A Case Study Examining the Activities and Experiences of Co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to understand how co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School described their activities and experiences with the instructional strategy known as co-teaching. Participants of this study included three co-teaching teams. Each co-teaching team consisted of one regular education and one special education teacher at the elementary school level. Both observations and interviews were utilized to gather data about the participants’ experiences and activities related to co-teaching. Pattern and In Vivo Coding was then utilized to analyze the data. After careful analysis, the following five major findings emerged: 1) Strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents are essential. 2) Ongoing communication between co-teaching partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues is imperative for supporting co-teaching practices. 3) More professional development should be provided for co-teachers. 4) Administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding their placement in a co-taught classroom. 5) A clear definition of what co-teaching is and looks like at Apple Valley Elementary School should be established. This study may be helpful to administrators and teachers who are seeking to improve co-teaching at their school.

Keywords: co-teaching, activity theory, professional development, education, inclusion, collaboration
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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Meeting the needs of every child in a classroom can be a daunting task, especially for one teacher. As a result, more schools are forging partnerships between regular education and special education teachers in the form of co-teaching (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010, Howard & Potts, 2009; Lamport, Graves, & Ward, 2012; Stefanidis & Strogilos &., 2015). Co-teaching involves two or more educators and/or educational professionals who work with one another to plan, evaluate, assess, and instruct students with diverse abilities within the general education classroom (Beninghof, 2012; Conderman & Hedin, 2015; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2014; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2008). However, for the purpose of this study, co-teaching is defined as a regular education teacher and a special education teacher working in collaboration with one another to teach students with diverse abilities in the same classroom. Both teachers are actively engaged in the planning process, which includes deciding on the best way to deliver content to students. This helps to ensure all students’ needs are met. Additionally, both teachers are involved in creating and utilizing assessments to monitor student progress and aid in the development of future lessons (Gately & Gately, 2001).

Co-teaching is a very complex process and can be difficult to implement (Friend, 2008). However, research has revealed that there are several determining factors that have been associated with making the implementation of co-teaching successful: 1) it is essential that all teachers and administrators, who will be involved in co-teaching, have professional development on best co-teaching practices (Embry & Dinnesen, 2013; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kamens, Susko, & Elliot, 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Murawski, 2006; Panscofar & Petroff, 2016; Pratt, 2014; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015; Walsh, 2012), 2) co-teaching partnerships must have
adequate time to co-plan with one another (Embury & Dinnesen, 2013; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kamens, Susko, & Elliot, 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Murawski, 2006; Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, & Patterson, 2016; Pratt, 2014), 3) co-teaching partnerships must have the support of their administrative team (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Pratt, 2014; Walsh, 2012), 4) teacher compatibility, or their ability to get along with one another, is also an important factor to consider because it can also impact the success of co-teaching (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Kamens et al., 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Pratt, 2014; Rice & Zigmond, 2000), and 5) how co-teachers perceive their role in a co-teaching relationship can also impact the success of the co-teaching relationship (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engaged in co-teaching. The researcher hoped that the information from this study could provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching instructional model being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information could then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

**Background**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was a pivotal piece of legislation that guaranteed all individuals, regardless of ability, access to a public education that was free of charge to the child and their families. Additionally, IDEA helped to ensure that all children were granted access to the general education curriculum without having to leave their regular education classroom (Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, 2004). More recently, The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), was enacted to help ensure equity amongst all
students. Under ESSA, states must have high academic standards in place for all children, regardless of ability. These standards must be rigorous enough to prepare all students to enter a trade, college, or career. Additionally, ESSA helps to ensure that there are effective teachers in every classroom by providing funding to establish mentoring programs, professional development, and other professional opportunities such as advocating for the utilization of co-teaching instructional practices to help support teachers and improve their overall effectiveness (Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) Act, 2015).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act placed emphasis on ensuring that all students, regardless of ability, were placed within the general education classroom. Moreover, it ensured that all students had access to the same general education curriculum as their peers whenever it was deemed appropriate to do so (Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act, 2004). In order to determine the most appropriate setting and services for each child with a disability, a team of individuals collaborates with one another to help ensure each child is successful. Typically, this team consists of the student’s parents or guardians, a school administrator, a student, a regular education teacher, a special education teacher, and a school psychologist. The team members may also include other school personnel such as speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, translators, occupational therapists, social workers, ESL teachers, or adapted physical education teachers. During the team meeting, the school staff and/or outside professionals will present the findings of their evaluations and observations. At this time, parents can also incorporate their observations as well as ask any questions they may have. The team will then determine if the student has a qualifying disability that impacts their academic progress. If they do, the team will create a draft of the Individualized Education Plan or IEP. Utilizing the information from the evaluations and observations, the special education
teacher, other school personnel, and the students’ parents or guardians make recommendations for accommodations or modifications to the general education curriculum. In addition, recommendations can also be made for any related services, or special devices that the student may need to be successful. The team then works together to create goals that they would like the student to accomplish by the next team meeting. These accommodations and goals, along with the student’s current performance and areas of strength, are then placed into a document called an Individualized Education Plan or IEP (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, July 2000).

Also included in the IEP document, is a section which describes where the child will be placed. When determining a child’s placement, it is important for team members to adhere to the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) guidelines as outlined by the IDEA Act. The Least Restrictive Environment guidelines require that students with disabilities are included in all activities with their typically developing peers. This helps to ensure that students with disabilities are not isolated from their typically developing peers and have access to the general education curriculum. Once the IEP is written and the parents sign and accept the IEP document, school personnel becomes responsible for ensuring that the accommodations, modifications, and services written in the IEP are implemented (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, July 2000). Depending on the students’ needs and the types of services outlined in their IEP, students may be placed in several settings such as a co-taught classroom, a substantially separate classroom, or a special school outside of the district that specializes in servicing students with specific disabilities. However, the most common settings utilized at Apple Valley Elementary are either a full inclusion or a partial inclusion setting. In a full inclusion setting, students spend the day in a general education classroom where
they receive any services and accommodations outlined by their IEP. The classroom teacher, special education teacher, aides, or other support personnel are responsible for ensuring the student’s IEP is followed, and all accommodations or services are implemented. In a partial inclusion model, students spend a portion of their day within the regular education classroom and may receive services from a service provider in another setting.

There are several types of inclusion or collaborative models that a school can employ to help students with disabilities integrate into classrooms with their developmentally typical peers while still receiving appropriate supports to be successful (Korinek, McLaughlin, & Gable, 1994). For example, at Apple Valley Elementary School, some children receive services by a service provider, such as an occupational therapist, within the general education classroom. Another model utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School is a co-teaching model. As previously stated, co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School consists of a regular education teacher and a special education teacher working in collaboration with one another. Both teachers are actively engaged in the planning process, which includes deciding on the best way to deliver content to students. This helps to ensure all students' needs are met. Additionally, both teachers are involved in creating and utilizing assessments to monitor student progress and aid in the development of future lessons (Gately & Gately, 2001). Additionally, Apple Valley Elementary also utilizes the consultation model in conjunction with one of the previously mentioned models. In a consultation model, the special education teacher or other service providers may meet with the regular education teacher to plan and/or offer suggestions on how to differentiate the lessons so that the students will be successful. Despite schools having several options to choose from, co-teaching is becoming a popular instructional choice to help promote inclusion (Dieker &
Currently, approximately 16% of all students at Apple Valley Elementary School are considered to have a learning disability (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The majority of these students are educated in a co-taught classroom. Yet, many of the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have not received adequate or effective professional development in co-teaching. According to Guske (2002), effective professional development has the following key characteristics: 1.) Participants who attend the professional development session have positive comments about the professional development training they attended. For example, the participants feel that the training was a valuable use of their time and the presenter was knowledgeable, 2.) Participants report that the professional development session added to their knowledge about the subject or they learned new skills as a result of the professional development activity, 3) Participants report that their district was supportive of their efforts to implement what they learned, 4.) The participants were able to integrate the skills they learned into their classroom and felt that the implementation of these skills was meaningful, and 5.) The professional development had a positive effect on student learning and resulted in improved student achievement, attendance, or their overall social-emotional well-being. Guske believes that in order for professional development to truly be successful, all five characteristics must be present (Guske, 2002).

To date, the only co-teaching professional development offered by the district was a voluntary online course. However, this professional development was offered several years ago, and not all co-teachers participated. Additionally, new staff was hired, and they have yet to be trained in co-teaching. This is problematic because research shows that a lack of professional
development can lead to negative attitudes towards co-teaching and a lack of confidence when implementing a variety of co-teaching methods (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that ongoing professional development has been attributed to an increase in student academic achievement (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007; Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016; Prast, Van de Weijer-Bergsma, Kroesbergen, & Van Luit, 2018). Thus, not providing co-teachers with ongoing professional development could greatly impact student achievement.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching. The researcher hoped that the information from this study could provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching practices being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information could then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

The Significance of the Research Question

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Every Student Succeeds Act are two important federal laws that work together to ensure that all public-school children have equal access to the general education curriculum. Additionally, these laws help to ensure all students receive a high-quality education. More specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ensured that all public-school students with disabilities have access to an education that is appropriate. Simply stated, a child with a disability is entitled to an education that is designed specifically for their individual needs and helps ensure that they have access to the general education curriculum (Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), 2004). Meanwhile, The Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) ensured that all students, regardless of ability, were held to rigorous
standards that would help prepare them for their future work endeavors (Every Student Succeeds (ESSA) Act, 2015).

However, in order to meet all students’ needs and abide by these federal mandates, some schools needed to change their instructional practices to be more inclusive of students with diverse learning needs. As a result, schools began to adopt inclusive educational practices, such as co-teaching to help support a diverse range of learning abilities in the regular education classroom (Austin, 2001; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Co-teaching involves two or more teachers working together to plan, deliver instruction, and assess students in the same classroom who have a wide range of abilities (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Although co-teaching has become a popular instructional method, many teachers lack the professional knowledge or skills needed to effectively implement co-teaching (Chitiyo & Brinda, 2018; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Friend et al., 2010; Miller & Oh, 2013; Murawski, 2006). When teachers lack professional development in co-teaching, several issues can arise, which may impact the effectiveness of the co-teaching team and student performance. For example, studies have found that a lack of professional development may hinder a co-teacher from assuming a variety of roles within the co-teaching relationship (Magiera, Smith, Zigmond, & Gebauer, 2005). Additionally, a study by Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) found that teachers who do not receive co-teaching professional development are more likely to have poor attitudes towards co-teaching and may lack the knowledge and confidence needed to implement a variety of co-teaching instructional strategies (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Moreover, without proper professional development, co-teaching teams may struggle to: collaborate effectively, utilize
multiple co-teaching models, modify the curriculum, provide accommodations, engage in meaningful co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessment (Murawski, 2006).

Therefore, it was essential to understand the activities and experiences of elementary co-teachers, at Apple Valley Elementary School, who engaged in co-teaching. The researcher hoped that the information gained from this study could provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching practices being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information could then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

**Statement of the Problem**

Currently, approximately 16% of all students at Apple Valley Elementary School are considered to have a learning disability (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The majority of these students are educated in a co-teaching classroom. Yet, many of the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have not received adequate professional development in co-teaching. To date, the only co-teaching professional development offered by the district was a voluntary online course. However, this professional development was offered several years ago, and not all co-teachers participated. Since the last training was offered, several new teachers were hired and assigned to a co-teaching position. These individuals have yet to been trained in co-teaching. This is problematic because research shows that a lack of professional development can lead to negative attitudes towards co-teaching and a lack of confidence when implementing a variety of co-teaching strategies (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that ongoing professional development has been attributed to an increase in student academic achievement (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007; Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016; Prast, Van de Weijer-
Bergsma, Kroesbergen, & Van Luit, 2018). Thus, not providing co-teachers with ongoing professional development could greatly impact student achievement.

By taking a deeper look at current co-teaching instructional practices, the strengths and weaknesses of the current program may be revealed. An examination of current practices is crucial since co-teaching has been attributed to positive effects on students’ academic achievement (Castro, 2007; Kofahl, 2016; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wilson & Michaels, 2006), yet Apple Valley Elementary has not reaped these benefits. For example, a longitudinal study conducted by Walther-Thomas (1997) investigated the implementation of co-teaching at both the elementary and middle school levels. The study findings revealed that the majority of the students with disabilities were more successful in the co-taught setting than in their previous self-contained setting (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Furthermore, a qualitative study conducted by Wilson & Michaels (2006) explored the perceptions of regular education and special education students who were placed in a co-taught classroom. The findings revealed that both regular education and special education students believed that they benefited academically from being placed in a co-taught setting (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Since co-teaching has been proven as an effective instructional strategy for students with disabilities, it is important to understand co-teachers’ activities and experiences with co-teaching to help the researcher gain a better understanding of what these individuals believe is working and what aspects of co-teaching can be improved upon. This information can then be utilized to develop ongoing professional development for staff so that all students succeed.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study is to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching. The researcher hopes that the information from this study can provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the
current co-teaching practices being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information can then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

**Positionality**

I have been employed as a regular education teacher for over fifteen years. During this time, I have had the opportunity to work closely with various special education teachers in different capacities. During my first several years of teaching, I experienced my special education students being pulled out of the classroom to receive their educational and related services for a large portion of the day. I always felt bad for these students, as they often missed out on class projects, science, social studies, or collaborative activities. While I worked hard with their special education teacher to ensure they didn’t miss the objective of the lesson, it was nearly impossible for them to truly make-up the lesson. They often missed out on rich classroom discussions that took place during the activity or the opportunity to collaborate with their peers. Unfortunately, these types of rich discussions or collaborative work simply could not be reproduced afterward. Therefore, I was as though these students were not truly reaping the benefits of being in my class.

