of what it entailed. A top-down decision was made regarding the two being paired together; there were no formal trainings, instructions, or directives. Roger, when asked about

how their relationship began, stated, “No one told us how to do this. We—well, I wanted to do it, and Anna was okay with it. So we did it. I guess that’s how we ended up here. We never really had any direction on how to do this or what to do. We’ve been making it up as we go.” Roger and Anna were put in a situation where they were given no directives from administration and had to determine their own plans and direction.

While collective autonomy strives to break from authority and have partners work with one another (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a), Roger’s and Anna’s break from authority and top-down directives was extreme due to no initial nor follow-up support to their co-teaching. They were engaged in the partnership without guidance, which forced them to build their accountability with one another and determine what that would look like on their own.

Roger and Anna’s autonomy developed slowly. During the first interview, it appeared they were still learning how to work with each other and navigate their partnership. Roles were not clearly defined, and Roger expressed that he felt that he was more of a “supporter” to Anna than an actual teacher in the classroom. The initial interview took place 2 months into the school year, and their partnership was in the emerging stages. For example, Roger and Anna expressed how they did not consistently plan together, and they did not collaborate on what was happening in the classroom. However, upon the final interview, a year later, Roger expressed how far their relationship had come and that he even considered the two of them friends. Roger expressed that he and Anna were truly working together versus just sharing a classroom. The example he provided was when he first starting working with Anna, he did not speak up or offer input about the plans or directions in the classroom. Anna indicated, “I feel like it’s more of a shared responsibility.” As time went on, they built a relationship; they became more accountable to one

another, and their partnership was clearly defined, leading them to a place of collective autonomy.

Connor and Danielle. In collective autonomy, teachers are more accountable to one another than they are to the system (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). With Connor and Danielle, it was evident their accountability was to one another and not a higher system or administration.

Connor and Danielle were near the end of their first year co-teaching together when interviews began. They had a previous professional relationship before teaching together, as Danielle was previously an instructional aide in Connor's classroom. When Connor found out he was going to be co-teaching, it was up to him to determine which teacher with whom he would be working. Due to their prior relationship, Connor asked Danielle, and she was willing to partner. Danielle and Connor received no official directives from their administration team; they were left to their own devices to make their co-teaching efforts a success. When starting the process, they only had each other for support and learning. Danielle said, "We organize our own classroom and make it how we want it."

In addition to only having each other in the initial stages, Connor and Danielle only had one another throughout the course of the year. Connor and Danielle had no required curriculum in their classroom and were free to make up lessons as they went along. Having this much freedom came with its blessings and pitfalls. Being able to plan their own lessons allowed Connor and Danielle freedom and flexibility, according to Connor. However, Danielle felt the lack of structure was difficult. To make sure the students were getting what they needed, the pair leaned on one another.

Depending on one another so greatly from the very beginning strengthened Connor and Danielle's co-teaching partnership. They were accountable to one another and had to depend on one another instead of the system.

Collective efficacy. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you truly believe that all your students can develop and succeed, and are you prepared to make sure that they do?" (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. When the interviews began with Darren and Jaiden, Darren was in his 18th year of teaching, and Jaiden in her third year. They were in the midst of their second year co-teaching together. Their partnership was solidified, and they were comfortable with one another, demonstrating easy conversation. Early on, both participants expressed that having "two teachers is better than one," and in having two teachers, they were able to make a greater difference with their students. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) contended in collective efficacy *we* is a pivotal element. The *we* was evident in Darren and Jaiden's partnership.

Jaiden gave the example that teachers are often able to spot a handful of students who are struggling more than others, but with all the duties the job entails, it can be hard to reach them individually, but with co-teaching it really is a "tag-team effort." She expressed that through her partnership with Darren, they were able to reach those struggling students, indicating, "I think connecting with the student was a huge thing." Darren shared the same sentiments about how they were able to work with students individually or in small groups. The examples they provided as to how they reached all students were nearly identical. Darren expressed that to support the struggling students, he used various strategies: check in with students, monitor their work completion, and use down time in the classroom to review key concepts. Jaiden expressed that with another teacher in the classroom, she was able to step in and help struggling students.

She explained when it was just her in the classroom, she was not able to always go back, review, and provide extra time, but having two teachers made that an option throughout the class time. Each teacher had their role, and Darren indicated “[Co-teaching] works best when the general education teacher is driving curriculum and the special education teacher is scaffolding.” With each educator having their part, they were able to collectively support their students.

Jaiden and Darren believed in and implemented the ideal that they could have a great impact on their students. In the final interview, Darren expressed he and Jaiden had to develop an “all for one” attitude. He went on to explain how they both had to agree that together, they were going to work make student success a priority. The key element is that they had to work together. Working together demonstrates the collective efficacy that they shared and were determined to practice consistently.

Roger and Anna. At the start of the interviews, Anna, despite being unclear about the dynamics of co-teaching, expressed how grateful she was to have Roger in her classroom because she had “the extra support with him.” Instantly, the “extra set of hands” allowed the students to be better supported. Roger agreed with that sentiment, indicating students were able to benefit from having two teachers, and they expressed to students “You’re so lucky, you get not only one but two teachers” (Anna). The students benefited from their collective efficacy, a shared belief that together they could make a difference (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018).

The first benefit Roger discussed was how co-teaching and sharing a classroom with Anna allowed students with disabilities to access the general education content. Roger expressed he also taught several self-contained classes (i.e., classes with only students with disabilities) throughout the school day, and he could see first the benefits of having a “blended classroom,”

where all students were able to have access. In having the students in a general education classroom, the teachers were able to make an impact on student learning.

The other benefit shared by Anna was the benefit of two teachers. Having two teachers allowed for station teaching, small groups, and re-teaching. Anna expressed that typically, she is responsible for all students, but in this scenario, the responsibility was shared between her and Roger. Roger stated, “We’ve come up with a few strategies to work with the high students and the struggling students. The main one that we have liked using is doing stations when we can; it really is about breaking them up into smaller groups.” Having two teachers allowed them to alter their teaching to ensure that all students were successful. They worked to support all learners and make an impact.

Connor and Danielle. The idea of being able to do “better together” is the foundational element of collective efficacy (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Connor and Danielle were both vocal about the benefits of working together, but their views were mixed on how the partnership would ultimately benefit students.

During the first interview with Connor, he spoke about the benefits co-teaching provided for students. He said it allowed students to have access to general education content, something he was unable to provide them in a separate setting. He also expressed how beneficial it was for students with disabilities to have peer role models. Co-teaching with Danielle allowed them to “work with students step by step” and break down content to their level. As indicated before, Connor and Danielle were given freedom in their curriculum and content, so they had the ability to be flexible, which they both believed was beneficial for the students.

Danielle reiterated the benefits of the partnership, emphasizing how helpful it was to have Connor in the classroom. By having two teachers in the classroom, Danielle felt they were able

to break down content and were able to reach more students because there were two of them. Despite indicating the benefits of the partnership, Danielle expressed doubts about the co-teaching classroom being the right setting for all students. She was not sure the co-teaching classroom truly supported the struggling learners, and she was also worried that in slowing down the class, the higher learners would get lost. She indicated they often would split the class and “regroup them into the highs and lows,” indicating students that may be struggling with the content, essentially defeating the purpose of co-teaching.

Despite their willingness to work together and their enthusiasm about their partnership, Danielle and Connor’s inconsistent views on student success in co-teaching placed a divide in their collective efficacy. Despite their “hands in the middle” attitude, they did not both hold to the idea that all students would experience success in the co-taught classroom, which ultimately led to a separation and not a collective effort.

Collaborative inquiry. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you ask questions about your own and others’ practice on a regular basis, with a view toward acting on the answers?” (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. In the classroom, collaborative inquiry serves to provide a process for reflection. According to Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a), collaborative inquiry should be “embedded in the very nature of teaching itself” (p. 112). Darren and Jaiden built a reflective element into their day-to-day work. Darren expressed, “We have a great relationship, but it’s not perfect, and we’re definitely trying to work on it. We spend a lot of time saying should we? Should we not? Should we do this? Should we do that?” When asked to expand on what that process looked like, he provided several examples.

The first example occurred early in their teaching together. Darren was responsible for the lesson, but the content was new to him. As he was teaching, Jaiden gently stepped in and provided additional information, guidance, and directions with the students. After the lesson, the two of them spoke about the lesson and examined the elements that were missing from Darren's instruction. They talked about how they could adjust the lesson. Darren expressed how he appreciated Jaiden adding in her input, but I was more impressed by the description of their interactions at the end of the lesson. Together they paused, reflected, and made steps for improvement. Collective inquiry can be used to identify issues and works toward problem solving, which is what Darren and Jaiden did.

The second example occurred after Darren and Jaiden had attended a co-teaching training together. They had been co-teaching together for nearly the entire school year when their administration sent them to the conference. Darren was familiar with the content, but it was new to Jaiden. At the training, they were given a lot of new information. Jaiden and Darren went back to the classroom and asked what they were doing "right" and what they were doing "wrong." Jaiden said, "I loved that training. . . and it made us feel like, okay, we can do this. We need to just figure it out." After the training, the pair discussed different models they could implement. They talked about how they could balance responsibilities, and they examined what they were doing extensively. Darren discussed how they implemented different models of co-teaching. They asked questions and pushed toward solutions, determined, together, to make improvements.

