CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

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CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

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CONTENTS

Abstract........................................................................................................Page 4
Tables.............................................................................................................Page 5
Figures...........................................................................................................Page 7
Acknowledgements.......................................................................................Page 8

Chapter I: Introduction.................................................................................Page 10
  Problem of Practice
  Practical & Intellectual Goals
  Research Questions
  Organization of the Document
  Theoretical Framework

Chapter II: Literature Review.......................................................................Page 19
  Historical Perspectives
  Definitions
  Teacher Perspectives
  Co-Teaching Models
  Summary

Chapter III: Research Design & Methodology.............................................Page 34
  Research Questions
  Methodology
  Site & Participants
  Data Collection
  Data Analysis
  Study Limitations
  Validity & Credibility
  Protection of Human Subjects
  Conclusion

Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings....................................................Page 50
  Research Questions
  Research Design
  Site and Participants
  Data Collection
    Perception of Co-Teaching Survey Results
    Perception of Co-Teaching Semi-Structured Interview Results
    Focus Group
  Member Checking and Peer Debriefing
  Summary of Findings

Chapter V: Summary, Discussion, and Implications....................................Page 118

References......................................................................................................Page 136
Appendices ........................................................................................................ Page 144

Appendix A  Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey............................................ Page 144
Appendix B  Semi-Structured Interview Questions........................................ Page 148
Appendix C  Focus Group Questions................................................................. Page 152
Appendix D  Informed Consent to Participate.................................................... Page 154
Appendix E  Participant Profiles....................................................................... Page 156
Appendix F  Itemized Semi-Structured Interview Data................................. Page 159
Appendix G  Focus Group Summary................................................................. Page 180
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Abstract

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 have directly contributed to an increase in students receiving inclusive specialized instruction within the general education classroom setting. To accommodate these students, many schools have implemented the practice of co-teaching, or pairing a special educator with a general educator, to service both special and general education students.

The purpose of this case study was to investigate which aspects of co-teaching teachers deemed critical to the practice of co-teaching, and consequently how the practice of co-teaching can be improved. The qualitative, single-case study was designed to analyze perceptions of teachers around co-teaching in an inclusive classroom where students with special needs and skills are included in the general education setting. Data was obtained through survey, semi-structured interviews and a focus group.

Fullan’s (2008), and Hargreaves & Shirley’s (2009) organizational and educational change theories guided the research questions for this qualitative case study.

1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?
2. How may co-teaching be improved?

Key words: Co-teaching, collaboration, inclusion, communication, team teaching
Tables

Table 1  A Summary of Data Collection & Analysis..............................................Page 37
Table 2  An overview of the Coding Process in Inductive Analysis..................Page 42
Table 3  Teachers’ Profile Information..............................................................Page 53
Table 4  Definitions of Bar Graph Terms..........................................................Page 60
Table 5  My Co-Teaching Partner and I Work Very Well Together......................Page 61
Table 6  Co-Teaching Has Improved My Teaching.............................................Page 61
Table 7  In My Current Co-Teaching Experience, I Do More Than My Partner.....Page 62
Table 8  Co-Teaching Is a Worthwhile Professional Experience.........................Page 62
Table 9  My Current Co-Teacher and I Solicit Each Other’s Feedback...............Page 63
Table 10  Co-Teachers Should Meet Daily to Plan Lessons.............................Page 66
Table 11  Co-Teachers Should Share Management Responsibilities..................Page 67
Table 12  Co-Teachers Should Share Classroom Instruction.............................Page 67
Table 13  Co-Teachers Should Regularly Offer Feedback................................Page 68
Table 14  Co-Teachers Should Establish Specific Areas of Responsibility.........Page 68
Table 15  Value of Provision for Scheduled Mutual Planning Time....................Page 72
Table 16  Access to Provision for Scheduled Mutual Planning Time...................Page 72
Table 17  Value of Administrative Support In Co-Teaching..............................Page 73
Table 18  Access to Administrative Support In Co-Teaching.............................Page 73
Table 19  Value of Adequate Teaching Aids and Supplies................................Page 74
Table 20  Access to Adequate Teaching Aids and Supplies................................Page 74
Table 21  Value of In-Service Training Opportunities Provided........................Page 75
Table 22  Access to In-Service Training Opportunities Provided.......................Page 75
Table 23  Value of School District Workshops/Courses on Co-Teaching............Page 76
Table 24  Access to School District Workshops/Courses on Co-Teaching............Page 76
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Table 25  Value of Mentoring By Experienced Co-Teachers...........................................Page 77
Table 26  Access to Mentoring By Experienced Co-Teachers........................................Page 77
Table 27  Process of Analysis............................................................................................Page 85
Table 28  Initial Codes and Definitions Categorized by Theme......................................Page 86
Table 29  Set 1 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview............................................Page 88
Table 30  Set 2 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview............................................Page 90
Table 31  Set 3 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview............................................Page 91
Table 32  Set 4 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview............................................Page 92
Table 33  Coding/Findings of Semi-Structured Interviews by Theme............................Page 96
Table 34  Coding/Findings of Focus Group by Theme.......................................................Page 104
Table 35  Triangulation of Data........................................................................................Page 106
Figures

Figure 1 Pillars of Moral Purpose.................................................................Page 16
Figure 2 Data Collection..............................................................................Page 41
Figure 3 Flow Chart of Data Analysis..........................................................Page 47
Figure 4 Phases of Data Collection..............................................................Page 58
Figure 5 Second Phase of Data Collection.................................................Page 83
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CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

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Chapter I: Introduction

Problem of Practice

In educational organizations today, educators are required to accommodate an extremely wide range of abilities. In the past, students were often grouped according to their academic ability. However, today in culturally and intellectually diverse classrooms, pedagogues are both ethically and legally bound to service all students in their charge to the best of their abilities. Students’ cultural backgrounds cannot be ignored. Those who speak English as a second language must be instructed in a means equitable to them, while simultaneously being prepared for statewide testing. Teachers must respect students’ languages, traditions, holidays and cultural nuances that affect both their social and academic progress. Additionally, teachers must honor individualized education programs (IEPs), 504 plans and curriculum accommodation plans (CAPs) while also addressing the needs of the regular education students, and those who are academically advanced.

Willingness alone is not enough. Teachers must be properly trained in how to effectively teach together in a way that is efficient, effective and realistic. Professional development must focus on these goals. Co-teaching may be popular, but it does not always come naturally (Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). The challenge of successfully implementing collaborative teaching models prevails across the nation, as schools are being held accountable for the academic progress of each and every student. More specifically, at one particular mid-sized suburban Massachusetts 5th and 6th grade public school, teachers are expected to attain adequate yearly progress (AYP) through co-teaching models of instruction. To this end, administrators have carefully built in time for cooperative planning. Despite the efforts in both scheduling and organizational
structure, many teachers are still not utilizing the allotted time as intended, but prefer to plan and teach independently. Without clear guidelines and expectations about how to effectively implement a co-teaching model of instruction, there will be little progress toward the goal. Meantime, state test scores for the special education population continue to be problematic as class sizes increase and financial resources decrease.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (2009), over the last ten years, there has been a steady increase in the number of students identified as needing special education services. Because schools do not have resources to match this growing need, it is imperative that schools implement co-teaching correctly. When the special education sub-group does not perform at the level to meet AYP, the whole school fails to meet AYP. The stress is tremendous. If done properly, co-teaching will serve to reduce the student-to-teacher ratios while increasing specialized instruction. For these reasons, it is time to uncover how to establish effective models of co-teaching.

**Practical and Intellectual Goals**

This qualitative case study determined how teachers’ perceive their effectiveness within co-teaching partnerships, and isolated recommendations to improve current co-teaching practices. Intellectual goals include learning how to conduct research and improving the practice of co-teaching, while furthering the understanding of change within schools.

**Research Questions**

Over the course of the last century, the education profession has shifted from strictly individualistic, to highly collaborative. Coupled with current reforms and federal mandates, teachers must be able to accommodate the needs of every student in their
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

charge, particularly those with special education needs. Although it is a popular theory of instruction, the practice of co-teaching is complicated, requiring many skills to be executed well. This case study was designed to illuminate teachers’ perceptions of their current co-teaching practices, and identify strategies for improvement. The information obtained from this research was used to make recommendations to improve current co-teaching practices, in direct response to teachers’ perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses. To this end, this study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?

2. How may co-teaching be improved?

Organization of the Document

In addition to the introduction and background of this study, the remainder of this report addresses the theoretical framework, review of literature, research design, research findings and summary, discussion and implications. The researcher articulates the theoretical framework to present the theories that frame the problem of practice and research design. Next, the literature review connects the problem of practice and research proposal to existing literature and research. Following the review of literature, the research design is presented including the research questions, methodology and trustworthiness of this particular study. The researcher follows up this section with a brief discussion of how the researcher protected the participants in this study. The following chapters detail the data collection and analysis. Finally, the conclusion, references and appendices follow.

Theoretical Framework

Organizational and educational change theories comprised a compelling theoretical framework for considering how one might go about successfully
implementing co-teaching between special education and general education teachers in an inclusive setting.

**Organizational Change Theory**

Organizational change theory was the primary theory guiding this research. This theory is comprised of many complex components of which some, but not all, were utilized to support the research questions. Theorists Fullan (2003), and Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) have different yet overlapping ideas about how organizations, particularly educational organizations, should go about the effective implementation of change.

Author and educational theorist Michael Fullan, with the support of many other researchers’ and theorists’ work, provides a clear structure of six guidelines to begin the process of co-teaching. Although all six “secrets” must be working efficiently for change to be successful, three of them apply directly to the educational issue of creating collaborative cultures in schools, which is the first step in implementing successful co-teaching models of instruction. In his book, *The Six Secrets of Change* (2008), Michael Fullan presents these six secrets not only to help educational organizations survive, but also to thrive. In juxtaposition with the aforementioned research questions, three of the six secrets were particularly important and interesting to explore.

Secret One implores that principals must value their employees. Surprisingly, Fullan suggests schools should not necessarily put children first, but purports the needs of children, teachers and parents should be considered equally. By appeasing this triumvirate, and considering all points of view, administrators will assist both educators and educational stakeholders in raising the bar and closing the existing gaps in achievement. Fullan (2001) suggests “creating conditions for [teachers] to succeed” and
helping teachers “find meaning, increased skill development, and personal satisfaction in making contributions” (Fullan, 2001, p. 25). This strategy is a strong beginning point for building a collaborative culture, which is crucial for success in co-teaching. Nearly every study of teacher performance and satisfaction finds administrative support is essential to teachers’ success (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975). In one case study by Salend & Johansen (as cited by Cook & Friend, 2001), the researchers illuminate just how instrumental the support of the principal is to the success of the co-taught curriculum. By modeling collaborative traits, principals can foster these characteristics in others. Cook and Friend (1995) summarize these ideas:

Among the strategies that administrators have used successfully to support co-teaching are (a) to help the co-teachers to plan and schedule their programs, (b) to provide incentives and resources that allow co-teachers to design and reflect about desirable changes in the way they provide services, and (c) to assist teachers in setting priorities that will protect their limited time. Committing resources to enhancing the preparation of co-teaching partners, participating with them in training activities, and scheduling additional planning time for co-teachers also are valued signs of administrative support. (p. 8)

Secret Two suggests principals connect peers with purpose. “The key to achieving a simultaneously tight-loose organization lies more in purposeful peer interaction than in top-down direction from the hierarchy” (Fullan, 2001, p. 41). Fullan (2001) stresses principals must nurture peer-to-peer interactions in place of dictating expectations. He
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

recommends the educational organization engage in meaningful interactions, focusing on the desired results. Fullan's (2008) theory suggests once a few teachers become intrinsically invested in co-teaching, they will positively influence their peers. “Peers are more effective than random individuals at work, and more effective than managerial groups at the top working by themselves to develop strategic plans” (Fullan, 2001, p. 47). Falk-Ross et al. (2009) suggest, “school system practices may be expanded to include professional development in-service presentations led by specialists and teachers from within the same school district to share approaches they have found effective for working with specific types of difficulties” (p. 115). This would enhance the collaborative school culture while also supporting the goals of co-teaching. When teachers are provided with time to converse about professional matters, they can use their knowledge of content, pedagogy and experience to guide them toward improved instructional design (Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Additionally, principals need to be diligent in providing their staff common planning time to plan and have professional discourse (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Secret Four: Learning Is the Work is the final component of interest in relation to collaboration. Not only must teachers be willing to reflect, learn and improve, they must seek to do so. By working collaboratively, teachers and students stand to gain a great deal. Bridging the achievement gap is not an easy task, especially under the rigorous demands of NCLB (2001), as well as ever-mounting state standards. Teachers and students can make great gains by working together, and utilizing individual talents. “As schools re-examine policies and procedures in light of contemporary challenges, the ‘one teacher responsible for one group of students’ paradigm is coming into question”
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS
(Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001, p. 242). The very nature of the teaching profession is being transformed; educators must rely on one another, and the principal must support, encourage and facilitate these changes.

“Moral purpose, relationships, and organizational success are closely interrelated” (Fullan, 2001, p. 51). These components serve as the pillars supporting this theory of how to pursue change in an effectual manner. The premise encourages leaders to focus on moral purpose while implementing three means of interacting with change: personalization, precision and professional learning. Personalization requires leaders know their audiences. By having a personal and meaningful connection with others, the relationship builds trust and cohesion. Precision is interconnected with personalization, as the leader can begin to determine an individual’s specific needs in place of standardization. And, lastly, professional learning ensures learning toward improvement continues on a daily basis. By pursuing these ideals with a clear sense of moral purpose, a leader can maintain integrity while still implementing an effective change. Interestingly, these concepts can be applied to both administrators when working with staff, as well as teachers in reference to their students.
In *Change Forces* (1993), Fullan espouses, “change is a journey of unknown destination, where problems are our friends, where seeking assistance is a sign of strength, where simultaneous top-down bottom-up initiatives merge, where collegiality and individualism co-exist in productive tension” (p. viii). By preparing for change and using it as an advantage to strengthen educational organizations, it is possible to have lasting and meaningful improvements, including effective implementation of co-teaching models. Implementation is critical to the success of programs and, if overlooked, the results can be devastating (Fullan, 1993).

Fullan isn’t the only one to extol the virtues of strong leadership. After outlining the prior failings of educational policies of the past half-century, theorists Hargreaves & Shirley present *The Fourth Way* (2009), “a Way more suited than previous Ways to building prosperous and competitive knowledge societies, to removing injustice and inequality, to restoring professional expertise and integrity, and to establishing greater cohesion and inclusion in our communities and societies than any of its predecessors” (p. 72). These ideals also guided this study on co-teaching because innovation and leadership were key determining factors in its successful implementation. Framing their theory, Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) decry:

What will ultimately bear the weight of sustainable educational change is not an overarching set of bureaucratic policies and interventions that shift from one government to the next, that subject educators to repetitive change syndrome and that undermine the basic trust and confidence that support their
relationships with students. Data can enhance and inform these relationships but cannot replace the value of teachers working closely and effectively with students and colleagues, students learning from and supporting each other, and all of them engaging with parents and communities around purposes they develop and deliberate on together. (p. 73)

This sentiment is woven throughout the literature and was under constant consideration during this particular research project about co-teaching. The “Six Pillars of Purpose and Partnership” presented in *The Fourth Way* are (1) an inspiring and inclusive vision; (2) strong public engagement; (3) achievement through investment; (4) corporate educational responsibility; (5) students as partners in change; and (6) mindful learning and teaching. Of these tenets, an inspiring and inclusive vision, as well as mindful learning and teaching were among the most important to consider in regard to co-teaching.

“Two of the key predictors of resilience are a strong sense of purpose and a supportive partnership” (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009, p. 74). When navigating this study, the researcher analyzed these ideas of purpose and partnership. Questions in all three methods of data collection revisited these themes. Additionally, the researcher considered Fullan’s ideas about organizational transformation with a focus on moral purpose. Because problems are inevitable and spawn learning, Fullan asserts they must be viewed as friend, not foe. This is an essential tenet the researcher bore in mind as participants highlighted anticipated areas for improvement, as well as those aspects they already perceived as effective.
Chapter II: Literature Review

In today’s data-driven educational climate, and with a marked increase in accountability, standards and transparency, many school systems are moving toward collaboration as a means of reform. Although some schools are prepared to embrace the theory of cooperative teaching, the process of translating the theory into practice is often lacking. Administrators must consciously foster a collaborative school culture before teachers can effectively implement a successful co-teaching model of instruction. Only then will the full potential of successful pedagogical collaboration be carried out to the benefit of students.

Historically, teaching has been accepted as a fairly isolated profession. The theory of co-teaching challenges this paradigm and the very definition of teaching. Co-teaching is an increasingly common service delivery model in public schools for students with learning disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). An inclusive setting is a classroom where students with disabilities are educated alongside their general education peers. In theory, by including special education pupils in an inclusive learning environment in the regular education classroom, there are multiple benefits for students such as improvement in self-confidence, academic performance, social skills and peer relationships (Walther-Thomas, 1997). However, research shows it is often challenging for teachers because simply placing a special educator and a general educator in the same classroom does not signify a co-teaching environment (Cook & Friend, 1995). “Collaboration requires shared thinking between the general educator and the special educator” (Jones, Mandala & Colachica, 2008, p. 203).

This review of literature investigated how best to effectively implement a co-teaching model of instruction in an inclusive classroom setting. From the impact of
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

organizational change on the process to the specific components of implementation, this literature added to the base of knowledge to begin to untangle how co-teaching could potentially benefit teachers and students alike in public schools in the United States.

**Organization**

This literature review centers around four main themes common to the studies and texts that were surveyed. The themes are: (1) Historical Perspectives; (2) Definitions; (3) Teacher Perspectives; and (4) Co-Teaching Models.

Through an analysis of historical perspectives, the evolution of the movement toward co-teaching is illuminated, including thoughts from the major influences in the field. The articles cited show the progression of teaching from an isolated profession toward a more collaborative career and why such changes have occurred.

Definitions are carefully considered to frame what co-teaching means in this particular body of literature and how it is defined in the literature represented, focusing on both the overlaps in definitions and where these vary.

The segment addressing teacher perspectives is an analysis of the scholarly literature from the perspectives of teachers involved in the collaborative process. Much research has been conducted on how teachers integrate their new roles to instruct students of varying abilities, and the challenges they face throughout this process.

Lastly, in the section designated co-teaching models, the reviewer provides an overview of specific ideas about how to bring the theory of co-teaching into the realm of practice. It serves to pinpoint the structural supports that need to be in place, as well as the expectations, guidelines and methods for teachers to use in order to experience success within a co-taught educational setting.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Historical Perspectives

The teaching profession has long been recognized as one of isolation (Cook & Friend, 1995). Over one century ago in the United States, the model of the one-room schoolhouse had students sitting in rows and the teacher at the head of the class. Throughout the years, education has evolved to include a variety of teaching practices in recognition of the fact that every student has different learning needs. Students with special needs, who historically may not have received an education at all, are now being included into the regular education setting.

In addition to the compulsory education of all children in this country, and because of the integration of special education students over the past four decades, there has been an emerging trend toward cooperative teaching practices that require teachers to team together to the benefit of the students in their charge (Cook & Friend, 1995). “As early as the 1960s, co-teaching was recommended as a strategy for reorganizing secondary schools in the United States as well as in England” (Warwick, 1971, as cited by Cook & Friend, p.1). In the 1990s there was a renewed interest in co-teaching to embrace reform efforts in middle school models around the country (McIver, 1990). The influx of cultural, linguistic, academic and behavioral diversity in America today challenges curriculum and instruction (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). Among the pioneers of recent co-teaching theory are Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend (1989) who tout “cooperative teaching”, as they call it, as an effective means of incorporating students with learning disabilities into the regular educational setting. “Further, co-teaching grew rapidly in response to factors recognized during the early days of mainstreaming, including the
need for special education teachers and general education teachers to work in constructive and coordinated ways” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 1).

Currently, in addition to the 2001 standards-based federal reform legislation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004 which ensures that, to the greatest extent possible, a student who has a disability has the opportunity to be educated in an unrestricted classroom setting with his/her general education peers. Because of the fairly recent legal and ethical obligations of educators to students with disabilities, it is no wonder administrators have made a move toward incorporating co-teaching into their educational organizations.

In order to accomplish this mission, students with learning disabilities are often integrated into the regular education classroom. In educational organizations today, educators are required to accommodate an extremely wide range of abilities. In the past, students were often grouped according to their academic ability. However, today in culturally and intellectually diverse classrooms, teachers must effectively service all students in their classrooms, regardless of the challenges they face. Each student must make tangible progress according to many standardized measures. Co-teaching is one possible solution to this conundrum.

**Definitions**

According to Dieker and Murawski (2003), co-teaching is two or more teachers who are equal in status working together in the classroom to provide instruction. Throughout contemporary educational institutions, and through the perspectives of multiple researchers and theorists, the views of co-teaching vary. Cook and Friend
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

(1995) define co-teaching as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space" (p. 2). Bauwens et al. (1989) define co-teaching as “an educational approach in which general and special educators, or related service providers, jointly plan for and teach heterogeneous groups of students in integrated settings” (p. 19). Similarly, Jones et al. (2008) state, “Collaborative teaching refers to an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a [cooperative], and coordinated, fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings” (p. 203).

Although there are a variety of definitions, one commonly accepted form of co-teaching is a “general educator paired with a special educator or licensed professional in a diverse, inclusive classroom” (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez & Hartman, 2009, p. 3). While definitions of the practice generally represent the same pattern of the pairing of a general education teacher with a special education teacher, the lack of specificity for implementing this approach leaves room for multiple interpretations. Hourcade & Bauwens (2001) bolster this definition when they state, “cooperative teaching provides an extraordinarily powerful educational package that combines a general educator’s knowledge of large-group instruction and curricular sequencing with a special educator’s knowledge of curricular alterations” (p. 246). However, without a specific menu of co-teaching models, educators are left to their own devices to implement co-teaching, and often revert to the way they deem most comfortable.

In order to understand the definition of co-teaching in reference to inclusion, it’s also important to understand, “Inclusion is a movement that seeks to create schools and other social institutions based on meeting the needs of all learners as well as respecting
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

and learning from each other’s differences” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p. 114). Cook & Friend (1995) argue:

Though co-teaching contributes to inclusive practices, it is not always synonymous with inclusion. Inclusion can be accomplished in many ways depending on the students’ needs just as co-teaching may be done to accomplish many goals other than inclusion. Yet co-teaching is clearly just one approach that is valuable for facilitating the inclusion of some students. (p. 3)

The differences in definitions revolve around particulars, but they all share the same common themes. Researchers have shown the success of co-teaching is influenced by factors including: scheduling, the content knowledge of special education teachers, the acceptance of the model by general education teachers and ideas of both teachers about classroom management (Bouck, 2007; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Changing the culture of a school is imperative to seed this process of change. According to Fullan (2001), “It is a particular kind of reculturing for which we strive: one that activates and deepens moral purpose through collaborative work” (p. 44). Many elements fold into the broader definitions to specify how co-teaching is accomplished. With these definitions as a backdrop, there are still other aspects of co-teaching to consider including how organizational change theory can be a lens through which to understand its implementation.

Teacher Perspectives

Because it requires a change in thinking and practice, and because of its very nature, co-teaching places multiple demands on educators. As with any endeavor, both benefits and challenges arise. The goal of co-teaching is to effectively service students
with learning disabilities, while adhering to the newly established federal policies of NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004). This mission requires new commitments from teachers in the United States. Establishing a collaborative learning environment will take time and persistence, but it is necessary (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). Ploessl, Rock, Shoenfeld & Blanks (2010), liken co-teaching to the benefits of two parents sharing the responsibilities of parenting, each using his or her strengths. Teachers working together need to regularly articulate their goals and needs in order to grow and improve.