More recently, the special education model has shifted to be more inclusive and collaborative. Therefore, I now work in a co-taught classroom. Together, the special education teacher and I are responsible for educating a diverse group of learners within our classroom. This has allowed all students to be included and immersed in our learning environment. Our students no longer have to be pulled away from rich classroom discussions, collaborative work, or special activities. More importantly, they truly feel like they are a valuable and contributing member of our classroom. As a result, I have seen my students’ self-confidence improve as well
as their academic achievement. That is why I believe co-teaching is an effective instructional model that can help all students achieve their personal best.

However, co-teaching can be challenging. Unlike a traditional classroom, a co-taught classroom involves two teachers working together. The two teachers must work cooperatively to establish classroom routines and expectations. Additionally, the two teachers must work together to plan for lessons that meet the diverse needs of learners in front of them and decide how they will deliver the lessons and assess what the students’ learned. This can be difficult as the two teachers may have different personalities, teaching styles, and expectations. Therefore, they must be willing to compromise and come to an agreement on how the classroom should be run.

In my experience, this level of cooperation and compromise is difficult to achieve, and thus many co-taught classrooms are not as successful as they could be. One reason why a co-taught classroom may be unsuccessful, is the administrators choose which two individuals will co-teach together. However, this decision is often made without realizing that the two teachers may have different personalities or teaching philosophies. Another reason why a co-taught classroom may be unsuccessful is that the teachers lack the professional knowledge and training needed to implement co-teaching successfully. For example, they may not know how to co-plan together or the different co-teaching models that can be utilized to deliver instruction. Lastly, I have witnessed that often co-taught classrooms lack needed resources in order to plan for instruction effectively. For example, there have been several times where I was given a new curriculum manual, and my co-teaching partner was not. This can make planning very difficult, especially when both teachers are trying to learn the new curriculum and decide on the best way to deliver their instruction to their students. Therefore, I believe it is essential to discuss
partnerships before teachers are paired together, provide all teachers with the needed resources and professional development needed so that co-teaching can be successfully implemented.

**Research Question**

How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

**Definition of Key Terminology:**

**Co-teaching** - Co-teaching involves two or more educators who work together to plan, deliver instruction, and assess students who have a wide range of abilities, within the same classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Villa et al., 2013).

**Individualized Education Program** - An IEP or Individualized Education Program is a legally binding written document that is jointly developed by team members during a team meeting. Additionally, an IEP outlines the special services, individualized instruction, modifications, and accommodations that are needed by a specific child so that they can access the curriculum and be successful in school (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, July 2000).

**Least Restrictive Environment** - The term Least Restrictive Environment or LRE states that children with disabilities must be educated with their peers who are developmentally typical, whenever it is deemed appropriate to do so (U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, July 2000).

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework, Activity Theory, was adopted to help focus this research. According to Merriam (1998), a theoretical framework provides a research study with structure
and a lens to frame the research question, view the literature, and analyze the data. Simply put, the theoretical framework guides all aspects of a research study (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, the researcher selected Second Generation Activity Theory to guide this study because it allowed the researcher to analyze Apple Valley Elementary School’s co-teacher’s activities and experiences in order to identify the issues and strengths associated with current co-teaching practices.

Following is an overview of Activity Theory that includes the history of Activity Theory and the critics of Activity Theory. Lastly, the researcher ends the section by providing a rationale for utilizing Activity Theory and by providing an explanation for how Activity Theory was applied to this study.

**Activity Theory**

Activity theory states that as individuals participate in activities, they interact with their environment, tools, and other individuals, to construct meaning. This new knowledge can be utilized to transform the way the activity is performed (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003; Wertsch, 1988). Therefore, activity theorists believe that activity is essential to help individuals create meaning about the world around them and their activity system (Wertsch, 1988).

Some of the first individuals to explore and understand the concept of activity were Hegel and Marx. Both of these individuals based their understanding of activity from a philosophical perspective. Later, S.L. Rubinshtein developed a more comprehensive theory of activity that was based on both a philosophical and psychological perspective (Brushlinskii, 2004). However, the origins of Activity Theory are attributed to Lev Vygotsky (Kozulin, 1986; Martin & Peim, 2009; Morf & Weber, 2000).

Vygotsky’s version of Activity Theory is often referred to as First Generation Activity Theory (Engestrom, 2001; Holzman, 2006; Kozulin, 1986; Martin & Peim, 2009; Roth & Lee,
Vygotsky’s First-Generation Activity Theory was deeply rooted in the constructivist paradigm (Yamagata-Lynch, 2003). This is evidenced by Vygotsky’s belief that an individual’s cognitive development was socially constructed as individuals interacted with people and objects within their activity system. Through these interactions, individuals gained a deeper understanding of the activity and the activity system as a whole (Hung, Tan, & Koh, 2006; Kozulin, 1986; Martin & Peim, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003; Wertsch, 1998). This new knowledge could be utilized to change how the activity is performed within the system (Cole, 1996; Hung, Tan, & Koh, 2006; Martin & Peim, 2009; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003).

Vygotsky utilized a triangle to represent how he believed an individual acquired new knowledge within an activity system. Each of the triangle’s three vertices was labeled. One vertex was labeled as the *subject*. The term *subject* referred to any individual or individuals who were actively involved in the activity. Another vertex was labeled *object*. Vygotsky utilized the term *object* to refer to what the individual hoped to accomplish as the result of the activity they were engaged in. The last vertex was labeled as a *mediated artifact* or *tool*. These interchangeable terms were utilized to describe tools, individuals, or past knowledge that could be utilized to perform the activity and help the subject achieve their goal (Hasan & Kazlauskas, 2014; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003).

Vygotsky’s First-Generation Activity Theory was later elaborated on by several of his colleagues. For example, Luria expanded on Vygotsky’s work by placing emphasis on the role that culture played in the development of higher-order thinking (Tobach, Falmagne, Parlee, Martin, & Kapelman, 1997). Leontiev also elaborated on Vygotsky’s First Generation Activity Theory. However, unlike Vygotsky, who focused on the actions of an individual within an activity system, Leontiev believed that an individual’s actions must be viewed within a larger
context that included a holistic view of the activity system. Therefore, in order to understand the actions of one person, one must understand how the individual’s actions are part of the larger picture or whole group activity (Engeström, 2001). Leontiev’s holistic view of activity became the basis for the second generation of Activity Theory. Unfortunately, Leontiev never expanded upon his work to include a visual representation. This left the door open for other theorists to expand upon his work. Engeström utilized Leontiev’s idea that an individual’s actions must be viewed in a broader context, to create a visual model that depicted Second Generation Activity Theory (Engeström, 2001; Said, Forret, & Eames, 2014). Engeström’s visual model, “The Structure of a Human Activity System” (as cited in Engeström, 2001), consisted of two triangles: one large triangle and a smaller inverted triangle that is embedded into the larger one. The vertices of the larger triangle were labeled mediating artifacts or tools, rules, and division of labor. Whereas, the vertices of the smaller inverted triangle were labeled as subject, object, and, community (as cited in Engeström, 2001). Engeström’s new model acknowledged the role that the individual played within the activity system but placed a larger emphasis on viewing the activity system as a whole. Therefore, Engeström believed it was important to consider the collective actions of all individuals within the activity system which included: the tools that they were utilizing, the rules that they had to abide by, and how work was divided up amongst the members of the activity system (Engeström, 2001). By shifting the focus to the activity system as a whole, Engeström’s model focused on understanding how the collective group of individual’s made sense of their experiences as they attempted to reach their objective. As individuals make sense of their experiences, they begin to gain a clearer understanding of their objective and how to best reach that objective. As a result, the whole activity system begins to undergo a transformation. For example, tools may be adapted to help the community reach their
objective more efficiently, or an individual’s jobs or roles (division of labor) may be changed to reflect a new process that is being implemented (Hung, Tan, & Koh, 2006). Thus, Second Generation Activity Theory can be useful to researchers in order to help them gain a holistic and comprehensive understanding of a complex work environment. Moreover, utilizing Second Generation Activity Theory allows researchers and other individuals to gain a thorough understanding of a work environment through analyzing the experiences of key stakeholders within the activity system (Hasam & Kazlauskas, 2014).

Engeström elaborated on his previous work to create Third Generation Activity Theory. Unlike the previous versions of Activity Theory, Third Generation Activity Theory focuses on two or more activity systems that share a similar goal (Engeström, 2001). As individuals within both activity systems interact and collaborate with one another, they share feedback on how to reach the objective or goal in a more efficient manner. As a result, some transformations or changes may occur over time in one or both activity systems (Yamazumi, 2006).

Critics of activity theory. Activity theory has grown in popularity amongst researchers and has been utilized to study multiple disciplines such as education (Mcnicholl & Blake, 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2003), medicine (Engeström, 1995; Eppich & Cheng, 2015), business (Artemeva & Freedman, 2001), and technology (Karanasios, 2018). Despite the growing interest of utilizing Activity Theory as a theoretical framework to guide empirical studies, there are still some criticisms of the theory.

Bakhurst (2009) and Martin and Peim (2009), for example, noted that one weakness with the utilization of Activity Theory is that the history of Activity Theory is incomplete because it neglected to incorporate other Russian philosophers views of activity (Bakhurst, 2009; Martin & Peim, 2009). Another criticism of Activity Theory is that much of the original work on activity
theory was published in Russian and then translated into English. Since not all words can be translated exactly from Russian to English, some of the original context and meaning of activity theory could have been compromised during the translation process (Hasan & Kazlauskas, 2014). Activity Theory was also criticized because Vygotsky and Engeström did not describe why they utilized a triangle as part of their model, and they did not describe how each component of the model was related to the other (Bakhurst, 2009). Therefore, these criticisms will need to be accounted for when discussing the limitations of the current study.

**Rationale**

Activity theory was chosen as a theoretical framework to help guide this study because it provides a lens through which to view a complex and changing work environment (Foot, 2014; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). According to Friend et al., (2010), co-teaching is a complex instructional method because it involves multiple moving pieces that must come together in order for co-teaching to be successful. For example, in a co-teaching partnership, it is important that both the regular education teacher and a special education teacher share a common vision of what co-teaching is and how co-teaching should be implemented within the classroom. However, this is not an easy feat. Many regular educators and special educators do not share the same educational background or educational philosophy. Thus, it may be difficult for co-teachers to agree on how co-teaching should be implemented within their classroom. Additionally, co-teachers lack professional development in co-teaching and thus may not be prepared to contribute to their co-teaching partnership. Moreover, in order for co-teaching to be successful, school administrators must have a solid understanding of co-teaching in order to effectively support co-teachers and the implementation of co-teaching within their school. School administrators must be able to effectively pair co-teachers, support co-teachers as they
form their co-teaching partnership by providing them with ongoing professional development, and support them through any problems that arise. Additionally, administrators must create schedules that allow co-teachers to have shared common planning time. Common planning time is essential to help ensure that all students’ needs are met, and both co-teachers are aware of their responsibilities for each lesson. Lastly, the administration must be able to articulate what co-teaching is to parents, teachers, and community members. By having a clear vision of what co-teaching is and what it looks like, administrators are able to hold everyone accountable for achieving the vision (Friend et al., 2010).

Since co-teaching is a complex instructional strategy (Friend et al., 2010) that involves several moving pieces, it was important to select and utilize a theoretical framework that allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the various moving pieces associated with the implementation of the co-teaching model. Activity Theory was ultimately chosen as a theoretical framework to guide this research study because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ activities and experiences with co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School from multiple vantage points and roles within the activity system (Foot, 2014). Moreover, Activity Theory afforded the researcher the opportunity to understand how co-teachers experience the many different components that comprise the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Applying Activity Theory to This Study**

Second Generation Activity Theory will be utilized in this study to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching. Second Generation Activity Theory states that an activity system is comprised of the following components: a) subject, b) object, c) tools, d) rules, e) community and f) division of
labor, which are all interrelated to one another (Foot, 2014). In terms of this study, the subjects are special education co-teachers and regular education co-teachers. The object or goal that the subjects are working towards is increasing student knowledge and student achievement. The tools that the subjects utilize to reach these goals include professional development, state, and common core state standards, textbooks, professional books, feedback from colleagues, students, and administration, student assessments, lesson plans, technology such as computers, paper, pencils, and prior knowledge of both the students and the teachers. The rules that govern how the subjects carry out activities within the system include teacher contracts, state, and common core state standards, school-wide expectations, district-wide expectations, and both state and federal laws. Individuals that make up the community and interact with the subjects inside the activity system include school and district administration, school employees, parents, students, and other community members. The division of labor includes the state board of education, school committee, superintendent, assistant superintendent, principal, assistant principal, teachers, support staff, and other school employees.