Both of the previous examples demonstrate the collaborative inquiry that took place in the partnership. The participants encountered situations in their working relationship where they paused, reflected, questioned, and took action, together.

Roger and Anna. During the initial interview with Roger and Ashley, the participants were posed with the question of what strategies they used that they felt really worked. Anna responded that she enjoyed the station teaching because it can “increase engagement with students,” but Roger felt differently, indicating that after stations, there were several times when he thought, “That didn’t go well.” Their varied responses demonstrated they were not fully on the same page, and there was no reflection taking place together.

During the final interview with Roger, he indicated a few weeks earlier, he and Anna reached a place in their partnership where they felt like things were not working. Pausing, they “noticed this really isn’t as great as it used to be, so we’ve tried to give ourselves more time to plan together” (Roger). Roger expressed how they had fallen into a rut, a routine, where they were not moving forward, and he felt they were stagnant in their partnership and teaching. He explained how he had a difficult conversation with Anna, posing to her that “this really isn’t as great as it used to be.” Together, they took a step back and worked to figure out what was going on. They had a conversation about what they could do differently. As a result, they increased their planning time with one another and made an effort to be intentional with their conversations by being more reflective.

The aforementioned example of pausing, reflecting, and making a plan for change encompasses collaborative inquiry. The process of collaborative inquiry works to transform teaching (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Collaborative inquiry “is embedded in the very nature of teaching itself” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a, p. 112). Roger and Anna strived to make it a regular part of their co-teaching partnership, working together to fine tune their relationship, their teaching, and their partnership.

Connor and Danielle. In collaborative inquiry, according to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), teachers must, "routinely explore problems, issues, or difference of practice together to improve or transform what they are doing" (p. 111). There is a constant state of action amongst the partners by regularly developing an action plans to move forward in one's teaching. Though co-teachers work to refine their own practices, the priority should be the action plan to refine their practices as a partnership. With Connor and Danielle, there was no evidence of a dual action plan or a desire to move forward toward a different level of teaching.

When Connor was first interviewed individually, he spoke of his depth of experience and the various settings he had taught in (i.e., elementary, middle, and high school). He said "I've seen [co-teaching] before, and I will see it again." He spoke of how he was told he "had to co-teach" and so he "picked" Danielle because he had a prior relationship with her. Co-teaching, to him, appeared to be something that was checked off a list to make administration happy. For example, he indicated he and Danielle did not have any training; they had not had any time with administration to discuss what they should be doing; and him and they did not have conversations regarding practices. Their conversations were just about planning.

Danielle indicated she agreed to co-teach with Connor because she knew him from before but admitted she did not really know "what [co-teaching] was all about." Over the course of a year, that sentiment never changed. There was no training or dialogue about co-teaching, just the logistics of plans and lessons. They did not seek answers, and they did not explore the issues or concerns in front of them. Instead, they went the duration of the year teaching side by side, helping students and working together, but did not take it to the level of collaborative inquiry.

Collective responsibility. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you feel almost as responsible for the other children in your school or

community as you do for your own, and do you take responsibility with others to help them?” (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. In collective responsibility, there is a mutual obligation between partners who work together to support each other and the learners they have in common (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). In this situation, Darren and Jaiden were paired together in a co-teaching classroom with general education and special education students. Jaiden expressed early on in the interviews that it was easy to fall into the habit of referring to the students as “his” and “mine,” as opposed to “ours,” sharing the responsibility equally. Darren expressed, one should not think, “That’s your kid, so this is my kid. That wouldn’t work at all.” As Hargreaves and O’Connor contend, through collective responsibility, teachers work together to break down this barrier, as “it is about *our* students, rather than just *my* students” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a, p. 112).

Jaiden owned that when she and Darren started teaching together, she was not familiar working with students with more significant academic and behavioral needs, and it came so naturally for Darren that a divide was created. She expressed, “It was definitely a challenge,” and she “needed to let go of the reigns a bit more.” However, as the year progressed, through growth, conversation, and working together, a number of transformations occurred, including the narrative of “his” and “mine,” slowly turning to “ours.” Darren supported this transition as well. When the partnership formed, he was more familiar with working with and addressing individual student needs rather than delivering the content, so it was expected that a separation would occur. Darren and Jaiden wanted to break the cycle of separation, so over time, they implemented different models of co-teaching: they broke up the classroom randomly, and they

altered responsibility. Throughout the year, they were able to see the students as “ours” and share collective responsibility.

Roger and Anna. Over the course of the interviews, Roger and Anna’s co-teaching relationship demonstrated significant growth and progress. In the first interview, Anna was candid about how nervous she was to co-teach. She did not understand the practice, was unfamiliar with it, and was not sure if she was right for the partnership. She indicated, “My concern is how the class is so heavily infiltrated with [special education] students, and it makes me nervous as a teacher. . . because I have so many kids I’m responsible for.” She spoke openly about those concerns. As the interviews progressed, a change was noted. Though Anna still seemed unsure of things, her language shifted, and she spoke about how grateful she was for the partnership she and Roger shared, expressing, “We have gotten into a rhythm.” A change was evident in her language. She previously spoke of “her” students and “my” classroom, but that became “our” students and “our” classroom.

Roger noted the change as well. When they first started working together, he expressed how he felt like a helper in the classroom, and his role was merely a supportive one. He did not feel like Anna’s equal as a teacher. In the last interview with Roger, he discussed how that had changed, and things were much more equitable between the two of them, providing an example of “We both know what we are doing now. I know the units and know what we are getting into. I can be ready with supports and the things kids will be needing.” Roger transitioned from supporting Anna to being her co-teacher.

Over the course of the interviews, a shift happened. Roger and Anna began the journey as individuals, working independent from one another, but over time, they moved toward collective

responsibility. Collective responsibility is a “mutual obligation” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a, p. 112), and Roger and Anna sought to embrace it.

Connor and Danielle. When interviews began with Connor and Danielle, a disparity in language about their students was noted immediately. When Connor spoke, he used the term “my students,” as did Danielle. There was a division between the students with disabilities and the general education students. Connor said from the beginning, “I decided to put all my special [education] kids in her class.” Danielle spoke of how “My students and his students learn at different speeds.” Their language was divisive, and it was contradictory to the foundational element of collective responsibility where it should be about “*our* students, rather than just *my* students” according to Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a, p. 113). Connor and Danielle did not speak of “our” students; however, despite their divide in language, they spoke about how they desired the partnership and the responsibility they had to one another.

Though she used the language of “his” and “mine,” Danielle spoke about how having two teachers supported students learning at different speeds: “Having two of us permits us to support varying learners.” She gave the example of how she or Connor would take a small group and provide either additional instruction or re-teaching. She said sometimes Connor would teach and sometimes she would teach. Whoever was not teaching would step in and support students who were struggling. Connor also spoke of how he would take students into his classroom to provide re-teaching or assistance and support for studying and test taking.

Both Connor and Danielle worked together to serve and support their students, despite the language being divisive. Though they did not fully embrace the terminology of “our” students, their actions supported the idea that each of them worked for their students together.

Collective initiative. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you seize initiative and step forward to innovate, make a change, or help a colleague in need before you are asked?" (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. In the tenet of collective initiative, teachers are expected to "step forward" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p. 113) and take initiative. According to Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), the desired outcome is "Educators are inspired and empowered to try out innovations that engage their students and reignite their own passions for teaching" (p. 113). Jaiden expressed that in the co-teaching relationship, you have to be "quick to jump in." Though she and Darren tried to be intentional with their planning and time together, as educators, much of what they did was in the moment, and there was not time to process every decision. She expressed that over time, as she and Darren built their partnership, they were able to take more initiative with greater ease. As they became comfortable with one another and their working relationship, it was common for Jaiden and Darren to pull groups of students to work with, or they would adjust the day's plans in the moment. Jaiden referred to it as "a constant state of going with the flow," stating, "I'm always up for a challenge, or something new."

While Darren and Jaiden shared a collective initiative on a smaller scale, the collective initiative was something that they continued to strive for in the bigger picture. Both Darren and Jaiden expressed they would like more training and more convenient planning time. According to Darren, "The biggest challenge, really, in the end, is always time and having time to do everything we know needs to be done." They felt the decision to co-teach was made for them, and there was not a lot of follow up to support their partnership. Through the interviews, and these examples, collective initiative was something that they were still striving for on a grander scale.

Roger and Anna. In the collective initiative, educators seek to “reignite their passions” (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a, p. 113) and step forward with greater initiative. Upon the initial interviews with Roger and Anna, collective initiative was not present. During the first partner interviews, both Roger and Anna appeared timid and unsure about their partnership and the work they were doing. Roger expressed how he held a supportive role, and Anna expressed that she did not even realize they were co-teaching, indicating “I didn’t even know we were co-teaching until somebody slapped that name on it. I just thought, he’s here for support.” They were in a partnership, but they were functioning somewhat independently of one another.