Walther-Thomas (1997) points to some of the potential benefits as teachers participating in a co-teaching model of instruction reported, “increased professional satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth, personal support, and increased opportunities for collaboration” (p. 401). Because of student success and the development of the program over time, many teachers were pleased with their progress in both behavior and academics and felt students exhibited fewer problems. “Results indicate that sharing common philosophies about educating students with disabilities, is an important aspect of successful collaboration” (Carter, Prater, Jackson & Marchant, 2009, p. 60). Working with other professionals also provides teachers with incredible opportunities for professional growth and the moral support they lack in an isolated teaching environment. The problems teachers noted involved scheduling issues, maintaining appropriate caseloads of special education students, mustering administrative support and adequate staff development (Austin, 2001; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Walsh & Jones (2004) note, “Co-taught classrooms easily become disproportionately filled with students with disabilities” (p. 16). When this happens, the benefits of co-teaching are not as prominent and the co-teachers become overwhelmed trying to meet the accommodations for each student. Because teachers have typically
been taught how to function in isolation, they will have to be exposed to, trained in and supported in a new effort to transition into a co-teaching model of instruction (Cook & Friend, 1995).

According to Austin’s (2001) research involving one hundred thirty-nine K-12 collaborative teachers in northern New Jersey, “Data from semi-structured interviews revealed that most of the co-teachers found the experience to be positive” (p. 250). The same teachers also expressed an incredible benefit of co-teaching was a reduction in the student-teacher ratio, which allowed more intimate instructional practices to take place. Not surprisingly, teachers expressed a need for scheduled planning time, administrative support, adequate supplies and professional development in order to co-teach effectively.

Conversely, some teachers did not view co-teaching favorably. “The preeminent reservation was that the inclusion of some students might be expressly for socialization, despite the evident disparity in academic achievement of these students compared with their general education peers” (Austin, 2001, p. 251). Additionally, some teachers in this particular study expressed concerns about the regular education students’ lack of progress due to some emulation of inclusion students, and the behavior of some special education students disrupting the learning of the others (Austin, 2001).

Possible barriers for successful co-teaching must be addressed prior to implementation. One consideration is that some teachers are being required to work in co-teaching models they did not choose (Cahill & Mitra, 2008). This can inspire negative feelings about the co-teaching model that will spiral into poor attitudes and a breakdown the communication of teaching partners. As mentioned in reference to organizational change, it is imperative that teachers are included as much as possible throughout the process and not forced out of their familiar, comfortable ways of doing things. Lack of
time is another constraint that concerns teachers entering into co-teaching. As it is, there is little time in a typical school day to accomplish all the tasks at hand. Teachers need to advocate for common planning time in order to efficiently and effectively plan joint instruction.

Communication, relationships and personal compatibility can be decisive factors in the eventual outcomes of students with disabilities in a co-taught classroom (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Conderman et al. (2009) provide a checklist of sentence starters to serve teachers in the process of beginning to understand the teaching style of their partners. This is a crucial, and often overlooked, step in the change process, and perhaps the most concerning issue for teachers who are used to working in isolation. Some teachers feel angst about having another adult in the classroom with them, and open communication helps co-teachers get to know one another professionally which serves to limit their judgments of one another. Conderman et al. (2009) address a variety of situations that might crop up, including how to deal with a disagreement and resolve conflict while still maintaining respect and dignity.

The conclusions of one study suggest, “in-services explaining the rationale for inclusion may be one way of facilitating the development of shared vision” (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997, p. 96). Working to make inclusion both a personal and positive pursuit can help the vision become a reality. Additionally, Villa & Thousand (2003) iterate, “The degree of administrative support and vision was the most powerful predictor of general educators’ attitudes toward inclusion” (p. 22). Knowing one’s strengths and weaknesses as a professional can be challenging, and oftentimes a teacher’s experience and expertise can interfere with effective co-teaching partnerships if they are unwilling or unable to share responsibilities (Keefe, Moore & Duff, 2004, p. 37).
Walsh & Jones (2004) tout the benefits of co-teaching and bring up some excellent points. They claim students may realize and appreciate the qualities of special educators more. On the other hand, they caution the special education teacher in a co-taught classroom may not be seen as an equal by the students, or that their skills may not be fully utilized. In addition, due to complex schedules, special education students will most likely not have a special educator at their disposal in all classes. Conjointly, because of the requirements placed on them, special educators are more likely to burn out in the role of co-teacher.

In summary, co-teachers have varying views and attitudes about the process of co-teaching in an inclusive setting. “Done well, [co-teaching] can be compared to a strong marriage – partners sharing and planning, reflecting and changing. Done poorly, it can be described as a blind date – co-teachers just waiting for the year to end” (Wilson, 2008, p. 240).

**Co-Teaching Models**

There are many names for the models of co-teaching, but they all share the same essential components with few variations. Cook and Friend (1995) describe five different, widely accepted models of co-teaching. Included in these are (a) one teacher and one assistant, or one teacher drifting as the other one provides the primary instruction, (also called “Lead and Support” by Cahill & Mitra, 2008, p. 151); (b) station teaching where both teachers deliver curricular content to ”stations” of children; (c) parallel teaching where teachers plan together but split the class and deliver content to two separate groups; (d) alternative teaching where one teacher works with a smaller group to pre-teach, re-teach or supplement regular instruction for increased practice and understanding; and (e) team teaching where teachers share instruction for the entire
class. Ideally co-teaching involves both teachers collaborating on every facet of the teaching process from planning and design, to implementation and assessment of the students’ work. Jones et al. (2008) contribute the usefulness of, “co-teaching to the low-performing group [whereby] each teacher takes the responsibility of working with the low-performing group of students and shares the teaching of information to these students” (p. 204).

According to Carter et al. (2009), Prater (2003) developed yet another method of co-teaching that goes by the anachronism CRIME, which stands for curriculum, rules, instruction, materials and environment. The necessary steps she prescribes are:

(a) evaluate the curriculum, rules, materials and environment of the general education classroom; (b) list the student’s learning and behavioral strengths and limitations; (c) compare the classroom environment with the student’s profile to identify learning facilitators and barriers, and (d) plan adaptations and accommodations that will facilitate learning and mitigate the effect of learning barriers (p. 61)

Prater is very specific in detailing the steps of the process, which is helpful for educators weaving these ideas into those of other theorists.

Collaboration is the key to successful co-teaching outcomes. Conderman et al. (2009) claim, “co-teachers frequently report personal compatibility as the most critical variable for co-teaching success and attribute weak collaboration skills as the reason for its failure” (p. 3). It is for this reason so much of the literature about models of co-teaching also maintain a focus on the importance of, and how to foster, reliable and effective communication between the special educator and general educator. To this end,
Conderman et al. (2009) point to personality tests developed by Alessandra (2007), Trent & Cox (2006), and Miscisin (2001), as valuable research-based tools to assess how one prefers to communicate in a partnership. Each researcher has his/her own set of codes for categorizing co-teachers into different teaching styles and claims knowing one’s style can be a preventive measure for unnecessary conflict. Regardless, co-teaching is certainly a call for compromise, honesty, clarity, non-judgment, reflection and effort.

Teaching partners must take time to communicate at length before attempting to establish a co-taught curriculum. They must decide on their specific responsibilities within the partnership, as well as how each prefers to communicate. They should also consider how they intend to share planning, implementation and assessment goals. The pedagogues must be willing to reflect on and modify their plan throughout the process. “Both formative and summative evaluations are needed to develop and implement an effective co-teaching program” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 10). True collaboration should bring about a transformation of curriculum and instruction based on research (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001).

In addition to understanding how the specifics of co-teaching are agreed upon, some researchers have tried to tease out which components are directly linked to a successful co-teaching model. It is important to note, no matter which model of co-teaching is being employed, in successful co-teaching models partners support one another. “Effective co-teaching is as much an art as it is a science. Embracing one, but not the other, can diminish the effectiveness of co-teaching, in turn creating feelings of frustration and mistrust between partners” (Ploessl et al., 2010, p. 167). In this vein, Ploessl et al. (2010) recommend developing protocols for meetings, using timelines, designing lesson plans together, monitoring student progress, and letting data guide
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

decision-making as further methods for integrating co-teaching. By using these strategies, the teachers will be able to rationalize their decisions and be sure they are evaluating the outcomes together. To take their partnership to the next level, Salend & Johansen (1997) assert that risk-taking and experimenting with new teaching methodologies would more likely occur once a sound professional relationship is established between the teachers involved.

Simmons & Magiera (2007) uncovered that co-teachers who are truly embedded in the process share some common attributes including compatibility between co-teaching partners, equity in responsibilities in the various roles of co-teaching and active, individualized instruction of students. Strahan & Hedt (2009) confirm this claim. Each model of co-teaching calls for some combination of these ingredients, but few give specific strategies about how to apply these ideas. Stivers (2008) is more explicit in her ideas. She makes twenty specific suggestions including examining the layout of a classroom to be sure it is conducive to the new co-teaching practices, lobbying for planning time and instructional materials, creating a mission statement and keeping a sense of humor about the challenges.

In addition to the aforementioned research, and after collecting field-based data from inclusion-based educators at one high school, researchers, Villa, Thousand, Nevin & Liston (2005) uncovered six emergent best practices in regard to co-teaching. They are as follows: (1) Administrative Support; (2) Ongoing Professional Development; (3) Collaboration; (4) Communication; (5) Instructional Responsiveness, and (6) Expanded Authentic Assessment Approaches. In sum, despite challenges, educators involved in this particular study felt the value of inclusive education programming outweighed the obstacles. Students become passionate about each other’s various needs if given the
opportunity to do so, and become more confident in their academic and social abilities. Clearly, with effective and strategic supports in place, the sentiments and shared vision of this school’s execution of co-teaching is succeeding.

**Summary of Literature Review**

As the federal government continues to enact more laws and regulations to ensure the equitable education of all American children, educators will be forced to depart from their old methods of teaching in exchange for those that support the learning of an increasingly diverse population of students. Educators will continue to focus their attention on special education students, who historically have not performed to the same standards as their peers. As administrators continue to probe methods of instruction to bridge the gap between special education students and their regular education peers, there will no doubt continue to be support for the co-teaching method of inclusive instruction in mainstream classrooms across the country.

Co-teaching is here to stay. Cook & Friend (1995) surmise, “This approach increases instructional options, improves educational programs, reduces stigmatization of students, and provides support to the professionals involved” (p. 15). In this effort, it will be imperative that researchers continue to document both successful and ineffective methods of co-teaching. Armed with this research, teachers will gain a greater understanding of how students with learning disabilities learn best, and how they can most successfully serve the needs of special education pupils in the least restrictive environment, while simultaneously meeting the ever-increasing demands of local, state and federal legislation. By identifying practices that need revision, researchers can help develop more specific guidelines and expectations for those teachers involved in co-teaching models of instruction. Additionally, further research should continue to explore
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

how effective models of co-teaching are implemented across grade levels and content areas to arrive at teaching practices that bring about academic achievement for students, as well as professional satisfaction for pedagogues.

This research project was positioned to add to the body of literature around co-teaching practices. With the data gathered from this qualitative, single-case study, the researcher analyzed perceptions of teachers around their practices of co-teaching in an inclusive classroom setting with the aim of improving the practice of co-teaching.

Looking toward the future, the expectations of America’s teachers must change in both theory and practice. Although moving in uncharted directions can certainly cause angst, this new direction may also lead to success and achievement for students, especially those with special education needs. These are only some of the potential gains co-teaching provides for both the students and educators of this great nation.
Chapter III: Research Design & Methodology

After a thorough review of literature and the careful and thoughtful posing of research questions, the researcher designed a qualitative single-case study (Yin, 2009). The targeted outcomes of this particular study were to analyze 5th grade teachers’ perceptions of their co-teaching practices in order to determine how those current practices may be improved upon.

This research was a qualitative, single case study designed to uncover the perceptions of 5th grade teachers in regard to their experiences co-teaching. The researcher conducted three methods of data collection (survey, semi-structured interviews and a focus group) to determine and validate emergent themes. By analyzing these themes, the researcher utilized the data gathered from teachers to recommend strategies to improve the practice of co-teaching. The study was designed to understand how teachers perceive the practice, and the outcomes targeted how teachers can increase reflection, communication and collaboration in a co-teaching partnership. Yin (2009) iterates, “the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions” (p. 26).

Research Questions

Co-teaching was the problem of practice under analysis for this case study. In order to effectively analyze the perceptions and potential improvements to this teaching strategy, this study gathered feedback from co-teaching participants at one 5th and 6th grade school. By addressing the following research questions, the researcher analyzed and summarized the current practice of co-teaching and aimed to improve upon it. To do so, the following research questions were critical. The primary research question under
investigation was as follows: How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching? The secondary question to consider was: How may co-teaching be improved?

The researcher anticipated there would be a gap in communication among participants in co-teaching partnerships. Additionally, the researcher anticipated it was likely the methods used to execute the co-taught curriculum would be inconsistent. Supported by the review of literature, as well as the theoretical framework, the research projected an opportunity to unify the practice of co-teaching based on the findings. To this end, the researcher declared the perceptions of a small group of co-teaching participants were the unit of analysis by which to move forward with suggestions for improvement. (Yin, 2009).

Methodology

The methodological design for this study was a single-case study designed to analyze perceptions of teachers around co-teaching in an inclusive classroom. By utilizing the case study methodology, in tandem with a survey, semi-structured interviews and a focus group, the researcher explored the aforementioned research questions. By triangulating and member checking the data collected, the researcher gained insight into one organization’s strategies for implementing co-teaching partnerships. As evidenced by research, co-teaching is a unique, complex partnership impacted by many, both tangible and intangible, variables. Thus, a qualitative case study design provided the necessary flexibility to analyze the experience of teachers through a variety of exploratory tools. It is for this reason the researcher justified this means of investigation for this research endeavor. A case study research methodology required the researcher to use varied sources of data collection to add breadth and depth to the
information gathered, to assist in triangulation, and to improve the validity of the research (Yin, 2009). This research project met this criteria and the researcher utilized survey, semi-structured interviews and a focus group to validate the findings.

**Site and Participants**

The research was conducted at a 5th and 6th grade public school in southeastern Massachusetts. The participants for this study were selected by purposeful sample, with voluntary participation of both special and general education teachers teaching in co-taught classrooms. The participants included four 5th grade general education teachers and two 5th grade special educators. Although in this case, the researcher was also a 5th grade general educator in the building, this relationship did not impact the researcher’s ability to impartially collect and analyze data from colleagues. However, to ensure that proper data collection and analysis prevailed, many considerations are further discussed in the Validity and Credibility section of this document.

**Data Collection**

As an expert on case study design, Yin (2009) suggests by using many varied sources of evidence “any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information” (p. 116). As noted in his Convergence of Evidence model, Yin (2009) points to six sources of evidence as a means for valuable gathering of data: observations, documents, archival records, open-ended interviews, focus interviews and structured interviews and surveys (p. 117). The researcher in this proposed case study utilized the final three sources of evidence. By becoming well versed in a variety of data collection techniques as well as utilizing
multiple sources of data, as suggested by Yin, the researcher added to the validity and credibility of this study.

The researcher acquired express permission to use Lance Austin’s survey and semi-structured interview questions “as is or modify and adapt to better suit the needs of [this] study” (V. Austin, personal email communication, June 22, 2011). With Austin’s permission, the researcher altered the survey to exclude the section entitled Teacher Preparation For Collaborative Teaching, as well as some teacher background information because the researcher is surveying a small population. Additionally, the researcher separated the “value” and “access” portions of the School-Based Supports that Facilitate Collaborative Teaching portion of the survey to clarify this section for the participants. After administering and analyzing the survey results, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews.

Keeping survey data influence in mind, the researcher administered Austin’s (2000) Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey, a twenty-two item instrument focused on co-teacher perceptions of current experience, recommended collaborative practices, preparation for collaborative teaching and school-based supports that facilitate collaborative teaching. The researcher omitted the section on preparation for collaborative teaching, as it did not help answer the research questions. The data from this probe was transcribed, then coded using both inductive and in vivo coding techniques and analyzed. The results are presented in stacked bar graphs for each item, coupled with a narrative of both overall and specific results.

Next, the researcher conducted Austin’s (2000) Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching of both open-ended and structured questions. The interview questions were used “as is” but the researcher added a question asking participants to
identify how the practice of co-teaching could best be improved. The researcher also asked participants to distill the determining factors of effective co-teaching. However, if any surprising survey results surfaced, the researcher took the liberty to seek answers to yet undetermined questions in addition to the prepared questions. For example, if survey results indicated a need for more school-based supports, the researcher followed up with a few more specific questions about this in the semi-structured interviews. Because this was a qualitative case study, the primary set of data was the interviews, as this is where the researcher gained the most valuable data about emergent themes. These interviews were transcribed by utilizing descriptive coding using chunking by theme and then organizing these chunks into clusters to begin drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The researcher then analyzed participant responses to identify themes and matched ideas already unveiled in the survey portion of the procedure.

Lastly, the researcher facilitated a focus group. Based on data gathered in both the surveys and interviews, the researcher developed questions for the focus group. In this interactive group setting, participants were encouraged to speak about their ideas, opinions and beliefs about co-teaching. The researcher structured the prompts around both convergent and divergent attitudes on the topic. During the focus group, the researcher looked for the emergent themes. “In this situation, the specific questions must be carefully worded, so that [the researcher] appears genuinely naïve about the topic and allows the interviewee(s) to provide fresh commentary about it” (Yin, 2009, p. 107). After the focus group, and after already determining emergent themes, the researcher “corroborated certain facts that [the researcher thought had] been established” (Yin, 2009, p.107). By member checking, or gathering informant feedback,
the researcher helped improve the accuracy of the study by corroborating the findings with the study participants. The researcher did so by providing participants with the reports of emergent themes and outcomes. The researcher provided the participants with the opportunity to comment on the viability of the study. In this way, participants had the chance to confirm, clarify and/or deny the findings of the surveys, semi-structured interviews and focus group.

Table 1. A Summary of Data Collection and Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Collection/Timeline</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?</td>
<td>Survey (as described above)</td>
<td>Survey (February) Semi-Structured Interviews (February) Focus Group (March)</td>
<td>Survey – Data was analyzed and presented in stacked bar graphs for each item, coupled with a narrative of both overall and specific results. Interviews – Following Austin’s protocol the interviews were conducted in sets. Initial questions were typically answered “yes” or “no” following up with probing questions. The interviews were transcribed and descriptively coded by themes. Focus Group – A focus group with all 6 co-teachers was conducted and digitally recorded. Questions were developed from outcomes from survey and interviews. Focus group was transcribed by hand and descriptively coded by theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How may co-teaching be improved?</td>
<td>Semi-Structured Interview (as described above) Focus Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Documentation

Documentation included the surveys, transcriptions of both semi-structured interviews and focus group data, as well as iterative reflective memos of the researcher to make transparent the evolution of thoughts as data was collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

The theory of organizational change and existing literature served to bolster the research. Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change points to leadership, innovation and meaningful peer to peer interaction as predicting factors of success in organizational change. Likewise, research literature shows the importance of communication and collaboration (Conderman, Johnson-Rodrigues & Hartman, 2009; Cook & Friend, 1995; Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). By investigating these themes in each phase of data collection, the resulting data was compared for both convergent and divergent outcomes. Triangulation of data was imperative to corroborate “evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). In the “interaction of theory and data” there were clusters of meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.248). The clusters, or classifications of themes, that emerged through descriptive coding directly connected to the research questions and theoretical framework. For example, the researcher desired to know how teachers perceived the practice of co-teaching. Inherent in the research question, one had to find out how leaders of the school managed this educational model, and how teachers were supported. The data triangulation pointed to emergent themes such as communication, collaboration and leadership. These are directly linked to Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change. The sequence of gathering and analyzing data was as follows:
Triangulation of data began with assessing and graphing the data gathered from the Likert scale survey. The thematic categories of Perceptions of Current Experience, Recommended Collaborative Practices, and School-Based Supports That Facilitate Collaborative Teaching were itemized and analyzed individually, as well as under each of the three subgroup headings. The researcher looked for converging and diverging perceptions. Stacked bar graphs delineated the results of each of the 24 survey questions. Special educator and general educator data was differentiated with color indicators to pinpoint where educators agreed and/or disagreed. Emerging themes and perspectives were articulated in reference to these findings. Coding of findings was anticipated to revolve around the aforementioned themes of collaboration, administrative support and professional development, with allowance for the unexpected. Lastly, the researcher concluded this phase of research with a narrative of overall results as well as specific points of interest.

Coding of the interview and focus group transcriptions was conducted in a “grounded” approach (Glaser & Strauss as cited by Miles & Huberman, 1994) whereby the researcher collected data first and then determined emergent themes. Anticipated themes, as informed by the theoretical framework included communication, time, professional development and support/resources as indicated by Fullan (2008), as well
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS
as Hargreaves & Shirley (2006). In relation to the first research questions, when considering the perceptions of co-teachers, the researcher anticipated issues around communication, time, professional development and administrative support would appear. Additionally, the researcher thought the same themes would emerge as areas for possible improvements. Ultimately, the coding of interviews tied the theoretical framework to both the research questions and the literature. As themes emerged through all three modes of data collection, and to establish validity in this qualitative case study, the researcher triangulated the data. The researcher triangulated “by looking for outcomes that are agreed upon by all stakeholder groups. The weight of evidence suggests that if every stakeholder, who is looking at the issue from different points of view, sees an outcome then it is more than likely to be a true outcome” (Guion, 2002, p. 1).

Following the survey, the researcher conducted, transcribed and coded semi-structured interviews with each participant. “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). To do so, the researcher utilized inductive coding, coupled with in vivo coding strategies, whereby the researcher’s aim was at understanding the targeted aspects of complex data by developing emergent themes or categories from the abundant, raw data (Thomas, 2003). Inductive codes were useful because the researcher developed them during the process of examining data. Because they were not predetermined, the categories emerged more organically.

The underlying goals of the inductive approach were to 1) condense extensive data
into an easily utilized format, 2) establish concise connections between the research objectives, theoretical framework and findings derived from the data and 3) aid in the development of a theory about the research topic derived directly from the raw data (Thomas, 2003). Despite great attention to detail, there was some flexibility within this process as Saldaña (2009) points out, “Coding is a heuristic (from the Greek, meaning ‘to discover’)—an exploratory problem-solving technique without specific formulas to follow” (p. 8).

According to Thomas (2003), the following are the procedures for inductively analyzing qualitative data, such as the data obtained from both the semi-structured interviews and focus group of the study in question:

1. *Preparation of raw data files ("data cleaning")*

   Format the raw data files in a common format (e.g., font size, margins, questions or interviewer comments highlighted) if required. Print and/or make a backup of each raw data file (e.g., each interview).

2. *Close reading of text*

   Once text has been prepared, the raw text should be read in detail so the researcher is familiar with the content and gains an understanding of the "themes" and details in the text.

3. *Creation of categories*

   The research identifies and defines categories or themes. The upper level or more general categories are likely to be derived from the research aims. The lower level or specific categories will be derived from multiple readings of the raw data (in vivo coding).
For “in vivo” coding, categories are created from meaning units or actual phrases used in specific text segments. Copy and paste (e.g., using a word processor) marked text segments into each category.

4. Overlapping coding and uncoded text

Among the commonly assumed rules that underlie qualitative coding, two are different from the rules typically used in quantitative coding: (a) one segment of text may be coded into more than one category. (b) a considerable amount of the text may not be assigned to any category, as much of the text may not be relevant to the research objectives.