**Conclusion**

In summary, Second Generation Activity Theory was utilized as a theoretical framework to understand the activities and experiences of elementary teachers, at Apple Valley Elementary School, who engage in co-teaching. Friend et al. (2010) stated that co-teaching is a complex instructional strategy because co-teaching involves several components that are often not stable (Friend et al., 2010). Therefore, it was important to select and utilize a theoretical framework that allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the complex nature of co-teaching. The utilization of Activity Theory allowed the researcher to examine current co-teaching
practices from multiple individuals’ perspectives (Foot, 2014). Additionally, it allowed the researcher to view co-teaching from both a micro and macro level. This allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of the various components that comprise the implementation of the co-teaching model at Apple Valley Elementary School. Lastly, Activity Theory was selected because it allowed the researcher to analyze Apple Valley Elementary co-teacher’s activities and experiences in order to identify issues with current co-teaching instructional practices.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

As federal and state governments continue to emphasize the importance of educating all children in an equitable manner and continue to encourage and celebrate diversity within regular education classrooms, educators must adapt their teaching practices to meet the needs of all their students. As a result, more districts are adopting co-teaching as an instructional model to help ensure that all students’ needs are met within the regular education classroom environment (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend et al., 2010; Howard & Potts, 2009; Lamport, Graves, & Ward, 2012; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Stefanidis & Strogilos &., 2015). Co-teaching involves two or more educators or educational professionals who work with one another to plan, deliver instruction, and assess students with diverse abilities within the general education (Beninghof, 2012; Conderman & Hedin, 2015; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2014; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2008). Research has shown that there are several factors that could impact the effectiveness of co-teaching instructional practices. For example, in order for co-teaching to be successful, it is essential that all individuals involved in co-teaching receive training on best practices (Embry & Dinnesen, 2013; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kamens, Susko, & Elliot, 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Murawski, 2006; Panscofar & Petroff, 2016; Pratt, 2014; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015; Walsh, 2012). Additionally, studies have highlighted the importance of co-planning time (Embry & Dinnesen, 2013; Fennick & Liddy, 2001; Kamens et al., 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Murawski, 2006; Pratt, et.al, 2016; Pratt, 2014), administrative support (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Pratt, 2014; Walsh, 2012), and teacher compatibility (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Kamens et al., 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Pratt, 2014; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Consequently, the purpose of this case study is to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who
engage in co-teaching. The researcher hopes that the information from this study can provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching practices being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information can then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

Co-Teaching

Researchers have defined co-teaching in multiple ways. Yet, most researchers agree that when referring to special education instructional services, co-teaching involves a regular education teacher and a special education teacher working collaboratively with one another in the same classroom to educate students with diverse needs (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Beninghof, 2012; Conderman & Hedin, 2015; Friend, 2008; Gately & Gately, 2001; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). However, this is not an easy task. In fact, researchers have found that there are several factors that can impact the effectiveness of co-teaching practices. Current research on co-teaching indicates that a co-teacher’s personality (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013), the amount of professional development they receive (Embry & Dinnesen, 2013; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kroeger et al., 2012; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Tzivinikou, 2015), the amount of common planning time they are afforded (Bryant Davis, Dieker, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Embry & Dinnesen, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016), the amount of administrative support the team receives (Kamens et al., 2013; Pratt, 2014), and how the co-teacher’s perceive their roles within the co-teaching partnership (Austin, 2001; Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Simmons & Magiera, 2007) can all influence the success of co-teaching practices.

Yet, despite all of the research on the factors that influence the success of co-teaching, a review of the literature related to the effectiveness of a co-teaching program at an elementary
level was not very extensive. The majority of the current studies focused on the teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching at the middle school level (Waddy, 2010; West, 2016) and high school level (Beaudoin-Colwell, 2009; King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, & Preston-Smith, 2014; Majchrzak, 2015; Marcellus, 2016) settings. However, only two studies examined co-teacher’s perceptions of co-teaching at the elementary level (King, 2010; Smith, 2012). Therefore, this study will extend the existing literature on the subject by attempting to understand the activities and experiences of elementary teachers who engage in co-teaching and how these activities and experiences relate to the overall effectiveness of the co-teaching model. It is the researcher’s hope that by highlighting the current areas of strengths and areas of improvement, this information can then be utilized by educators to develop an ongoing and effective co-teaching professional development for the teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School.

The Context

This case study focused on understanding the activities and experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, a k-5 public school in the northeastern region of the United States that utilizes co-teaching as an instructional strategy. Currently, approximately 16% of all students at Apple Valley Elementary School are considered to have a learning disability (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The majority of these students are educated in a co-taught classroom. Yet, many co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have voiced that they have not received professional development in the area of co-teaching. This is alarming since research has found that a successful inclusion classroom is largely due to the teachers’ knowledge, skills, and beliefs about inclusion (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Given the lack of professional development on co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School and the fact that co-teaching is the preferred method of inclusion instruction, further
investigating into current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School are warranted. Such an investigation may reveal the strengths of current co-teaching practices as well as practices that need to be adjusted to help all students succeed. One way this can be achieved is through ongoing professional development for all staff. This professional development should focus on the best instructional practices for teaching and reaching all learners, regardless of abilities.

Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to understand the activities and experiences of elementary school teachers, at Apple Valley Elementary School, who engaged in co-teaching. More specifically, the researcher was interested in understanding how the participants make sense of these activities and experiences as it relates to the overall effectiveness of the co-teaching model. This information could then be utilized by educators at Apple Valley Elementary to put together a comprehensive and on-going co-teaching professional development program to improve current instructional practices.

The Significance

Currently, 16.5% of all students at Apple Valley Elementary School, are considered to have a learning disability (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). The majority of these students are educated in a co-taught classroom. Yet, many of the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have not received adequate or effective professional development in co-teaching. According to Guske (2002), effective professional development has the following key characteristics: 1.) Participants who attend professional development have positive comments about the professional development training they attended. For example, the participants feel that the training was a valuable use of their time and the presenter was knowledgeable, 2.) Participants report that the professional development added to
their knowledge about the subject or learned new skills as a result of the professional development activity, 3) Participants report that their district was supportive of their efforts to implement what they learned, 4.) The participants were able to integrate the skills they learned into their classroom and felt that the implementation of these skills was meaningful, 5.) The professional development had a positive effect on student learning and resulted in improved student achievement, attendance, or overall social-emotional well-being. Guske believes that in order for professional development to be successful, all five characteristics listed above must be present (Guske, 2002).

To date, the only professional development offered by the district was a voluntary online course. However, this professional development was offered several years ago, and not all co-teachers participated. Additionally, new staff was hired, and they have yet to been trained in co-teaching. This is problematic because research shows that a lack of professional development can lead to negative attitudes towards co-teaching and a lack of confidence when implementing a variety of co-teaching methods (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). Furthermore, studies have shown that ongoing professional development has been attributed to an increase in student academic achievement (Fisher, Frey, & Nelson, 2012; Johnson, Kahle, & Fargo, 2007; Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016; Prast, Van de Weijer-Bergsma, Kroesbergen, & Van Luit, 2018). Thus, not providing co-teachers with ongoing professional development could greatly impact student achievement.

By taking a deeper look at current instructional practices, the strengths and weaknesses of the current program may be revealed. An examination of current practices is crucial since co-teaching has been attributed to positive effects on students’ academic achievement (Castro, 2007; Kofahl, 2016; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wilson & Michaels, 2006), yet Apple Valley
Elementary has not reaped these benefits. For example, a longitudinal study conducted by Walther-Thomas (1997) investigated the implementation of co-teaching at both the elementary and middle school levels. The study findings revealed that the majority of the students with disabilities were more successful in the co-taught setting than in their previous self-contained setting (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Furthermore, a qualitative study conducted by Wilson & Michaels (2006) explored the perceptions of regular education and special education students who were placed in a co-taught classroom. The findings revealed that both regular education and special education students believed that they benefited academically from being placed in a co-taught setting (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Since co-teaching has been proven as an effective instructional strategy for students, it is important to examine co-teachers’ activities and experiences with co-teaching to help the researcher gain a better understanding of what these individuals believe is working and what aspects of co-teaching can be improved upon. This information can then be utilized to develop ongoing professional development for staff so that all students succeed.

**Organization and Problem Statement**

The purpose of this literature review was to understand the activities and experiences that affect the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. As a result, the researcher utilized literature from a variety of sources that included academic journals, dissertations, and books. While studying the literature, the following central themes emerged as essential to understanding this topic more thoroughly: co-teaching, co-teaching partnerships, co-planning, professional development, and teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching. As a result, these themes of literature seek to address the following research question: “What are the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching and how do they make
sense of these activities and experiences as they relate to the overall effectiveness of the co-teaching model?"

**First Theme: Co-Teaching**

As school districts attempt to abide by federal mandates that require students to be educated within the least restrictive environment, a greater emphasis is being placed on inclusion instructional strategies. As a result, general education teachers are now working with special education teachers in a co-teaching partnership to meet the diverse needs of the students within their class (Austin, 2001; Friend, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

Over the years, researchers have developed several definitions of co-teaching. While researchers may have slightly different definitions of co-teaching, most researchers agree that when referring to special education instructional services, co-teaching involves a regular education teacher and a special education teacher working collaboratively with one another in the same classroom to educate students with diverse needs (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Beninghof, 2012; Conderman & Hedin, 2015; Friend, 2008; Gately & Gately, 2001; Murawski & Lochner, 2011; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Together, the two teachers must work together to plan and deliver lessons that meet the diverse needs of students. Additionally, the co-teachers must work together to decide what instructional delivery methods they are going to utilize throughout their lessons. Lastly, they must work together to decide what formative and summative assessments they will utilize throughout their instruction and then how they will utilize that information to support students (Conderman & Hedin, 2015; Murawski, 2008). However, to gain a better understanding of co-teaching and how it can be implemented within a
classroom, it is essential to understand the various models of co-teaching that can be utilized within a co-taught classroom.

Co-Teaching Models

Despite researchers agreeing on the basic definition of co-teaching, the way that co-teaching is implemented can vary from classroom to classroom. Friend (2010); Friend et al., (2010), Friend (2014), and Perez and Perez (2012) identified several models associated with the implementation of co-teaching.

1. *One teach/one observe* consists of one teacher instructing the whole class. Meanwhile, the other teacher observes various interactions within the classroom and may gather data about what they observe. For example, the teacher who is observing may be tracking how many times a specific student displays a specific behavior (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012).

2. *One teach/one assists* involves one teacher conducting a whole group lesson, while the other teacher assists by walking around the room and helping students who may have a question, need additional clarification, or may require additional supports to meet the lesson objectives successfully (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012).

3. *Parallel teaching* involves both teachers dividing the class in half. Then, each teacher presents the same content to their students. While the instructional content is the same, the teachers may opt to utilize different instructional delivery practices or materials within their group. This allows each teacher to individualize their instruction for the students in front of them (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012).
4. *Station teaching* involves the teachers dividing their class into three groups and creating three stations for the groups to rotate through. Typically, each station is designed to teach students part of the objective for that lesson. At two of the stations, a teacher directs the instruction and activities. For the other station, the students are given a task to work on independently. This model allows both teachers to be actively engaged with instruction (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012) and decreases the number of students each teacher works with. Working with a smaller number of students can make it easier for teachers to differentiate their instruction (Perez & Perez, 2012).

5. *Alternative teaching* involves one teacher instructing the class, while the other teacher simultaneously works with a small number of students. Often, the small groups are utilized to reteach a concept or to extend the learning of a concept. However, small groups can also be utilized for other purposes, such as assessment. This model affords teachers the opportunity to provide a small group of students with individualized attention and allows for differentiation (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012).

6. *Teaming/ Team Teaching* occurs when the two co-teachers work collaboratively to deliver instruction in front of the whole class. Teaming can be utilized by co-teachers to highlight different ways to approach a problem or task or to highlight differing viewpoints of an issue (Friend, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Friend, 2014; Perez & Perez, 2012). For example, one co-teacher may present a specific strategy to solve a math equation, and the other co-teacher may demonstrate the utilization of a different method to solve the same math equation.
While there are six different co-teaching models that co-teachers can utilize to deliver instruction, it is essential that the co-teachers work together to choose a co-teaching model that allows them to deliver the instructional content in a manner that supports their students’ needs (Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010). Additionally, Brawand and King-Sears (2017) advise that co-teachers should use different types of co-teaching models, instead of just one. Using a variety of models can help teachers maximize the utilization of both teachers and their expertise (Brawand & King-Sears, 2017). Unfortunately, studies have found that co-teachers typically do not vary their use of the co-teaching models. Instead, co-teachers frequently utilize the one-teach, one-assist model (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). The utilization of just the one-teach/one assist model is problematic because it is not as productive as other models because it limits the number of students that can be supported, and it interferes with whole group instruction. For example, often when a teacher assists a student, they are doing so during whole group instructional time. This results in the student missing valuable information and result in further gaps in the student’s knowledge (Friend, 2014).