Over the course of the interviews and throughout the year, their relationship grew. Anna expressed she was grateful for Roger and that they were able to work together. Roger expressed that as they built their relationship, he was better able to predict where Anna was going in the lesson and could be a better support. Their time together and the efforts to build their relationship allowed them the opportunity to move forward together. As time went on, Roger was able to take more of an active role in the class, teach lessons, and felt comfortable stepping in. He expressed that he began to feel like a teacher and not just a helper. Building their relationship, increasing trust, and planning together contributed to them being able to propel their relationship forward. In doing that, they were able to take initiative and make improvements to their teaching. Anna expressed they implemented more co-teaching models and that the time in front of the class was more equitable. It was a process for Anna and Roger to build a collective initiative, but over time, they were able to do so.

Connor and Danielle. In collective initiative, teachers are encouraged to step forward and work toward change and improvement (Hargreaves and O’Connor, 2018a). When Connor and Danielle began working together, it was through Connor’s initiative and his desire to see his

students included in a general education course. He took the initiative, and Danielle was willing to go along. She said because she had helped in Connor's class previously as an instructional aide, she was aware of the benefits of inclusion and was happy to have him in her classroom. She admitted not knowing how to co-teach but was open to "sharing her classroom."

It was evident from the beginning that Connor wanted to step in, help, support, and even teach, saying several times, "I know how to teach them. I can do it." He was determined to step forward. He was taking initiative, and he wanted Danielle to see his efforts. He spoke about how he was there to support her and make her job easier and would do that any way possible. Danielle admitted this was an area where she needed to "release control" and be "more aware" of splitting into groups and letting Connor step in. It was an area of struggle for her because she was new to "how it should look." With Connor pushing forward and Danielle willing to be on board, there was a level of collective initiative driving them. It appeared they were still working out the how, but the desire to move forward was evident.

Mutual dialogue. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you get into deep dialogue or even heated debate with colleagues about ideas, plans, politics, or the best way to help struggling children who need another way to move forward?" (p. 118).

Darren and Jaiden. Conversation is a foundational component of any collaborative relationship. In collaborative professionalism, Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) contended mutual dialogue goes beyond surface conversation, as "talk is also the work" (p. 114). Partners need to provide feedback, offer constructive criticism, and have difficult conversations that can push the relationship forward (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a).

Upon the initial interview with Darren and Jaiden, it was clear that they had open communication in their working relationship. They spoke easily around one another: They finished each other's sentences, and they both commented on how each day, they "touch base" to plan together and debrief from the day. Darren and Jaiden were teaching together four periods of seven during the school day, and it was clear that there was a certain level of personal familiarity between them.

Mutual dialogue goes beyond typical conversation, and it was evident Darren and Jaiden went further with their conversations. When Darren and Jaiden first started teaching together, Darren had just moved to the middle school from elementary school. Though he had been teaching for a number of years, the content and curriculum was new to him. Initially, Jaiden was responsible for the majority of instruction, but as time went on, Darren realized he was ready to take on more responsibility. He was teaching the students a lesson one day, unsure if it was completely on target, and Jaiden was supporting him throughout the lesson. At the end of the day, Jaiden and Darren sat down to discuss the lesson, and Jaiden kindly and gently provided some imperative feedback for Darren on his instruction. She made several suggestions on how he could further explain the content and improve the lesson. Darren expressed how grateful he was for the feedback and how it helped him fine tune his teaching skills and increase his familiarity with the content. In mutual dialogue, feedback should be honest, and it was evident that Darren and Jaiden were willing to have deep discussions.

Another example of willingness to have deep conversations was evident in a partner interview, where both participants expressed they were learning as they went. Darren and Jaiden attended a conference on co-teaching, and after they returned from the conference, they expressed how they sat down and had an honest and candid conversation where they questioned

if they were truly co-teaching. While this conversation was more evaluative, it was another example of how they were willing to have deep conversations.

Roger and Anna. It is expected in a professional partnership that the individuals have a certain level of consistent dialogue between them. As Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) insisted, for there to truly be mutual dialogue, the conversations must be deep and evaluative. In the following examples, conversational elements were noted between Anna and Roger, but there was no evidence of them taking it to a deep level.

When I first sat down with Anna, she seemed timid in regard to co-teaching and what the partnership should entail. She had no formal training nor formal directives, and from one day to the next, she had a new teacher in her classroom. When Roger first joined her class, she felt he was just there to help. When I asked Anna if she had received any training or directives on co-teaching, she was not aware such training existed. All of this was said in the interview with Roger, so I could see that they were comfortable with one another, but they were not having deep conversations together to improve their work.

Over the course of the interviews, Roger and Anna expressed they could be doing better as partners. They felt they needed to work on their planning time, making it more consistent. They were in agreement that conversation was important, but both spoke of it as something they needed to do, not that they were currently doing. Roger expressed toward the end of the interviews that he and Anna had been making an effort to be friends. He stated, "The stronger relationship you have with the person you're working with. . . I'm going to do a better job working with that person." Roger recognized the importance of conversation and going deeper with one another. While there was not evidence of true mutual dialogue between Roger and Anna, there was evidence that they were striving for something deeper.

Connor and Danielle. When two teachers work closely together, conversation is inevitable. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) urged educators to take their conversations “deeper” and claimed, “talk is also the work” (p. 114). Discussion is honest and genuine, and will often result in challenging one another because conversations go beyond a courteous and personal level to a true and consistent dialogue (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Deep, authentic conversations were not evident between Connor and Danielle.

Connor and Danielle spoke about how they planned together once a week. With their classrooms being adjacent to one another, there were times when they “touch base during the day” (Danielle), and Danielle stated, “I usually already have it planned out and just give it to him,” demonstrating they were not regularly working together. Danielle said she usually had the lessons planned and let Connor know what it was they are doing. They worked together, got along with one another, and knew each other well, but they were not intentionally taking the time to plan together and have genuine dialogue. While there was evidence of a strong working relationship, there was no evidence of deeper conversations.

Joint work. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you have other colleagues you do truly fulfilling work with—inside or outside your school—in terms of planning, teaching, reviewing, or giving feedback, for example?” (p. 119).

Darren and Jaiden. The foundation of co-teaching is the partnership. Co-teaching could be defined as joint work. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) defined joint work as work that “connects people and binds them together to construct something bigger than themselves” (p. 116). The key to joint work is more than just working together, but rather, it is intentional and productive, elements that were evident in Darren’s and Jaiden’s working relationship.

In the first interview with Darren, he jokingly referred to Jaiden as his work wife and unveiled several personal details about Jaiden of which a dear friend would be aware. He again referred to her as his work wife in their joint interview. The ease and familiarity between the two of them was evident from the very first moment. What struck me was the high regard with which they spoke of one another and their partnership. Darren said, “Our personalities really get along” and “we have a great relationship.” Jaiden said when she was paired with Darren, she was new to the school and did not know many people. She had heard a little bit about Darren because he had worked in the district for a while, and she was optimistic that it would be a positive pairing. She said she realized almost instantly how lucky she was to have the partnership, expressing, “He and I get along very well together,” and “I love that we have trust there, and there’s a really strong trust factor there.” Darren was not familiar with the general education content their first year, but from the very beginning of the year, he stepped in and supported the class and students. Jaiden said while he was learning the content, he did whatever he could to be an active partner. He planned with the grade-level team; he graded papers; and he supported Jaiden during lessons. The early days allowed Jaiden to see Darren’s investment in their co-teaching partnership. Over the course of their partnership, their joint work evolved. They were equals, partners, and teachers, working together and doing the hard work on a daily basis.

Roger and Anna. When interviews began with Roger and Anna, their partnership was in the emerging stages. They had been paired together without having an existing working relationship. Anna was unfamiliar with co-teaching, and Roger was new to teaching altogether. In the early interviews, it was clear they were still learning about one another and how to develop their partnership. Anna discussed how she did not even know what co-teaching was, and she did not realize that was what they were doing. Roger, though he knew what co-teaching was, said he

had never seen it in practice before. The two were in a very uncertain place. However, a shift was noted over time, and I could see how their relationship progressed and how they both put their “hands in the middle” to “make it work,” according to Roger.

Roger and Anna shared the sentiment, “Two teachers are better than one.” Anna expressed as she and Roger became more familiar with one another and comfortable with their partnership, they shared roles and found a sense of balance in their relationship. Anna gave the example of how she and Roger switched teaching. While one was teaching, the other would be able to support and monitor students. Roger indicated when they first started, he felt like more of a helper in the classroom, but as time went on, he felt like true partners. Roger echoed Anna’s sentiments, saying that they were able to share roles, and it no longer felt like only Anna’s classroom.

In the final interviews with both Roger and Anna, each participant independently mentioned the significance of trust in their relationship. Over the course of the year, Anna said they were able to trust one another, and that made all the difference. Roger said almost exactly the same thing: trust was what made the relationship work and got them to a place where they were able to find a “rhythm and routine.” Roger said their relationship “requires a really high level of vulnerability. You need people who you are comfortable with,” and he was able to find that over time with Anna. In building the trust, they were able to build their working partnership and join together as teachers with a common goal and shared responsibility.