5. Continuing revision and refinement of category system. (p. 5)

### Table 2. An Overview of the Coding Process in Inductive Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>Phase 4</th>
<th>Phase 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation of raw data</td>
<td>Close reading of text</td>
<td>Creation of categories</td>
<td>Overlapping coding an uncoded text</td>
<td>Revise and refine category system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initial read through text data</td>
<td>Identify specific segments of information</td>
<td>Label the segments of information to create categories</td>
<td>Reduce overlap and redundancy among the categories</td>
<td>Create a model incorporating most important categories/themes based on the theoretical framework</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Many pages of text | Many segments of text | 20-30 categories | 5-10 categories | 3-5 categories |

Adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p. 266
Once these interviews were coded, themes from the survey and the interviews were compared to those anticipated through existing research and the theoretical framework to inform the focus group. Fullan (2008) points to the importance of administrative support in his first secret: love your employees. It was important for the researcher to explore administrative supports. When looking at collaboration, Fullan (2008) urges connect peers with purpose in his second secret. All phases of data collection directly explored peer-to-peer relationships and how these impacted co-teaching. In Hargreaves & Shirley's sixth pillar, Mindful Learning and Teaching, they also iterate the importance of collaboration in any successful model of education. This sentiment resounded throughout the literature as well (Salend & Johansen, 1997; Strahan & Hedt, 2009; Walther-Thomas, 1997). The focus group was structured around the information retrieved in the first two data collection measures, as well as the theoretical framework. In Phase Three of data collection, the focus group, Fullan’s (2008) emphasis on Learning Is the Work was useful in synthesizing the findings. The teachers had a chance to explain how they learn best and what they need to make co-teaching effective. Their input was critical to the resulting outcomes. The focus group was digitally recorded, transcribed and coded using the same methods used for the interviews. By bringing the themes to the surface, the researcher sought clarification and/or confirmation of the themes that arose. Finally, from this information, the researcher was able to analyze the findings and validate the perceptions of teachers’ experiences. The themes and perceptions that arose from the survey were compared to those of the interviews and focus group. If the same themes/perceptions emerged throughout, then the researcher was able to draw credible conclusions. However, when the data appeared contradictory, the researcher analyzed why this may have occurred.
Finally, the researcher provided each participant with a draft of the thematic analysis of the interviews and focus group. Each participant was afforded the opportunity to member check the outcomes for accuracy, and to comment on the degree of its accuracy. These comments were reflected in the final report. The presumption is that if the researcher can determine a “pattern of distortion” such as overarching biases, the researcher can correct for it when presenting the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Armed with this information, the researcher was also able to determine teachers’ needs and make suggestions for improvements in the practice of co-teaching.

**Figure 3. Flow Chart of Data Analysis**

**Validity and Credibility**

Trustworthiness addresses the truths of respondents in the context of the study, the applicability of the findings to other settings, the replicability with the same or similar respondents over time and the degree to which outcomes arise from data gathered as opposed to biases, motives, interests and perspectives of the researcher
(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln & Guba (1985) propose four terms to address trustworthiness as “credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability” (p. 219). To address concerns about credibility, the researcher triangulated data. The researcher thoroughly documented procedure and data analysis techniques so when applied to a similar population, the outcomes will be as transferable as possible.

After the focus group, the researcher provided each participant with the findings of the study. At this time, each participant was requested to review the findings. To establish credibility, as suggested by Lincoln & Guba (1985), participants were encouraged to review the researcher’s findings and clarify any misinterpretations before the study was reported in full. The participants were asked to review the results of the interviews and focus groups for clarity and accuracy. This was how member checking was achieved. The participants all concurred that the results were clear and an accurate representation of their perceptions.

The researcher chose reliable, piloted survey and interview instruments to confirm objectivity. To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher presented biases and limitations, such as acknowledging the small sample size and that the researcher had already established relationships with the participants as their colleague. However, it must be noted, the researcher’s position in this study was solely that of colleague. Thus, participants responded openly knowing that the researcher was neither a supervisor nor an evaluator. Additionally, the participants had a vested interest to improve their current practices of co-teaching.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Yin (2009) iterates that because case study involves contemporary human affairs, it is imperative the researcher takes special care in and is sensitive to considerations of
the protection of human subjects. In careful consideration of ethical conduct, the researcher gained informed consent from the district’s superintendent, the school’s principal as well as the participants. They were alerted to the procedures and purpose of the study, and were granted the right to exit the study at any time should they have so desired. The researcher was honest throughout the process by keeping participants fully informed about the progress of the study throughout. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all participants in the study were granted anonymity, as was the school. The researcher did not share or duplicate recordings of private, semi-structured interviews with anyone not involved in the study.

It was important that participants were informed that while aspects of their professional approach were considered throughout the study, their responses would in no way impact their standing as a professional in the school, nor was the information used for evaluative means. These and other pertinent details were outlined in the informed consent form (Appendix C) as participants considered their participation. After receiving signed consent from all participants, and by the end of the study, it was the researcher’s hope participants experienced a sense of accomplishment about the strategies they have in place, as well as partaking in professional discourse about co-teaching. This study may have served to improve their understanding and/or implementation of co-teaching. Finally, with the suggestions that emerged from the study, it was the researcher’s desire to improve the conditions among co-teachers and positively impact the practice for the participants.

Conclusions

The goal of the study was to reveal the perceptions of 5th grade general and special educators currently in co-teaching partnerships. The data obtained from these
perceptions was used to recommend enhancements to co-teaching practices throughout a suburban southeastern Massachusetts community. This research study was designed to expose 5th grade teachers’ practices and perceptions of co-teaching. A secondary purpose was to identify the gaps in the current co-teaching model and make effective revisions to improve student outcomes. Fortified by the theoretical framework and an extensive review of literature, the researcher hoped to improve upon the current practice of co-teaching, while adding to the body of research on this topic. With the data resulting from this case study, it is likely this school in southeastern Massachusetts may implement improved professional development around co-teaching and ultimately enhance the quality of both learning and teaching at the school.
Chapter IV: Report of Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to synthesize co-teachers’ perceptions of the quality and effectiveness of their current co-teaching model in order to determine how the practice may be improved. The practical goal of the study was to survey and interview intact pairs of co-teaching partners to determine how they perceived their effectiveness within their co-teaching partnerships. The researcher simultaneously accomplished the intellectual goals of learning how to conduct qualitative research, and making recommendations to improve upon co-teaching within one school in southeastern Massachusetts.

This chapter is divided into six sections to facilitate the logical presentation of the data collected in this study. In the first section, titled Research Questions, the researcher describes the significance the research questions have on why and how data were collected. In the second section, titled Research Design, the researcher reviews the rationale behind conducting a single case study as supported by Yin (2009) and Maxwell (2005). The third section, titled Site and Participants, delivers a brief overview of the school and teachers involved in this study. It provides the reader with the subjects of classes taught by each educator, the level of education and the range of experience of the teachers, as well as additional demographic information gathered from the surveys. In the fourth section, titled Data Collection, the researcher sequentially delves into all three methods of data collection (survey, semi-structured interviews and focus group) and the analysis of each. The sub-section titled Survey Results, presents stacked bar graphs and narrative summaries of data from each survey question as they pertain to teachers’ current experiences, recommended practices and school-based support of this pedagogical model. In the second sub-section, titled Semi-Structured Interview Results,
the researcher describes the coding process for inductive analysis of transcription. Then, the researcher highlights significant findings from the analysis of participant interviews regarding their perceptions of co-teaching. Because the interviews served as the most critical data set, findings from the interviews influenced by survey results, will be presented in this section. In the third and final sub-section, titled Focus Group Results, the researcher used participants’ collective commentary to affirm and clarify the data collected throughout this research, to unveil yet another finding in the final phase of research. The fifth section, titled Member Checking and Peer Debriefing, seeks to show two methods by which the findings of this case study were validated. Lastly, in the sixth and final section of Chapter IV, the researcher presents the impressions of all cumulative data in the Summary of Findings.

**Research Questions**

This investigation was a qualitative single case study. This research method was deemed most appropriate to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth (Yin, 2009). The researcher designed the study to uncover the perceptions of 5th grade co-teachers at one school in southeastern Massachusetts.

The problem of practice was identified as the discrepancy between the theory and actual implementation of co-teaching models of instruction in inclusive special education classrooms. In the quest to improve upon the current pedagogy, the following research questions were utilized:

1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?

2. How may co-teaching be improved?

The questions that guided this study are not unlike those used by other esteemed researchers in the field, such as Austin (2001), Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend (1989) and
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Salend & Johansen (1997). These researchers, among others, also investigated co-teaching to determine which best practices and models would maximize student learning outcomes and teachers’ professional satisfaction. Because these research questions have “an inherently processual orientation” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 75), it is appropriate and right to use an open-ended, inductive approach. By gathering data by three different data collection methods, the researcher was able to reveal the meanings behind situation-specific phenomena through the perceptions of those involved (Maxwell, 2005). Utilizing multiple sources of data was an effective way to access teachers’ perceptions, because although they were unique, each layer was complementary to the others (Yin, 2009). More specifically, this study highlighted the perceptions of six co-teachers to determine how their approaches may be supported and improved. When reinforced by Fullan’s (2008) organizational change theory, it is apparent how personalization, precision and professional learning all factor into the process.

When designing each phase of data collection, the theoretical framework was critical. Fullan’s (2008) ideas about leadership (love your employees), collaboration (connect peers with purpose) and professional development (learning is the work) were central topics of exploration throughout each phase. These ideas also overlap and complement Hargreaves & Shirley’s (2009) pillars of purpose: vision, achievement, public engagement, responsibility, students’ role, and mindful learning and teaching. Each of the pillars, excluding public engagement, was directly addressed in the research methodology by pertinent research questions and led the researcher to uncover the findings. When formulating the research questions, the researcher sought to discover how the co-teachers’ experiences of these underpinnings of organizational theory influenced their overall perceptions of this educational model.
This study explored various and critical aspects of co-teaching, and to what degree these were implemented. The categories included perceptions of co-teachers’ current experience, recommended practices and school-based supports (Austin, 2000). At the time of data collection, the participants in the study were all involved in co-teaching models of inclusive special education instruction. The process by which data was collected is described in detail so similar studies may be conducted in the future (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Research Design**

In this qualitative, single case study, by investigating the case of 5th grade teachers at one school in southeastern Massachusetts, the researcher established the unit of analysis as co-teachers (Yin, 2009). Because there was only one unit of analysis, this was a holistic design (Yin, 2009). Using a qualitative means of data collection and analysis allowed for a holistic view of the problem and eventual recommendations for improvement (Maxwell, 2005). By using this all-encompassing method to collect, analyze and interpret data, the researcher sought to reveal the most salient findings. According to Yin (2009):

> The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (p. 18)

A single case study “can represent a significant contribution to knowledge, and theory building” (Yin, 2009, p. 47). The researcher hopes through studying these
particular co-teachers, improvements may be made to the school’s current model, and that some of the findings may be applicable to other settings as well. Additionally, upcoming researchers may look to this case to refocus future findings to either confirm or refute the practicality of the findings, especially in their application to similar settings (Yin, 2009). The data collection techniques the researcher used in this study reflect Yin’s (2009) case study research design. Yin rationalizes using a single case design when the single case is the “representative or typical” case (Yin, 2009, p. 48). By capturing the everyday experience of co-teachers at this school, the researcher illuminated areas of strength and areas of weakness in its current implementation.

Case study is not an uncommon method for seeking understanding of, or improvements in, co-teaching. In fact, many prominent researchers in the field (Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Goddard, Goddard & Tschannen-Moran, 2007; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Simmons & Magiera, 2007; Strahan & Hedt, 2009) have employed case study to collect and analyze data with the goal of improving co-teaching. Case study design has proved to be an effective method to provide rich, humanistic data on a phenomenon, while also allowing for the unexpected (Yin, 2009). Although there are strengths and limitations to this research method, once they are acknowledged, the researcher can move forward on a rigorous methodological path to explore important problems of practice, as well as potential solutions.

**Site and Participants**

This single case study was conducted at a 5th and 6th grade school in southeastern Massachusetts. The six participants were selected by purposeful sample, with voluntary participation of 5th grade teachers who were partnered in co-taught classrooms. The following profile information was gathered as part of the initial survey. Of the six teacher
participants, two were male and four were female. Their teaching experience ranged from five to twenty-eight years. Five of the six educators reported volunteering for their current co-teaching positions, and all taught a variety of core academic subjects including math, English/language arts, social studies and science. Only one teacher was licensed as both a general and special educator. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants listed in Table 3.

Table 3 Teachers' Profile Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Current Assignment</th>
<th>Licensure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>21 years (all as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>19 years (all as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>8 years (6 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Math</td>
<td>Special Education K-12 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>28 years (17 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, Social Studies &amp; Math</td>
<td>Special Education K-12 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>18 years (14 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Social Studies &amp; Math</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>5 years (3 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Science &amp; Math</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Special Education K-12 Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data, which is provided in Table 3, above, depicts the participants’ profile information. Each of the participants’ information has been protected with pseudonyms.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Studying intact teams of co-teachers was helpful to determine the models and philosophies of a variety of teachers in the school. In order to accomplish this, and because special educators must be shared among multiple general educators, there are only two special educator participants as compared to four of the their general educator counterparts. All the teachers involved were active fifth grade teachers. Additional information concerning the participants is contained in Appendix E.

“Qualitative researchers usually work with small samples of people, nested in their context and studied in-depth” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 27). Participants were selected through purposeful sample based on their current positions as 5th grade co-teachers within the school. The researcher was a colleague of the participants and had fostered a trusting, professional relationship with all participants prior to the beginning of this research. Participants, on the other hand, were interested in seeking improvements in their co-teaching model of instruction. Because of this goal, and their preexisting peer-to-peer relationship with the researcher, the participants were willing to openly communicate their experiences, and able to provide reliable responses regarding their perceptions of co-teaching.

Data Collection

The data collection phases, as detailed in the schematic below (Figure 4), were the basis for how the researcher verified “descriptive conclusions about the phenomena in a bounded context that [made up this] single case” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 90).
In order to accomplish the goals, the researcher employed a triumvirate of data-gathering tools and techniques. First, a revised version of Vance Austin’s (2000) Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey was administered. Second, the researcher utilized Vance Austin’s (2000) Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-teaching. Both of Austin’s research instruments were vetted through his own research (Austin, 2000). Through personal email communication, the researcher obtained Austin’s permission to use, and to modify, both research tools. The adapted survey consisted of both demographics and three categories of statements based on a five-point Likert rating scale (Appendix A). The survey results were organized and analyzed by three areas of exploration: (1.) Perceptions of Current Practices, (2.) Recommended Collaborative Practices and, (3.) School-Based Supports. Each sub-section was clustered for emergent themes within each of the three represented groupings.
Then, as the primary data set, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the six participants based on a modified version of Vance Austin’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching Interview. Transcriptions of the interview responses were coded and analyzed for emergent themes using both inductive and in vivo coding techniques. Next, the researcher interviewed all participants as a focus group to validate and confirm the trends that emerged during the prior stages of research. Finally, member checking was accomplished by each participant’s review of the findings. In this step, the researcher met with the participants, presented the findings of the research and gave them each the chance to review the data. The participants were encouraged to confirm, refute or revise the document based on their perceptions. Upon review of the data, each participant confirmed the findings were a clear and accurate reflection of their perceptions of co-teaching, and their participation in the three phases of data collection.

**Survey results.** In Phase One (Figure 4) of data collection, Vance Austin’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey (Appendix A) was used to explore three key areas of co-teaching. The first category was Perceptions of Current Experience, the second category was Co-Teaching Techniques and the final category was School-Based Supports. With Vance Austin’s permission, the researcher removed a fourth section of the survey that addressed Teacher Preparation for Collaborative Teaching. While this section would have been interesting, it would not be applicable to the research questions. For this reason, it was removed from the existing research instrument. Also, due to the small sample size of participants, the researcher omitted some of the unnecessary questions under Teacher Information.

After completing the necessary background information, the participants were requested to respond to items based on a five-point Likert rating scale. To minimize
extraneous variables and increase consistency, each of the six participants took the
survey in a small, quiet computer lab during the school day. The researcher verbally
reminded the teachers they were to complete the survey in reference to their current co-
teaching experiences, as opposed to prior teaching partners. Additionally, they were
prompted to read all directions carefully. The researcher was available for clarification,
but the participants completed the survey without incident.

In the researcher’s memos, it was noted teachers took an average of fifteen
minutes to complete the survey. The teachers did not require any further clarification
beyond the directions provided. The room where they completed the survey was cool
and quiet, and participants were not interrupted during this time. The information
gathered through teachers’ responses to survey items indicated participants’ perceptions
of the following questions:

1. What co-teaching practices do teachers recommend as valuable?
2. What are the collaborative practices currently employed by co-teachers?
3. What school-based administrative supports should be in place to facilitate co-
teaching?

In the upcoming section, the researcher discusses the survey results as they relate
to the co-teachers’ experiences in the practice. Additionally, the researcher presents
participants’ perceptions of recommended collaborative practices, as well as school-

Perceptions of current experience. Vance Austin designed the first category
of survey items to elicit general impressions of teachers’ views of their current co-
teaching partnership(s). In addition to more specific information, these items indicated a teacher's predisposition for collaborative practices. Through the survey prompts, and in keeping with the review of literature, the researcher anticipated finding a disparity between special and general educators’ sharing of responsibilities. The researcher also expected most co-teachers would value their co-teaching partnership as a worthwhile experience.

In this section, each bar graph displays both general educator and special educator responses. Based on the results of the first section of survey items, and in keeping with the anticipated themes, there was a consensus that all teachers, both special and general educators, agree co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience. It also appeared most teachers involved in this study felt they worked well with their partner(s) and had grown professionally as a result. Surprisingly, and contrary to expected results, most teachers felt they shared responsibilities relatively equally with their partner. For the following bar graphs, please note:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4 Definitions of Bar Graph Terms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>This refers to the data from the general education teachers on each survey item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>This refers to the data from the special education teachers on each survey item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General/Special Education Value</td>
<td>This refers to teachers’ belief in the value of the practice or school-based service noted in the survey item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General/Special Education Employ</td>
<td>This refers to whether teachers currently employ the practice noted in the survey item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General/Special Education Access</td>
<td>This refers to whether teachers currently have access to or receive the school-based services noted in the survey item.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For question #1, “My co-teaching partner and I work very well together,” five of the six, and both special education co-teachers agreed, while only one general education teacher neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Thus, overall, the co-teaching participants felt they were working effectively with their partner(s).

For question #2, “Co-teaching has improved my teaching,” all participants indicated agreement with the statement showing their professionalism had increased through this collaborative experience.

On question #3, “In my current co-teaching experience, I do more than my partner,” one special educator indicated they disagreed, while the other special educator neither agreed nor disagreed. To the contrary, one general educator agreed with the statement while three general educators neither agreed nor disagreed. It is likely the general educator who agreed with the statement felt the responsibilities in the partnership were not shared equally, but it was unclear through the survey results alone, why that was the case. This anomaly was addressed more in-depth during the interviews in Phase Two of the data collection process. Despite this outlier, overall this data indicated the majority of teachers felt they shared the responsibilities within their co-teaching partnerships.

Question #4 was the only survey item where participants unanimously indicated the same response. When asked to rate whether “Co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience”, interestingly all participants agreed it was. It is likely, because they volunteered for their current positions, that they valued the collaborative process. In other research studies, where teachers were forced into co-teaching partnerships, this was often not the case (Friend & Cook, 1995).
For Question #5, “My current co-teaching partner and I solicit each other's feedback and benefit from it,” responses varied. The special educators both indicated agreement with the statement, where two general educators agreed. The other two general educators indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. It is possible these inconsistencies were due to the personalities of the participants, and how they preferred to communicate. Because this is not necessarily an inherent component of co-teaching, the teachers may or may not have partaken in this strategy, as evidenced by the responses.

As demonstrated in the bar graph below (Table 5), when asked to rate how well they work with their current co-teaching partner, responses varied. On the x-axis, responses were differentiated by both special and general educators’ responses. On the y-axis, the number of respondents is visible. The legend indicates the five-point Likert scale used to determine teacher perceptions. In this case, two general educators “strongly agreed” they worked very well with their co-teaching partner. One general educator “agreed” they worked very well with their co-teaching partner. Lastly, one general educator “neither agreed nor disagreed” to working very well with their co-teaching partner. The graph also indicates both special educators “strongly agreed” they worked very well with their co-teaching partner. In this way, the following graphs were analyzed for patterns.
Table 5  My Co-Teaching Partner and I Work Very Well Together

#1: My current co-teaching partner and I work very well together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

Table 6 Co-Teaching Has Improved My Teaching

#2: Co-teaching has improved my teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
Table 7  In My Current Co-Teaching Experience, I Do More Than My Partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#3: In my current co-teaching experience, I do more than my partner.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8  Co-Teaching is a Worthwhile Professional Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education</th>
<th>Special Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#4: Co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience.</td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Graph" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9  My Current Co-Teaching Partner and I Solicit Each Other’s Feedback and Benefit From It

#5: My current co-teaching partner and I solicit each other's feedback and benefit from it.

Co-teaching techniques. This category of survey items was developed to indicate the collaborative and cooperative practices teachers perceive as most relevant to their practice. It directly related to both research questions guiding this study, as it uncovered teachers’ perceptions of recommended co-teaching practices. In so doing, it also allowed the researcher to assess ways to strengthen current trends.

The results of both special and general educators’ perspectives are indicated in stacked bar graphs. The participants reflected on the usefulness of daily planning, sharing classroom management and instruction, offering feedback and maintaining specific areas of responsibility. The researcher anticipated teachers’ responses would reflect the importance of planning time and sharing responsibility, but a weakness in how these strategies are employed.
Analysis of these items was rooted in Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change because collaborative practices are highly dependent upon his secrets related to meaningful peer relationships and an environment where learning is supported and expected. Through an analysis of responses, it was evident that while these co-teachers generally expressed fairly high value for all of the recommended co-teaching strategies, their employment of the strategies almost always fell short of their indicated value, with the exception of establishing and maintaining specific areas of responsibility. This surprised the researcher, but confirmed there were helpful strategies available to teachers that were not implemented regularly.

Questions #6-10 sought to clarify the co-teaching techniques co-teachers employed. Item #6 asked participants to rate, “Co-teachers should meet daily to plan lessons”. While five out of six educators indicated they thought this was a valuable practice, only three indicated they actually employed this strategy. The review of literature noted even when afforded common planning time, many teachers revert back to what is most comfortable and may prefer teaching in isolation to collaborative approaches (Stivers, 2008).

Question #7 required participants to rate how much they valued and employed the idea that co-teachers should share classroom management strategies. Five out of six participants indicated they valued the practice, while only one participant neither agreed nor disagreed. In terms of how teachers employed this co-teaching strategy, one teacher disagreed classroom management responsibilities were shared, while one neither agreed nor disagreed. The remaining four teachers indicated they did employ shared responsibility in the area of classroom management. The practice of co-teaching requires
individuals to give up control. It is quite likely the participant who did not value sharing of classroom management responsibilities was not yet comfortable with relying on others in a shared teaching environment, or unsure about how to accomplish this task.

Question #8 asked whether or not participants agreed “Co-teachers should share classroom instruction”. All six participants agreed with this survey item. However, when asked whether they employed this strategy, five out of the six agreed, while one indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed they employed the practice of sharing classroom instruction. While the researcher anticipated more discontinuity from this prompt, the responses were surprising. This outcome points to evidence of more collaboration than the researcher expected.

Survey question #9, “Co-teachers should regularly offer feedback” resulted in all six participants agreeing in the value of this approach. However, when asked whether they employed this approach in their own model of co-teaching, only three teachers indicated agreement, while the three remaining teachers neither agreed nor disagreed. The researcher explained this discrepancy as a possible factor of relationships. Reflecting back on Fullan’s (2008) idea of connecting peers with a purpose, and reflecting on the literature, it has been noted many co-teachers are not reflective in practice. To access the benefits of peer-to-peer feedback, lateral interaction must become more purposeful (Fullan, 2008).

Results from survey question #10 indicated that five out of six participants agreed they valued “Co-teachers should establish and maintain specific areas of responsibility”, while one special educator neither agreed nor disagreed. Interestingly, five participants indicated they employed this approach, while one general educator neither agreed nor
disagreed they established and maintained specific areas of responsibility within their cooperative partnership. This prompt is similar in nature to that of sharing classroom management responsibilities, and also similar to the discrepancies in how teachers employed this practice. The following collection of bar graphs displays data about recommended co-teaching practices, and to what degree the participants utilized these strategies in their own practices.