Furthermore, Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) noted that the special educator is often the one who assumes the assisting role. This means that the special educator may walk around the classroom and help or redirect individual students. Meanwhile, the regular education teacher assumes the primary teaching role and is most often seen leading whole group instruction (Scruggs et al., 2007). This can result in the special educator being viewed and treated as an assistant or teacher helper instead of a certified teacher (Austin, 2001; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005), which can cause tension within the co-teaching partnership and can make the co-teaching relationship more difficult.
The research on co-teaching models asserts the need for co-teachers to be able to collaborate with one another effectively in order to seamlessly deliver instruction that meets the needs of a diverse student population (Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010). Additionally, research emphasized that a variety of co-teaching models should be utilized (Brawand & King-Sears, 2017) by co-teachers to maximize effectiveness. While current research has highlighted the importance of collaboration and the utilization of different co-teaching models, they have failed to take into account how co-teacher’s experiences with various co-teaching models may provide insights into the current strengths and weaknesses associated with the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

Effectiveness of Co-teaching

When examining the effectiveness of an instructional strategy, it is important to consider what the research to date has concluded. Subsequently, the following studies have examined the effectiveness of co-teaching. A qualitative study conducted by Walther-Thomas (1997) assessed the impact that co-teaching had on students. Findings revealed that overwhelmingly, teachers believed that all students benefited from their placement in a co-taught classroom (Walther-Thomas, 1997). These findings were similar to a qualitative study by Strogilos, Tragoulia & Kaila (2015), which investigated the effects of co-teaching on students with disabilities. The findings of the study reveal that both teachers and parents have reported that that co-teaching has led to an increase in students’ academic skills (Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015). These findings were also consistent with the academic benefits that were reported by a New York elementary school. The school had measured the same students’ progress on state testing over a period of three years. The first test was administered before co-teaching was implemented in the school. After the first test, the school began to implement co-teaching as an instructional
strategy for students. A second test was administered two years later, to the same group of students, and was utilized to measure the effectiveness of the co-teaching instructional strategy. State testing results revealed that students with and without disabilities had shown improvements in their academic scores. For example, in one grade-level, the percentage of students with disabilities who scored at or above grade level in the state testing went from 8 percent before co-teaching was implemented to 40% two years after co-teaching was implemented (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2010).

**Conclusion**

Co-teaching is a complex instructional strategy (Friend, 2008) that involves at least two individuals working collaboratively to plan, assess and deliver instruction to a group of students who have a wide variety of academic abilities (Cook & Friend, 1995; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Current research in co-teaching, emphasizes the importance of co-teachers working together to plan for and utilize different co-teaching models. By varying the different models utilized, co-teachers are able to utilize their strengths and become more successful in implementing co-teaching (Brawand & King-Sears, 2017). Additionally, previous studies have determined that teachers believe co-teaching can be an effective co-teaching strategy (Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2010; Walther-Thomas, 1997). However, these studies have failed to gain an understanding of how elementary co-teachers experience co-teaching and how their experiences and activities can provide insight into the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Second Theme: Co-Teaching Partnerships**

Co-teaching involves a minimum of two qualified individuals from different professional and personal backgrounds to collaborate and deliver instruction with one another in order to meet
the needs of a diverse student body (Cook & Friend, 1995). A co-teaching partnership has been equated to a dance partnership due to the amount of collaboration required to ensure they are not stepping on one another’s toes (Parker, Allen, McHatton, & Rosa, 2010). Conversely, others have compared the co-teaching partnership to a marriage because of the amount of time, energy, and nurturing that is needed to develop a successful co-teaching partnership (Howard & Potts, 2009; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski, 2008). However, like many other partnerships, co-teachers face a variety of factors that can impact their relationship.

**Personality**

A teacher’s personality can impact the success of a co-teaching partnership. A study conducted by Kames, Susko, & Elliot (2013), examined administrators’ knowledge about co-teaching partnerships. More specifically, the researchers utilized a survey to gather information about what the administrators knew about forming partnerships, supporting co-teachers, and evaluating co-teaching teams. The results of the study indicated that many of the administrators believed that it was essential to pair co-teachers based on teachers’ personalities.

Similar findings were noted in a study conducted by Bronson & Denith (2014), which examined the relationship of a kindergarten co-teaching partnership. The co-teaching pair was assigned to work together by their administrators based entirely on their similar personalities. Throughout the study, the co-teachers noted several obstacles they had to overcome in order to work as a team. However, the co-teachers stated they were able to overcome these challenges due to their similar personalities and their willingness to collaborate and compromise with one another (Bronson & Dentith, 2014).

These studies indicate that teachers’ personalities play an essential role in the formation and success of co-teaching partnerships. Therefore, administrators should take teacher
personalities into account when forming co-teaching partnerships. While current studies point to the importance of taking into account the personalities of co-teaching partnerships, the studies failed to address how co-teacher’s make sense of their co-teaching experience and how the participants understand how personalities may impact their co-teaching arrangement and the overall effectiveness of current co-teaching practices.

**Roles/Responsibilities**

It is imperative to consider how co-teachers perceive their role in a co-teaching relationship because it can affect the success of a co-teaching partnership. A study conducted by Gurgur and Uzuner (2010) examined teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching. The findings revealed that the co-teachers had different expectations of one another’s responsibilities and roles within the co-teaching partnership. For example, the regular education teacher believed that her responsibility was to educate the regular education students, while the special educator should assist her. As a result, the regular education teacher planned and conducted whole group instruction on her own with no input from her special education co-teacher. Therefore, the special educator often assumed the role of assistant, which limited her impact she was able to make with students in the class. Ultimately, this caused a great deal of conflict in their co-teaching relationship and affected their success (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010).

Similar findings were noted by Austin (2001) and Panscofar and Petroff (2016). These studies assert that a teacher’s perception of their role within a co-teaching relationship can affect the implementation of co-teaching. Furthermore, the studies found that their perceptions also influenced their willingness to collaborate with one another and the overall success of the co-teaching partnership (Austin, 2001; Panscofar & Petroff, 2016).

**Conclusion**
The findings affirm that a teacher’s personality and how they perceive their role within their co-teaching partnership can affect the success of the co-teaching partnership. Since co-teaching involves at least two teachers working together on an ongoing basis, it is important to understand the factors that can impact their relationship dynamic. While current studies have explored some of the factors that can impact co-teaching partnerships, the studies have failed to examine how a co-teacher’s activities and experiences, with their co-teaching partner, can impact the overall effectiveness of the co-teaching model. Therefore, this study will add to and extend the existing literature by exploring how an individual makes sense of their co-teaching activities and experiences. Moreover, the researcher hopes to utilize the participant's experiences and activities to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the co-teaching model.

**Third Theme: Co-Planning**

Co-planning is an essential component of effective co-teaching. Co-planning involves both teachers dedicating time to engage in lesson planning, discuss objectives, and determining how they can best meet their students’ needs (Pratt et al., 2016). However, despite these benefits, many co-teachers do not receive adequate co-planning time (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murawski, 2006; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Failing to provide co-teachers with co-planning time can negatively impact the effectiveness of co-teaching.

**The Importance of Co-Planning**

Co-planning is important for ensuring the effective implementation and utilization of a variety of co-teaching strategies. Horne and Timmons (2009) conducted a study to examine twenty teacher’s opinions on inclusion and its effectiveness for students with special needs. The study found that the majority of the teachers believed that inclusion was effective for meeting the needs of students with different abilities. Additionally, the findings found that the teachers...
valued planning time because it helped them address the needs of their students. However, many of the teachers believed that they were not given enough time to plan with special education teachers in an effective manner. As a result, the teachers reported that it was difficult to meet the diverse needs of the students in their class (Horne & Timmons, 2009).

These findings are consistent with studies done by Bryant Davis et al., (2012), Fennick & Liddy (2001), and Hang and Rabren (2009). These studies also confirmed that teachers needed adequate planning time to ensure that all students' needs are met through appropriate supports and challenges (Bryant Davis et al., 2012; Fennick & Liddy; Hang & Rabren, 2009). These studies emphasize the importance of co-planning time in helping teachers design and implement lessons with appropriate supports.

Co-Planning and the Effects on Co-Teaching

A study conducted by Bryant Davis et al. (2012) examined three different groups of middle school co-teaching teams. The study analyzed co-teachers lesson plans over a period of three years, utilizing a content analysis approach. The findings indicate that although a variety of co-teaching models were employed, the one-teach, one-assist model was used most frequently by co-teachers. The researchers attributed these results to the co-teachers not having enough time to adequately plan together (Bryant Davis et al., 2012). Similarly, a study conducted by Simmons and Magiera (2007) examined three high schools within the same district to determine if high school co-teachers were implementing the co-taught model correctly. The researchers found that co-teaching was being executed inconsistently throughout the district. As a result, the researchers recommended that in addition to professional development on co-teaching, the schools should implement daily co-planning time. The researchers assert that regular common planning time results in an improved co-teaching implementation that meets the needs of all
learners (Simmons & Magiera, 2007). These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Embury and Dinnesen (2013) and Pancsofar and Petroff (2016), which found that co-planning time can affect co-teachers comfort level with various co-teaching roles or models (Embury & Dinnesen, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). These studies stress the importance of co-planning time, which affords co-teachers the opportunity to plan a variety of co-teaching models to assist them in meeting the needs of their students.

**Conclusion**

The findings of these studies affirm the need for co-teachers to be given ample common planning time to develop lessons. This common planning time should be utilized by co-teachers to develop differentiated lessons and determine the best way to deliver the instruction to their students. While current studies have examined the importance of co-teaching, they have yet to examine the activities that occur during common planning time. Therefore, this study will add to and extend the existing literature by examining the activities and interactions of co-teachers during common planning time.

**Fourth Theme: Administrative Support**

School administrators are vital in fostering and supporting teachers that are in a co-teaching relationship. However, administrators often do not have the knowledge or skills needed to help a co-teaching partnership flourish. A study conducted by Kamens, Susko, & Elliot (2013) investigated what administrators knew about co-teaching by utilizing an electronic survey to gather data. The survey revealed that there was a large discrepancy in the amount of co-teaching knowledge that administrators had. Furthermore, the findings revealed that the administrators expected their co-teachers to collaborate and share teaching responsibilities. Yet,
often, administrators did not have the knowledge needed to support the co-teaching teams (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013).

Similarly, Pratt (2014) conducted a study to examine how five co-teaching partnerships resolved challenges that arose as a result of working together. The findings revealed that the co-teaching pairs thought administrative support was one of the crucial elements needed to help make them overcome obstacles that they may face. Some ways in which the co-teachers believed their administrators could support them was by providing them with professional development related to co-teaching and providing the co-teachers with time to plan and work on challenges they are facing (Pratt, 2014).

Conclusion

Despite the overwhelming need for co-teacher’s to be supported by the administration, studies have found that administrators are unprepared to support co-teachers and help them develop their co-teaching partnerships. This is especially troubling because administrators are the ones who typically pair co-teachers together, provide them with support, and help to ensure the co-teaching team is successful. However, without proper training, this can be difficult.

Therefore, this study will add to and extend current research by understanding how co-teacher’s activities and experiences with co-planning at Apple Valley Elementary School can provide insight into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching model.

Fifth Theme: Co-Teaching Professional Development

Teachers and administrators have various understandings of what co-teaching means and what it looks like in practice. This lack of knowledge is partly due to the fact that pre-service education programs do not prepare teachers and administrators to implement co-teaching successfully (Kamens, Susko, & Elliot, 2013). Moreover, many teachers do not receive
professional development on co-teaching as part of their employment. Therefore, it is essential that teachers and administrators are engaged in on-going professional development centered around co-teaching.

**Professional Development for Pre-Service Teachers**

A study conducted by Keefe & Moore (2004) examined eight co-teaching partnerships at the high school level to determine the challenges that they faced when establishing their co-teaching relationships. The findings of the study revealed that creating successful co-teaching partnerships were challenging because teachers felt unprepared to meet the challenges associated with teamwork. The researchers also found that many of the teachers involved in the study did not feel prepared because their pre-service experience did not include a co-teaching component. Therefore, they contend that many new teachers do not have the skills necessary to develop and maintain a co-teaching relationship. This can make it difficult for teachers to collaboratively decide on what responsibilities and roles each co-teacher will assume for each lesson (Keefe & Moore, 2004). These findings are consistent with studies conducted by Kroeger et al. (2012) and Pancsofar and Petroff (2016). The studies highlighted the need for more co-teaching professional development experiences for pre-service teachers (Kroeger et al., 2012; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Furthermore, the studies asserted that pre-service professional development could impact the way that co-teaching is implemented (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016) and increase collaboration among co-teachers (Kroeger et al., 2012).