Connor and Danielle. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) believed joint work involves action and it goes beyond surface-level partnering. From the first interview with Connor and Danielle, I could see an ease and familiarity between the two of them. Though they had only been co-teaching together for 1 year, they had known each other for nearly a decade, as Danielle

previously worked in Connor's classroom as an instructional aide. Having this prior professional relationship created a working rapport and lent to them demonstrating a willingness to come together in their partnership.

When posed with the question of how they made their partnership work, Danielle expressed it required "constant reflection." She said it was important to continually "try different strategies and collaborate about the results." In having a constant state of reflection, the pair saw what worked and what did not work. They adjusted their teaching and instruction accordingly. Danielle said she and Connor planned intentional time to meet together at least once a week, but they also touched base at unplanned times. Their rooms were adjacent, which allowed for conversation to happen easily. One time, when I was doing an individual interview with Connor, Danielle stopped in to chat and talk about the day, not realizing I was there.

As Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) indicated, "Joint work is thoughtful work that involves dialogue as well as doing" (p. 116). Danielle and Connor were willing to do the work with one another and needed to continue to do the work. They needed to continue their constant reflection, meeting together, and conversations to make improvements moving forward.

Common meaning and purpose. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Is your teaching and your own learning imbued with meaning and a deep sense of moral purpose, and do you use your influence and authority to help young people find genuine meaning and purpose in their lives also?" (p. 119).

Darren and Jaiden. Common meaning and purpose in a collaborative partnership are expands beyond students' academic achievements, as it will "encourage young people to grow and flourish as whole human beings who can live lives and find work that has purpose" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a, p. 117). Educators are charged to not only teach students but

also prepare them for the future. Darren and Jaiden strived to work together to teach and prepare their students. However, that preparation was only discussed in an academic realm.

Darren gave several examples of how he and Jaiden worked to prepare their students, give them access to the curriculum and content, and adhere to the rigor for which co-teaching allows. Jaiden supported each of these claims, agreeing that the co-teaching environment gave students opportunities to learn, have access to their peers and general education, and reach higher levels of learning. Darren and Jaiden took the rigor and academics in their classroom very seriously, and it was evident that teaching students was of the utmost priority.

According to collaborative professionalism, educators are encouraged to go beyond the academics to prepare students for life beyond the classroom (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). While this was not discussed directly, it was evident through the interviews that Darren and Jaiden strived to prepare students for the years ahead of them. Their responses did not reflect a direct revelation of a greater purpose, but it did show purpose.

Roger and Anna. When Roger and Anna began co-teaching together, Roger was a new teacher. He expressed how he had heard about co-teaching in his teacher preparation program and had heard about the benefits for students. When he learned he would be co-teaching, he said he was eager and excited to be able to implement what he had learned. In the first interview with Roger, he indicated, “it really was my goal to make it work.” Roger wanted the experience to be a positive one for students, where they could learn, grow, and flourish. Roger realized, however, that he could not be the only partner sharing that sentiment.

In collaborative professionalism, an underlying goal is long-term student success (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Student success is not just in the present moment; it goes beyond that to their future and developing “whole human beings” (Hargreaves & O'Connor,

2018a, p. 117). Roger recognized that though his ultimate goal was student success, both in the present moment and in the long term, he needed to have buy-in from his co-teaching partner. According to Roger, “You need two people who are flexible and have a common understanding,” and also indicated, “If the two people who are trying to co-teach together aren’t trying to achieve the same thing, or aren’t willing. . . . Then they’re not going to work together.” When I asked Roger how he developed and strengthened this element of his co-teaching partnership with Anna, he said that the ultimate factor was intentionality. They spent time together, built a friendship, and were vulnerable with each other. Those things led to a deeper relationship, shared goals, and common ground. They started their partnership on opposite ends of the spectrum—one all in and the other uncertain—but over time, they were able to meet in the middle through continued effort. As Roger and Anna improved their relationship, they were able to find common meaning and purpose in their partnership and classroom efforts.

Connor and Danielle. According to Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a), collaborative professionalism “advances a common purpose that is greater than test scores or even academic achievement on it’s own” (p. 116). The tenet of collaborative professionalism is centered on the bigger picture, so students are not just successful in the moment, but rather they are prepared to flourish for years to come as a whole human being. In the individual interviews, Connor and Danielle both spoke to this matter.

Connor had been teaching for over a decade in varying locations and grade levels. He spoke emphatically about preparing his eighth-grade students for high school and “whatever lies beyond.” Connor said he had regular conversations with his students about how the choices they make will shape their future. For example, he shared about how each year, he has a conversation at the end of the year with his students about moving on to high school and how one decision can

change everything. That one decision can be a positive choice or a negative choice, but it has the potential to leave a lasting impact. He said he encouraged students to not only work hard academically but to also be aware of the choices that they make.

Danielle spoke about the “whole student” and approached the issues her students might be facing on personal and emotional levels. Danielle discussed how much students are impacted by what is going on in their lives, such as depression, family issues, or a break up. She did not speak to how students are impacted by these in the long term, but she did speak to how mindful educators need to be of these things.

Connor and Danielle desired to see their students succeed, in the immediate and in the long-term. However, their views and approaches were different. Connor talked about conversations and actively working to prepare students, whereas Danielle discussed student success from an perspective of mindfulness and being aware of what students are experiencing in the day to day. Connor and Danielle did not seem to approach this as a pair but rather as individuals. A common purpose in the partnership was not evident; however, it was clear that they both want students to succeed.

Collaborating with students. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: “Do you collaborate *with* your students sometimes as well as *for* them?” (p. 119).

Darren and Jaiden. One agreement between Darren and Jaiden was the benefit of an additional teacher in the classroom, which increased the student-to-teacher ratio. Both participants spoke of groupings and times they were able to work more closely with students. Jaiden, as the general education teacher, stressed how helpful it was to “have an extra set of

eyes.” She expressed how she and Darren were able to reach more students, increase the quality of their instruction, and have a better gauge of student progress.

Despite their active work for students, Darren and Jaiden did not reveal instances where they were working with their students. Their students were not considered partners in the process. Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) believed that in collaborative professionalism, students are not just the subjects but participants and they are “actively engaged with the teachers in constructing change” (p. 117). While direct collaboration with students was not evident, it both Darren and Jaiden placed student progress and wellbeing as a priorities.

Roger and Anna. According to Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a), students are generally the focus of teachers’ collaboration. Teachers actively work for their students to increase learning, improve behavior, and develop strategies of support. Roger and Anna were adamant that their biggest struggle was planning together. They expressed they were not given adequate time to meet together; they were not provided with directives on how to move forward with co-teaching; and they were required to make it work on their own. Roger expressed the lack of planning time was the biggest gap for the two of them. Over the course of the interviews, Roger and Anna demonstrated significant growth in the area of collaboration. Roger indicated they were more intentional with their time together and were making time each week to meet and plan. Anna, though she agreed they were making strides in this area, she felt their planning time was an area that needed improvement.

Collaborative professionalism implies students are part of the collaboration process (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Student voice is critical, ensuring that the teacher is working with them and not just for them (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). There was no indication Roger and Anna were including students in the collaboration process. They did, however,

develop strategies to fine tune their own collaboration over time through increasing their weekly meetings, building a friendship, and developing common goals.

Connor and Danielle. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a), through collaborative professionalism, encouraged educators to collaborate with students and not just for students (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Student voice is foundational in student engagement and a key factor in moving forward toward change (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). While there was no evidence of Connor and Danielle working with students to move toward educational change, they both discussed situations during their individual interviews where they were collaborating with students and allowing students to have voices in the classroom.

Connor had been a middle school teacher for a number of years, but he previously taught at the high-school level and in an adult education program. His experience informed him about tools students need to be prepared for their futures. Connor explained each year as he discussed the transition to high school with his students, he also discussed job opportunities, necessary requirements, and how the choices the students make could impact them in their academic futures. He put the math to the side and had real and candid conversations with his students about what is awaiting them and how their choices are instrumental in the years to come.

Danielle's example was in relation to students' personal lives. She talked about how what is happening in a student's life can impact their academic performance, such as a break up or depression. Danielle used those moments with students to work with them and help them navigate the things that they are going through. She, too, put the math aside and worked alongside the student on how to move forward despite of what they were experiencing.

Connor and Danielle talked about instances of working with students independent of one another in their individual interviews. It was important to both of them to work with students on

a level that stretched beyond academics. While the conversations may not have been about educational change, they certainly incorporated student voice and provided an arena for students to be a part of their own futures.

Big-picture thinking for all. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) provided the following question for analysis: "Do you get the big picture of your organization, understand how everything is connected to everything else, and take responsibility for your own part in all of that?" (p. 119).

Darren and Jaiden. The bigger picture with Darren and Jaiden was student success, and for that to take place, their relationship was a priority. According to Jaiden, when asked how she would describe the essence of the co-teaching relationship, her first response was "really strong." She described how every day was a learning process for them both: "We both are still learning how to properly do the co-teach thing. . . but our relationship is strong." They were learning how to co-teach, work together, and be the best they could be for the students. The students saw them as one unit, as equals, as their teachers. In their time together, Darren and Jaiden had seen growth in students and themselves. Jaiden expressed, "The first year was definitely a challenge. Last year, we were still growing, and I feel like this year, we are really honing in on how we can do this." Jaiden said it is a struggle to make sure student needs are being met, make sure they are splitting things equally, and stay on top of planning. Jaiden and Darren worked daily toward doing what was best for the students. Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018a) contended the bigger picture requires everyone's involvement: "They see it, live it, and create it together" (p. 7). Darren and Jaiden worked together each day, striving to build their partnership and ensure student success. They were partners in that mission and goal.