**Table 10 Co-Teacher Should Meet Daily to Plan Lessons**

![Bar graph showing the perception of co-teachers meeting daily to plan lessons.](image)
Table 11  Co-Teachers Should Share Classroom Management Responsibilities

#7: Co-teachers should share classroom management responsibilities.

Table 12  Co-Teachers Should Share Classroom Instruction

#8: Co-teachers should share classroom instruction.

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CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Table 11  Co-Teachers Should Share Classroom Management Responsibilities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Value</th>
<th>Special Education Value</th>
<th>General Education Employ</th>
<th>Special Education Employ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12  Co-Teachers Should Share Classroom Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Value</th>
<th>Special Education Value</th>
<th>General Education Employ</th>
<th>Special Education Employ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interestingly, although co-teachers unanimously agreed co-teaching is a worthwhile experience, the data showed their approaches to implementing collaborative...
practices varied. While teachers recognized the value of recommended collaborative practices, almost every teacher ranked the use of these practices below the value they assigned them. In this way, the researcher surmised there was a need for collaborative supports, and perhaps more professional development on how and why to employ the recommended practices. Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change iterates the importance of peer-to-peer development of meaningful practices. By involving teachers in the process, they would be more likely to more effectively implement co-teaching.

**Administrative supports.** This final category of Austin’s (2000) survey was developed to gather data regarding what kind of supports the school provided to facilitate effective co-teaching. Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) tout purpose as a critical component of effective organizations. Leaders must support co-teaching models through continued professional development, necessary teaching materials and time for planning. The researcher anticipated that, aside from planning time, teachers would express a need for more administrative support.

Each item from this section also differentiated both general and special educator responses. An examination of responses revealed teachers almost always placed a higher value on planning time, administrative support, adequate supplies, and professional development, than what they felt they had access to in those same categories. This corroborated the researcher’s anticipated outcomes.

The following questions, #11-22, were included to establish the school-wide administrative supports that were in place to facilitate co-teaching. They were evaluated in terms of both value and access with separate bar graphs to accommodate the different rating scales. In question #11, “provision for scheduled mutual planning time,” all educators agreed it is useful, but as seen in question #12, only four educators indicated
having plentiful access to this planning time, while one teacher signified having some access and the last participant felt there was limited access to scheduled mutual planning time. Complicated schedules, in addition to participants’ use of the time given, is likely responsible for this discrepancy.

Questions #13-14 investigated “administrative support of co-teaching”. Five out of six respondents indicated it was useful, where only one participant reported its value was of limited use. However, when asked to reflect on their access to administrative support of the practice in question #14, the responses were fractured. Two teachers reported plentiful access, while two indicated some access. Further, one teacher reported limited access and yet another indicated there was no access to administrative support in the practice of co-teaching. Because of the discontinuity in responses from this prompt, the researcher explored this topic more in Phase Two of the data collection process during the semi-structured interviews.

Questions #15-16 asked teachers to assess the value of, and access to, “adequate teaching aids and supplies appropriate to learning levels”. All teachers agreed this consideration was useful to influence effective co-teaching. In juxtaposition to that, for question #16, only three teachers reported they had some access to adequate supplies and the remaining three felt they had only limited access to the necessary materials to maximize their performance in a co-teaching model of instruction.

When prompted to respond to question #17 regarding the value of “in-service training opportunities” such as workshops, all six participants agreed these opportunities would be useful. Despite their feelings on the previous item, question #18 indicated five
of the six participants reported limited to no access to these opportunities, while one participant indicated they did not know of such opportunities being available.

Participants were asked to indicate the value of “school district workshops/mini courses on facilitating co-teaching” in question #19. Five of six participants agreed these opportunities would be useful, while one participant signified they did not know how useful workshops would be. Interestingly, when addressing whether or not the district offered such professional development, five educators reported limited to no access in question #20 while one participant did not know. Therefore, professional development was revealed as an area of weakness.

Lastly, in questions #21-22, participants were requested to rate the value of “mentoring by experienced co-teachers”. Four of six teachers thought it would be useful, while two felt it would be an experience of only limited use. When asked in question #22 to consider their access to mentoring by an experienced co-teacher, two respondents indicated they had limited access, while three indicated having no access and the last respondent was not sure about their access to mentoring.

The following graphs display the cumulative results of probes related to school-based supports for co-teaching. Teachers responded to both their value of and access to these recommended provisions.
Table 15  Value of Provision for Scheduled Mutual Planning Time

#11: Provision for scheduled mutual planning time.

Table 16  Access to Provision for Scheduled Mutual Planning Time

#12: Provision for scheduled mutual planning time.
Table 17  Value of Administrative Support of Co-Teaching

#13: Administrative support of co-teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Value</th>
<th>Special Education Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Limited Use</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Useful</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Useful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18  Access to Administrative Support of Co-Teaching

#14: Administrative support of co-teaching.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Access</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Access</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Access</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plentiful Access</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19  Value of Adequate Teaching Aids and Supplies Appropriate to Learning Levels

#15: Adequate teaching aids and supplies appropriate to learning levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Education Value</th>
<th>Special Education Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of Limited Use</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Useful</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Useful</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20  Access to Adequate Teaching Aids and Supplies Appropriate to Learning Levels

#16: Adequate teaching aids and supplies appropriate to learning levels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Access</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Access</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Access</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plentiful Access</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 Value of In-Service Training Opportunities Provided (Workshops, etc.)

#17: In-service training opportunities provided (workshops, etc.)

Table 22 Access to Adequate Teaching Aids and Supplies Appropriate to Learning Levels

#18: In-service training opportunities provided (workshops, etc.)
Table 23  Value of School District Workshops/Mini Courses on Facilitating Co-Teaching

#19: School district workshops/mini courses on facilitating co-teaching.

Table 24  Access to School District Workshops/Mini Courses on Facilitating Co-Teaching

#20: School district workshops/mini courses on facilitating co-teaching.
Table 25  Value of Mentoring by Experienced Co-Teacher(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#21: Mentoring by experienced co-teacher(s).</th>
<th>General Education Value</th>
<th>Special Education Value</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Useful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Of Limited Use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat Useful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Useful</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26  Access to Mentoring by Experienced Co-Teacher(s)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#22: Mentoring by experienced co-teacher(s).</th>
<th>General Education Access</th>
<th>Special Education Access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Don't Know</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Access</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Access</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some Access</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plentiful Access</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In their organizational and educational change theories, Fullan (2008) and Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) all proclaim the important role administrative supports play in a co-teaching model of instruction. To effectively implement this cooperative model, leaders must be cognizant of teachers’ needs. Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) assert, “Accountability is the remainder that is left when responsibility has been subtracted” (p. 102). This component of the educational change theory applied directly to the role of administration. When the researcher sought to answer how co-teachers perceive their role, they confirmed although they valued sustained learning and training toward the goal of improvement, the opportunity to engage in these activities was limited or unavailable. For co-teaching to be truly and thoroughly successful, co-teachers must feel empowered, supported and inspired. They must reclaim shared responsibility for all of the students they impact. These survey results revealed most teachers did not feel adequately supported, especially in the areas of adequate materials and professional development.

In sum, Phase One of the data collection timeline was a revised version of Vance Austin’s (2008) Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey. The results of this survey were effective in providing valuable data on both research questions: (1.) How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching? and (2.) How may co-teaching be improved?

In response to the first research question, co-teaching respondents overwhelmingly indicated they valued the practice of co-teaching. The research revealed many teachers shared responsibilities and worked well with their co-teaching partner(s). While many teachers responded favorably to suggested co-teaching strategies, few employed them to the same degree they valued them. Additionally, teachers perceived a
grave disconnect between the school-based supports they should ideally be afforded, and the actual supports that were in place.

Data addressing the second research question aligned with organizational change theory. In his fourth secret, Fullan (2008) suggests, “consistency and innovation can and must go together, and you achieve them through organized learning in context. Learning is the work” (p. 79). Without consistent and continuous professional development aimed at strengthening collaborative models of instruction, it is unlikely this method of teaching will reach its greatest potential. Although participants denoted interest in various growth opportunities, they almost exclusively reported the prospects were not readily available.

Results from the co-teacher surveys were coded by the broader categories of: (1.) co-teacher’s current experience, (2.) recommended collaborative practices and (3.) school-based supports, as predetermined by Austin (2000). The themes emerging from participant feedback showed co-teachers generally valued their current co-teaching partnerships. The results also indicated that although co-teachers valued the ideas of recommended practice, they did not utilize them as much as they valued them. Similarly, under the theme of school-based supports, professional development emerged as an area of substantial weakness, as teachers noted their access to co-teaching professional development was quite limited. The survey results led the researcher to tailor Austin’s (2000) semi-structured interview questions to probe deeper into what factors the participants deemed critical for the model’s success, and how they envisioned improving upon the standards that were in place.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Semi-Structured Interview Results

As indicated in Phase Two of the Data Collection Timeline, the researcher next conducted Vance Austin’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching Semi-Structured Interview (Appendix B).

Phase 2: February 2012

- **Interviews** – Following Vance Austin’s protocol, semi-structured interviews were conducted in sets. Initial questions were typically answered “yes” or “no” followed up with probing questions. The interviews were transcribed and descriptively coded by themes using both inductive and in vivo coding strategies.
  - These interviews served as the primary data set.

*Figure 5. Second Phase of Data Collection*

This information served as the researcher’s primary data set as suggested by Yin (2009), “One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview” (p.106). After gathering and analyzing the data from the survey in Phase One, and with Austin’s permission, two questions were added to the survey: (1.) What are the determining factors of effective co-teaching? and (2.) In your opinion, how could we improve co-teaching in this building? Both of these questions were added to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ ideas around their perceptions of their practice, and more specifically their visions for potential improvements.

Additionally, armed with information from Phase One, the researcher was prepared to probe more deeply into some of the discrepancies that arose around the broader themes of collaboration, professional development and school-based supports.
Through the interview process, the teachers provided insights into how they viewed the co-teaching model, and how they would like to see it improved.

Additionally, as with the survey, the researcher eliminated the section of questions pertaining to teacher preparation for collaborative practices, as it did not inform the research questions. Austin’s survey is organized in sets by theme. Typically each set of questions began with a “yes” or “no” question and then followed up with a probing question, providing allowance for a humanistic interaction and room for extended conversation about the emergent themes (Yin, 2009). This proved to be important in developing the themes and allowing for clarification of data interpretation. The researcher consciously maintained a conversational quality throughout Phase Two of data collection as suggested by Yin (2009) in a non-threatening setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). “The interviews will be guided conversations rather than structured queries. In other words, although you will be pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, your actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid” (Yin, 2009, p. 106).

The researcher conducted the interviews in each participant’s own classroom. The researcher was purposeful in choosing this setting in order to promote a feeling of comfort. Before each interview was digitally recorded, participants were reminded of their rights to discontinue at any time, or decline any question they did not wish to answer. Each interview lasted between 20 and 35 minutes. The researcher noted participants seemed generally eager and confident to share their perceptions of their co-teaching experience.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

The same questions were posed to each of the six participants, with allowances for expanded conversation when needed. These insightful interviews served as the researcher’s primary data set. In order to determine how educators perceived co-teaching, respondents were asked to reflect on questions organized into five sets (Appendix B). Each participant involved in the process was interviewed separately and in isolation to ensure confidentiality. In the following section, the researcher has summarized the results of the semi-structured interviews. Additional, more detailed information concerning participants’ responses is contained in Appendix F.

After completing all six interviews, the researcher transcribed each discussion, word-for-word, inserting pseudonyms in place of participants’ real names. As with Austin’s (2000) survey, and in keeping with the research questions for this case study, the vital themes were collaboration, time, professional development and administrative support. These codes emerged through descriptive coding as the majority of participants referred to the same central ideas, as evidenced in Table 28. As similar words appeared and were highlighted, the themes became apparent. In this way, Saldana (2009) urges researchers to, “trust your instincts with In Vivo coding” (p. 75). As recommended by Miles & Huberman (1994), “One method for creating codes – the one we prefer – is that of creating a provisional ‘start list’ of codes prior to field work” (p. 58). Many themes that emerged were those the researcher predicted would arise. As supported by the research, and by Austin (2000), the emergent themes simultaneously overlapped with the research questions, organizational and educational change theories and the extensive review of literature.
In his Six Secrets of Change, Fullan’s (2008) ideas that Learning Is the Work and connect peers with purpose critically support both collaboration and professional development. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) also iterate the importance of innovation and cooperative practices as the underpinnings of educational reform. Many researchers (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989; Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Cook & Friend, 1995; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001) tout the importance of collaboration, sufficient time for planning, professional development and administrative supports.

**Coding.** The researcher utilized Saldana’s (2009) in vivo, also called “literal”, coding as the initial method of organizing the interview data. “In vivo’s root meaning is ‘in that which is alive,’ and as a code refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record” (Saldana, 2009, p. 74). The researcher highlighted each interview transcription by theme in different colors. The initial coded themes were those that were also addressed directly in both the survey and the interview questions. The foci were identified by Austin (2000) and agreed upon by the researcher as collaboration, administrative support and professional development. As indicated, these general themes emerged in the theoretical framework, research literature and Austin’s (2000) research instruments. Although these themes served as the backdrop for questioning, the researcher allowed flexibility to explore other areas of importance as they arose. Because in vivo coding does not assign a fixed number of codes, but rather imparts the overall sentiments of the interviewee, it is a flexible option for practically all types of qualitative research studies (Saldana, 2009).

As a second level of coding, the researcher applied inductive coding techniques to hone in on the most pertinent information. Because of the conversational nature of the
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

A semi-structured interview process, the data collected was abundant, and consequently not all of it was relevant. By carefully narrowing and focusing through the categories, the researcher developed emergent themes (Thomas, 2003). The transcriptions were coded for the predetermined themes. Each theme was assigned a color. As other, sometimes unexpected, ideas emerged and were descriptively coded in the margins of the transcriptions, recurring patterns were noted. For the most part, and as expected, these themes correlated to the themes already established through the review of literature, as well as the theoretical framework. Fullan (2008) and Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) all assigned importance to the components mentioned in the literature. According to these sources, professional development, time for planning, and administrative supports were all critical aspects of effective models of co-teaching. The researcher wanted to determine if this coincided with participants’ perceptions. Despite the similarities in emergent themes, this coding technique was useful because the categories materialized more spontaneously. Because the themes served as the foundation, even though the researcher was cognizant of coding for unexpected themes, the researcher maximized the ability to be more objective when determining outcomes.

The inductive approach assisted with condensing data, and promoted an advancement of the theory of co-teaching case solely on the raw data collected (Thomas, 2003). These interviews were analyzed using a process that consisted of transcribing interviews, preparing raw data files, creation of categories (in vivo coding), and finally revising categories. Descriptive coding used “chunking” by theme and then organizing these chunks into clusters to begin drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994).
Table 27 Process of Analysis

Adapted from Creswell, 2002, Figure 9.4, p.266

And, though the researcher carefully structured the coding process, at the same time it needed to be fluid (Saldana, 2009). Saldana (2009) iterates, “Sometimes the participant says it best; sometimes the researcher does. Be willing to mix and match coding methods as you proceed with data analysis” (p. 76).

Phase Two of the data collection timeline necessitated many sequential steps. First, the researcher prepared the raw files by typing them into a common format. Second, the researcher conducted a close read of the text to become familiar with the themes and details. Next, the researcher defined the general categories as influenced by the research goals, but redefined by the specific content of the interviews. Then, the researcher eliminated any text that did not inform the research goals and double coded any overlapping text that fell within two or more themes. Lastly, the researcher continued to narrow the codes, eventually distilling findings (Thomas, 2003).
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

The researcher utilized first-level coding as a starting point to sort participant responses into the three targeted themes of collaboration, administrative support and professional development. Through the use of color, this process allowed the researcher to find out the continuity of the themes and how strongly the predicted themes emerged from the actual data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The semi-structured interviews were initially broadly coded by theme, and then analyzed for recurring patterns of codes.

Researcher memos were kept in a journal and also through researcher commentary in the margins of the transcriptions that highlighted interesting and/or common remarks (Miles & Huberman, 1994). “These ideas are important; they suggest new interpretations, leads, connections with other parts of the data, and they usually point toward questions and issues to look into during the next wave of data collection, and to ways of elaborating some of these ideas” (Miles & Huberman, 2009, p. 67). By being alert about the emerging details of the text, the researcher bridged the survey results with the interview data.

Table 28 Initial Codes and Definitions Categorized by Theme

| Phases Two and Three of Data Collection Timeline (February/March 2012) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Themes | Research Question(s) Addressed | Code | Definition | Data |
| Perceptions of Co-Teaching | 1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching? 2. How may co-teaching be improved? | PERC | Description of perceptions of co-teaching | Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Group |
### CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column 1</th>
<th>Column 2</th>
<th>Column 3</th>
<th>Column 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Collaboration** | 1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?  
2. How may co-teaching be improved? | TC | Evidence of Teacher Collaboration  
Mention of Recommended Collaborative Practices | Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Group |
| **School-Based Supports/Professional Development** | 1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?  
2. How may co-teaching be improved? | SBS-PD  
SBS-O | Actual school-based supports and professional development available to teachers | Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Group |
| **Definition of Co-Teaching** | 1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?  
2. How may co-teaching be improved? | DEF | Teachers perceptions about how co-teaching is defined by themselves and by the school | Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Group |
| **Time** | 1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?  
2. How may co-teaching be improved? | T-Y  
T-S | Time in years as a factor of co-teaching  
Time in scheduling | Semi-Structured Interviews & Focus Group |

#### Key of Code Initials

- **PERC:** Perceptions
- **TC:** Evidence of Collaboration
- **RC:** Mention of Recommended Collaborative Practices
- **SBS-PD:** School-based Supports (Professional Development)
- **SBS-O:** School-based Supports (Other)
- **DEF:** Definitions of Co-Teaching
- **T-Y:** Time in Years
- **T-S:** Time in Scheduling
**Data analysis.** As a result of existing research literature, (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989; Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Cook & Friend, 1995; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001) in addition to Vance Austin’s (2000) study on co-teaching, the researcher anticipated the themes of collaboration, professional development and administrative support. Not surprisingly, these themes did emerge. Furthermore, and as unanticipated themes, time and defining co-teaching also recurrently arose throughout the interview process in Phase Two of the data collection. The themes supported the research question regarding how co-teachers perceived their practice. It also addressed the research question aimed at improving the co-teaching practice. More specifically, the themes revealed the perceptions of teachers and their perspectives on how to improve the practice of co-teaching. By using the already established themes as a starting point, Austin (2000), and consequently the researcher, had a basis from which to begin coding. Further, the themes support the theory of organizational change. Fullan’s (2008) and Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009) theories both claim the importance of collaboration, professional development and administrative support.

**Collaboration.** Austin’s (2000) first set of interview questions was designed to discover how teachers felt about their co-teaching arrangements. Set 1 questions included:

**Table 29: Set 1 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #:</th>
<th>Question Asked:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Would you describe your co-teaching experience generally as a positive one?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>If yes...would you describe the positive aspects for me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>If no...would you describe the negative aspects for me?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Have you and your teaching partner ever disagreed about an important aspect of co-teaching?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>If yes...what was the disagreement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>If no...go to question 3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2C</td>
<td>Were you able to resolve the disagreement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2D</td>
<td>If yes...how was it resolved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have you taught in a regular education classroom (non-inclusive) or a self-contained special education classroom?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>If yes...which type?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>If no...go to set 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does your recollection of that experience compare with your co-teaching experience?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By providing more information about the interpersonal experiences of the teachers, these questions revealed some key points of interest. In general, the co-teachers referred to their co-teaching experience as a positive one, and preferred it to both non-inclusive and substantially separate models of instruction. Overwhelmingly, they remarked about the benefits this partnership provided to students and themselves, including sharing workload and approaches to instructing students with a wide range of abilities. Also, teachers did not report having any major disagreements with each other, so it is likely they demonstrated respect for each other in their shared classroom setting. This information was consistent with data from Phase One during the survey segment of the study.

**Recommended co-teaching strategies.** Austin’s (2000) second set of interview questions was designed to evaluate teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their approach to co-taught instruction. It also unraveled how teachers’ practices could be
improved addressing the investigator's second research question: How may co-teaching be improved? Overall, respondents reported their instructional approaches were effective, though some denoted room for improvement. When considering one inconsistency in Phase One, some points were clarified. During one of the interviews, one participant iterated she did not consider her current partnership a true co-teaching partnership. She cited infrequent communication about lesson planning as one area of weakness. This information served to explain why one participant indicated uneven distribution of responsibilities in the survey phase of the study. It also provided a possible explanation for inconsistencies in how co-teachers perceived their working relationship(s) and sharing of responsibilities.

Themes that continued to surface in this set of questions, as factors that make co-teaching successful, were time and collaboration. As evidenced by research (Bouck, 2007; Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Carter, Prater, Jackson & Marchant, 2009; Conderman, Johnson-Rodriguez & Hartman, 2009; Keefe, Moore & Duff, 2004) and Austin (2000) himself, collaboration is an undeniably important ingredient in the co-teaching process. Although the literature persistently mentions time for common planning as a critical component, the researcher was surprised to unveil time, in years, as an even more proliferating theme throughout the interviews. Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change would bolster this finding, as relationships are key to successful organizational change on any scale. And, one bridge to strong working relationships, leading to trust and communication is time, in years, spent in a partnership.
Table 30: Set 2 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #:</th>
<th>Question Asked:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Have you used any new instructional techniques, management strategies, or curriculum adaptations in your co-teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>If yes...would you describe these?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>If yes...which of these do you consider to be most effective? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1C</td>
<td>If yes...which of these you consider least effective? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1D</td>
<td>If no...would you describe the teaching methods you currently use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1E</td>
<td>If no...which of these do you consider to be most effective? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1F</td>
<td>If no...which of these do you consider to be least effective? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What are the determining factors of effective co-teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Has the collaborative teaching experience contributed to your professional knowledge and skill?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3A</td>
<td>If yes...would you describe these contributions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3B</td>
<td>If no...would you describe some of its shortcomings?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfaction of co-teaching. The interview questions in Austin’s (2000) Set 3 targeted practices teachers find valuable, and sought to answer the research questions for this study. This segment addressed teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching by converging on the most satisfying aspects of this teaching model. It also prompted participants to reflect on potential changes and improvements in both their partnership(s) and school-wide, which directly supplied evidence toward answering the second research question regarding potential improvements.

According to the interviewees, the co-teaching program of which they were a part would be best improved by an increase in special education teaching staff, and a decrease in students needing those services. Clearly, they felt the student-to-teacher ratio is paramount to success. Also, teachers felt a common definition of the practice, and concentrated professional development specifically on how to co-teach, was necessary.
These sentiments aligned with the findings from the survey, literature and theoretical framework as well. Set 3 asked the following questions of each participant:

Table 31: Set 3 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #:</th>
<th>Question Asked:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Are you satisfied with your current collaborative teaching assignment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>If yes...would you describe the most satisfying aspects?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>If no...what changes or improvements would you recommend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Are you satisfied with the level of support provided by the school to facilitate your collaborative teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>If yes...go to set 4.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>If no...what types of support do you think the school should provide?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Effectiveness in educating students. Austin (2000) designed the questions in Set 4 to illuminate the perceptions about how educators’ co-teaching practices affected their students. From the interviews, it was clear all participants were working with a diverse population of students with multiple special education needs ranging from specific learning disabilities, to Tourette’s Syndrome, to social-emotional disabilities. And, although the students, and the impact co-teaching had on them, was not a critical focus in terms of the research questions, it was useful in showing how teachers believed their work influenced their pupils.