While numerous studies have advocated for the need for pre-service professional development for teachers, to date, there have been few studies that have examined co-teaching professional development at the pre-service level. Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010) conducted a four-year study that compared the educational experiences of students who were...
engaged in a traditional pre-service teaching program and those students who received training in co-teaching as part of their pre-service experience. The findings of the study indicated that the pre-service teachers who engaged in co-teaching were more prepared to share the classroom with another adult and felt more comfortable with grouping students and utilizing a variety of co-teaching models to support student learning (Bacharach, Heck, & Dahlberg, 2010). Similar findings were reported in a study conducted by Ricci, Zetlin, and Osipova (2017). This qualitative study examined the perceptions of special education pre-service teachers in regards to their experiences with co-teaching during their in-service training. The findings of the study highlighted that the pre-service teachers experienced many challenges as they practiced implementing co-teaching instructional strategies. Some of the challenges they faced included a lack of time for collaboration and dealing with personality differences within the co-teaching relationship. Despite these challenges, the majority of the pre-service educators believed that their co-teaching skills were enhanced, and their ability to meet the needs of a diverse student population was enhanced as a result of their pre-service training that included co-teaching experiences (Ricci, Zetlin, & Osipova, 2017). These studies highlight the benefits of including co-teaching as part of pre-service educators' training.

**Professional Development for Teachers**

A study conducted by Keefe & Moore (2004) investigated eight co-teaching partnerships to determine if the co-teachers faced any challenges that hindered the development of their co-teaching partnerships. The findings revealed that co-teachers faced many challenges. For example, many co-teachers reported that they lacked the content knowledge needed to assume various co-teaching models. Additionally, the co-teachers expressed that they felt unprepared to meet the challenges associated with collaboration. Consequently, many teachers believed they
would have benefited from professional development to help support them as they attempted to implement the co-teaching model (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

These findings were consistent studies conducted by Kroger et al. (2012) and Panscofar and Petroff (2016). These studies also stressed the need for additional training in co-teaching (Kroeger et al., 2012; Panscofar & Petroff, 2016). Furthermore, the researchers stated that professional development in co-teaching could impact the way co-teaching was implemented (Panscofar & Petroff, 2016) and could help to foster teamwork and collaboration within the partnership (Kroeger et al., 2012).

Similar findings were noted by Embury and Dinneson (2012) and Tzivinikou (2015), who also found that co-teaching professional development could have an effect on the implementation of co-teaching. More specifically, the studies found that teachers who participated in co-teaching professional development training were more likely to utilize a variety of co-teaching models and had a better attitude towards co-teaching (Embury & Dinnesen, 2012; Tzivinikou, 2015).

**Professional Development for Administrators**

Kamens et al. (2013) conducted a study to learn what administrators knew about evaluating and supporting co-teachers. The researchers utilized an electronic survey to gather information from various school leaders in New Jersey. The findings indicated that the leaders’ understanding of co-teaching was very inconsistent. This affected their ability to support co-teaching teams effectively (Kamens et al., 2013). A similar study conducted by Bai & Martin (2015) investigated the need for administrators to receive professional development training in special education to improve their knowledge of special education practices to support inclusive services for students. The researchers utilized a survey to gather information related to
administrators’ knowledge of special education. The findings indicated that administrators’ understandings of special education and inclusion were varied, and most administrators welcomed the idea of additional professional development to help strengthen their current practices (Bai & Martin, 2015). These results emphasize the need for administrators to receive professional development related to co-teaching and other inclusion strategies. Providing administrators with professional development will allow them to support teachers in implementing co-teaching more effectively.

Conclusion

Both teachers and administrators need professional development to support the implementation of co-teaching. Studies have found that both teachers and administrators have varying degrees of knowledge about co-teaching. This can result in co-teachers not being able to implement co-teaching within their classroom correctly. Furthermore, the lack of administrator knowledge can hinder teacher support and professional growth. Therefore, this study will add to current research by exploring the activities and experiences of co-teachers related to professional development and their implementation of the co-teaching model.

Sixth Theme: Teacher’s Perceptions of Co-teaching

Co-teachers are actively involved in the implementation of co-teaching instructional strategies. Therefore, their perceptions of co-teaching can provide valuable insight into what they believe is currently working in a co-teaching program and what can be improved upon. Furthermore, their perceptions of the co-teaching may influence how they implement co-teaching within their classroom. Therefore, it is essential to explore current research on the topic.

High School Teacher’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching
King-Sears et al. (2014) conducted a case study to examine the perspectives of two high school co-teachers’ and their students with disabilities regarding co-teaching instructional practices. The findings of this study revealed that the special education co-teacher was viewed as the main teacher in the classroom due to their frequent interactions with students. However, the regular education science teacher was more likely to introduce new content to the class. Both co-teachers believed they had a strong co-teaching partnership. Lastly, students enjoyed being in a co-taught classroom (King-Sears et al., 2014). Similarly, Majchrzak (2015) also conducted a qualitative study that investigated the perceptions of eight relatively new high school co-teaching partners. More specifically, the co-teachers involved in the study were asked to reflect on their co-teaching relationships and their utilization of instructional strategies. The findings of this study revealed that most of the co-teachers perceived that co-teaching was a beneficial instructional strategy for all students. For example, the majority of teachers believed co-teaching was effective because it afforded the teachers an opportunity to manage behaviors in an efficient manner. Additionally, it allowed the teachers to share their thoughts on how to best meet their students’ needs. Furthermore, the teachers perceived that the co-teaching instructional model allowed students to be more successful than a traditional classroom with one teacher. Regarding their perceptions of their utilization of co-teaching models, the majority of the co-teachers reported that they primarily utilized one co-teaching instructional model. Lastly, the findings revealed that the special education co-teacher often took on the role of assistant, which involved helping and redirecting students when needed. Meanwhile, the regular education co-teacher was in charge of instructing the whole class (Majchrzak, 2015).

Conversely, a mixed-methods study conducted by Beaudoin-Colwell (2009) investigated whether special education co-teachers and regular education co-teachers had different
perceptions of co-teaching. Furthermore, the study also investigated the factors that the teachers believed contributed to effective co-teaching. The findings of the study revealed that special education co-teachers and regular education co-teacher’s perceptions about co-teaching were relatively similar. However, the findings did indicate that both regular education co-teachers and special education co-teachers believed that there was a need to provide both teachers with common planning time and professional development. Another common theme that emerged was that the co-teachers desired more support from their administration (Beaudoin-Colwell, 2009). Similar findings were reported by Macellus (2016), who conducted a qualitative study to investigate teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching at the high school level. The findings revealed that the co-teachers did not feel as though they had enough common planning time or professional development to implement co-teaching effectively. Additionally, the findings also revealed that the co-teachers believed that the amount of special education paperwork hindered their ability to implement co-teaching effectively (Marcellus, 2016).

**Middle School Teacher’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

Waddy (2010) conducted a multiple case study to examine what middle school co-teachers perceive as the challenges to the implementation of co-teaching. The findings revealed that the co-teachers perceived several factors as challenges to implementing co-teaching effectively: 1) The co-teachers believed that the special educator’s schedule was not conducive to co-teaching because the special educators had a very large caseload of special education students that they needed to service, 2.) The co-teachers believed that they lacked professional development related to co-teaching which hindered their implementation of co-teaching instructional models, 3.) The co-teachers believed that their inability to choose their co-teaching partner also affected their implementation of co-teaching, 4.) Co-teachers reported that they
lacked common planning time, which impacted their ability to co-teach effectively, 5.) The
student population within a co-taught classroom is very different from the population of students
outside a co-taught classroom, 6.) Co-teachers are often not viewed as equals within the co-
teaching relationship, 7.) Administrative support is needed to help facilitate the implementation
of co-teaching instructional strategies (Waddy, 2010).

Conversely, West (2016) investigated how middle school teachers perceive the
effectiveness of the co-teaching program in relation to improving students’ academic
achievement. The findings revealed that the majority of the co-teachers believed that a co-
teaching program was effective in meeting all students’ needs if co-teaching was being properly
implemented. Additionally, the majority of the co-teachers believed that the students behaved
better in a co-taught classroom (West, 2016).

**Elementary School Teacher’s Perceptions of Co-Teaching**

A study conducted by King (2010) investigated how elementary school co-teachers
perceive the instructional model, co-teaching. The findings from the study revealed that the
majority of the participants believed co-teaching was an effective instructional strategy and was
beneficial in helping students with disabilities improve academically. The findings also revealed
that the co-teachers believed common planning time, collaboration, and professional
development was essential in making a co-teaching partnership work. Additionally, findings
revealed that curriculum pacing was an issue; it was difficult for the co-teaching teams to stay at
the same pace as regular education classrooms. Also, participants noted that budgetary concerns
were also an issue and could affect the continued implementation of co-teaching (King, 2010).

Conversely, a case study conducted by Smith (2012) investigated fifth-grade elementary
co-teachers’ perceptions of what they believed as important components of co-teaching as well
as how they believed the current co-teaching practices could be improved upon. The study findings revealed that the participants believed that co-teaching was a positive experience for them. The participants also noted that they believed the success of a co-teaching partnership was directly related to the number of years they were together as a team. However, they also believed that current co-teaching practices could be improved by creating a school-wide universal definition of co-teaching, providing co-teachers with more professional development on co-teaching, and reducing the number of students in co-taught classrooms (Smith, 2012).

Conclusion

The aforementioned studies highlight how teachers at various grade levels perceive co-teaching. The studies assert that the majority of teachers perceive that co-teaching instructional practices are beneficial to students. While the current studies have examined teachers’ perspectives towards co-teaching, they have not examined how co-teachers’ experiences and activities can be utilized to understand the current state of co-teaching practices. Such a study could provide insight into how co-teachers perceive current practices and what could be improved to enhance current co-teaching practices.

Summary

This literature review was conducted in order to gain information about what is known about factors that could impact the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. A review of the literature found that researchers have investigated several factors related to the effectiveness of co-teaching. In order to gain a more in-depth understanding, it was imperative to conduct a literature review to examine what is known about co-teaching and the factors that could impact its effectiveness. The three main themes that emerged as a result of the literature review included: co-teaching, co-teaching partnerships, and professional development.
However, despite all of the research on the factors that influence the success of co-teaching, a review of the literature related to co-teacher’s activities and experiences with co-teaching at an elementary level was not very extensive. The majority of the studies related to the teachers’ perceptions of co-teaching focused on the middle school (Waddy, 2010; West, 2016) and high school (Beaudoin-Colwell, 2009; King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, & Preston-Smith, 2014; Majchrzak, 2015; Marcellus, 2016) settings. However, only two studies examined co-teacher’s perceptions of co-teaching at the elementary level (King, 2010; Smith, 2012). Furthermore, there have been no studies to date which have utilized Second Generation Activity Theory to examine teachers’ activities and experiences at the elementary level in order to gain a deeper understanding of current co-teaching practices. Therefore, this study will extend the existing literature on the subject by utilizing Second Generation Activity Theory to understand the activities and experiences of elementary teachers who engage in co-teaching and how these activities and experiences relate to the overall effectiveness of the co-teaching model. It is the researcher’s hope that by highlighting the current areas of strengths and areas of improvements with the current co-teaching model, this information can then be eventually utilized by educators within the district to develop an ongoing and effective co-teaching professional development for the teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School.
Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching. The researcher hopes that the information from this study can provide insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the current co-teaching practices being utilized by Apple Valley Elementary School. This information can then be utilized by educators to put together a comprehensive co-teaching professional development program.

Research Question

How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

Qualitative Research Approach

Upon completing a comprehensive review of the literature and contemplating the benefits and drawbacks of each research design, the researcher believes that a qualitative, single case study approach should be utilized for this study (Yin, 2018). A qualitative research approach was ultimately chosen because qualitative research recognizes that everyone will not have the same experiences, even if individuals experience the same event. Therefore, qualitative research recognizes that each individual may experience a phenomenon in a different way. Since the purpose of this study is to understand how the participants made sense of their activities and experiences with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School, it made sense to utilize a research design that recognized each participant’s experiences might be different and their unique perspective can be utilized to gain a holistic understanding of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary (Merriam, 1998). In order to gain a deeper insight into the participant’s experiences, semi-structured interviews and observations were utilized to gather data and to determine
emerging themes. These themes were then utilized to make recommendations on how to improve current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Constructivism**

A constructivist paradigm will be utilized to help frame and guide this case study (Mertens, 2010). According to Creswell and Poth (2018), constructivists are interested in gaining a better understanding of their surroundings by relying on participants’ views of their experiences. This often requires the researcher to interact directly with their participants during the data gathering process to elicit their unique views and understanding of the experience. Therefore, constructivists will often gather their own data through a variety of methods such as interviews, surveys, and observations, which enables them to engage with their participants throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Case Study**

Modern case study research is associated with the constructivist paradigm (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). A single-case study approach will be utilized because it will allow the researcher to gain an understanding of Apple Valley Elementary School teacher’s activities and experiences with co-teaching. According to Yin (2018), a case study approach is often chosen by researchers when they want to learn more about a current phenomenon or case by studying it within the context that it is occurring. Once a case is selected, it must be bound by clearly describing who will be included in the case, where the case is located, and the timeframe that the case will be examined during. Unlike other research methods, a case study approach places emphasis on conducting an in-depth study of both the case and the setting in which that particular case occurs (Yin, 2018). Therefore, utilizing a case study approach requires the utilization of multiple data gathering techniques. Some examples of
data collection techniques that can be utilized in a case study approach include interviews, emails, questionnaires, observations, posters, artwork, videos, audio recordings, or surveys (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Baxter and Jack (2008) assert that the utilization of multiple data sources can provide a more holistic view of the research problem by exploring the problem from multiple perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

**Justification for utilizing case study.** A single case study approach was chosen for this study because it will allow the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of Apple Valley Elementary School teacher’s experiences with co-teaching. The utilization of a case study approach will allow the researcher the opportunity to be an active participant within the study and affords the opportunity to view the participants within their natural setting. By utilizing multiple data points (semi-structured interviews and observations), it allowed the researcher to gain a deep understanding of the participant’s unique experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Furthermore, the utilization of multiple data points will also help to triangulate the data that will be collected and can also add to the validity of this study (Creswell, 2015).