Roger and Anna. For Roger and Anna, their focus was their relationship. They believed it was imperative to share “a common understanding of what you’re trying to achieve” (Roger), and “if we’re not trying to achieve the same thing, they we’re going in two different directions” (Roger). Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) indicated in collaborative professionalism, everyone needs to be part of the big picture. For Roger and Anna, their big picture and driving force was their partnership. Over the course of a year, they worked to get on the same page, work together, and improve their classroom function. To gain that common understanding, several actions were needed, and intentionality was at the forefront.

Roger and Anna became intentional in their planning time. At the beginning of their partnership, they were finding time to meet whenever they could or would touch base at the start of a class period. By the end of the year, they had built time in each week to plan. Roger and Anna were also intentional about building their relationship. Roger indicated they talked about personal things, spent time together outside of class, and worked to become friends.

As Roger and Anna discovered their co-teaching partnership was the foundational element that needed their focus, they saw the impact it had in the classroom. Both Anna and Roger indicated they trusted each other and were comfortable sharing responsibility. Ultimately, the foundation of the relationship was where their efforts were focused.

Connor and Danielle. Using collaborative professionalism can encourage educators to be a part of the big picture and have ownership in their cause (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018a). Ultimately, Connor and Danielle shared the big picture of student success, but they were disconnected when it came to the big picture of co-teaching and the purpose behind it.

Connor and Danielle’s school was piloting the co-teaching model, and there was a lack of buy in from Connor and Danielle. Connor indicated he had “seen this before” and he was certain

it would not last. He expressed how often things change and “nothing sticks around forever.” He expressed how the school not being well versed on what co-teaching is and not providing support for teachers, led to a lack of directives and cohesion. Danielle shared the same sentiment: There was no support of follow through or directives. She said she went along with what Connor said.

Having little to no support, no follow through, and no directives on how to co-teach or on what co-teaching is left Connor and Danielle to make it work on their own, separated from the bigger picture.

Across the Pairs

As Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) outlined, “Collaborative professionalism is about working well together in a professional way” (p. 14). To take steps forward in co-teaching, educators and practitioners must understand what is working, the benefits, and the challenges. With an examination of the benefits and challenges of co-teaching, the following section introduces factors that facilitate success on individual, relational, and administrative levels, relative to the co-teaching partnerships in this study.

Individual factors that facilitate success in co-teaching. Co-teaching is centered around a partnership: The partnership is the foundational element. Despite co-teaching being a partnership, at the root of the partnership are two individuals. Certain factors must be evident in those individuals to lead to a successful co-teaching relationship.

Knowledge base. When an individual begins co-teaching, it is imperative they begin with knowledge of what co-teaching is and a basic understanding of how to co-teach. Schools regularly incorporate co-teaching, but definitions and applications are not universal. It is imperative schools make clear what co-teaching is and what the expectations are in regard to implementation.

Of the six individuals, two were not clear on what co-teaching was before they began. Anna stated, “I didn’t even know we were co-teaching until somebody slapped that name on it, I thought he was just here for support.” A lack of knowledge impeded partnership development, and instead of building a partnership from the beginning, the pair struggled to understand what their purpose was.

In addition, of the six individuals, at least one individual in each partnership shared they were not clear on how to co-teach and what the expectation was. Roger stated he and Anna, “never really had any direction on how to do this or what to do,” and Jaiden indicated in their third year of co-teaching, she was still learning how to co-teach. If the individuals better understand the *what* and *how* of co-teaching, they would be better prepared, ultimately leading to increased success.

Relational factors that facilitate success in co-teaching. With the relationship being such a foundational element of co-teaching, it needs to be of the utmost priority in co-teaching. However, there are components to the relationship that are essential in building and solidifying a partnership.

Common goal. In a co-teaching partnership, a common goal is necessary. A common goal brings about a unified mindset. The two individuals must come together and work toward the same thing. The common goal can be in regard to the big picture or in the day-to-day workings. For example, as pairs work together, they need to be aligned on what it is on which they are working. As Roger indicated, “If we’re not trying to achieve the same thing, then we’re going in different directions.” Connor and Danielle echoed the same sentiment, saying, “a common understanding” is the foundation of partnership. Sharing the same goal allows for individuals to work together in their partnership and set their vision on what is ahead of them.

For each pairing, though their common goal might be different, it is essential that common goals are a part of the working relationship.

Trust. Trust is the foundational element of any relationship, including the co-teaching partnership. All participants in the study discussed the importance of trust in a co-teaching partnership. For the partners involved, trust was the foundation upon which their relationship was built, and trust allowed them to become partners. Jaiden indicated, “There’s a really strong trust factor there,” when asked what the most important element of their partnership was. Anna expressed similar sentiments when asked in her final interview what the biggest change was in their partnership, “trust has increased,” demonstrating trust’s foundational significance. The pairs in this study built their relationships and became partners. A huge factor in that process was being able to trust one another. Trust allowed them to be vulnerable and open to working with one another.

School-level factors that facilitate success in co-teaching. Individual and relational factors are ultimately part of the larger picture of school level factors. To facilitate success at a school level, certain administrative supports are foundational.

Administrative supports. The support of administration in co-teaching is imperative and needs to be a factor not only in the initial stages of a partnership but throughout the co-teaching partnership. During both of those stages, it is necessary for administration to provide support. The support can vary based on the needs of the individuals, teachers, and school site, but some common ways to provide support would be to communicate clear expectations, involve the teachers in the planning and implementation, and regularly follow up with co-teachers.

In the case of the three pairs involved in this study, administration made the initial decisions about co-teaching, but there was no consistent follow through while the pairs were

working together. Darren and Jaiden were sent to an initial training when they began co-teaching, but there was no follow up. Connor and Danielle and Roger and Anna did not receive any formal training or direct guidance from administration. Each pair expressed that support from administration was something they wished they had. Ironically, it was the absence of administrative supports that demonstrated its significance to the co-teaching partnership. Having support, clear direction, and guidance from administration is essential for co-teaching.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the co-teaching relationship as the participants experienced it. Three pairs of co-teachers participated in the study to share their experiences with co-teaching and the dynamics of their relationships. Using a phenomenological approach, through in-depth interviews and an analysis using the framework of collaborative professionalism, a deeper understanding of the co-teaching relationship as it was experienced emerged. With a greater understanding of the co-teaching partnership and the factors that lead to success, there are several steps that must be taken. The following chapter outlines the implications of this study and the implications it holds for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE—DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The history of co-teaching as an inclusive practice is extensive and dates far back into the history of special education (L. Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 1993; Scruggs et al., 2007). Co-teaching emerged to provide effective instruction for all students, including students with disabilities (Friend, 2008b; Scruggs et al., 2007). According to educational research, the premise of co-teaching is to ensure students with disabilities not only have seats in classrooms but that their places in classrooms have the same importance as general education students, and students with disabilities are provided with meaningful educational experiences (Friend, 2014a). Educators and scholars have discussed the benefits of co-teaching, which has been widely used in schools; however, co-teaching continues to evolve in definition and application (Beninghof, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, co-teaching is defined as a partnership between a general education teacher and a special education teacher, in which they teach a group of heterogeneous students, including students with disabilities (Friend, 2008b; Friend et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). This study examined the authentic experience of three pairs of middle school co-teachers. Through a phenomenological approach, I attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the study and the implications and recommendations for practitioners and educators.

Purpose of the Study

Friend et al., 2010 called for an increase in co-teaching literature, in both quantity and quality. While the literature is consistent in that partnership is a foundational component of co-teaching (Friend, 2008a, 2014a; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Solis et al., 2012), there is a need for more depth and breadth of research, especially as it pertains to the co-teaching relationship.

In addition to a need for an increase in literature, this study was born of a personal desire for a greater understanding of the co-teaching experience. As a special education teacher who co-teaches daily, it is my desire to better understand the partnership to improve the co-teaching experience. I am currently in my fifth year of co-teaching and work with two different teachers, my fifth and sixth partners. Every partnership and every experience has been different and unique. With so many variations, prescriptive literature is not always applicable. The relationship in co-teaching is a foundational element, but steps need to be taken to improve and increase the understanding of the relationship.

Through this study, I the researcher, attempted to bridge the gap between the literature and teacher experiences. It provided an increase in understanding of the phenomenon of the co-teaching partnership. Through a phenomenological approach, I examined the co-teaching relationship through the lived experience of three pairs of co-teachers.

The Co-Teaching Relationship and a Call to Action

Educational scholars have consistently expressed that the relationship between co-teachers is a foundational component of co-teaching (Benninghof, 2012; Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008a, 2014a; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sims, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). However, educational literature surrounding co-teaching continues to be prescriptive in nature (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Ploessl et al., 2010; Sileo, 2011). Literature provides directives of what co-teaching is and how to co-teach, but it rarely stretches beyond that scope.