The responses showed teachers overwhelmingly felt they were having a positive impact on both their general and special education students. This perspective likely led to an increased satisfaction in this particular teaching model. All respondents indicated students were receptive to the model. This information differed from the literature that revealed some teachers felt general education students were negatively influenced by the
behavioral habits of lower-functioning students (Carter et al., 2009; Mastropieri, 2005). Because five of the six teachers in this study reported volunteering for their current position, it is likely their preference for this method of instruction positively influenced their students’ behavior. The fourth set of questions included:

**Table 32: Set 4 Questions from Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question #:</th>
<th>Question Asked:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students without disabilities in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1A</td>
<td>If yes...why are they effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1B</td>
<td>If no...why are they not effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students with disabilities in your classroom?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2A</td>
<td>If yes...why are they effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2B</td>
<td>If no...why are they not effective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To what extent do you think that participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of some students without disabilities? In what ways does it contribute?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>To what extent do you think that participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of students with disabilities?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>In what ways does it contribute?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4B</td>
<td>What type of disability?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4C</td>
<td>What level of severity?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Are the students in your inclusive classroom generally receptive to collaborative teaching?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5A</td>
<td>If yes...how do you determine this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5B</td>
<td>If no...how do you determine this?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Distribution of teacher’s responsibilities._ The fifth and final set of questions was critical to help determine the model of co-teaching utilized by the participants. It also helped to assess how to improve upon current co-teaching practices. Research recommends the equal sharing of teaching responsibilities in effective co-teaching
partnerships (Cook & Friend, 1995). However, the division of labor was not equal in this case.

Results from these questions exhibited the most common area of shared responsibilities was “Administering Discipline”. Data in all other categories was inconsistent, suggesting a lack of uniformity among co-teachers in the building, and even among partners in the same co-teaching partnership. The areas that revealed the least amount of shared responsibility were “Planning Lessons” and “Classroom Management” which fell disproportionately to the general educator. In both cases, four respondents agreed these items were the responsibility of the classroom teacher, where only two co-teachers saw it as a shared responsibility. Appendix F contains more detailed information.

The aim of the final question, and as an addition to Austin’s (2000) original Perceptions of Co-Teaching Semi-Structured Interview, was to extend participants’ thinking of how to best improve the practice of co-teaching. Typically, and not surprisingly as relative to the survey responses, interviewees’ recommendations fell into three categories. The groupings were support (reduced student-to-teacher ratio), planning time and professional development. More surprisingly, and as a departure from the preceding survey results, interviewees also noted time, in years, and a common definition of co-teaching, as areas of need.

Primarily, four teachers were adamant smaller class sizes were one of the keys for success. They expressed the need for more adults to support the ever-increasing needs of students in their charge. This is also fully recognized by researchers Dieker & Murawski (2003) and Fox & Ysseldyke (1997). David explicated, “Anytime you could get more
people in, then you could make small groups, so then you can target those kids and you could probably make even more progress. But, you know, in the utopian world, if everyone had another adult in the room, it would be perfect.” So, whether they saw it as additional support, or fewer students per class, these teachers were seeking a reduced student-to-teacher ratio in order to improve their co-teaching practice.

Time, both in years and in daily scheduling, was noted as a critical factor of effective co-teaching. Although one participant commented that growth accompanies change, many co-teachers pointed out that comfort and communication, and developing a strong rapport, come with years of teaming together. So, this fact suggests leaders have to time the changes of partnerships in accordance with individual teams’ circumstances. This long-term time is as important as the daily planning time. Several teachers expressed an appreciation for regular common planning time. It appeared as though most teachers were pleased with the effort of administrators to schedule time for them to meet with their co-teaching partner, although a few alluded to the ability to make better use of that time.

Lastly, professional development surfaced as another potential catalyst for improvement for the practice of co-teaching. Some teachers thought direct instruction on how to co-teach would be beneficial, while others sought a common language, definitions and expectations from the district regarding co-teaching. Finally, two teachers recommended observing other schools that have effective co-teaching models in place. Serena vocalized:

We need a common definition. We need professional development on it, trainings and workshops. We have to talk about what it looks
like. We have to either go to other schools, not even in our district, but elsewhere where it’s working for them. I don’t think that two teachers standing up in front of a class should be considered co-teaching. I think to really dive deeper into that, we have to know what co-teaching is and really have some clear examples of it. I would say that’s really important.

**Findings.** In Phase Two of data collection, and from Vance Austin’s (2000) Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching, the researcher was able to confirm many themes that materialized during the Phase One survey. The coding chart below (Table 33) delineates the frequency with which the themes appeared and the findings that emerged from the primary data set.

### Table 33 Coding/Findings of Semi-Structured Interviews by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Question Set(s) Where Related Codes Appeared</th>
<th>Examples Of Excerpts (Descriptive)</th>
<th>Frequency of Theme (# of times in six transcriptions)</th>
<th>Finding (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Collaboration (Anticipated)        | Set 1 Set 2 Set 3 Set 4 Set 5               | • “share of workload”  
• “sharing the instruction”  
• “complement each other”  
• “we”/”us”/”our”                                                      | 118                                                  | Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience |
| Professional Development (Anticipated) | Set 3 Set 4 Set 5                           | • “not much professional development”  
• “haven’t worked on it as a district”  
• “should be more workshops”                                                   | 21                                                   | Administrative support was weakest in the |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative Support (Anticipated)</th>
<th>Set 1</th>
<th>Set 2</th>
<th>Set 3</th>
<th>Set 4</th>
<th>Set 5</th>
<th>“there are still lots of holes”</th>
<th>95</th>
<th>area of professional development.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“chipping away at inclusion”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“you could always make it better if you had more support”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“adequate support”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“administrator is very open to ideas”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements (Anticipated)</td>
<td>Set 1</td>
<td>Set 2</td>
<td>Set 3</td>
<td>Set 4</td>
<td>Set 5</td>
<td>“number one would be smaller class sizes”</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Limiting student/teacher ratio and/or caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“have a co-teacher all the time in your classroom”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“more people would honestly be helpful”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“it comes down to money and bodies”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>in the utopian world, if everyone has another adult in the room, it would be perfect</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time In Years (Unanticipated)</td>
<td>Set 1</td>
<td>Set 2</td>
<td>Set 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“keep working at least a couple years in a row with the same person”</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>The educators perceived time (in years) was an important component on successful co-teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“the longer I’ve known Andy, the better we co-teach”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>having worked together for a number of years, we understand each other”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to data garnered through surveying and interviewing 5th grade co-teachers in a southeastern Massachusetts community, the following findings were revealed:

1. Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience.
2. Administrative support was weakest in the area of professional development.
3. Limiting student-to-teacher ratio and/or caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching.
4. The educators perceived time (in years) was an important component of successful co-teaching.
5. A common definition of co-teaching is currently lacking.

**Focus Group Results**

Phase Three of the research model simultaneously addressed both research questions for this study, with the intent of affirming participants’ perceptions about co-teaching and the subsequent findings. For this final phase of data collection, the researcher conducted a focus group. The focus group was held after school in one participant’s classroom. The questions (Appendix C) were created by the researcher, and borne of the culminating data from Phase One (survey) and Phase Two (semi-structured
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

interview) portions of this qualitative, single case study. During the focus group, and after already determining emergent themes, the researcher corroborated certain facts the researcher believed were established during the study (Yin, 2009).

The interview lasted roughly 45 minutes, and throughout this time all participants voiced their thoughts on the various prompts. In this way, participants had the chance to confirm, deny and/or revise the findings of the survey and semi-structured interviews. During the focus group, the researcher again looked for the emergent themes, carefully wording the questions, so that the researcher appeared genuinely naïve about the topic. This allowed the interviewees to provide fresh commentary about the results as suggested by Yin (2009).

The researcher’s reflective memos of this process indicated the focus group was held beginning at 3:30pm following a staff meeting. Although all co-teachers were present, it was a challenging time of day as the participants had worked all day and a few had commitments following the focus group. Despite that, all of the participants appeared willing and eager to share their perceptions as a group. The researcher also noted that despite the participants’ care and concern with responding to each question, the focus group was punctuated by moments of laughter. The researcher explained this by noticing contributors found humor in their common experiences and frustrations.

Again, the researcher created the focus group questions as a natural follow-up to the survey and interview questions, seeking to clarify and confirm findings of both preceding phases of data collection. In this section, the responses have been synthesized and analyzed seeking confirmation of the Phase Two findings as well as any additional findings. Appendix G contains a more detailed summary of the focus group data.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Views on professional development varied a little, though teachers articulated a need for it. Serena expressed interest in visiting other schools or seeing videos of successful co-teaching models to help improve upon her own practice. Andy also felt that observing effective models of co-teaching in other schools would be beneficial. In terms of professional development, David suggested some training on various ways to implement co-teaching and ways to name those models so the co-teachers had a common language around their practice. When considering the usefulness of professional development Robin reflected on relationships and personality as deciding factors of co-teaching’s success rate. Some intangible factors, such as personality, are challenging to reform. None of the teachers mentioned ever having had explicit training on this model of instruction.

When asked about the school-based supports that sustained their co-teaching, the educators agreed that scheduled time for planning was a critical component. They appreciated the common planning time and administrative support in making this time a priority. This notion supported earlier data that determined teachers at this school, on the whole, felt they had sufficient planning time. The administrators in this building recognize that planning time is one of the determining factors of successful co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995).

However, when teachers were asked to comment on their use of planning time, the researcher noted a slight change in mood. The researcher’s memos indicated an uncomfortable hiatus in conversation. After reassuring participants they were in no way being judged, this prompt revealed common planning time for these teachers was not truly used for lesson planning. While teachers often met to discuss the needs and
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

circumstances of specific students in regard to particular accommodations for upcoming
lessons, their actual lesson planning was conducted, as Andy reported, “On the fly”. Robin explicated the infrequent planning by reminding the researcher that because Katie
works with four general education classrooms, she is “spread very thin”. She also
acknowledged that because of her special education duties, Katie is often pulled from the
classroom making her hard to rely on, through no fault of her own.

This was an epiphany, because in order for a special educator and general
educator to co-teach, ideally they must be working together all day. In the current model
at this school, the special educator is shared among four general education teachers.
Thus, the cry for more support and smaller class sizes was appropriate. Throughout
Phases One, Two and Three of research, many teachers indicated the ideal co-teaching
situation would be to have their co-teacher with them all day. Thus, overall, it seemed
that for co-teaching to work as a model where responsibilities are truly shared, one
special educator would have to be placed exclusively with one general educator.

Time, in years, which unexpectedly arose as a theme during Phase Two of data
collection, was reaffirmed in Phase Three’s focus group. Participants spoke of the time
needed to build a relationship and a rapport with their colleagues. Once enough time
had passed, co-teachers enjoyed a level of comfort and predictability that then allowed
them to integrate themselves more as a team. David also noted that time in one grade
level was a limiting factor in his co-teaching partnership. He explained because he was
new to teaching 5th grade, his confidence and familiarity with the curriculum was
growing, but not yet at a point where he felt comfortable releasing responsibility to Katie.
Both of these notions had not appeared during the researcher’s investigation of existing
literature, but developed throughout the research, especially in Phases Two and Three.
Thus, and in keeping with Fullan’s (2008) assertion, relationships are vital components of co-teaching that must be fostered over time.

Personality traits play a large role in collaboration, and as the model is now, the teachers must be flexible. Interestingly, when asked what they deemed as the most critical factor to effective co-teaching, four teachers chose “flexibility”, one educator cited “cooperation” and, after careful thought, the final participant selected “trust”. Interestingly, all six respondents decided on elements that are personality/relationship, leading the researcher to believe relationships are perhaps the most critical component. Fullan’s (2008) and Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009) theories both point to relationships as key components for successful organizations. The research of Cahill & Mitra (2008), Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005) and Hourcade & Bauwens (2001) also purport the necessity of strong relationships to successfully implement co-teaching models of instruction.

Participants revealed a common definition on co-teaching within the school and district-wide would be beneficial overall, although one participant voiced that guidelines may infringe on the current flexibility they enjoy. As participants conversed about necessary changes for co-teaching’s improvement, David made a very profound statement. If, in fact, David is correct, then it is possible co-teaching in its true sense, does not exist at this school, although the term is used often.

I don’t think we have a co-teaching model. I think we have an inclusion model. Like I said earlier, [special education teachers are] skewed to their caseload. That’s not co-teaching. So, we don’t have a definition of co-teaching at all. We are talking about our inclusion model of how it’s done, but it’s not really a co-teaching model. If a
student has an IEP that says the kid needs this, that is defining whereas I see co-teaching as ‘CO’ - even. We’re supposed to share, but [special education teachers] have certain things that they are responsible for as the inclusion teacher. If you still have IEPs, a common definition is not going to change the practice.

The researcher’s reflective memos indicated all participants non-verbally, but eagerly, supported his sentiments that the school has an inclusion model to address the needs of special education students, however, the school does not have a co-teaching model. The teachers also agreed even though they were collaborating in pairs of general and special educators, that because of their model, one special educator servicing four classrooms, a true co-teaching model didn’t exist. From this commentary, and the affirmations that followed, the fifth and final finding was derived.

Finding 5: Teachers perceived they had an inclusion model absent of a co-teaching model.

Throughout the focus group, time and professional development continued to appear as consistent themes. Although teachers had both convergent and divergent views regarding their importance, each teacher had commentary on their practicality. Overall, the focus group both confirmed and expanded on the findings of both the survey and interview portions of this investigation. The researcher’s memos suggested the importance of this very intentional, probing focus group. The researcher’s review of literature included research studies that suggested ways to improve the practice of co-teaching (Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Carter, Prater, Marchant & Jackson, 2009; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Fox & Ysseldyke, 1997; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). Coupled with the
participants’ surveys and interviews, the researcher addressed recommended ways to improve co-teaching. In conclusion, some of the suggestions are attainable goals derived directly from participants’ perceptions. Table 28 provides more detailed information on specific coding, while Table 34, below, summarizes the outcomes of the focus group.

Table 34 Coding/Findings of Focus Group by Theme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Examples Of Excerpts (Descriptive)</th>
<th>Finding From Survey and Focus Group</th>
<th>Original Finding Confirmed?</th>
<th>New Findings (if any)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration (Anticipated)</td>
<td>• “flexibility” • “trust” • “cooperation” • “responsibility” • “it has to do with personality too”</td>
<td>Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development (Anticipated)</td>
<td>• “not much professional development” • “haven’t worked on it as a district” • “should be more workshops” • “there are still lots of holes”</td>
<td>Administrative support was weakest in the area of professional development</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative Support (Anticipated)</td>
<td>• “scheduling” • “they trust you to do the right thing” • “our administration does a nice job of giving us the space to work”</td>
<td>Limiting student/teacher ratio and/or</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improvements (Anticipated)</td>
<td>• “expectations of each other” • “I would like to”</td>
<td>Limiting student/teacher ratio and/or</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>have seen, and still do, other schools”</td>
<td>• “have to have some sort of guidelines”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “have to have some sort of guidelines”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time In Years (Unanticipated)</td>
<td>• “for me, it’s time”</td>
<td>The educators perceived time (in years) was an important component of successful co-teaching</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “you need time”</td>
<td>• “how much time you’ve taught the subject and then also have you worked with that person for an amount of time”</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Definition of Co-Teaching (Unanticipated)</td>
<td>• “what is the definition of inclusion in this town?”</td>
<td>A common definition of co-teaching was lacking</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “within our school it should be more uniform”</td>
<td>• “it would be better for both parties involved”</td>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “we don’t have a definition of co-teaching at all”</td>
<td>• “we all have a different definition of what co-teaching even is”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-Teaching Model Versus Inclusion Model (Unanticipated)</td>
<td>• “I don’t think we have a co-teaching model”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• “I think we have an inclusion model”</td>
<td>• “I don’t think we really know the difference between inclusion and co-teaching”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers perceived they had an inclusion model absent of a co-teaching model.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

The researcher triangulated the data by comparing the outcomes of all three phases of data collection. The following table summarizes this triangulation process.

Table 35: Triangulation of Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Collaboration</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers enjoyed the experience of co-teaching</td>
<td>• Teachers reported finding professional satisfaction in their co-teaching partnerships</td>
<td>• Teachers respected each other and perceived they basically shared the responsibilities of co-teaching</td>
<td>• Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Many teachers did not faithfully employ recommended strategies</td>
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<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Teachers reported they valued, but lacked professional development opportunities</td>
<td>• Teachers reported a need for more professional development and training</td>
<td>• Teachers expressed the need for more professional development</td>
<td>• Administrative support was weakest in the area of professional development</td>
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<td>School-Based Support</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Definition of Co-Teaching</td>
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<td>• Teachers valued, but reported limited access, to materials and support in the form of professional development</td>
<td>• Teachers reported having sufficient time to plan</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>• Teachers reported the administration was supportive in time and space, but not in professional development</td>
<td>• Teachers reported that time (in years) with the same co-teacher was important</td>
<td>• Teachers were unclear, and believed their colleagues were unclear as to the school's definition of co-teaching</td>
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<td>• Teachers wanted smaller teacher-to-student ratios</td>
<td>• Teachers valued the common planning time in their schedules</td>
<td>• Teachers iterated the lack of a common definition for co-teaching</td>
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<td>• Limiting student-to-teacher ratio and/or caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching</td>
<td>• Teachers expressed the need for time to develop a rapport with colleagues</td>
<td>• A common definition of co-teaching was lacking</td>
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<td>• Teachers cited the importance of time in years for subject/grade level</td>
<td>• Teachers perceived they had an inclusion model absent of a co-teaching model.</td>
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Member Checking and Peer Debriefing

In order to establish credibility, the researcher subjected the interpretations and findings to member checking. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit this is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. This process required the researcher to return to the original group of participants from whom the data was collected to allow them to confirm, deny or revise the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the final analysis of all three phases of data collection, and prior to reconvening the participants for one final meeting, the researcher accumulated and distributed the final findings of the study to participants via email. Participants were then requested to review the final outcomes and meet as a group after school. All participants were present when printed copies of the findings were distributed. Upon presenting the findings, the researcher confirmed all members unanimously agreed the findings were an accurate portrayal of their perceptions of co-teaching.

Lincoln & Guba (1985) point to peer debriefing as a method whereby an impartial colleague critically reviews the research methods and findings of a researcher. In so doing, they confirm the accuracy and completeness of the research. To add to the credibility of this study, this work was peer debriefed by Pamela Vose who, as the department head and special education team chair, has a vested interest in both co-teaching and the special education population of students. She read through the study and agreed the research was clear and appropriate, and that the findings were valid.
Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to document the perceptions of six 5th grade co-teachers. From the information garnered through this study, the researcher suggests strategies for improving the current practices. A review of participants’ profile information indicated the majority of co-teachers in this school, five out of six, had volunteered to teach in this co-taught model of instruction. All of the educators involved in the study taught 5th grade math, English/language arts, social studies and science in some combination. The demographic data also revealed all of the co-teachers involved in this study had spent the majority of their profession in an inclusive classroom setting, although many had experience with other models of general and special education.

In the first grouping of questions for both the survey and the interview, and in reference to the researcher’s first research question, participants were queried about their perceptions of their current co-teaching experience. From that, the first finding emerged. **Finding: Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience.** Interestingly, analyses of the surveys, interviews and focus group, exposed all teachers valued the experience of co-teaching. They also all agreed collaborative teaching had improved their pedagogy. This result confirmed the researcher’s expected outcomes.

**Finding: The educators perceived time (in years) was an important component of successful co-teaching.** Although time was not a predicted theme, it arose many times throughout the interviews and focus group as a critical component for co-teaching. Teachers enjoyed collaborating and expressed the need to develop a rapport
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

with their colleagues. They continually cited time as a necessary support toward this goal.

Recommended collaborative practices were also included in all three phases of this research study to determine how teachers were executing the practice of co-teaching. Analyses for this segment implied a discrepancy between the values assigned to the usefulness of recommended practices, and the rate of actual implementation of the same techniques. However, all co-teachers conveyed they valued sharing instruction, and five out of six teacher surveys indicated this was part of their regular collaborative teaching practice.

**Finding:** Limiting student-to-teacher ratio and/or caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching. Participants iterated co-teaching could be more effective with more support, in terms of staffing, or fewer special education students. Although they enjoyed working collaboratively, teachers stressed that due to scheduling and caseloads which required special educators to be in four classrooms throughout the day, the time they had with their co-teacher limited the effectiveness of their practice. Co-teachers felt if they were paired one-to-one with another co-teacher, they could collaborate and share the duties of the profession more equally. Some teachers also yearned for smaller caseloads of special education children so they could spend more time and effort servicing each child’s education plan.

The other item participants revealed as highly regarded was co-teachers’ practice of regularly offering feedback. All teachers agreed to its importance. However, only three teachers reported they utilized this communication method. The survey data was
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

bolstered by both individual interviews and focus group data where both general and special educators alluded to limited direct communication. As discussed in the focus group results section, teachers described how oftentimes planning periods were monopolized by conversations about individual students, as opposed to lesson planning and/or communication about collaborative skills.

Finally, across all phases of data collection, an in-depth analysis of school-based supports to facilitate co-teaching revealed some interesting trends where school-based supports could be strengthened. **Finding: Administrative support was weakest in the area of professional development.** Participants in the study indicated although they valued the opportunity to be professionally trained specifically in co-teaching, the opportunity to do so was limited or not available. All three data collection techniques found this to be a recurrent belief. Altogether six participants disclosed they felt trainings and workshops about co-teaching would be useful. However, five participants also revealed they had limited or no access to such opportunities for professional growth. The remaining participant did not know if said prospects were available. Similarly, when the participants were probed further during Phase Two (interviews), interviewees confirmed the lack of professional development geared specifically at supporting their co-teaching practice.

**Finding: A common definition of co-teaching was lacking.** Many teachers expressed the need for a common definition and expectations for the practice of co-teaching. Both interviews and the focus group clarified this desire for consistency, not only within the school, but also across the district. Although the school lacks a common definition, it was apparent the participants perceived the district lacked a common clarity
as well. Teachers indicated that the lack of common language and definitions surrounding the model contributed to inconsistencies.

Similarly, the district could better support co-teachers. Five of six participants’ surveys demonstrated their backing of district workshops and mini-courses to strengthen their collaboration. But, the same number of participants believed they had limited or no access to this provision. Focus group data, specifically statements made by David, and agreed to by the group, further exhibited the weaknesses in district support of the current co-teaching model. Furthermore, according to participants’ data, administrative support was an area of value that could be improved upon.

On a positive note, teachers unanimously agreed to the value of common planning time, and five of the six participants expressed they had adequate access to this time. Interviews and focus groups showed this planning time was not always consistently utilized, and that there was no model or expectations on how this time should be used. Buttressed by Fullan’s (2008) organizational change theory, personalization, precision and professional learning emerged consistently throughout all three phases of data collection. It is clear these pillars of organizational change are critical in the effective execution of co-teaching as a model of instruction. However, an analysis of the frequency of responses in the values domain in juxtaposition to the access domain confirmed a gap between co-teaching in theory, and co-teaching in practice.

When centering on the interviews and focus groups, it is necessary to point out the emergent themes. Coding of both the interviews and focus group of this study held interesting data. Both segments, in addition to the survey, revealed all of the co-teachers generally found their collaborative teaching experience to be a positive one. Most of the
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

teachers pointed to their access of small group instruction, made possible by having another adult in the room, as the primary means of successful pedagogy for educating children of varying abilities in an inclusive, co-taught classroom. Once again, the need for more teaching staff was recapitulated.

Also, most of the co-teachers agreed to the social benefits of all students learning in an inclusive classroom environment. They defined these social benefits as tolerance, encouragement and patience for students with a broad range of strengths and weaknesses. Additionally, all participants concurred their students were receptive to this model of learning. Most teachers felt students approached both general and special education teachers equally when trying to resolve both educational and social conflicts.

Further, the teachers saw co-teaching as professionally advantageous for improving, and building on their current skill sets. Although responsibilities were not always seen to be shared equally, matters of discipline were handled by both special and general educators. Also, the general education teachers emphasized they learned from the special educators’ specialization of instruction, while special educators valued the experiences their associates brought to the partnerships.