According to Yin (2018), a case study approach should be utilized to understand a current, complex, and real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2018). According to Friend (2008), co-teaching is a very complex instructional practice that can be difficult to implement (Friend, 2008). Therefore, it was imperative to select a methodology that would enable the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how Apple Valley Elementary School teachers describe their experiences with the instructional strategy, co-teaching.

After careful consideration, a single qualitative case study design will be utilized for this study because the focus of this study is a single specific case (Creswell & Poth, 2018), Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engage in co-teaching. Currently, 18 of the 30
classrooms at Apple Valley Elementary School are currently designated as co-taught classrooms. More specifically, there is one designated co-taught kindergarten, first-grade, second-grade, and third-grade classrooms. Additionally, there are two designated fourth-grade and fifth-grade classrooms. While co-teaching has been in place at Apple Valley Elementary School in some capacity for over ten years, there has been a greater emphasis on ensuring that both co-teachers are teaching together every day. In the past, the special education co-teacher was split between two or more classrooms. Ultimately, this case was selected because the participants, Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers, could provide their unique perspectives and experiences related to co-teaching. The participant’s insights helped shed light on the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary.

Lastly, the utilization of a case study approach will be instrumental in helping to frame all aspects of this study. For example, the influence of a case study approach can be noted in the research question. According to Yin (2018), a case study is best utilized when the researcher is attempting to answer a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question (Yin, 2018). This was taken into consideration as the researcher formulated the following research question: How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching? Additionally, the case study approach influenced the selection of the participants, research site, phenomena under study, the data gathering methods, and data analysis processes to be utilized.

**Key scholars associated with case study.** Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales (2007) and Yazan (2015) assert that there are three key or seminal scholars who are known for advancing case study methodology. The three seminal scholars are Robert K. Yin, Sharan Merriam, and Robert E. Stake. These three seminal scholars have written numerous books and
articles that provide other researchers with information about conducting a case study (Creswell, Hanson, Plano-Clark, & Morales, 2007; Yazan, 2015). After a thorough review of each seminal author, the researcher has chosen to utilize Yin’s approach to case study methodology. Next, the researcher will provide a brief overview of each seminal scholar and their beliefs.

Dr. Robert K. Yin is the chairman and CEO of COSMOS, which is a research firm that works for private, non-profit, government, and business organizations. Yin is also a published author of over 100 different publications. In addition, Yin actively works to train other researchers from a variety of different sectors (Yin, 2018).

However, Yin (2018) is probably best known for his work pertaining to the case study methodology. He has also developed one of the most recognized and utilized definitions of a case study (Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), “a case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.” (Yin, 2018, p. 15). Yin utilized this definition and his experience to help researchers gain a better understanding of how to conduct a case study. In fact, Yin has written and edited several books and research articles to help both students and seasoned researchers learn more about conducting a case study (Yin, 2018).

Another seminal scholar who helped to develop the case study approach is Dr. Robert E. Stake. Dr. Stake is currently a professor of education at the University of Illinois. In addition, he has also previously worked as a director for the Center of Independent Research on Classical Education (Illinois College of Education, n.d.), which focuses on promoting classical education in schools (CIRCE Institute, 2018). Additionally, Stake is also a well-published author in case study methodology (Stake, 1995).
Stake (1995) has developed his own unique definition and understanding of a case study approach (Stake, 1995). According to Stake, “case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (Stake, 1995, p.xi). In addition to defining case study, Stake (1995) has worked to advance the case study approach by creating and defining three unique types of case studies. The first type, an intrinsic case study, is utilized to gain a better understanding of a phenomenon that the researcher is genuinely interested in knowing more about. The second type of case study is called a collective case study. A collective case study is when a researcher examines several cases and compares them to gain a more holistic view of the phenomenon. Lastly, the instrumental case study is a method used by researchers who utilize the case to help them gain a deeper understanding of an issue or problem that the researcher wants to learn more about (Stake, 1995).

In addition to Yin and Stake, Dr. Sharan B. Merriam is also known for her contributions to the case study approach. Merriam (1998) is a professor at the University of Georgia, where she focuses on adult education. Merriam is also a respected researcher whose research interests have been centered around adult learning, education, and qualitative research designs (Merriam, 1998). Similar to Yin (2018) and Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) has also been recognized for her work, which contributes to advancing the case study methodology (Merriam, 1998). According to Merriam (1988), “A qualitative case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1988, p. 21).

**Participants**

The researcher utilized purposeful homogeneous sampling to identify possible participants for this study. According to Creswell & Poth (2018), purposeful sampling
involves selecting participants that will be able to provide rich data and insights into the research problem under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A homogeneous sample refers to a group of individuals who share a similar background or experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Based on these criteria, the initial purposeful sample included a total of sixteen co-teachers from Apple Valley Elementary School. This initial population of teachers was considered for this study because it focused on the experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, and there are currently sixteen co-teachers employed by Apple Valley Elementary School. In addition, the researcher plans to utilize criterion-based sampling. According to Patton (2002), criterion sampling involves selecting participants based on their ability to meet certain conditions. Therefore, criterion sampling was utilized to narrow the sample size to individuals who could provide the researcher with rich data (Patton, 2002). The following three requirements were utilized to narrow down the participants of this study: 1). The participants must be current co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, 2). The participants must have at least two years of co-teaching experience at Apple Valley Elementary School, 3). The participant cannot be the researcher. After applying these criteria, there was a total of twelve participants who were eligible to participate in this study. It should be noted that Yin (2018) does not give a specific number of participants that must participate in order for a case study to be considered valid. Thus, this sample number of participants is aligned with Creswell (2015), who suggests that researchers use a small number of participants in order to gain an in-depth understanding of each participant and their experiences (Creswell, 2015). Similarly, Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) also advocate for a small sample size to allow the researcher to fully understand each participants’ experiences (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).
Research Site

The study site was a Title I public elementary school in the northeastern region of the United States that utilized co-teaching as an instructional model. The school serviced approximately 600 students in grades k-5 and employed approximately 40 full-time classroom teachers. At the time the study was conducted, there were eight classrooms within the school that were designated as co-taught classrooms.

Procedures

After receiving IRB approval from Northeastern University, the researcher requested permission from the superintendent of schools, to conduct a single qualitative case study at Apple Valley Elementary School. According to Creswell (2015), it is imperative to seek permission from a potential research site before any research takes place in order to adhere to ethical research guidelines (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher provided the superintendent with a copy of the IRB approval letter and a copy of the research proposal. As a courtesy, an email was also sent to the Apple Valley Elementary School’s principal to request permission to access the research site.

Once permission was granted from both the superintendent and principal, the researcher asked the principal to provide a list of individuals that met the study’s criteria along with their email information. A recruitment letter was sent, via email, to the individuals identified by Apple Valley Elementary School’s principal as potential participants. After sending the email to these individuals, the researcher waited for them to respond. A total of six individuals replied to the email and stated they were interested in participating in this study.

These six participants were then sent a participant consent form via email. The email also contained a note that asked them to carefully review the attached consent form prior to the first
meeting. Additionally, the email included the email address and cell phone number of the researcher in case the participants had any questions or concerns. Prior to the first interview session, the researcher once again reviewed the consent form. The participants were then asked if they have any questions or concerns that they wanted to be addressed. Then, the researcher provided time for the participants to re-read and sign the document if they chose. Once the consent was signed, data collection began.

**Data Collection**

This qualitative case study was conducted at Apple Valley Elementary School, which is located in the northeastern region of the United States during the winter and spring of 2019. The purpose of this case study was to gain an understanding of how Apple Valley Elementary School teachers describe their activities and experiences with co-teaching. Therefore, the participants of this study included both regular education and special education co-teachers. The utilization of multiple participants was important because it allowed the researcher to understand the different ways in which the participants experience co-teaching. In order to gain a deeper and thorough understanding of the participant’s activities and experiences, it was essential to utilize multiple data collection methods (Yin, 2018). Therefore, two different data collection methods were utilized in this study. The utilization of multiple data collection methods aided in triangulation, which also added to the validity of this study (Creswell, 2015).

**Interviews**

The main source of data collection for this study was obtained through semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant that lasted approximately 20-40 minutes. The first semi-structured interview was utilized to gain basic background information about each participant, such as their work history, current
role, educational background, and some of their experiences with co-teaching. For more detailed information regarding the interview questions, please see Appendix A. According to Atkinson (2011), it was important to allow the participants to select the setting of the interview. Therefore, the participants selected where the interviews took place. The first interview served as an opportunity for the participant to get to know the researcher and to establish a positive rapport with them (Atkinson, 2011). The second semi-structured interview focused on their activities and experiences related to co-teaching. The interview questions were framed so that they are in alignment with this study’s theoretical framework, Activity Theory. For more detailed information regarding the interview questions, please see Appendix B. In addition to the two semi-structured interviews, the participants also completed a member checking session at the conclusion of the data gathering process.

Advantages. Semi-structured interviews were selected as a data collection method because it had several advantages. First, interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to understand a phenomenon or experience that they could not directly observe. Additionally, the interviews provided insight into a participant’s personal experiences. Lastly, interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to ask specific questions tailored to the types of information they hoped to learn about the participant and their experiences (Creswell, 2015).

Disadvantages. Despite the numerous advantages associated with utilizing interviews as a data-gathering method, there are also disadvantages associated with utilizing interviews. For example, the participant may have been reluctant to share how they feel. This may have caused the participant to provide a response that they thought the researcher might have wanted to hear. Additionally, the participant may have had difficulty putting their thoughts or experiences into words. This may have affected the researcher's ability to truly understand the situation and the
meaning the participants were trying to convey. Lastly, there was a risk that the researcher may have unintentionally inserted their bias as they summarized and analyzed the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2015).

Observations

The second data collection method that the researcher utilized was observations. The researcher worked with the participants to find a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location to conduct the observations. Each participant participated in two observations during this study. The first observation of the participants lasted approximately 45 minutes. This observation was utilized to understand the activities and experiences of co-teachers during a co-planning session. During this observation, the participants worked on creating a lesson that they were planning to implement within the next few days. The second observation of the participants involved observing the co-teaching pair implementing the lesson they had planned for during the first observation.

During these observations, the researcher was a non-participant observer. As a nonparticipant observer, the researcher observed the participants and their surroundings from the back of their classrooms as they engaged in co-planning and co-teaching. The researcher collected data from these observations using field notes. The field notes included both descriptive and reflective notes that were taken during and after the observations. These observations were utilized to gain first-hand information about the participant's activities and experiences with co-teaching within their natural setting (Creswell, 2015).

Advantages. There are several benefits associated with the utilization of observations as a data-gathering technique. First, observations allowed the researcher to observe the participants within their natural setting as the activities were occurring. Additionally, the observations
provided additional insights into each of the participants and their behaviors. Lastly, observations were helpful because they provided additional insights into the participants’ experiences and feelings (Creswell, 2015).

**Disadvantages.** While there were several advantages to utilizing observations as a data-gathering technique, there were also some drawbacks. For example, at times, it was difficult for the researcher to gain clarification on what was said during the observation because the researcher took on an observer role. Additionally, at times it was difficult to focus and pay attention to what the participants were saying and doing during the observations. This was because there was a lot of activity and distractions during the observations. As a result, there were several brief moments were the researcher’s attention was drawn away from observing the participants (Creswell, 2015).

**Data Organization**

After the data was collected, the researcher prepared the data for the analysis process. The researcher utilized the theoretical framework, Activity Theory, to help guide the data analysis process. The first step in this process was to ensure that the data remains organized. Therefore, a locked file storage system and a password-protected digital file storage system was utilized. The file storage system was utilized to store all original handwritten documents. This included handwritten field notes and observations. Additionally, a password-protected digital file storage system was utilized to organize all typed information and recordings. The digital files will be organized by the participant and the data collection method. This method of organization helped to ensure that the researcher could locate information easily (Creswell, 2015; Miles et al., 2014).
After the data was collected and organized, the researcher utilized a word document, on the researcher’s password-protected computer, to transcribe all field notes that were collected during the observations. However, the researcher utilized Temi, a secured web-based transcription service, to transcribe the interview audio recordings into typewritten text. The researcher then checked the generated transcripts for accuracy by re-listening to the audio recordings and comparing them to the transcripts. If there are any discrepancies found, the researcher edited and revised the transcripts to ensure accuracy. This data was then organized into the aforementioned file storage systems.