Co-teaching literature, most often, focuses on what co-teaching is (Conderman et al., 2009; Friend, 2008b; Friend & Cook, 2007; Friend et al., 2010; Friend et al., 1993; Sims, 2008). The literature often provides an account of the definition of co-teaching, followed by the most

commonly used models of co-teaching (Friend, 2008b; Friend, 2008b; Friend & Cook, 2007; Friend et al., 2010; Friend et al., 1993; Sims, 2008). A number of scholars have provided resources to educators on strategies for successful co-teaching experiences (Broderick et al., 2005; Conderman & Hedin, 2012; Friend, 2008a; Friend 2008b; Friend, 2014a), and many have recognized the importance of the relationship (Danforth, 2014; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Friend, 2007; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sileo, 2011). However, a deeper level is needed in co-teaching literature (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012).

In this study, I sought to reach a deeper level of understanding of the co-teaching relationship. I examined the experiences of general education teachers and special education teachers sharing a co-teaching relationship, the working relationships and dynamics between co-teachers, and the perceived benefits and challenges that come with a co-teaching partnership. Through the teachers experiences a greater understanding of the partnership was obtained and now steps forward must be discussed. The following sections provide a call to action for educators and practitioners in their future work with co-teaching.

Research Implications

The relationship between co-teachers is a foundational structure of co-teaching. Co-teaching literature is extensive; however, it has remained prescriptive (Friend, 2008a, 2008b, 2014a; Friend et al., 2010; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Sims, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). In this study, I examined the co-teaching relationship on a deeper level, and as a result, this study provides valuable insights. The following section includes implications for the study, as it relates to the following stakeholders and scenarios: teachers, administration and school culture, professional development, and teacher preparation.

Teachers

Danforth (2014) claimed, “If the essence of co-teaching can be captured in a nutshell, it is this: the effectiveness of co-teaching directly reflects the quality of the working relationship between the teachers” (p. 105). As the relationship is the foundational element of co-teaching, it is important to support teachers involved in that partnership. This can be done in several ways.

First, teachers need to be involved in the planning and implementation of co-teaching. Scholars have contended a critical element of co-teaching is to ask for volunteers. (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016; Murawski & Dieker, 2008). If educators step into roles willingly, they will be more likely to succeed. In this study, half of the participants volunteered, whereas the other half were approached by other teachers or administrators. Teachers must be a part of the process from the beginning.

Teachers need to understand what their roles are and how important those roles are. This study showed how teachers were able to work together collaboratively, how important trust was in the relationships, and how important a common goal was in the partnerships. Understanding these foundational components is important and can lead to a better understanding of the partnership. Using this study to increase teacher awareness and knowledge would be beneficial for educators and practitioners.

Administration and School Culture

Similar to educators, administrators would benefit from the findings of this study. School administrators are often responsible for the initial implementation of co-teaching at their schools, and the responsibility of scheduling and creating a partnership often falls to them (Friend et al., 2010). Administrators cannot lead this initiative, nor sustain co-teaching without proper planning (Friend et al., 2010).

This study provides a unique understanding for administrators. Administrators are able to understand the complexities of the partnership and see the essential elements needed for successful collaboration. They would benefit from the findings of this study because it provides a synopsis of teachers' experiences, providing insight on how to better support teachers. Support could come in the form of collaboration before co-teaching, such as involving the teachers in preplanning. While Darren and Jaiden attended a training at the beginning of their partnership, none of the other pairs received follow-up directives or support from their administrators while they were co-teaching together. This is a crucial area for support, as it is the administrators' responsibility to implement and sustain successful co-teaching partnerships (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016).

The support from administration also is relevant to school culture. To ensure teachers and administrators are prepared for co-teaching, one must first ensure the school climate and culture promotes an inclusive environment (Kohler-Evans, 2006). Without an inclusive culture, teachers are less likely to want to share their classrooms (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2016). Collaboration should be built into the culture and life of a school (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018a). Collaboration and co-teaching should not be the exception; they should become the norm in school settings. Murawski and Bernhardt (2016) contended, "Students with special needs can no longer be simply physically 'included' in general education classes. These students need authentic opportunities to access and participate in the curriculum" (p. 31). Changes such as these need to happen in schools.

Professional Development

Ongoing professional development is critical to support co-teachers. Teachers should be trained prior to co-teaching, and training and support needs to continue throughout the

partnership. According to the participants, Darren and Jaiden were the only pair who received any formal training on co-teaching. Roger and Anna indicated how helpful training and directives would have been to them. Providing educators with opportunities to grow and strengthen their practices would lead to increased success with co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010). Friend et al. (2010) contended, “A critical need exists for stakeholders involved in co-teaching to be better prepared for implementation” (p. 19). Those stakeholders include special education teachers, general education teachers, and school administrators (Friend et al., 2010). All three groups need training and on-going professional development on co-teaching, with special focus and attention given to the co-teaching partnership.

Teacher Preparation and Support

Researchers have stressed the importance of the co-teaching relationship and the foundational structures that must be in place (Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). One pivotal foundational structure that needs developing and improvement is to prepare and support co-teachers, before they begin teaching. Teacher preparation programs fall short of preparing general education teachers and special education teachers for co-teaching. As Danforth (2014) stated, “Nowhere in your teacher education program were you taught how to create a relational foundation built on mutual respect (p. 105); however, that is exactly what is needed.

Under the umbrella of co-teaching, general education teachers and special education teachers have unique skillsets (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b; Murawski, 2002; Scruggs et al., 2007). Special education teachers generally have a higher understanding of specially designed instruction and individualizing instruction for students with unique learning needs (Friend,

2014a; Friend, 2014b; Friend et al., 2010; Murawski, 2002). General education teachers are generally well versed in content and grade-level standards (Friend, 2014a; Friend, 2014b; Friend et al., 2010; Murawski, 2002). In all three partnerships in this study, it was evident the knowledge bases of the special education teachers were different from the bases of the general education teachers. The general education teachers were not adequately trained for what co-teaching is, and though the special education teacher held a greater knowledge on this topic, there was still a level of application that was missing. Altering teacher preparation will be pivotal to co-teaching. It is to be expected teachers will continue to learn throughout the process, but more efforts must go into teacher preparation.

Research Limitations

In this study, there were several limitations. The first limitation pertains to the size of the study. Six individuals participated in the study, and while some scholars believe an appropriate sample for a phenomenological study is four to 10 participants (Creswell, 2013; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009), the findings are cannot be applied to all co-teachers. Similarly, the research was conducted exclusively in the middle-school setting. Because the scope of participants was limited to a certain area and age range, application is limited.

Though the research was limited due to the size and sampling of the study, there is still an element of transferability in the research. Transferability, denotes the application of the results of this study in another context (Burchett, Mayhew, Lavis, & Dobrow, 2012; Joram, Gabriele, & Walton, 2020). The transferability and application of the research is addressed in the future steps and recommendations.

Another limitation of the study is possible researcher bias. As the researcher, I was the sole individual responsible for data collection and data analysis. As a special education teacher

who is currently co-teaching, I brought my own biases pertaining to co-teaching. Through the process of bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; M. D. Smith & Fowler, 2009), I, the researcher, attempted to put aside my biases and focused on the data to provide rich and thick descriptions to increase the reliability and validity of the findings.

Future Steps and Recommendations

This research study was necessary for an increased understanding of the co-teaching relationship and the dynamics of co-teaching partnerships as experienced by individuals. The following recommendations would allow for continued understanding of the co-teaching partnership and how that partnership can continue to develop and thrive, ultimately leading to increased success in co-teaching. The recommendations pertain to teacher preparation programs, professional development, support from administration, the co-teaching partnership, and additional research. The following section outlines specific steps to increase knowledge, provide support, and improve application.

Teacher Preparation

The first opportunity to prepare teachers for co-teaching is in their teacher preparation programs. As Murawski and Bernhardt (2016) proclaimed, “Co-teaching shouldn’t be seen as a ‘special education thing,’ but rather a ‘best practices in education thing” (p. 31). Teacher preparation programs need to substantially increase their instruction on co-teaching (Austin, 2001). Co-teaching should be taught in both general education programs and special education programs, as both teachers are equal partners in the service delivery model. Furthermore, relevant to co-teaching, teacher courses should include information on relationship building, conflict management, and collaboration. Incorporating a greater depth and breadth of education on co-teaching in teacher preparation programs would allow for teachers to be more prepared

before they step into classrooms. In addition, a greater understanding normalizes co-teaching and allows all teachers to become more familiar with the practice.

Professional Development

Another option to further teachers' education and understanding of co-teaching is professional development. According to Friend et al. (2010), "A critical need exists for the key stakeholders involved in co-teaching to be better prepared for its implementation" (p. 19). To prepare stakeholders, professional development requires a shift. Professional development on co-teaching should happen on several levels (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Sims, 2008). First, teachers should attend an initial training on co-teaching with their partner, outside of their district, by a state or national presenter. They should be equipped with co-teaching strategies, models, and information on procedures. In addition to an initial training, teachers should attend at least one other training during the year with their co-teaching partner to delve deeper into practices and working on the relationship. Professional development on co-teaching, must move from *what* is co-teaching to *how* do we co-teach. Administration should be involved in the professional development trainings so they can provide necessary supports to their staff.