The final finding was quite significant, but unexpected. **Finding: Teachers perceived they had an inclusion model absent of a co-teaching model.** Although this final finding did not surface during Phase One (survey) of data collection, it appeared a little during Phase Two (semi-structured interviews) and was confirmed by the participants during Phase Three (focus group). Because teachers felt the inclusive special education needs of the students were driving the schedule and model of instruction, it became clear teachers perceived their model of instruction as an inclusive
model. Although the catch phrase “co-teaching” is frequently used, they believed that to co-teach, the work must be shared equally between the special and general educator. However, this simply would not be possible when one special educator had to accommodate students in four general educators’ classrooms.

The researcher’s memos noted for each of the findings highlighted above, there was no significant split between special educators and general educators on any of the themes. The following chapter will further discuss how to remedy the disparity between co-teaching in theory and co-teaching in practice.

**Conclusion**

In order to accommodate a growing number of students with diverse learning needs, the school in this study utilized an inclusion co-teaching model of instruction. Although this model paired general educators with special educators to address the needs of various learning disabled students, the model did not always take a consistent form. To reveal the perceptions co-teachers had of their own practice, and determine how the practice may be improved, the researcher conducted this qualitative single case study.

The study involved six 5th grade co-teachers. The researcher collected data in three distinct phases. Phase One consisted of an adapted version of a 24-question Likert scale survey developed by Vance Austin (2000). Phase Two was comprised of an adapted version of Vance Austin’s (2000) Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching. The final data collection tool of a focus group questionnaire was created by the researcher and utilized in Phase Three of the study. The researcher carefully collected
and analyzed data from each of the three phases, seeking trends and themes. The resulting data was traingulated to corroborate the findings. Overall, teachers expressed an appreciation for the co-teaching model. Some of the data gathered indicated areas of weakness, when compared to recommended supports and practices of co-teaching. To confirm the validity and accuracy of this study, the researcher subjected the work to both member checking and peer debriefing.

The following questions guided this case study, as reinforced by Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change: (1.) How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching? and (2.) How may co-teaching be improved? The analysis of data through the three phases of this case study revealed the five findings. Incidentally, these findings were also consistent with the researcher’s impressions at the outset of this investigation.

In the following and final chapter of this thesis, recommendations for improvements, as well as implications for future research will be discussed.
Chapter V: Summary, Discussion, and Implications

Introduction

The final chapter of this qualitative, single case study highlights the essential findings, while connecting them to both the theoretical framework and review of literature. Additionally, it provides recommendations for both current educational practices and for future research. The case study model allowed the researcher to reveal a clear and complete representation of the participants’ perceptions of co-teaching (Yin, 2009). For this single case study investigation, the researcher utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary source of data. Prior to the interviews, the researcher employed the use of a five-point Likert scale survey to inform the interview questions. Following the interviews, the researcher conducted a focus group, involving all of the participants, to confirm the findings. This study contributes to the existing body of literature in the following areas: co-teaching, collaboration, inclusion, communication, and team teaching.

This qualitative, single case study (Yin, 2009) examined a co-teaching model of instruction at a 5th and 6th grade school in southeastern Massachusetts during the 2011-2012 school year. All of the participants were 5th grade teachers, of both general and special education students, in an inclusive model of instruction. The researcher investigated the teachers’ perceptions of their co-teaching practice, in order to determine how co-teaching may be improved. At a time of increased accountability, administrators must provide teachers with the training, skills and resources to effectively instruct students, regardless of their abilities. To make the most effective use of a co-taught model of instruction, teachers and administrators alike must be willing to reflect on their
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

professional development, collaborative approaches and definition of the practice.

**Research Questions**

As the basis of this qualitative case study, the researcher explored the following questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the effectiveness of co-teaching?

2. How may co-teaching be improved?

**Professional Development & School-Based Supports**

In reference to the theme of professional development and school-based supports, two important findings emerged:

(1.) Administrative support was weakest in the area of professional development.

(2.) Limiting student-to-teacher ratio and/or caseload of special education students would improve the effectiveness of co-teaching.

**Theoretical framework.** These findings confirm Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change. In his first secret of change, love your employees, Fullan (2008) implores leaders, “scientifically select, train, and develop each worker rather than passively leaving them to train themselves” (p. 22). Teachers in this study expressed many times, and in many ways, they felt underprepared in the pursuit of co-teaching. As unveiled in the semi-structured interviews, and historically at this school, teachers were plunged headlong into co-teaching with no training at all. In all three phases of data collection, by and large teachers expressed an interest in attending professional development to improve their practices, but followed up by indicating the availability of
Fullan (2008) goes on to state, “One of the ways to love your employees is by creating conditions for them to succeed” (p. 25). Teachers clearly and consistently conveyed the desire for reduced student-to-teacher ratios. They indicated they could have a more influential and positive impact on student learning if given more support (in the form of additional staffing) or smaller caseloads of students. At times, teachers felt overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of accommodations they were required to provide.

Similarly, as one of their Pillars of Purpose, Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) indicate the importance of Achievement Through Investment. They purport, “We can’t expect to raise standards on the cheap. In schools, as in business, there is no achievement without investment” (p. 79). Clearly, budgetary concerns have much influence on the quality and consistency of professional development and staffing. However, both are critical components to student success; they are undoubtedly worth the investment of capital. This case study complicated the theory because the needs of students, and what districts are financially able to provide, are not always aligned. Concessions are often made based on finances.

**Literature.** In keeping with the findings, the literature supports the need for professional development for teachers seeking an effective co-teaching model. A problem identified in this study, as well as many others (Walther-Thomas, 1997; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007) was a lack of staff development directed at co-teaching strategies. This professional development can take many forms. In one study, Scheeler, Congdon & Stansbury (2010) tested the effectiveness of an on-the-job training technique
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

where the participating teachers used bug-in-ear microphones to receive immediate feedback from a mentor during their instruction. This real-time coaching proved quite effective and the participants recommended this technique to others in the field. Simmons & Magier (2007) and Villa et al. (1996) suggest school districts should train co-teachers as a pair, instead of separating general educators from their special educator peers. The participants in this study complicated this suggestion because some teachers were not interested in mentorship programs to facilitate co-teaching. Despite their perceptions, the literature shows when they are all trained together, it increases the understanding of their collective roles. Conderman & Johnson-Rodriguez (2009) found hands-on experience was most beneficial in teacher training to accommodate special education students.

Lastly, in regard to professional development, Gerber & Popp (2000) suggest professional development on co-teaching should include all staff members such as new teachers, administrators, general educators, guidance counselors and parents. In their study, Smith & Dlugosh (1999) iterate in-service trainings need to be both relevant and practical. Participants in the study confirmed this notion. In keeping with the research findings, the review of current research corroborates the importance of professional development when instituting an effective model of co-teaching. The results of this study coincided with studies that found, in general, educators felt they were not sufficiently trained to engage in successful co-teaching practices (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Carter, Prater, Jackson & Marchant, 2009). While they enjoyed the collaborative experience, participants conveyed they had substantial room for growth. Gerber & Popp (2000) cite, “mentorships, school-based staff as consultants, problem-solving sessions,
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

and sessions for teacher dialogue to share best practices as vehicles to support new and ongoing collaborative efforts” (p. 233).

Unlike professional development, there seems to be limited research concerning effective student-to-teacher ratios. In this study, there was no doubt teachers felt there would be substantial benefits to being paired exclusively with one other teacher for the duration of the school day. In this way the students would have consistent access to both a general and special educator at all times. Because of this gap in research, examining various caseloads of special education students in regard to co-teaching would be informative and useful in determining both ideal and acceptable standards.

Implications for practice. This case study, coupled with the first two findings, generated two immediate implications for practice. First, it is critical administrators plan and execute meaningful, professional development geared specifically for co-teaching.

If they are to be successful, teachers need to be trained in all aspects of this model. Collaboration, communication, division of responsibilities and approaches to co-teaching are just a few of the potential areas for improvement through professional development. Participants in this study revealed they would gain valuable insight from seeing successful models of co-teaching in other districts. Embedded professional development, coupled with more cooperative planning between teaching partners and among pairs of co-teachers, would allow for an increase in reflective practices.

Not surprisingly, professional development must be ongoing and supported. By providing a network of resources to sustain the practice, administrators will ensure
teachers’ efforts are met with the necessary foundations of understanding. As issues arise, there should be an established protocol for finding solutions and seeking improvements. By approaching professional development as a process, as opposed to a one-shot treatment, teachers will grow and learn as professionals.

It should not be assumed that placing a special educator in a classroom with a special educator results in co-teaching. As evidenced, the process is nuanced and requires dedication and purposeful training to be fully realized.

Second, to the greatest extent possible, administrators should minimize the number of special education students in a caseload to reduce the student-to-teacher ratio. This could also be accomplished by hiring additional special education staff members. Teachers consistently expressed a desire for more teacher support. Although there is not a great deal of research on this finding, it is logical that larger caseloads and increased student-to-teacher ratios make effective co-teaching a more challenging prospect.

**Implications for future research.** Although there is substantial research on co-teaching, and specifically the need for professional development, the existing body of literature would benefit from data informing the following questions:

1. What is the most effective training for co-teachers?

2. Within a school what continuous supports should be in place to ensure effective co-teaching?

3. What is the most effective student-to-teacher ratio for co-teaching?
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

These research questions would serve educators and administrators alike in determining the most reliable and effective means to professionally support co-teaching efforts.

Collaboration

In reference to the theme of collaboration, two important findings emerged:

(3.) Teachers perceived co-teaching was a valuable experience.

(4.) Educators perceived time (in years) was an important component of successful co-teaching.

Theoretical framework. Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change confirms these findings. In his second secret, Fullan (2008) urges leaders to connect peers with purpose. Collaboration is at the heart of Fullan’s theory and is the core of co-teaching as a practice. Fullan (2008) stresses the importance of peer interaction. He states, “Secret Two is about how organizations engage peers in purposeful interaction where quality experiences and results are central” (p. 46). By supporting collaborative practices, administrators can attain a co-taught, inclusive curriculum that is rewarding for both the educators and students. Teachers must be both professionally and emotionally invested in their co-teaching partnership to flourish. In his theory, Fullan (2008) decrees the strength of personal relationships is pivotal to the success of professional partnerships. He recommends the practice of “lateral capacity building” (p. 46) as one method for school districts to learn from each other’s successes.

Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) also point to collaboration as a critical component of their educational change theory. The pillar of purpose entitled mindful learning and
teaching encourages personalization of educational experiences. Because personality is such an intangible, yet influential, component of cooperative partnerships, it is important that administrators cultivate collaboration as an organizational standard.

**Literature.** In terms of readily available resources, collaboration is among the most useful and accessible approaches to education (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006). The outcomes of this study verify the literature on collaboration. Simmons & Magiera (2007) tout the importance of keeping co-teaching pairs together as long as they continue to be an effective team. Although change can be a catalyst for growth, change only for the sake of change, can disrupt the delicate partnerships that take time to form. Although collaboration sounds like a natural process, it requires a special skill set and is not always easy (Cook & Friend, 1995). One study by Tobin (2005) indicates that teachers need to compromise on how to solve disagreements about the best instructional strategies for learning disabled students. Teachers in this study also iterated the importance of personality as a factor in the effectiveness of co-teaching.

Despite the challenges, researchers (Austin, 2001; Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989; Cahill & Mitra, 2008; Carter, Prater, Jackson & Marchant, 2009; Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez & Hartman, 2009) report the majority of co-teachers find the practice valuable. This claim was substantiated in this study. Teachers generally appreciated working with other professionals toward shared goals. They readily welcomed the benefits of sharing ideas, learning new strategies and forging professional relationships.

The literature demonstrates a correlation between teachers volunteering to participate in this instructional model, and the rate of success they experience (Martin,
Because five of the six participants in this study reported having volunteered for their current position of co-teaching, it is also likely they are predisposed to gravitate toward interpersonal pursuits. Their willingness, and positive approach to the practice, likely served as an advantage to the students in their inclusive classrooms. For this reason, and to avoid resistance from forced collaboration, Gerber & Popp (2000) recommend administrators include co-teaching in the criteria for recruiting new teachers.

Planning time is a reliable predictor of co-teaching success. Overall, the participants in this case study felt they had sufficient time for planning. However, they indicated the time was not always used in a uniform manner. Although flexibility should be considered, Gerber & Popp (2000) also recommend, “In addition to regular planning, time should be allocated for preplanning and team-building sessions and sessions for problem solving and long-range goal setting” (p 232). These are some useful ideas for participants’ collaborative planning time.

Implications for practice. Collaboration is a complicated and personal endeavor. Differing philosophies and other interpersonal issues can make co-teaching challenging. (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009). At the teaching site involved in this study, it is advisable administrators continue to allow teachers to volunteer for co-teaching positions. By encouraging naturally collaborative employees of the organization to participate in the practice, administrators will be encouraging its success. Also, including co-teaching requirements in hiring criteria could be an effective means of ensuring inclusion staff would be available and willing to partake as needs arise.

Because co-teaching is a fluid and complicated process, it is imperative
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

administrators consciously, and consistently, support co-teachers. They should begin by trying to match educators who share similar teaching philosophies. By encouraging a collaborative culture, administrators can influence the efficacy of the co-teaching model. They must also be sensitive to time. Administrators must allow co-teachers the time, in years, they need to foster a strong rapport, effective communication, clear divisions of responsibilities and a common vision for their co-taught instructional model. By permitting effective partnerships to remain intact, administrators would demonstrate respect for the effort it takes to create successful partnerships.

Implications for future research. Although time, in reference to provisions for scheduled mutual planning time, is pervasive in research literature, the researcher was surprised to discover data about time, in years, was not readily available. Interestingly, this theme emerged as an area of considerable concern for participants in this study. Therefore, probing further into this facet of co-teaching would be extremely informative for administrators who are invested in improving co-teaching practices. The following research questions would be beneficial avenues of investigation for future research studies.

1. How should administrators determine the ideal time, in years, to keep co-teaching partnerships intact?

2. How can teachers improve upon their shared vision and execution of the collaborative teaching model?

Discovering the answers to these questions would be influential in structuring and/or restructuring co-teaching partnerships, and reaping the rewards intended by this model.
Definition of Co-Teaching

Two findings emerged from the data collected around the definition of co-teaching and related practices. They are as follows:

(5.) A common definition of co-teaching was lacking.

(6.) Teachers perceived they had an inclusion model absent of a co-teaching model.

Theoretical framework. In his fourth secret, Fullan (2008) imparts to leaders that Learning Is the Work. This cornerstone of Fullan’s (2008) theory of organizational change directly confirms the findings around the importance of defining co-teaching. “We need to strike a dynamic balance between consistency and innovation” (Fullan, 2008, p. 75). When considering the important and overwhelming task of transitioning teaching from a notably independent career to one where educators must depend on each other to accomplish students’ academic goals, consistency is significant.

Without a common definition of co-teaching, and all that this instructional model entails, teachers are left to their own devices to integrate their skill sets and educate the pupils in their charge. Fullan (2008) explains, “The essence of Secret Four concerns how organizations address their core goals and tasks with relentless consistency, while at the same time learning continuously how to get better and better at what they are doing” (p. 76). Without a doubt, this is also the essence of defining co-teaching as well. Co-teaching requires consistency and, at the same time, serves as an invitation for innovation. The participants supported Fullan’s ideas.
In his theory, Fullan clearly upholds the needs of the participants in this study. The co-teachers unmistakably expressed the need for a framework within which expectations are defined. They sought a common language around their shared practice. They wanted to understand what it is they are expected to do within this instructional model. By standardizing co-teaching, goals could be set and expectations met. Similarly, by identifying a few key practices critical to success, teachers could strive to meet the agreed upon aims and objectives.

Hargreaves and Shirley’s (2009) theory of educational change also reinforces the findings regarding defining co-teaching. Under the pillar of purpose and partnership entitled an aspiring and inclusive vision, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) discuss the importance of resilience. They purport, “Two of the key predictors of resilience are a strong sense of purpose and a supportive partnership” (p. 74). Co-teachers need to know their role. They must be educated enough to have a collective vision of the co-teaching process and reflective enough to implement strategies that work. The findings of this study upheld this pillar of purpose.

Co-teaching requires the U.S. emphasis on individualism be transformed into a shared vision. Teachers and administrators must be partners in this endeavor. Until the practice is defined, teachers may continue to feel they have an inclusion model absent of true co-teaching. With support from Hargreaves & Shirley (2009), it is evident educational leaders must support co-teaching by first defining it. Just using the term “co-teaching” is not enough. Just placing a special educator in a room with a general educator is not enough. The craft of co-teaching should be seeded, watered and tended to with great care. “We need to be bolder and get better by moving beyond the basics”
Literature. The findings of this study supported much of the literature on defining co-teaching within the practice. Stating the expectations of this model is a recurring theme in research literature. Simmons and Magiera (2007) find value in defining co-teaching practices, as did the participants. They iterate doing so strengthens co-teaching by reinforcing a consistent district-wide understanding of the practice. Beyond that, within the definition, individual teaching styles can be celebrated to accentuate each teacher’s strengths. Teachers need to consider their roles when co-teaching, and the impact they have on their partner, while simultaneously being aware of tensions, constraints and privileges of the partnership (Bouck, 2007). Clear expectations provide educators with a much-needed basis to begin their collaborative tasks. The participants in this study confirmed the need for clear expectations, as suggested by Bouck (2007).

Some strategies that could be applied as general scaffolding for co-teaching district-wide are developing protocols for meetings, using timelines, designing lesson plans together (Friend & Cook, 2007), using a template (Keefe, Moore & Duff, 2004), and reflecting on lessons together (Deiker & Murawski, 2003). The specific practice of co-teaching should be differentiated from inclusion. Inclusion addresses the placement of students. Co-teaching encompasses the task of general and special educators to utilize their professional strengths to instruct students of ranging abilities in the same classroom (Keefe, Moore & Duff, 2004). Evidently, participants in this study were not alone in their desire for a common definition for co-teaching.

Implications for practice. It is recommended schools define the goals,
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

expectations and guidelines of its co-teaching model. Having an amorphous model of instruction, attached to the catch-phrase “co-teaching” does not mean it is actually co-teaching. With so many considerations to bear in mind when implementing this complex teaching model, districts should be thoughtful in their approach. Teachers are more likely to embrace a shared vision of co-teaching if they know the parameters for its enactment.

Schools already have divergent versions of co-teaching in place. For this reason, it would be advisable schools assess whether or not the current model of inclusion is, or is not, a co-teaching model of inclusion. If it is inclusion, but not co-teaching, administrators should take steps to construct a co-teaching definition and professional development to support the goals. In this vein, the teachers involved in co-teaching partnerships will have a prototype to apply.

Implications for future research. Based on the needs of the school in this study, and the perceived gaps in existing research, the two questions below would provide educators with the means to define, and carry out, a more cohesive model of co-teaching within their educational setting.

1. How are co-teaching and inclusion related?

2. How do effective co-teaching practices enhance an inclusion model of special education?

Studies addressing both of these research questions would benefit all educational stakeholders who believe co-teaching is a promising avenue for inclusive student achievement.
Additional Implications for Future Research

Despite the breadth and depth of this qualitative, single case study, the findings are limited. This study examined teachers’ perceptions of their co-teaching practice in order to make recommendations for improvements. However, future researchers would benefit from investigating the academic gains of students in co-taught classrooms. By infusing quantitative research with this quantitative data, educators could apply skills that effectively inform students’ academic goals. It would be advantageous to observe successful co-teaching models of instruction and apply similar strategies to less efficacious models.

This study was limited by a small sample size. It would be valuable to conduct a similar study on a larger scale and compare the results that evolved through this exploration. Additionally, it would have been useful to include teachers from various schools. Because this study was limited to co-teachers from one grade in one school in one town, the results are not necessarily generalizable. Furthermore, the researcher did not include all 5th grade teachers in this study. Although the surveys required participants to narrow their perceptions into just one of the five Likert scale response options, the semi-structured interviews and focus group provided respondents the opportunity to expand on their insights.

The field of co-teaching research could be enriched by far-reaching qualitative research including in-depth case studies tracking intact pairs of co-teachers from the inception of their partnership through the end of their partnership. In this way researchers might find how to predict the time, in years, needed to promote meaningful and effective co-teaching teams. This rich context could provide some extremely relevant
and valuable data about how co-teaching evolves over time, in years. Moreover, researchers could explore how different districts define the practice for their employees, and how doing so impacts the practice. Also, it would be beneficial for researchers to consider how co-teaching is implemented across various grade levels and content areas to gain a broader depiction of its effectiveness. Lastly, and although this research touched upon teachers’ impressions of co-teaching as related to their students, research studies designed to reveal achievement for both special and general education students would be indispensable to its future implementation.

**Conclusions**

At a time of amplified assessments and educational accountability, and due to an influx of increasingly diverse students with wide-ranging academic needs, co-teaching is becoming an increasingly popular teaching model. The intention of co-teaching is to bring together the specific skill sets of both general and special educators to enhance instruction for all students (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1991). Despite recent research studies touting its many benefits, this instructional delivery service often fails to meet expectations because teachers are often left to their own devices to implement this model of instruction. This qualitative, single case study revealed teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching and ways it may be improved.

Three distinct data sources indicated that teachers in this study were unquestionably positive about the value of co-teaching. The data also showed the participants’ responses were consistent with the review of literature that indicates planning time is invaluable to this cooperative endeavor. Consistent with prior research, and in keeping with the researchers expected outcomes, co-teachers revealed the
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

importance of collaboration, professional development, recommended co-teaching strategies and administrative supports. Unexpected findings revealed the importance of keeping co-teaching partnerships intact for a number of years to cultivate the necessary rapport for the most effective collaboration. Also, co-teachers felt strongly about defining the practice of co-teaching, as well as juxtaposing it to inclusion. These were weak areas in their vision of the practice, and likewise seem to be inadequately addressed in the literature.

Fullan (2008) and Hargreaves & Shirley (2009) present organizational theories that bolstered the findings of this research study. Their claims that peer interaction, shared vision, continued improvement through learning and personalization of responsibilities point directly to the findings of this investigation. The teachers involved clearly articulated a need to be supported by their co-teaching partners, as well as administrators in order to achieve success. The teachers involved in this study, and in many studies presented in the literature (Austin, 2000; Cook & Friend, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997) want to be successful. With appropriate professional development, meaningful support and consistent expectations for this instructional method, teachers can succeed.

From this study, the theoretical framework could potentially be strengthened, as well as the model of co-teaching. Since Fullan (2008) and Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) tout partnerships as a cornerstone of organizational change. At the crux of co-teaching is communication, and specific training and professional development must be included for the theory of co-teaching to meld with the practice. Additionally, administrators must define the practice and expectations for the teachers executing the model, and differentiate co-teaching from inclusion. The professionals in this study
desired parameters. Based on the needs they expressed, as well as existing literature, this model should include some structured way to use common planning time, as well as ongoing and supported trainings about co-teaching. Partnerships should begin with a survey addressing communication style, since partners’ interactions can determine outcomes. A map of how to plan interdisciplinary lessons including the needs of both special and regular education students would be beneficial as well. Lastly, time to share successes, in a structured manner among co-teaching partners would solidify a school-wide commitment to the vision of co-teaching.

Ultimately, the results of this study are encouraging. As supported by the problem of practice, research questions, theoretical framework and research methodology, the data indicated, when given the necessary supports of expectations, time, professional development and collaborative strategies, co-teachers are ready to embrace co-teaching. While contributing to the existing body of literature, the researcher seeks to inspire further research to discover how co-teaching can have the most positive impact possible on teachers, as well as the education of the diverse students in their charge.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

References


CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS


CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS


CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS


Simmons, R. J. & Magiera, K. (2007). Evaluation of co-teaching in three high schools within one school district: How do you know when you are truly co-teaching?