Next, the data needed to be formally analyzed. The researcher began the formal data analysis process by choosing to code the data by hand instead of using a computer-based program. This allowed the researcher the opportunity for the researcher to interact with the data and see the patterns that emerged. Additionally, the study’s theoretical framework, Activity Theory, was used to focus the data analysis process.

Next, Yin (2018) recommends choosing a general analytic strategy. This can help the researcher look for patterns that emerge within the data. The general analytic method selected for this study was the ‘ground-up’ method. This method required the researcher to read through all of the data several times. After the data had been read several times, the researcher assigned codes to the data. Each code represented a different idea that emerged from the data (Yin, 2018). To help with the coding process, the researcher utilized In Vivo coding. In Vivo coding involved utilizing the participant’s actual words as codes (Miles et al., 2014). Therefore, the researcher re-read each individual line of the transcript and chose a word or phrase from every line that either resonated with the researcher, was repeated several times, or was related to the research question (Saldana, 2016). The researcher then highlighted these words or phrases in the
transcript. Next, the researcher wrote the selected words or phrases at the end of each transcribed line and placed quotation marks around them. This process was repeated for each line of the transcription.

Once there was a code for each line of data, the researcher started from the beginning of the transcript and wrote every code on an index card. Next, the researcher grouped similar codes together and then created an overarching category. The index cards were then arranged into an outline format. This allowed the researcher to analyze how the codes and categories were related to one another (Saldana, 2016).

Pattern coding was then utilized during the second cycle of the data analysis process. The goal of pattern coding is to reduce the number of categories or themes that developed from the first cycle of coding (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). The researcher began this cycle of coding by displaying the index cards on the floor according to the themes developed during the first round of coding. The cards were then carefully analyzed to determine if any relationships existed between the categories or if any overarching themes could be developed. Next, the index cards were sorted based on these new overarching themes or relationships. The researcher then displayed the data in a table to help with the readability of the data (Miles et al., 2014).

**Criteria for Quality Qualitative Research**

All research studies must adhere to fundamental guidelines to help ensure the quality of the study. Therefore, when conducting a study, the researcher must take great care to ensure the trustworthiness of the study by paying close attention to the study’s credibility. In addition, I need to be aware of how this study can be transferred to other studies. Lastly, I need to ensure that this study can be replicated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, Yin (2018), advocates the utilization of the following four tests to help ensure the quality of a case study: ‘construct
validity,’ ‘internal validity,’ ‘external validity,’ and ‘reliability’ (Yin, 2018). Following, the researcher will provide a detail explanation of how they will maintain the trustworthiness of this qualitative study.

**Ethical Considerations**

Creswell and Poth (2018) state that there are several ethical considerations that the researcher must keep in mind as they progress through the various stages of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, the following ethical considerations were utilized throughout the study to help ensure that all ethical guidelines were maintained.

Prior to beginning the study, all required forms were filled out in order to obtain IRB approval from Northeastern University. Once IRB approval was granted, the researcher obtained written permission from both the superintendent and principal to conduct the study at Apple Valley Elementary School. After approval was given, the researcher obtained a list of potential participants from Apple Valley Elementary School’s principal. These individuals were then invited via email to participate in the study. The recruitment letter included background information about the researcher, the purpose of the study, and information regarding how the researcher will protect them if they should choose to participate in the study. Additionally, these individuals were also provided with a consent form. The consent form explicitly stated that their participation in this study was voluntary, and ample time was given for them to review, ask questions, or voice concerns prior to signing the consent. Once consent was given, the data collection process began (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During the data collection process, a variety of data collection methods were utilized. These methods included interviews and observations. To help preserve the identity of the participants and the research site, they were all assigned pseudonyms. The pseudonyms were
utilized throughout the whole data collection process, and only the researcher has access to the participants’ real identities. The researcher utilized a professional transcription service (Temi) to transcribe all audio recordings into written form. All audio recordings were captured via an app (Temi) on the researcher’s password-protected phone and iPad. To help preserve the anonymity of each participant, the transcriber only had access to the participant’s pseudonyms. It is also important to note that the transcription service did not keep a copy of the data sent to them.

After the data was collected, the researcher stored all paper copies of the data in a locked filing cabinet inside the researcher’s home. Additionally, all electronic data collected was stored on password-protected files on the researcher’s password-protected computer. The only person who has access to these data files is the researcher. The researcher will keep all data secured for five years. After this time frame, the researcher will destroy all data by deleting all electronic files and shredding all paper files (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

During the data analysis and reporting process, the researcher took care to report the findings of the study in an honest manner. This included reporting any findings that contradicted the researcher's own beliefs and appropriately citing all sources used throughout the study. Additionally, the researcher took great care to ensure that the participants of the study remained anonymous. This was accomplished by not disclosing identifiable information about the participants of the study. Also, the researcher carefully wrote this so that it would be accessible to a wide variety of audiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Lastly, to help maintain the ethical guidelines of the study, the study will be accessible to individuals via ProQuest. The researcher hopes that by sharing the results of this study via ProQuest, other educators may benefit from this study’s findings or utilize the findings to help generate professional development (Creswell & Poth, 2018).
Credibility

In order to ensure the accuracy of the findings and analysis, it was imperative that the researcher validated their findings (Creswell, 2015). Therefore, the researcher utilized several strategies to help ensure the validity and credibility of the study. Following, each of the strategies utilized throughout the study is explained.

**Member checking.** Member checking was utilized as a strategy to help ensure the credibility of the study. Each participant in the study was given a copy of their transcripts ahead of time via email and was instructed to read the document carefully at their convenience. Once they were done reviewing the transcripts, the participants were asked to set up an interview with the researcher. During the interview, the participants were then given another opportunity to read the transcripts. When they were done reading the transcripts, the researcher asked the participants to verify the accuracy of the transcripts to ensure that they were a fair and accurate representation of what they said (Creswell, 2015).

**Triangulation.** Both Creswell (2015) and Yin (2018) advise that researchers utilize multiple participants and a variety of data gathering techniques in order to help ensure the credibility of the study. Therefore, the researcher utilized a total of six participants and several different data collection techniques. The participants of this study included both special education co-teachers and regular education co-teachers. By incorporating participants from different educational backgrounds, the researcher was able to gain multiple perspectives on co-teaching. Additionally, interviews and observations were utilized to gather data. The utilization of multiple data gathering techniques helped to add to the credibility of this study (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018).
Transferability

According to Creswell (2015) and Yin (2018), there are several different techniques that can be utilized to help ensure the transferability or external validity of a study (Creswell, 2015; Yin, 2018). Therefore, several different techniques were utilized to help ensure the validity of the study. Following, the researcher described each technique in detail.

Thick descriptions. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a thick description occurs when the researcher explicitly describes a case that the researcher is studying or a theme that has emerged from the data. This detailed description of the setting, participants, and/or theme helps the reader gain a better understanding of the study and whether the findings could be applied to a different situation or setting. If there are enough similarities between the initial case under study and another case, the results of the initial study may be transferable to the new site (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

External Audit

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommends that researchers utilize an external auditor or an outsider to help ensure the validity of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the researcher enlisted the help of her dissertation chair, second reader, and the third reader to help ensure the validity of the study. These individuals helped to ensure that the findings of the study were supported by the data and that all stages of the study were completed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the researcher carefully documented, collected, and stored a chain of evidence throughout the study (Yin, 2018). For the purpose of this study, a chain of evidence referred to the researcher maintaining an accurate record of all articles that were sourced throughout the study as well as the researcher's related notes. Additionally, the chain of evidence included detailed notes that described the various steps that were utilized during the data
collection and data analysis process. This could help an auditor trace the researcher’s thought process and can aid the auditor in understanding the various decisions that were made by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Internal Audit**

The researcher conducted a qualitative case study in order to understand the activities and experiences of both regular education and special education co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School. Since the researcher is currently employed by the district in which this study took place, it was imperative that the researcher examined any bias that she may have towards the study and how she controlled these biases.

Several years ago, the researcher was asked if she would be interested in co-teaching the following year. Despite not knowing what co-teaching entailed, the researcher agreed. The following year, the researcher (a general education teacher) was paired with a special education teacher. The special education teacher spent half of the day in the researcher’s classroom and the other half of the day in a first-grade classroom. During this first year, the researcher and the special education co-teacher did not have any common planning time. This made it difficult to utilize a variety of co-teaching models. Consequently, the researcher and the co-teacher mostly utilized the one teach, one observe co-teaching model. Both teachers became frustrated with not having a common planning period because they realized that the utilization of different co-teaching instructional models could benefit their students. With this realization, the researcher and her co-teaching partner approached the administration and voiced their need for common planning time. Unfortunately, no attempts were made to provide the researcher and her co-teaching partner with planning time that year.
In the following two years, the researcher continued to work with the same special education co-teacher. During this time, the researcher and her special education co-teacher took a voluntary course on co-teaching. As a result of this course, both the researcher and the special education co-teacher became more excited about co-teaching. Within the first few weeks of the course, the researcher and her co-teacher decided to implement a variety of co-teaching models that they had learned about in the class. However, the researcher’s co-teaching partner was still split between the researcher’s class and another class. Therefore, the researcher and her co-teaching partner still did not have common planning time. This made planning extremely challenging. Frustrated by their inability to implement a variety of co-teaching models, the researcher, and her partner approached the administration again to voice their concerns and frustrations. This time, the administration was able to provide the researcher and her partner with two, fifteen-minute planning periods a week. While this was not a lot of time, it did afford the researcher and her partner the ability to plan and utilize several different co-teaching models throughout the week. After several weeks of implementing a variety of co-teaching models, both the researcher and her co-teaching partner began to notice several changes. For example, both the researcher and her co-teaching partner noted that when they utilized a parallel co-teaching model, they were better able to support students and their needs. Additionally, both teachers noted that there were improvements in students’ academic performance and their behavior. The researcher and her co-teacher were excited about co-teaching and looked forward to the following year.

Unfortunately, for the next two years, the researcher was told that she would not be co-teaching. During this time, the researcher was a second-grade general education teacher. This experience made the researcher realize how much she missed co-teaching and her co-teaching partner. As a general education teacher, the researcher found it very difficult to differentiate her
instruction to meet all of her students’ needs. Additionally, she became frustrated with the lack of individual attention she was able to provide her students. Overall, this experience made her realize that her true passion was co-teaching.

At the start of the current school year, the researcher was once again given an opportunity to co-teach with her former co-teaching partner. However, this time, the researcher and her co-teaching partner now spend the entire day co-teaching. This afforded both teachers the opportunity to co-plan on a daily basis. As a result, several different co-teaching models were being utilized throughout the day. Both teachers have stated that this year has been the best co-teaching year that they have experienced. The researcher attributes this year’s success to knowing her co-teaching partner better, having the researcher’s co-teacher full-time in the classroom, becoming more familiar with the implementation of various co-teaching models, and having daily common planning time.

Overall, the researcher believes that co-teaching is a beneficial co-teaching strategy that can help all students learn and grow. However, the researcher also believes that in order for co-teaching to be successful, co-teaching teams must be given ample time to plan and get to know their co-teaching partners. Additionally, the researcher believes that co-teaching teams must have the support of their administration. Without administrative support, the researcher believes that co-teaching can be difficult to implement. This is because they may not see the value of providing common planning time to co-teachers.