In addition to trainings and workshops provided outside of the district, teachers should be allowed collaboration time with other teachers in their district who co-teach. Such opportunities could include mentor programs, where new co-teachers are paired with veteran co-teachers, or collaboration times to discuss what strategies are working and what areas are a struggle. Opportunities for collaboration ensures cohesion and consistency when it comes to the implementation of co-teaching.

The final recommendation for co-teaching is to incorporate trainings on co-teaching into staff trainings and district-wide professional development days. To reduce the stigma around co-

teaching and to increase understanding, all teachers at a school should be involved, not just those who co-teach. Increasing the general understanding for what co-teaching is and the purpose behind it allows for inclusion to become a school-wide initiative.

Support From Administration

Altering teacher preparation programs and increasing professional development can increase teacher knowledge and awareness, but administrative supports are fundamental in ensuring co-teaching is supported and prioritized (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Sims, 2008). Administration ultimately sets the tone for co-teaching and implementing it as the norm at a school site. Co-teaching should be a school-wide initiative, and it is the administration's responsibility to move in that direction.

Administration should meet with co-teachers prior to the start of the year to outline clear expectations for co-teaching and for the partnership. For example, they can define the goals of co-teaching, discuss roles of each teacher, and share strategies to build co-teaching partnerships. In addition to the initial meeting, administrators should follow up with co-teachers on a quarterly basis, including an end-of-the-year review. Conversations should be had about what is working, what is not working, and how things can be improved moving forward. Administration could meet with teachers individually or as a collective group of co-teachers, but co-teachers need to work together and strategize.

In addition to supporting co-teachers throughout the year, there are several logistical recommendations for administrators. It would be beneficial for administration to limit the numbers of teachers with whom a particular co-teacher is paired. It is unreasonable to have an individual teacher paired with more than two teachers throughout their school day, as the relationship component becomes more difficult to manage. Procedural and logistical elements

also need to be reviewed. For example, the proximity of teacher classrooms should be considered, and teachers should be provided with common planning times. Finally, teachers should be provided with resources on co-teaching; professional development for teachers should be a priority; and access to collaborate with other co-teachers at the school site and in the district should be part of the support provided to co-teachers.

Co-Teaching Partnership

The knowledge base about co-teaching must increase, and co-teachers must be well supported (Danforth, 2014; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Sileo, 2011; Sims, 2008). There are several recommendations derived from this study that pertain specifically to the co-teaching partnership and the steps teachers can take together to carry out the vision of co-teaching.

First, teachers should plan together frequently, at least one time a week. Their classrooms should be in close proximity to ensure access, and they need to have common planning times and to attend professional development trainings together.

Beyond common time to discuss classroom lessons, teachers must have deep and meaningful conversations. Teachers must determine their common goals as partners. Identifying what they are working toward can help them fine tune their everyday teaching and classroom strategies. It can assist them in outlining expectations for behavioral standards, classroom management, roles and expectations, and curriculum planning. In addition, teachers should check in at least one time a month. They should check in with each other about their partnership and how they are progressing toward their goals. Reflection must be a regular part of their teaching practices. Finally, conversations need to be had on student individualized education program

goals and how specialized academic instruction should be implemented. Having these conversations ensures both teachers are aware of student needs and can drive instruction.

The final recommendation for co-teachers would be to build a unified partnership. When two teachers share a classroom and are responsible for co-teaching, they must be able to work well together. This does not mean they have to be best friends or be a part of each other's social circles, but they must trust one another. Building a foundation of trust ensures cohesion in the classroom and it ensures that the teachers are working together toward common goals (Naraian, 2010).

Additional Research

The final recommendation stemming from this study is to increase relevant and applicable research on co-teaching partnerships. Friend et al. (2010) said, "Many questions must still be answered" (p. 18). Researchers must continue to delve deeper. For example, additional research pertaining to co-teaching relationships and the dynamics of the co-teaching partnerships would be beneficial. Researchers should study the co-teaching partnership and the personalities of the individuals involved and examine what factors make for a successful partnership and what factors are evident that support student success. Additional studies should include larger samples of teachers or samples that span across grade levels and subject areas. Increasing the depth and breadth of the study would further the understanding of the co-teaching relationship. Educators, and practitioners must continue to work toward an increased understanding of the co-teaching relationship, as the foundational structure of co-teaching is vital to furthering the practice of co-teaching.

Murawski and Bernhardt (2016) encouraged, “Co-teaching requires a paradigm shift” (p. 31). Teachers and administrators must step forward, use the knowledge garnered and continue to do better and understand more. Co-teaching has come so far, yet there is still more to do.

Personal Implications and Reflection

When I began co-teaching 5 years ago, I was out of my element. I was used to having my own classroom, doing things my own way, and implementing instruction the way I always had. Suddenly, I was expected to share all of that with another teacher. It was scary, challenging, and one of the greatest learning curves I have ever experienced as an educator. The change I was required to make in my professional life brought about this study, and the lessons I have learned from it have influenced my practice as a co-teacher.

As previously mentioned, I am now in my fifth year of co-teaching and am working with partners numbers seven and eight. I have been paired with an array of educators over the past 5 years. I have had experiences I would consider a success and some I would consider far from a success. At the foundation of each of those experiences has been the co-teaching relationship. I have seen firsthand the power of partnership.

I walk into other teachers’ classrooms each day, and I am expected to teach with them. I am expected to know their classroom expectations and rules. I am supposed to be familiar with their lessons and their goals for the day. I am expected to work alongside them, support them, and share responsibilities with them. All of that comes in addition to the support that I am expected to provide students. Working for and with students is extremely difficult if I am not in sync with the teacher. To be in sync with the teacher, we must have a strong working relationship. To have a strong working relationship, as previously mentioned, the following criteria are foundational: knowledge base, a common goal, trust, and administrative supports.

If I reflect on experiences, retrospectively, I have had over the 5 years that I would not consider a success or instances where I was struggling with my co-teacher, I can identify that one of more of those foundational factors were missing. Upon completion of the study, as I reflected on the information gathered I saw how essential these factors were with the participants, and I see how essential they are in my own practices as a co-teacher. Gaining that understanding, left me seeing there are still strides forward that need to be made.

Conclusion

In this study, I captured the experiences of three pairs of co-teachers. It examined the phenomenon of co-teaching as it was experienced by each of the individuals. As M. D. Smith and Fowler (2009) contended, “Phenomenological research reaches the core of one’s personal experience” (p. 169). This study highlighted these co-teachers’ experiences. Born of a desire for a deeper understanding of the co-teaching partnership, I used this study to bridge a gap in understanding and explored the experience of the participants.

This study affirmed the importance of the co-teaching partnership and the power that lies in the working relationship. As Hargreaves and O’Connor (2018a) insisted, “Working together beats trying to do everything yourself” (p. viii). Teachers must move beyond the silos of solo teaching and embrace co-teaching with one another. We will not be able to do this until we continue to develop and fine tune how co-teaching is defined, implemented, and supported. As Friend et al. Shamberger (2010) contended:

Working from the assumption that most professional educators are in the field because they want to help students’ success, it would seem a simple matter for two teachers to blend their expertise. . . such is not the case. Many pieces must be in place for co-teaching to be successful. (p. 18)

We need to continue to put the proper individual, relational, and administrative factors in place to achieve success in co-teaching. This work is important. We must continue to make strides to improve co-teaching implementation, starting at the very foundation of co-teaching, the relationship.

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APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT SCRIPTS

Recruitment Script To Administrators (Phone call)

I am a student in the Department of College of Educational Studies at Chapman University and I am conducting my dissertation research on the experience of general education teachers and special education teachers that co-teach together.

I am asking for your assistance in helping find potential participants. Participants will be a part of 3-5 interviews over the course of 2-3 months. Participants must be current educators in the secondary setting, and have a co-taught class as part of their work schedule. Both teachers would need to be willing participants. If you have any teachers you believe would be interested in the study, please provide them with my contact information _____. If you have any questions, please feel free to get in touch with me as well.

Thank you.

Research Script to Potential Participants (Phone call)

I am a student in the Department of College of Educational Studies at Chapman University and I am conducting my dissertation research on the experience of general education teachers and special education teachers that co-teach together.

I am asking for your assistance in the study by participating in a series of interviews. Interviews would take approximately 45-60 minutes, and would be done both individually and with your co-teacher, at times that are convenient for both of you. Interviews would be conducted 3-5 times over the course of the next 2-3 months. If you agree to participate in the interviews, you may be assured that all information will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any interviews and audio recordings. If you are interested in participating, I can send you the consent form for review. If you have any questions or would like clarification, you can reach me at _____.

Thank you.

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

CONSENT INFORMATION FOR PARTICIPATION IN

Phenomenological Study

TITLE OF STUDY: The Power of Partnership: Understanding the Dynamic of Co-Teaching Pairs

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
ONE UNIVERSITY DR.
ORANGE, CA 92866

**PRINCIPAL
INVESTIGATOR or
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**STUDENT
INVESTIGATOR**

Amanda Lozolla
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You are being invited to participate in a research study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop your participation at any time for any reason. Please read all the information provided below. If you have questions about this information you are encouraged to contact **Amanda Frazier** about anything that you do not understand.