Appendix A

Perceptions of Co-Teaching Survey  #_____ 

The purpose of this survey is to learn from your experience co-teaching. The results of this survey will be used to help improve co-teaching practices. Your participation in this survey is voluntary. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, no identifiers will be used, and all responses will be presented as aggregate data.

PART ONE

Teacher Information

Definition of Terms

Co-Teaching refers to the assignment of a general education teacher and a special education teacher to work together, sharing responsibility for the planning and execution of instruction.

Co-Teachers, as defined for the purposes of this study, are general and special education teachers who are teamed for providing instruction to a heterogeneous, inclusive class for one or more periods of instruction per day.

General Education Teacher refers to any teacher certified to provide instruction in an elementary level classroom or a secondary level subject area.

Special Education Teacher refers to any teacher certified to provide instruction to any student in grades K-12 who is classified as having one or more disabilities.

1. Check the content area(s) of the class(es) that you co-teach.

- Reading
- Social Studies
- Sciences
- English/Language Arts
- Mathematics

3. Please mark the area of certification in which you are currently employed.

- Special Education K-12
- General Education (Elementary K-6)

4. Check the highest level of education you have achieved.

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Masters +
- Doctorate

5. How many total years of teaching experience do you have? _____________ years
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

6. What is your gender?
   - Male
   - Female

7. Please write the number of:
   - Years as a co-teacher: __________ years
   - Years taught with your current co-teacher: __________ years
   - Number of teachers with whom you co-teach daily: __________ teachers
   - Number of classes you co-teach in a day: __________ classes
   - Number of subjects you co-teach in a day: __________ subjects

8. Did you volunteer for your current co-teaching experience? Please check one answer.
   - Yes
   - No

PART TWO

Co-Teacher Perceptions of Current Experience

Please circle a number from 1 to 5 to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement below about your CURRENT co-teaching practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. My current co-teaching partner and I work very well together. 1 2 3 4 5
2. Co-teaching has improved my teaching. 1 2 3 4 5
3. In my current co-teaching experience, I do more than my partner. 1 2 3 4 5
4. Co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience. 1 2 3 4 5
5. My current co-teaching partner and I solicit each other’s feedback and benefit from it. 1 2 3 4 5

Other Comments ________________________________________________________
**Recommended Co-Teaching Practices**

Please circle a number from 1 to 5 to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement below about co-teaching. You are asked to rate each statement according to: (a) **your belief in the value of the practice (the column titled “value”), and (b) whether you employ the practice in your CURRENT co-teaching partnership (the column titled “employ”).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Employ</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Co-teachers should meet daily to plan lessons. 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Co-teachers should share classroom management responsibilities. 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Co-teachers should share classroom instruction. 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Co-teachers should regularly offer feedback. 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Co-teachers should establish and maintain specific areas of responsibility. 1 2 3 4 5 1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other co-teaching practices you find effective ____________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
**CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS**

**School-Based Supports that Facilitate Co-Teaching**

What kinds of school-based services should be provided in order to facilitate co-teaching? For the purpose of this study, school-based services are defined as services including teaching materials/equipment, administrative support, and provision of adequate planning time.

Please circle a number from 1 to 5 to indicate the importance you place on each of the following school-based supports. You are asked to rate each statement according to your belief in the value of the school-based service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Very Useful</th>
<th>Somewhat Useful</th>
<th>Of Limited Use</th>
<th>Not Useful</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Value**

11. Provision for scheduled mutual planning time.

12. Administrative support of co-teaching.

13. Adequate teaching aids and supplies appropriate to learning levels.

14. In-service training opportunities provided (workshops, etc.).

15. School district in-service presentations on alternative assessments

16. School district workshops/mini courses on facilitating co-teaching

17. Mentoring by experienced co-teacher(s)
Please circle a number from 1 to 5 to indicate the importance you place on each of the following school-based supports. You are asked to rate each statement according to whether you CURRENTLY have access to or receive the school-based service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plentiful Access</th>
<th>Some Access</th>
<th>Limited Access</th>
<th>No Access</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Access**

18. Provision for scheduled mutual planning time.

19. Administrative support of co-teaching.

20. Adequate teaching aids and supplies appropriate to learning levels.

21. In-service training opportunities provided (workshops, etc.).

22. School district in-service presentations on alternative assessments

23. School district workshops/mini courses on facilitating co-teaching

24. Mentoring by experienced co-teacher(s)

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS SURVEY!
Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview: Perceptions of Co-Teaching

Directions to the Interviewees:

The following questions are designed to provide additional information about your co-teaching experience. You are encouraged to answer these questions as candidly and as completely as possible; the anonymity of your responses is assured. The responses of all those teachers interviewed in the course of this study will be reported as group data according to trends that are identified. The interview normally takes from 15-20 minutes – although you may take as much time as you need to answer the questions. The results of this study will be available to you upon request.

SET 1

1. Would you describe your co-teaching experience generally as a positive one?
   
   1A. If yes ... would you describe the positive aspects for me?
   
   1B. If no ... would you describe the negative aspects for me?

2. Have you and your teaching partner ever disagreed about an important aspect of co-teaching?
   
   2A. If yes ... what was the disagreement?
   
   2B. If no ... go to question 3.

Were you able to resolve the disagreement?

   2C. If yes ... how was it resolved?
   
   2D. If no ... go to question 3.

3. Have you taught in a regular education classroom (non-inclusive) or a self-contained special education classroom?
   
   3A. If yes ... which type?
   
   3B. If no ... go to set 2.

How does your recollection of that experience compare with your co-teaching experience?
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

SET 2

1. Have you used any new instructional techniques, management strategies, or curriculum adaptations in your co-teaching?
   
   1A. If yes...would you describe these?
   1B. If yes...which of these do you consider to be most effective? Why?
   1C. If yes...which of these you consider least effective? Why?

   1D. If no...would you describe the teaching methods you currently use?
   1E. If no...which of these do you consider to be most effective? Why?
   1F. If no...which of these do you consider to be least effective? Why?

2. What are the determining factors of effective co-teaching?

3. Has the collaborative teaching experience contributed to your professional knowledge and skill?
   
   2A. If yes...would you describe these contributions?
   2B. If no...would you describe some of its shortcomings?

SET 3

1. Are you satisfied with your current collaborative teaching assignment?
   
   1A. If yes...would you describe the most satisfying aspects?
   1B. If no...what changes or improvements would you recommend?

2. Are you satisfied with the level of support provided by the school to facilitate your collaborative teaching?
   
   2A. If yes...go to set 4.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

2B. If no...what types of support do you think the school should provide?

SET 4

1. Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students without disabilities in your classroom?
   
   1A. If yes...why are they effective?
   
   1B. If no...why are they not effective?

2. Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students with disabilities in your classroom?
   
   2A. If yes...why are they effective?
   
   2B. If no...why are they not effective?

3. To what extent do you think that participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of some students without disabilities?
   
   In what ways does it contribute?

4. To what extent do you think that participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of students with disabilities?
   
   4A. In what ways does it contribute?
   
   4B. What type of disability?
   
   4C. What level of severity?

5. Are the students in your inclusive classroom generally receptive to collaborative teaching?
   
   5A. If yes...how do you determine this?
   
   5B. If no...how do you determine this?
SET 5:

1. What are your responsibilities in the inclusive classroom? Which of these are exclusively your responsibilities? Which of these is exclusively the responsibility of your partner? Which of these do you share?

The following are suggested areas of teacher responsibility in the classroom:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>My Job</th>
<th>Shared Responsibility</th>
<th>Partner's Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Planning lessons</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifying curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remedial instruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administering discipline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment and grading</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. In your opinion, how could we improve co-teaching in this building?

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this interview. Your responses have provided valuable information that will contribute to this study.
Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

READ ALOUD:

Thank you all so much for coming. You have been asked to participate in this focus group as part of a study on co-teaching. The purpose of the group is to try to gather your perceptions of your co-teaching experience as a collective group. The information learned in the focus group will be used to improve our practice of co-teaching and inform future decisions made in regard to the practice.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be digitally recorded, your responses will remain anonymous and your names will not be mentioned in the report.

There are no wrong answers to the focus group questions. I want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. I may call on you if I have not heard from you in a while. I hope you can be open and honest with your responses even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect to each other, I ask that only one individual speaks at a time and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential.

Do you have any questions?
1. What current school-based supports best facilitate your collaborative teaching?

2. In your surveys, all participants “strongly agreed” that co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience. How do you feel you can improve communication and expectations with your co-teacher to maximize your co-teaching potential?

3. Research shows that shared lesson planning between special and general educators is critical to a successful model. How do you currently utilize your planning time and how could you improve the use of your planning time?

4. In one word, what do you believe to be the most critical factor for effective co-teaching?

5. How would a common school-wide definition of co-teaching change the practice?

6. How would explicit expectations for how to plan lessons and execute models of co-teaching change the practice?

7. When interviewed about how you would improve co-teaching, two themes emerged - time (in terms of years with the same co-teacher) and professional development. Please talk about which you feel is more valuable.
Appendix D

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Doctor of Education Program
Investigators: Valerie M. Smith and Dr. Margaret Dougherty
Title: Co-Teaching: A Case Study of Teachers’ Perceptions

February 14, 2012

Dear Study Participant,

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in my educational research about co-teaching. The purpose of this case study is to investigate which aspects of co-teaching teachers deem critical to the practice of co-teaching, and consequently how the practice of co-teaching can be improved. The study is designed to analyze perceptions of teachers around co-teaching in an inclusive classroom.

The study will take place after school in the computer lab and will take about a total of 1 hour and 30 minutes. If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you complete a survey (20 minutes), answer a series of questions in a one-on-one interview (25 minutes) and participate in a focus group (45 minutes to 1 hour). As part of the focus group you will be afforded the opportunity to member check, in which you will be provided with a draft of the research data to review. If you feel anything in the report is inaccurate, the results may be adjusted. The interview and focus group will be audio-recorded for transcription and analysis purposes only.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study. The information that you provide will have no impact on your professional standing. Evaluation will play no role in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, it is hoped that your insights may help improve the practice of co-teaching.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Your responses will not be shared with the school administration and any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you, the school or any individual as being of this project. All audio-recordings will be destroyed following transcription and analysis.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. Your decision to participate or not to participate will have no effect on your standing at the school.

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.
If you have any questions about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at: smith.val@husky.neu.edu or 339-235-5583, or email my advisor Dr. Margaret Dougherty at m.dougherty@neu.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: irb@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of my request.

**By providing your signature below, you are indicating your consent to participate in this study:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Participant's Printed Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>_______________________</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher’s Signature</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Researcher's Printed Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>_________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Participant Profiles

Table 1: Teachers' Profile Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher (Pseudonym)</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Current Assignment</th>
<th>Licensure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbara</td>
<td>21 years (all as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin</td>
<td>19 years (all as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Social Studies</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>8 years (6 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, English/Language Arts &amp; Math</td>
<td>Special Education K-12 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>28 years (17 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Reading, Social Studies &amp; Math</td>
<td>Special Education K-12 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>18 years (14 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Social Studies &amp; Math</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Masters+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serena</td>
<td>5 years (3 as a co-teacher)</td>
<td>Grade 5 Science &amp; Math</td>
<td>General Education Elementary 1-6 Special Education K-12 Masters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data, which is provided in Table 1, above, depicts the participants' profile information. Each of the participants' information has been protected with pseudonyms.

Andy

Andy is a special educator with 28 years of teaching experience. Of that, he has co-taught for 17 years. He has been co-teaching for 4 years with Barbara and this is his first year with Serena. In addition, he currently co-teaches with two other teachers in the areas of reading, social studies and math. Andy is certified as a special educator (K-12) and has achieved a Masters+ level of education. He reported volunteering for his current co-teaching experience.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

Katie
Katie is a special educator with 8 years of teaching experience. Of that she has co-taught for 6 years. She has been co-teaching with Robin for 5 years and this is her first year with David. In addition, she currently co-teaches with two other teachers in the areas of reading, English/language arts and math. Katie is certified as a special educator (K-12) and has achieved a Masters+ level of education. She reported volunteering for her current co-teaching experience.

Robin
Robin is general educator with 19 years of teaching experience. She has always had an inclusive, co-taught classroom. She has been co-teaching with Katie for 5 years. She currently teaches reading, English/language arts and science. Robin is certified as a general educator (1-6) and has achieved a Masters+ level of education. She reported volunteering for her current co-teaching experience.

Serena
Serena is a general educator with 5 years of teaching experience. Of that, she has co-taught for 3 years. This is her first year co-teaching with Andy. She currently teaches science and math. Serena is certified as both a general educator (1-6) and a special educator (K-12) and has achieved a Masters level of education. She did not report volunteering for her current co-teaching experience.

David
David is a general educator with 18 years of teaching experience. Of that, he has co-taught for 14 years. This is his first year co-teaching with Katie. He currently teaches math and social studies. David is certified as a general educator (1-6) and has achieved a
Masters+ level of education. He reported volunteering for his current co-teaching experience.

**Barbara**

Barbara is general educator with 21 years of teaching experience. She has always had an inclusive, co-taught classroom. She has been co-teaching with Andy for 4 years. She currently teaches reading, English/language arts and social studies. Barbara is certified as a general educator (1-6) and has achieved a Masters+ level of education. She reported volunteering for her current co-teaching experience.
Appendix F

Itemized Semi-Structured Interview Data

Data gathered from the semi-structured interviews is arranged in groupings that are representative of the five sets of questions and in the same order the probes were presented to the interviewees. Furthermore, the data is presented so both individual and group results can be analyzed. Finally, emerging trends are identified and reviewed for each interview question to summarize the salient findings.

Interview Questions – Set 1

Question 1: Would you describe your co-teaching experience generally as a positive one? If yes, please describe the positive aspects. If not, please explain.

When considering co-teachers current experiences with their co-teaching partner, this question served to illuminate how they perceived the experience. In each of the six interviews, participants responded affirmatively to the question with responses including both “yes” and “yeah”. When the researcher requested interviewees to describe the positive aspects of this arrangement, the co-teachers included helping students and collaboration. In terms of helping students, Katie explained in co-teaching, they “try to help the kids out as best we can”. David also supported this benefit of co-teaching when he stated, “It doesn’t matter who had the idea as long as it’s going to benefit the students”. And when reflecting on how he helped struggling students, Andy noted, “I’ll catch the kids that are in between, that may not have an ed plan”. Robin cited another benefit to students as, “We can plan together, decide what, you know, see where we think the problem areas might be and try to bypass some of that as we go”.
When considering the benefit of collaboration, Barbara stated, “I recognize Andy’s strengths. He recognizes my strengths and we’re able to, um, kind of complement each other. It’s kind of a yin and yang piece.” Similarly, Serena points to “being in here working very well together” while David expressed an appreciation of “share of workload” and “general sharing of ideas”. Robin included, “sharing the instruction, I think is very positive” and “I love having another adult in the room”. She also observed “my partner is always willing to pull aside a small group”. Finally, Katie mentioned the people she works with are “just awesome, letting me jump in and do whatever”. She appreciated, “talking to each other, planning” and “being able to communicate with each other” as some of the benefits she enjoys in her co-teaching partnerships.

**Question 2:** Have you and your teaching partner ever disagreed about an important aspect of co-teaching? If yes, what was it about? Were you able to resolve it? How?

This question was designed to provide more information into the interpersonal experience of collaborative teaching. Interestingly, all six respondents indicated a negative response. However, two of the six respondents indicated they had never sat down to have discussions about the co-teaching roles, so disagreements were unlikely to occur. The researcher’s reflective memos indicate that one interviewee was quite careful and deliberate in how she answered the questions. It is possible this indicated a certain level of discomfort in sharing her opinions about her current partnership. Serena further explained, “Um, well, to be honest my partner and I have never actually sat down and said this is co-teaching and this is what we’re doing so to actually disagree on an aspect of co-teaching, I don’t think that we really have”. Her partner, Andy, agreed confirming, “No, but I don’t think we’ve ever sat down and had discussions about the roles. It’s just
sort of happened.” Additionally, Katie answered, “No, I mean, I guess we have discussions about modifying work or what kids should be expected to do because obviously they, the curriculum needs to be covered and things need to get done. If they think it’s going to be a problem, then they let me decide, but I like to get their ideas too... we try to meet halfway”. Despite these comments, overall teachers indicated they had not had disagreements, but on occasion had discussions regarding expectations of students that were quickly resolved and agreed upon.

*Question 3: Have you taught in a regular education classroom (non-inclusive) or a self-contained special education classroom? How does your recollection of that experience compare with your co-teaching experience?*

Both Barbara and Robin had only ever taught in an inclusive classroom setting, where the others had diverse experiences in other settings. Serena spoke about teaching in a regular general education classroom as well as a self-contained resource room class. She compared the two experiences:

Um, well I think with being a self-contained class you always worry about, you know, you think about how those kids are going to do in the general ed classroom. Just compared to my experience this year being an inclusion class, you always think of how are those kids, you know, that need the extra help, how they are doing within the general ed class. So, I think those kind of compare because you’re always thinking of whether you’re the general ed teacher, the self-container teacher, or the special ed teacher, you’re always trying to
think of how, you know, those kids could get the most out of their education.

Andy indicated he had taught in a self-contained special education program for students with developmental delays. He recalled having 12 students, two in wheelchairs, and one aide. He found commonalities between that and his current co-teaching experience, as he was one of the first to integrate his students into the regular education setting before stated mandates required it. “Oh, I had those children, way back when, included in certain science and social studies classes, so I was already on step ahead of the crowd. I had found some 6th and 5th grade teachers that had said, ‘Yea, Andy, let’s try it’. So, my assistant would go with two or three that I thought could handle it”.

David responded by comparing his experience in a non-inclusive classroom to his current inclusive co-teaching experience. He touted the benefits; “I like co-teaching better because you have another adult to bounce ideas off of” and “it’s helpful to have another adult in there... so you have another adult to help out, which I think is very beneficial.” Katie also pointed to having “more people to work with the kids” in an inclusion model in contrast to her regular education classroom experience in a Catholic school setting. She felt “it’s definitely easier this way”.

Overall, of the teachers who had experiences in co-teaching and other models of classroom instruction, they all preferred the co-teaching model to either inclusion or regular non-inclusive classroom models of instruction.
Interview Questions – Set 2

This set of questions was designed to evaluate teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of their approach to co-taught instruction. Overall, respondents reported they felt their instructional approaches were effective, though some suggested there was room for improvement.

Question 1: Have you used any new instructional techniques, management strategies, or curriculum adaptations in your co-teaching? Which of these do you consider to be most effective? Why? Which of these do you consider least effective? Why?

This multi-part question was included to inform the researcher about teachers’ perceptions of their own effectiveness within their role as co-teacher. It sought to find out what collaborative practices are currently in place and what practices teachers recommend as valuable. The majority of co-teachers, five out of six, pointed to “small groups” as the most effective co-teaching practice they currently utilized. Robin noted, “I think one of the most successful is the guided reading groups that we try to do.” In addition to specialized rubrics for special education students, Barbara stated that Andy, “will take the children out if it’s too distracting again because more review of that topic needs to be completed”. David expanded on the same concept when he said, “If we can get a really small group at times, it’s more helpful ‘cause sometimes these small groups could be, like, you know, eight to ten kids and that’s not really small”. Serena also thought that “one of the best techniques to use for co-teaching is having let’s say the special ed teacher teach a lesson and I take a small group, and then the special ed teacher takes the small group an I teach the lesson”. She added, “For co-teaching it should be interchangeable”.

Robin indicated technology as her least effective strategy based upon the fact that it can be undependable, while Serena pointed to ineffective planning. She stated co-teachers feel they can “fly by the seat of [their] pants, but that’s not really what co-teaching is and that’s why too often we don’t see co-teaching because they don’t talk about what am I gonna do? What are you gonna do?” David warned against grouping by ability iterating, “If you’re just grouping one way all the time, like, if you put all the ones who supposedly need help together all the time, then you know you’re labeling those kids and it doesn’t work”. Katie agreed saying:

We have to be careful about how many kids are in a small group, and what kids, so I think in terms of mainly learning that if I put all the kids who have no clue and try to put them all in a small group it just isn’t very helpful all the time so mixing it up depending on what we’re doing. That’s beneficial because I think that they just don’t get it and then there’s just no spark.

**Question 2: In your opinion, what are the determining factors of an effective co-teaching partnership?**

This question was added to Austin’s interview to pinpoint exactly what aspects of co-teaching educators deemed critical to the efficacy of their collaborative practice. The importance of this question cannot be understated as teachers reflected upon what makes the co-teaching model work.

The ideas that surfaced again and again were time and collaboration. All interviewees touched upon one or both of these components. For instance, Serena noted
the importance of planning time when she stated, “I think the ability to plan and actually create lessons with your co-teacher and not just, you know, think that, because that’s literally one thing, and it’s no fault necessarily of the special ed teacher, but we don’t have that time”. Katie also mentioned, “time to talk” as an important factor. Lastly, Robin spoke about “having the time to plan and to talk about how you see a lesson going”. Time, in years, was highlighted as critical by Andy when he said, “It’s gotta be time. It’s time... And there’s no shelf life to it. It can last forever.”

Collaboration is also a necessary ingredient in the co-teaching process. Katie appreciated, “being able to bounce ideas off one another and not feel like... they’re not valued, or that they’re being penalized”. She also valued, “being able to talk freely about ideas” and “feeling comfortable enough to chime in”. Similarly, Robin spoke about sharing the same philosophy of education and matching partners by their “philosophy of the kids and what they can do, and how you treat kids and your expectations”. “Being able to have a good working relationship” was important to David in addition to trust and shared expectations, which Barbara also noted when she recollected, “sometimes the communication is almost ESP because Andy will look at me, and I’ll look at him”. Clearly participants vocalized the importance of both time and cooperation as essential components of their collaborative processes.

**Question 3: Has the collaborative teaching experience contributed to your professional knowledge and skill? If so, how would you describe these contributions?**

This question was designed to tease out the benefits teacher perceive from the co-teaching model. All six participants reported affirmative answers to this question. In the second part of the question, where teachers were asked to describe how their
professional knowledge and skills have been developed, all teachers alluded to learning from their teaching partners’ experiences. Robin pointed out Katie’s special education skill set when she mentioned, “special ed teachers have a different... take on a situation. Some of the things I see my co-teacher do with her group, I kind of try to emulate with the whole group”. Andy reflected on his ability to learn new things every day and helping to be the bridge to share great ideas among his four general educators, by taking one teacher’s idea and bringing it to another. Katie noticed, “everybody has new ideas to contribute. So, I think in that way you grow and learn”. Further, Barbara noted, “where I struggle, he is strong. Where he struggles, I am strong.” Teamwork is at the center of co-teaching and David noted the importance of this skill set especially as a teacher in his first year teaching fifth grade. He described, “We kind of come up with a plan together which is kind of nice... she has the prior knowledge because she’s done it before. I have different ideas because I’ve never taught with her before. So, if you kind of put that together it kind of works out pretty well.”

**Interview Questions: Set 3**

These interview questions target the areas of practices that teachers find valuable, seeking to answer both of the research questions for this study. This segment addresses teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching by addressing the most satisfying aspects of this teaching model. It also prompts participants to reflect on potential changes and improvement in both their partnership and school-wide, which directly supplies evidence toward answering the second research question regarding potential improvements.
Question 1: Are you satisfied with your current co-teaching assignment? If yes, would you describe the most satisfying aspects? If no, what changes or improvements would you recommend?

For this item, five out of the six participants reported being satisfied with their current co-teaching assignment. Many reported comfort, personality or relationships as being the determining factors. For example, Robin commented, “having worked together for a number of years, we understand each other. We have a similar expectation or set a similar tone in the classroom and I try to be really flexible.” Katie agreed affirming, “We all get along for the most part, so I think people are comfortable... bouncing ideas off each other and putting in their input and not feeling like their walking on somebody’s toes. I think we both try to be very flexible.” Similarly, David noted Katie’s “easy-going, helpful nature” as well as her flexibility to cover his recess duty when he needs to meet with students. Along similar lines, Andy believed, “Comfort. It’s comfortable. I don’t walk into those rooms feeling like I’m an outsider. I don’t feel like I’m just somebody that’s getting a paycheck to watch other kids.”

On the other hand, Serena reported wanting more out of her co-teaching partnership. Although she stresses that she has a great personal connection with her co-teacher, she is eager to invest more time together in the planning process as opposed to improvising. Barbara suggested yet another area for improvement. She claimed, “Collaborative teaching works better if you have less students... We need smaller class sizes or more special ed help.” Despite these areas of improvement, overall, teachers reported being satisfied with their assignments as co-teachers.
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

**Question 2:** Are you satisfied with the level of support provided by the school to facilitate your collaborative teaching? If not, what types of support do you think the school should provide?

This question was instated to provide additional information into how the school could better support the practice of co-teaching from the perspective of these participants. The results of this interview questions were split. Some teachers reported feeling adequately supported, while others had many suggestions for potential improvements. Support, in the form of smaller caseloads of special education students and/or increased special education staffing, was a frequent suggestion among many respondents. David mentioned that he could probably “make a little bit more headway” with more support, but deemed his current support as adequate to service the students in his charge. Barbara and Katie both agreed smaller class sizes and more support staff, even in the form of a reading and/or math coach, would be helpful. Being an experienced special educator, Andy noted many specific models of which he’s been a part. He stated, “I think it should go back to where it was two or three years ago where they had three 5th grade teachers and three 6th grade, special needs. That opens it up. Or, if you’re gonna keep it at this where it’s only really 8 classrooms where there’s a full-time inclusion teacher in this building, then you need to open up a resource room. You have to have a 5th grade resource and a 6th grade resource”. While Andy was not pleased with some recent decisions made around co-teaching, Barbara seemed pleased that the administrator was “very open to ideas”. Serena mentioned the need for more professional development in the form of workshops, videos or articles. She raised her concerns when she explained:
I don’t think people know what inclusion is. Like, I did inclusion in 6th grade and I know I did it totally differently than every other 6th grade teacher. I’ve seen 5th grade inclusion run differently. I just don’t think that people really know what co-teaching is and I mean my vision, my definition, could be totally different than Barbara’s. I don’t think people really know what co-teaching is, so I think that there could definitely be more professional development.

According to the interviewees, the co-teaching program of which they are currently a part would be best improved by an increase in special education teaching staff, and a decrease in students needing those services. Also, professional development specifically on how to co-teach would be useful.

**Interview Questions – Set 4**

*Question 1:* Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students without disabilities in your classroom? If yes, why are they effective? If no, why are they not effective?

This question was included to gather data about teachers’ perceived impact on their regular education students. Interestingly, all teachers agreed their collaborative teaching strategies were benefiting general education students in their class. They pointed to small group instruction, reduced student-to-teacher ratios, special educators’ expertise in breaking down tasks, and individualized instruction for low-level regular education students. Robin expanded on these ideas when she affirmed, “I think good teaching is what a lot of the co-teaching does, whether it’s breaking things down or
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

slowing down the pace when you need to or modifying the assignment, or going into a small group. Everyone can benefit from that.”

**Question 2:** Do you think the collaborative teaching strategies that you are using are effective in educating students with disabilities in your classroom? If yes, why are they effective? If no, why are they not effective?

This question, like the previous one, was included to gather data about teachers’ perceived impact on their special education students. Again, the majority of teachers agreed it is effective. David posited, “I think they are effective. Could they be more effective is the question... definitely.” Andy also believed it is effective for “80% of them; eight out of ten. There are certain kids that no matter what you modify and accommodate for... the pace of the classroom is just too quick for them. It’s just too fast”. Two instructors pointed to the small groups yet again as an effective strategy made available through co-teaching. These interviewees reported this helps the special education students to make effective progress. Katie expounded, “We try to do small groups as much as we can. They get lost in a large group so I think the more you can go over and reinforce it.” Robin concurred, “We’ve built in that they can really get a small group individualized. They can kind of move over to the side, or go to my co-teacher’s room whenever they need really individualized instruction.” Having another adult in the room allows the special education students to progress.

**Question 3:** To what extent do you think that participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of some students without disabilities?
This question was designed to consider how teachers perceive the social benefits of co-teaching on children without learning disabilities. In response to this question, all teachers agreed on the social growth of regular education students learning in an inclusive model of instruction. According to Serena, being in this setting “teaches them compassion and it teaches them that... not everyone’s the same, that they all have their own... strengths and weaknesses and all that.” Robin agreed the impact is “very significant” because “it promotes tolerance and patience, and understanding that people are different and have different strengths, and I think it just makes them better rounded.”

Katie also saw the benefits of co-teaching on the social development of students without disabilities. She noted, “We have some tough kids, and I think the other kids are really understanding... really accommodating to them and helpful, so I think that just understanding that even though it might be easier for them, that they are still part of the class and they try to help them out.” David also had similar sentiments. He stated, “Kids are very egocentric. It’s all about them and I think seeing sometimes that kids are different and kids have certain disabilities but then you can shine in other areas, so it’s kind of nice for them to see that with kids with different abilities.” In the researcher’s reflective memos, the researcher noted none of the teachers spoke of negative influences, as they had been mentioned in the literature.

**Question 4:** To what extent do you think participation in an inclusive experience contributes to the social development of some students with disabilities? What type of disability? What level of severity?
This question was included in the interview to expose teachers’ perspectives on how their students with disabilities are included. It also provides some background to consider the types of disabilities serviced by this group of teachers, as well as the needs of their particular population. As opposed to the preceding question, only five interviewees believed that students with disabilities in a co-taught classroom benefitted socially from the experience. David iterated:

I think they definitely need to be with their peers group. They have to be seeing that they can do it, that they can be equal to their peer group. It helps them socially. They’re gonna rise to the occasion. They are going to see good social behavior. They are going to see how kids are supposed to behave. They are gonna see how kids do things... and that’s life too. You’re going to be with different people your whole life so you have to learn to deal with different types of people.

Robin’s ideas about social benefits were clear. “I think that it helps kids with disabilities to feel, um, more a part of a bigger group, not to feel so different, not like they’re dumb, that they are just as smart. It’s just in different ways, or they have to access it differently, but I think it makes them feel part of a bigger group. They can socialize... just be part of the big experience.” Serena’s perspective as she is certified in both special and general education came across in her statement:

The students with disabilities have positive role models all day long. You know, I have kids that might not want to raise their hand, but they might now and all day long they are kind of reinforced. I think
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

that those kids that are in the more self-contained classrooms don’t have those positive role models whether it’s academically, socially, anything. Even just having kids make eye contact.

Although overall, Katie touted the benefits of “good role models” and peer examples for students with disabilities, she also mentioned one potential consideration when she pointed out, “I think, on the other hand, it’s hard for them because if they see that someone’s done in five minutes and they haven’t really started, I think some of them get really frustrated by that because they just know that they’re never going to be as easy.” Andy felt that his inclusion students didn’t realize they’re any different than anyone else. He expounded, “As time goes by, they don’t even realize they have an ed plan. They don’t realize that they’re any different. We give out modified math tests. Nobody says anything.”

Although the majority of respondents indicated support of co-teaching in regard to special education students’ social development, not all agreed. Contrary to her colleagues, Barbara expressed, “There is still that stigma. There just is. Everybody knows who needs more help. Whether they are leaving the room to get help or whether they’re in here. And again, I find that when they are in the room, the problem is that they are still struggling and are not getting that extra time or help.” In reflective memos, the researcher noted that although Andy and Barbara are working together with the same population of students they have exceedingly differing views of the impact inclusion has on their special education students.

Just as the impact on students varied, students had wide-ranging needs too. The group of pupils serviced by David, Robin and Katie included students with specific
learning disabilities in reading and math, language-based learning disabilities, as well as students with high anxiety. Additionally, they had students with mild autism, Asperger’s and students with ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder). Katie identified the ADHD students as “a little bit more challenging” and as needing “a lot of care”.

Serena, Barbara and Andy serviced students with a broad range of needs as well. They have two developmentally delayed students, one with Tourette’s Syndrome (including loud vocal tics), two with social-emotional disorder(s), two on the autistic spectrum and many students with specific learning disabilities in reading and math. Additionally, they were responsible for meeting the needs of students with neurological issues and impaired processing speed. Both teams had an array of learning needs to be mindful of when considering modes of educational instruction.

**Question 5:** Are the students in your inclusive classroom generally receptive to collaborative teaching? How do you determine this?

All six teachers interviewed affirmed students in their classrooms are receptive to the inclusive, co-teaching model. Serena expanded, “I would say yes and the way I would determine that is because they really do respond to the special ed teacher being here.” Andy agreed, “They know they can get help from both of us.” Barbara also found the students reactions supported their model of co-teaching because students know they can seek either her or Andy when they feel they need extra help.

Similarly, David responded, “They see us as one big group of 51 students that share our inclusion teacher, our inclusion aide and two classroom teachers, so I think we see it as one big team.” Robin cited the team’s flexibility as an asset: “They feel very free
to move between my room [and the other rooms]... It’s like an open door policy.” Also in support of this idea, Katie stated, “Yes, I think ‘cause they respond to all the teachers, so in that sense they see us pretty much as all equal for the most part. When either one of us has a small group or is doing a lesson, they are pretty active and engaged and they don’t really differentiate between us.” In sum, David said it well when he reflected, “When the kids feels like I have all this help and they’re all my teachers, the kid feels better and the kid does better, and that’s what it’s all about.”

**Interview Questions – Set 5**

**Question 1:** What are your responsibilities in the inclusive classroom? Which of these are exclusively yours? Which of these responsibilities are exclusively those of your partner? Which of these do you share?

This set of questions was critical to help determine the model of co-teaching, or lack thereof, in place for each co-teaching partnerships. Research recommends the equal sharing of teaching responsibilities in effective co-teaching partnerships.

Results of this multipart question exhibited the most often area of shared responsibilities was “Administering Discipline”. Data in all other categories was inconsistent, suggesting a lack of uniformity among co-teachers in the building, and even among partners in the same co-teaching partnership. The areas that revealed the least amount of shared responsibility were “Planning Lessons” and “Classroom Management” which fell disproportionately to the general educator. In both cases, four respondents agreed these items were the responsibility of the classroom teacher, where only two co-
teachers saw it as a shared responsibility. The table below summarizes the collective data.

Table 28 Collective Data – Reflection of the Implementation of Suggested Shared Co-Teaching Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>General Educator’s Responsibility</th>
<th>Special Educator’s Responsibility</th>
<th>Shared Responsibility</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment and Grading</td>
<td>G G</td>
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<td>S S G G</td>
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*** S = Special Educator Data  G = General Educator Data ***

Question 2: How would you improve co-teaching?

The aim of this final question, and as an addition to Austin’s original Perceptions of Co-Teaching Semi-Structured Interview, was to extend participants’ thinking of how to best improve the practice of co-teaching. Typically, and not surprisingly as relative to the
survey responses, interviewees’ recommendations fell into three categories. The groupings were support (reduced student-to-teacher ratio), time and professional development.

Primarily, four teachers were adamant that smaller class sizes were one of the keys for success. Although David recognized this improvement hinges on financial resources, he explained, “Anytime you could get more people in, then you could make small groups, so then you can target those kids and you could probably make even more progress. But, you know, in the utopian world, if everyone had another adult in the room, it would be perfect.” Andy echoed his thoughts of a best-case scenario, saying a special education teacher would be assigned to one classroom “all day from 8:30-3:00 and there’s two teachers in there all day long. That would be the ultimate, perfect inclusion.” Robin concurred, “in a perfect world, you would have a co-teacher all the time in your classroom. I think it would be every subject. I think it would be, you’re in it all day together.” Barbara’s notions aligned with her colleagues when she responded, “First of all, number one would be smaller class sizes.” So, whether they see it as additional support, or fewer students per class, these teachers were seeking a reduced student-to-teacher ratio in order to improve their current co-teaching practice.

Time, both in years and in daily scheduling, was noted as another important factor. Katie revealed, “I think being able to keep working at least a couple of years in a row with the same person is important ‘cause then you don’t have to start at square one and try to plan.” Barbara also referred to time when she noted, “The longer I’ve known Andy, the better we co-teach because I know where and what and he can, again, he can almost ESP.” Contrary to these ideas, Barbara pointed out that growth happens with
change. She explained working with a different partner has developed her flexibility and expressed an interest in changing co-teachers for her “own revitalization”. So, this suggested that leaders have to time change in accordance with individual teams’ circumstances. Several teachers expressed an appreciation for common planning time. Robin maintained that it’s “invaluable”. She further explained, “I think if [teachers are] not using the common planning time, that can be detrimental to the co-teaching”.

Lastly, professional development surfaced as another potential catalyst for improvement for the practice of co-teaching. Some teachers thought direct instruction on how to co-teach would be beneficial, while others sought a common language, definitions and expectations from the district regarding co-teaching. Finally, a couple of teachers recommended observing other schools that have effective co-teaching models in place. Robin concluded, “I think anytime you can have more professional development to improve, it’s going to be worthwhile”. Serena vocalized:

We need a common definition. We need professional development on it, trainings and workshops. We have to talk about what it looks like. We have to either go to other schools, not even in our district, but elsewhere where it’s working for them. I don’t think that two teachers standing up in front of a class should be considered co-teaching. I think to really dive deeper into that, we have to know what co-teaching is and really have some clear examples of it. I would say that’s really important.
Katie also supports seeking a common language. She remarked, “I think it’s getting there. I think having the pods and teams is better than trying to float around, but I think everyone views it very differently what their role is versus the special ed role.”

Andy explained the beginnings of inclusion at the school were based on a quick implementation absent of any instruction, discussion or expectations. He believed the historical roots of the practice are impacting its current state. He recapped the beginnings of inclusion roughly fifteen years ago:

When the school district started inclusion, for argument’s sake we’ll say 15 years ago, it might have been longer, but we’ll say 15, the principal at that time, when she came back from the administrative meeting with all the principals and the superintendent said this is what we have to do, the elementary school studied it, the junior high and the high school said, ‘We’ll wait’. This school said, ‘Do it’, and the principal at that time just said, ‘You’re in. Go!’ There was no rationale, theory or anything. It was just ‘It’s inclusion. Do it.’

Andy doesn’t think all teams are implementing the same model of co-teaching. He expanded on this saying, “Cause you gotta go back to the very beginning. This school was told, ‘Go!’ We had no idea what we were doing. We really still haven’t sat down as a district.” To remedy the current situation, he suggested the district work on it together so each building doesn’t have its own theory.
Appendix G

Focus Group Summary

Question 1: What current school-based supports best facilitate your collaborative teaching?

Three participants contributed to this response indicating that scheduling, combined with administrative support, facilitated their collaborative teaching. Andy iterated, “The administrators are very supportive. They trust you to do the right thing, to not go in a room and say you have to do this... our principal today is very supportive of it.” Barbara agreed when David announced, “having the same preps as your partner, so you’re able to meet with parents and talk during those times. Those are things that the school provides us and then lunch, recess times help for it to be successful and the common planning time of meeting with your co-teacher, plus your partner that also shares that co-teacher is important. I think that’s where the school support is.”

Question 2: In your surveys, all participants “strongly agreed” that co-teaching is a worthwhile professional experience. How do you feel you can improve communication and expectations with your co-teacher to maximize your co-teaching potential?

Just as in the individual interviews, both time and class size resurfaced as areas to maximize co-teaching potential. Andy answered, “I think more time. I’m in a situation with four classrooms, so half a day with my partners here and half a day with the other two. I don’t know if we’d get sick of each other, but to have more time [would be beneficial]”. Barbara supports Andy’s sentiment, agreeing, “And to kind of
support what Andy said, I think class size would help our co-teaching experience. If we had a small group to begin with, I think that we could address the needs a little bit more.” Serena pointed to time as well when she said:

I think the planning time would help though because most of the time we do get common planning, it's spent talking about the needs of the student, not always so much lesson planning, so I think that's maybe where the expectations of each other would come in so we could actually lesson plan. We would know each other's role instead of just talking about the kids’ needs, their home life, how they are doing, which a lot of times is just as important as lesson planning, but it doesn’t give way to expectations of each other as co-teaching.

David made a profound statement when he posited, “I think our model is focused on special needs. So, our co-teacher always has to have an eye toward their caseload and their kids that they have. They are our co-teacher, but when push comes to shove, they are responsible for their kids. So, that ‘CO’ is a little skewed toward the special need population.” The researcher’s reflective memos noted this to be a moment where David's colleagues agreed. It seemed as if he had put in words much of what others were thinking.

Robin reflected on the idea that her communication with Katie, as well as her students, must be clear because they are not always in the same classroom and yet,
she wants them all to hear the same information. She explained, “I have to be careful
to stick to the plan and not get ahead of myself if they are in the other room.”

Question 3: Research shows that shared lesson planning between special and general
educators is critical to a successful model. How do you currently utilize your
planning time and how could you improve the use of your planning time?

The researcher noted a slight change in mood when teachers were asked to
comment on their use of planning time. In the researcher’s memos, she noted it was
a little uncomfortable and participants were reminded they were in no way being
judged. After reassuring participants, this prompt revealed that common planning
time in these two co-teaching models is not truly used for lesson planning. While
teachers often met to discuss the needs and circumstances of specific students in
regard to particular accommodations for upcoming lessons, their actual lesson
planning was conducted, as Andy reported, “On the fly”. David added that
discussions about the special education population sometimes monopolized planning
time and setting a time limit on such discussions helped, but wasn’t always possible
because as he mentioned, “I don’t know how you get away from that because you’re in
the kid’s business anyway, so we spend a lot of time with children, with all the kids.”
Robin explicated the infrequent planning by reminding that because Katie works with
four general education classrooms, she is spread very thin. She also acknowledged
that because of her special education duties, Katie is often pulled from the classroom
making her hard to rely on, though no fault of her own. Additionally, Barbara spoke
about how because she and Andy have worked together for multiple years he is able
CO-TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS

to anticipate where she’s going in a lesson. Thus, planning the lesson is not quite as critical.

**Question 4:** *In one word, what do you believe to be the most critical factor for effective co-teaching?*

When teachers were asked to pinpoint the most essential factor for effective co-teaching, four agreed that “flexibility” was key. Serena chose “cooperation” as imperative, while after much thought and some giggling from the group, David settled on “trust”. He explained, “I think I agree with trust ’cause you have to make sure that when you’re releasing responsibility, you have to trust that the co-teacher is gonna kind of, or expectations. If your expectations are the same, then you’re gonna have trust.” Interestingly, all six respondents decided on elements that are personality/relationship, leading the researcher to believe relationships are a critical component. Not surprisingly, that idea aligns with the theoretical framework and research found in the relevant literature as well.

**Question 5:** *How would a common school-wide definition of co-teaching change the practice?*

Participants revealed that a common definition on co-teaching within the school and district-wide would be beneficial. First, Andy replied:

> For me, I think it would change it for the better, but I think it has to be a district-wide policy of what’s common for inclusion. Every elementary school is different. The middle school is different. The high school’s different. We’re different. Within this building,
we’re different. So, to me, it’s a change district-wide, and I don’t think this school district has ever said, ‘What is the definition of inclusion in this town?’

Barbara agreed it should be more uniform and Serena supported that idea too. Having had experience as both a special educator and a general educator, she realized teachers don’t know what co-teaching is or what it should look like, so she strongly supported finding a common definition. Robin presented one possible drawback as the potential limitations a definition and expectations could put on their current flexible interpretation of co-teaching.

Lastly, and again making a seemingly profound statement with which all participants non-verbally agreed. The researcher’s reflective memos indicated all participants non-verbally, but eagerly, supported his sentiments, and the information he provided was both new and supported. David remarked:

I don’t think we have a co-teaching model. I think we have an inclusion model. Like I said earlier, [special education teachers are] skewed to their caseload. That’s not co-teaching. So, we don’t have definition of co-teaching at all. We are talking about our inclusion model of how it’s done, but it’s not really a co-teaching model. If a student has an IEP that says the kid needs this, that is defining whereas I see co-teaching as ‘CO’ - even. We’re supposed to share, but [special education teachers] have certain things that they are responsible for as the inclusion
teacher. If you still have IEPs, a common definition is not going to change the practice.

If, in fact, David is correct, then it is possible co-teaching in its true sense, does not exist at this school although the term is used often.

**Question 6:** How would explicit expectations for how to plan lessons and execute models of co-teaching change the practice?

In response to this question, David reflected that his colleagues valued ‘flexibility’ and “taking away that flexibility would... not be a good thing.” Robin mentioned the inconsistencies of the schedule drive the model currently in place. She explained, “I also think for us, you know, it changes. We have Katie three mornings a week and then she goes to the other team and they have her three mornings a week. So, unless it were a more consistent schedule which would have to come from administration, it’s hard to give up the control of planning out all six days because she might not be there, and I know for three of them, she won’t be there. And, it’s different with a [teaching assistant]. The expectations are slightly different.” Thus, overall, it seems if co-teaching were to work as a model where responsibilities are truly shared, one special educator would have to be placed exclusively with one general educator.

**Question 7:** When interviewed about how you would improve co-teaching, two themes emerged - time (in terms of years with the same co-teacher) and professional development. Please talk about which you feel is more valuable.
Remaining consistent with his interview, Andy stated, “For me, it’s time. But, there is a shelf life. There is a shelf life. I mean, I worked with one for 13 years. It was time. You need time... more than two to three years. Five? I’m not sure. I don’t know what the magic number is. But there is that amount of time, more than professional development.” Barbara agreed that it took quite a while to get to know Andy, but that over time they’ve developed a successful working relationship.

Coming from a completely different angle, David reflected on the need for time in one grade level. He pointed out that although he has many years of teaching experience, this is his first year teaching 5th grade. He went on to acknowledge his reticence to share responsibilities in regard to the curriculum because he is still learning what the curriculum requires. Because of this, he expressed needing to be more familiar with every aspect of the curriculum first. Thus, he felt less comfortable delegating tasks to Katie. He elaborated, “I’ve probably taken on more than anyone else Katie works with this year because I don’t know it myself. So, if I knew it myself. I’m learning every day of what I’m doing the next day, so that’s where you are as a first year teacher teaching that grade.”

Views on professional development varied. Serena expressed interest in visiting other schools or seeing videos of successful co-teaching models. Andy also felt observing effective models of co-teaching in other schools would be beneficial. In terms of professional development, David suggested some training on the various ways to implement co-teaching and ways to name those models so the co-teachers had a common language around their practice. When considering the usefulness of
professional development Robin reflected on relationships and personality as deciding factors of co-teaching’s success rate. She contributed:

A lot of it comes down to personality because I have had inclusion teachers who come in and sit at my desk and read the newspaper. So, you can professionally develop all you want, but that’s not going to make a difference. Some of it comes down to personality, I think. I mean, there are some people that, why would I invest all this time in professional development when I do not want to work with that person? Well, I think there should be a certain amount, and I don’t even know how you’d do it or how much there is of teacher say into with whom you would like to work. You know, it’s a lot. There’s the partner, and then there’s the inclusion person. There’s a lot of personality. I know that you wouldn’t want to get into a situation where there’s one person that nobody wants to work with because that’s not right either, nor professional, but there are people it’s not going to work with.

Throughout the focus group, time and professional development continued to appear as emergent themes. Although teachers had both convergent and divergent views regarding their importance, each teacher had commentary on their practicality. Overall, the focus group both confirmed and expanded on the findings of both the survey and interview portions of this investigation. The researcher’s memos suggested the importance of this very intentional, probing question. Although the researcher’s
review of literature, the participants’ surveys and interviews all addressed recommended ways to improve co-teaching, some of the desired improvements that arose in this portion of the focus group seem unrealistic to implement due to factors out of the school’s control i.e. budget and personality. However, some of the suggestions are attainable goals derived directly from participants’ experience.