PURPOSE:

The investigators are looking to examine and understand the authentic experience of co-teaching, as experienced by teaching pairs at the secondary level.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS & STUDY LOCATION:

This study will enroll approximately eight participants, four co-teaching pairs.

QUALIFICATION(S) TO PARTICIPATE:

In order to participate in this study you must be 18 years of age or older and working as an educator in Southern California. Educators must be working at a secondary school (middle or high school), and currently have a co-taught classroom (general education teacher and special education teacher working together) as part of their workday. Both co-teaching partners must be willing participants.

PROCEDURES:

Should you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in 3-5 semi-

structured interviews with the student investigator. Interviews will be conducted both individually, and with the co-teaching partner. Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour each, and will be held in a mutually agreed upon location, in a place that is secure and conducive to an audio recorded interview (ie: library study room at Chapman University, work office of student investigator, classroom or office of participant). Interviews will take place over a 3-5 month time frame. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

BENEFITS:

You will not directly benefit from participation in this study. However, your responses may assist researchers studying **co-teaching** and the results may be disseminated in a way that benefits education in general.

RISKS:

There are no known or anticipated harms or discomforts associated with participation in the interviews. It is possible you may feel minimal discomfort in answering questions about your experiences within education or co-teaching. As with any study involving collection of data, there is the possibility of breach of confidentiality of data. Every precaution will be taken to secure participants' personal information to ensure confidentiality.

PRIVACY & CONFIDENTIALITY:

All interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Audio-recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on password-protected software to which only the Investigators will have access. The data you provide cannot be linked individually to you.

COMPENSATION, REIMBURSEMENT, COSTS:

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study. There is no cost to participate.

FOR QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE STUDY:

If you have any questions regarding the research or your participation in the study or about the consent form, please contact **Amanda Frazier: xxxxx@mail.chapman.edu** or the Chapman University IRB office at 714-xxx-xxxx.

AUDIO RECORDING:

I have received an adequate description of the purpose and procedures for audio-recording sessions during the course of the proposed research. I give my consent to allow myself to be audio-recorded during participation in this study, and for those records to be reviewed by persons involved in the study, as well as for other professional purposes as described to me.

_____ **Yes**, I agree to allow the research team to **audio record** my interview(s).

_____ **No**, I do not wish to have my interview **audio recorded**.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to answer any questions or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with Chapman University, student status or employment.

I have read the above information and have had any questions regarding the study answered to my satisfaction. By completing the survey I am giving my consent to participate in the research.

Yes, I agree to participate in the above research study– Thank you, you will be **contacted by the investigator to begin the interview process**.

No, I do not agree to participate in the above research study– Thank you for your consideration.

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW GUIDE: PARTNER INTERVIEWS

Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of my study on teacher perceptions and experiences with students with disabilities. Over the course of approximately 1 hour I will be asking you both a series of questions. At any point you are free to skip a question, or not answer something if it might be uncomfortable for either of you.

To get us started, I will be asking you a few basic questions:

- 1) How many years have you been teaching together?
- 2) How often are you together during the day?
- 3) What subjects do you teach together?
- 4) What is your schedule for the remainder of the day?

Now I am going to ask you a few more in-depth questions regarding your co-teaching experience together.

- 5) Tell me a little bit about your experience working together.
- 6) How did you two meet and get paired together?
- 7) What supports/trainings have you two been provided together?
 - a) What is the frequency of this training/support?
 - b) Do you feel like the trainings/support are beneficial?
- 8) What is the make-up of students in your classroom?
- 9) Tell me about how you address the needs of all learners in your classroom.
- 10) Who is responsible for what in the classroom?
- 11) How do the students respond to both of you?
 - a) How do you foster the co-teacher dynamic?
- 12) Tell me about your overall experience of your partnership and working together.
 - a) What are the benefits?
 - b) What are the challenges?
 - c) What works?
 - d) What doesn't work?

Is there anything we did not cover that you would like to share regarding your experience of co-teaching?

Wonderful. Thank you. I appreciate the time you both spent with me today and the opportunity to talk with you two. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or any other points of discussion arise. I will be in contact about our next interviews. Again, thank you.

Second and Third Interview Topics & Questions:

- 1) What trainings and supports have taken place since the last interview?
- 2) Has there been a shift in roles between you two since our last interview?
- 3) Tell me about the current curriculum units you are doing and each of your roles.
- 4) Tell me about your planning time together.

- 5) What is your perception of successful co-teaching?
- 6) What continues to work for you two?
- 7) What continues to be a challenge for you two?
- 8) Have you seen any changes in your classroom since our last interview?

Final Interview Topics & Questions

- 1) Tell me about the past month, how have things been going?
- 2) Is your planning time the same?
- 3) Have any changes occurred?
- 4) What is your perception of successful co-teaching?
- 5) How have your thoughts changed throughout this process?
- 6) What have you learned as partners through this process?

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

Thank you so much for agreeing to be part of my study on teacher perceptions and experiences with students with disabilities. Over the course of approximately 1 hour I will be asking you a series of questions. At any point you are free to skip a question, or not answer something if it might be uncomfortable for you.

To get us started, I will be asking you a few basic demographic questions:

- 13) What is your current teaching assignment?
- 14) How many years have you been teaching?
- 15) How many years have you been co-teaching?
- 16) How long have you been working with your co-teacher?
- 17) How many class periods are you together?
- 18) How old are you?
- 19) When did you complete your teacher-training program?
- 20) What is your gender?
- 21) How do you identify your race/identity?

Now I am going to ask you a few more in-depth questions regarding co-teaching, specifically in relation to your experiences. Today, since it is our first interview, I want to understand your experience as an educator and what your initial experience with co-teaching has been.

- 22) Tell me a little bit about your teaching history.
 - a) How did you get your start as an educator?
- 23) Tell me about your start with co-teaching.
 - a) How did you feel when you found out you would be co-teaching?
 - b) Did you have any background knowledge about co-teaching?
 - c) Were you asked to co-teach or did you volunteer?
- 24) How was your first day?
 - a) Do you recall how you felt?
 - b) Are those feelings still prevalent?
- 25) What supports/trainings have you been provided to support your co-teaching?
 - c) What is the frequency of this training/support?
 - d) Do you feel like the trainings/support are beneficial?
- 26) Tell me about the dynamic with your partner, what is that like?
- 27) What does the classroom dynamic look like?
 - a) How is instruction set up?
 - b) How are duties split between the two of you?
 - c) How does this class look in comparison to the other classes you teach?
 - d) What role do each of you primarily do?
- 28) Tell me about your overall experience with co-teaching and your current assignment.
 - a) What are the challenges you've encountered?
 - b) What are the benefits you've seen?

Is there anything we did not cover that you would like to share regarding your experience with co-teaching?

Wonderful. Thank you. I appreciate the time you spent with me today and the opportunity to talk with you. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or any other points of discussion arise. I will be in contact about our next interview. Again, thank you.

Second and Third Interview Topics & Questions:

- 1) Have there been any changes in your teaching assignment?
- 2) Tell me how the last month has gone since we last spoke.
- 3) Have things shifted at all between you and your co-teacher?
- 4) What is your work relationship like?
- 5) What are your continued roles?

Final Interview Topics & Questions

- 1) Tell me how things are going.
- 2) Have there been any changes?
- 3) Over the course of this process, how would you describe the dynamic of your co-teaching relationship? Any changes?
- 4) I am going to ask you to be a little introspective, have your thoughts toward co-teaching changed?
- 5) Has your co-teaching relationship changed?
- 6) How would you describe the essence of your co-teaching experience?
- 7) How would you describe the essence of your co-teaching relationship?

APPENDIX E

COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONALISM ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

Collective Autonomy

Question: Are you able and willing to make significant professional judgments together?

Collective Efficacy

Question: Do you truly believe that all your students can develop and succeed, and are you prepared to make sure that they do?

Collaborative Inquiry

Question: Do you ask questions about your own and others' practice on a regular basis, with a view toward acting on the answers?

Collective Responsibility

Question: Do you feel almost as responsible for the other children in your school or community as you do for your own, and do you take responsibility with others to help them?

Collective Initiative

Question: Do you seize initiative and step forward to innovate, make a change, or help a colleague in need before you are asked?

Mutual Dialogue

Question: Do you get into deep dialogue or even heated debate with colleagues about ideas, plans, politics, or the best way to help struggling children who need another way to move forward?

Joint Work

Question: Do you have other colleagues you do truly fulfilling work with – inside or outside your school- in terms of planning, teaching, reviewing, or giving feedback, for example?

Common Meaning and Purpose

Question: Is your teaching and your own learning imbued with meaning and a deep sense of moral purpose, and do you use your influence and authority to help young people find genuine meaning and purpose in their lives also?

Collaborating With Students

Question: Do you collaborate *with* your students sometimes as well as *for* them?

Big-Picture Thinking for All

Question: Do you get the big picture of your organization, understand how everything is connected to everything else, and take responsibility for your own part in all of that?