Since the researcher has expressed several biases about co-teaching, it was important to control these biases. Since the researcher works in the district where she conducted her study, she must be mindful of how this impacted the study. For example, the researcher currently has professional teaching status within the district. As a teacher with professional teaching status,
the researcher had to be conscious of how their professional teaching status may have influenced the participant's responses. For example, a couple of the participants did not have professional teaching status. Therefore, they may have been reluctant to answer a question truthfully in fear that they may not be rehired. Therefore, the researcher took extra precautions to ensure that the participants and their responses remained anonymous. Additionally, since the researcher has worked in some capacity with the majority of the teaching staff at Apple Valley Elementary School, the researcher has formed their own opinions about these individuals, including their work habits, roles, strengths, and weaknesses. These personal views could present a challenge if not controlled. Therefore, the researcher took extra care when designing the interview instrument, conducting interviews, and interpreting the data. For example, open-ended questions were utilized throughout the interview process so that the questions won’t be misleading. Additionally, Creswell (2015) recommends utilizing member checking to help control researcher biases. As a result, the last interview was utilized for member checking. Prior to the interview, the participants were given the transcriptions from their interviews and observations. The participants were given ample time to read and digest the information. At a mutually agreed upon time and place, the researcher sat with each participant and again gave them the opportunity to re-read the transcripts. When they were done, the participants were asked if the transcripts were an accurate depiction of what they said and did. All of the participants agreed that the transcripts were an accurate account of what happened. Therefore, this member checking process helped to ensure the accuracy of the study by ensuring that all of the participant’s experiences and actions were portrayed in an accurate manner (Creswell, 2015).
Limitations

This study had several limitations. These limitations included a small sample size, the research site, and the researcher’s biases. The sample size of the study was viewed as a limitation because the number of participants was small in comparison to other research methods. The small sample size was a result of the limited number of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School and the number of individuals who responded that they would like to participate in the study. Since there were only sixteen co-teachers employed at Apple Valley Elementary School, the total sample population is limited to these sixteen co-teachers. Additionally, the research site was also a limitation of this study. Since all of the participants were from Apple Valley Elementary School, and they shared their unique experiences and activities with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School, it may be difficult to transfer the findings of this study to another setting. Lastly, since the researcher is currently employed by the district as a co-teacher. Therefore, she has some existing biases toward participants, the research site, and co-teaching. Although several measures were put in place to control for these biases, the researcher believed that their direct connection to the research site, participants, and co-teaching was viewed as a limitation to the study.
Chapter Four: Report of the Research Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engaged in co-teaching. Semi-structured interviews and observations were utilized to investigate teachers’ activities and experiences related to the instructional practice known as co-teaching. The collected data was then analyzed to gain a deeper understanding of the activities and experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School. As a result, the information gathered from this study was utilized to make recommendations on how to improve current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. In the first section, titled research overview, an overview of the study, and a rationale for utilizing the selected research approach is explained. In addition, there is an explanation of the data collection methods utilized along with the research question that guided the study. In the second section, titled research site and participant profiles, information pertaining to the research site, and the participants are provided. In the third section, data analysis, an analysis of the data collected will be explained. In the last section titled conclusion, an overview of the findings from this study is presented.

Research Overview

A qualitative single-case study approach was utilized for this study. A case study approach was selected to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon by studying it within the context in which it occurs (Yin, 2018). More specifically, a case study approach allowed for the examination of the following research question: How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-
teaching? Additionally, the utilization of several data collection methods helped to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ experiences and activities (Yin, 2018).

The data collection process began by conducting two semi-structured interviews with each participant. The questions for each interview were guided by Engeström’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which served as the theoretical framework for this research study.

Engeström’s Second Generation Activity Theory is best understood through his visual model. The model consists of two triangles: one large triangle and a smaller inverted triangle that is embedded into the larger one. The vertices of the larger triangle were labeled ‘mediating artifacts or tools,’ ‘rules,’ and ‘division of labor.’ Whereas, the vertices of the smaller inverted triangle were labeled as ‘subject,’ ‘object,’ and ‘community.’ This model focused on the activity system as a whole. Therefore, Engeström believed it was important to consider the collective actions of all individuals within the activity system which included: the tools that they were utilizing, the rules that they had to abide by, and how work was divided up amongst the members of the activity system (Engeström, 2001).

Second Generation Activity Theory was selected as a theoretical framework for this study because it allowed for a deeper understanding of the activities and experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School. Since co-teaching is a complex instructional strategy (Friend et al., 2010), it was important to utilize a theoretical framework that allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of such a complex phenomenon through the perspectives of multiple individuals (Foot, 2014). Additionally, by framing all interview questions utilizing Second Generation Activity Theory, the researcher was able to understand the various components that comprised the co-teaching activity system. By examining how the subjects, co-teachers, interact with each of the components of the activity system, it allowed for a better understanding of the
various components that comprise the implementation of the co-teaching model at Apple Valley Elementary School so that recommendations can be made to improve current co-teaching practices.

**Research Site and Participants’ Profiles**

**Research site**

Apple Valley Elementary School is a Title I public elementary school in the southeastern region of the United States. Apple Valley Elementary School services approximately 600 students in grades k-5 who have diverse learning needs. In order to meet some of these diverse learning needs, eight classrooms within the school have been designated as co-taught classrooms. Each of these co-taught classrooms has two full-time teachers who are responsible for educating the children in their class. One of the teachers is a certified regular education teacher, while the other is a certified special education teacher. This study focused on six co-teaching pairs who are currently teaching in a co-taught classroom and have a minimum of two years of co-teaching experience at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Participants**

Purposeful homogeneous sampling was utilized to determine participants for this study. When utilizing purposeful sampling, it is important to select participants who will be able to provide rich data and insights into the research problem under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A homogeneous sample was also utilized for this study. A homogeneous sample refers to a group of individuals who share a similar background or experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Based on these criteria, an initial purposeful sample included sixteen co-teachers, as this is the total number of co-teachers employed by Apple Valley Elementary School. Criterion sampling was then utilized to narrow the sample size to include
participants who could provide rich data for this study. According to Patton (2002), when utilizing criterion sampling, it is important to select participants based on their ability to meet specific criteria. The following three criteria requirements were utilized to narrow down the participants of this study: 1). The participants must be current co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, 2). The participants must have at least two years of co-teaching experience at Apple Valley Elementary School, 3). The participant cannot be the researcher. After applying these criteria, twelve participants were eligible to participate in this study. A recruitment letter was sent, via email, to these twelve individuals. A total of six participants, three co-teaching pairs, volunteered for this study. The co-teaching pairs consisted of one regular education teacher and one regular education teacher who worked in the same classroom setting for the entire workday. All co-teachers were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity. Table 1 provides a brief overview of each participant. Following the table, the profile of each participant is given.

Table 1

Teachers, Gender, Role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher’s name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rose</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regular Ed</td>
<td>5th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelsey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regular Ed</td>
<td>4th Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Regular Ed</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sue</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Special Ed</td>
<td>3rd Grade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First co-teaching pair: Sally and Rose.
**Sally.** Sally is a licensed special educator who currently holds her master’s degree. Sally is a veteran special educator at Apple Valley Elementary School. Sally has taught for over ten years in a variety of special education settings, including a resource room and a substantially separate classroom. She is currently employed as a fifth-grade special education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Rose.** Rose is a regular education teacher who currently holds her master’s degree. Rose is a veteran regular educator at Apple Valley Elementary School. Rose has over fifteen years of teaching experience. During this time, she has taught in a variety of settings, including a regular education classroom, an inclusion classroom, and a co-taught classroom. While working in these settings, she has worked closely with both special educators and a variety of interventionists. Rose currently works as a fifth-grade regular education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Second co-teaching pair: Jennifer and Kelsey.**

**Jennifer.** Jennifer has a master’s degree and currently works as a special education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School. She has been employed at Apple Valley Elementary School for over five years. During this time, she has worked in a variety of positions that have afforded her the opportunity to work with regular education teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, and support staff. She currently works as a fourth-grade special education teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Kelsey.** Kelsey has a master’s degree and has been an educator for over fifteen years. For the majority of her career, she has been a regular education co-teacher. Kelsey enjoys co-teaching and sharing her classroom with another educator. She is currently employed by Apple Valley Elementary School as a fourth-grade regular education co-teacher.
Third co-teaching pair: Sue and Regina.

*Sue.* Sue is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years. Sue holds a master’s degree and is currently employed by Apple Valley Elementary School as a special education teacher. Throughout her teaching career, Sue has taught in a variety of settings, including a substantially separate setting and a co-taught setting. Additionally, Sue has been a teacher of students with severe autism. Sue is currently a third-grade special education teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

*Regina.* Regina is a veteran regular education teacher who holds a master’s degree. Regina has been teaching for approximately ten years in a variety of settings and grade levels. She is currently a third-grade regular education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Data Analysis**

A qualitative single case study design was employed to understand how the participants made sense of their activities and experiences with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted to gather data. The utilization of different data collection methods throughout the study helped to triangulate the data that was collected. According to Creswell (2015), triangulating data increases the validity of this study (Creswell, 2015).

After each interview was conducted, Rev.com was utilized to transcribe the discussions. The transcriptions were then shared with each of the participants. Afterward, a follow-up meeting occurred with each participant. This allowed the participants to share any noted discrepancies within the transcripts so they could be corrected. Then, the transcripts were hand-coded utilizing In vivo coding. Afterward, pattern coding was used to identify emerging themes.
In addition to the interviews, two observations were conducted with each co-teaching pair. During the first observation, the co-teaching pair was observed during a lesson planning session. During the second observation, the co-teaching pair was observed as they implemented the lesson that they had previously planned for. After the observations, the handwritten notes and drawings were transferred to a computer template. The notes were then analyzed for emerging themes.

After analyzing the data, several themes emerged related to the research question. Figure two presents the themes that emerged from the data. In addition to the themes, the researcher also identified if the emergent theme was expected or unexpected based on the literature review.

Table 2

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**Theme One: Relationships**

Throughout the interviews, participants were asked questions to learn more about their relationships with their co-teaching partners, colleagues, administrators, and parents. A common theme in all of the participants’ interviews was the need to establish strong relationships with all
stakeholders in order for co-teaching to be successful. Following is a breakdown of the different stakeholders and the participant’s perceptions of their relationships.

**Co-teaching partner.** A common theme that occurred in all interviews was the importance of having a strong relationship with your co-teaching partner. The participants discussed some common factors that contributed to the building of a strong working relationship with your co-teaching partner. These common factors included time and personality.

First, the participants noted that strong relationships do not develop overnight; it takes time. During the first interview, Jennifer reflected back to the first year working with her co-teacher. Jennifer reported that she and her co-teacher acknowledged early on in their relationship that “establishing that relationship and that routine takes so much time.” She went on to elaborate that the first two years were “really tough” as they established their co-teaching relationship together. Kelsey also acknowledged how difficult their first few years of co-teaching were together. During her first interview, Kelsey stated:

> The first year, I think I just went with what I would normally do and she kind of went with me, and as we were just on that journey for that first hellish week together, we were able to kind of go back and forth, and we spent, we were here for hours, we were here for so long together and every, especially those first few months, we were just, we were together all the time. We stayed after school for hours, just trying to like get on the same page with each other, um, throw ideas back and forth, um, and, and just get an idea of who we were as teachers. When I say it was hairy, it was, it was pretty crazy.

Regina and Sue also highlighted the importance of devoting time to establishing their relationship early on. Regina noted:

> In the beginning, we, um, we met in the summer a few times to get to know each other, to also talk about curriculum and um, our visions for the year. And I think that was super helpful too, you know, be able to set the precedence for the year and for us to get to know one another before meeting the kids.
Sue also noted that although she couldn’t honestly remember how her co-teaching relationship with Regina started, she noted it was important that they spent time discussing what their co-teaching relationship should look like. Sue felt it was important that they both openly talked about what they felt should happen in a co-taught classroom. Afterward, she noted that if there were any disagreements, they would “work through any kind of kinks.” Rose and Sally also noted the importance of devoting time to establishing their relationship. Rose noted that “the dynamic between the two teachers is huge.” She noted that she and Sally had a prior friendship and that they had worked together previously. Rose believed that this friendship helped them establish their co-teaching relationship. Sally also noted that time was important for developing “trust” with their co-teaching partner.

Second, the participants noted the importance that personalities play in a co-teaching relationship. When asked about her experiences with co-teaching, Jennifer shared that her first co-teaching relationship wasn’t ideal. Jennifer stated that she and her co-teaching partner, “wasn’t a match, personality-wise.” In the end, she stated that their differences in personality attributed to the end of their co-teaching partnership. Similarly, Sue shared that personality differences can be difficult to overcome, especially if the co-teachers do not share similar educational philosophies. She suggested that administrators consider educational philosophies, personalities, and teaching styles when pairing co-teachers together. Sue stated that she “lucked out” when the administrators paired her with her current co-teacher. Sue recognized that she and her co-teacher are “a good balance” in terms of their personality. Rose also highlighted the importance that personality plays when developing a co-teaching partnership. During her interview, Rose concurred that “personality matters.” She believed that personality played a large part in ensuring that both teachers felt supported both inside and outside of the classroom. She
also recognized that she had a “strong personality,” and it can be difficult for her to give up control within her classroom. Rose believed that she and her co-teaching partner were successful because her co-teaching partner’s personality was “easy-going” and therefore complimented hers. Her co-teaching partner, Sally, also concurred that co-teaching could be difficult if “you’re not with the right match, that same personality.”

**Colleagues.** Another important sub-theme that emerged under relationships was the co-teacher’s relationships with their colleagues. Most of the participants noted that they appreciated that their colleagues understood the co-teaching model. For example, Jennifer reported that her colleagues had a “positive outlook” on co-teaching. Similarly, when Kelsey was asked about how her colleagues viewed co-teaching, she responded, “I think that everyone just is fairly comfortable with it and, and understands the need for it. And, um, yeah, I think it's just part of the culture that's here.” Sue also noted that she feels co-teachers are “valued members of the whole staff.” This was highlighted by her following statement, “My peers feel they can come to me if they're struggling with something.” Whereas, Regina highlighted that she and her colleagues have a good working relationship. More specifically, she stated, “I enjoy working with my colleagues and also learning from them.”

**Administration.** Throughout the interviews, the participants highlighted the importance of having a positive and supportive relationship with both their building level administrative team. The participants perceived that administrative support and a positive working relationship was important to the implementation of co-teaching. Throughout her interview, Jennifer noted that the building based administrative team is “supportive” of co-teaching practices, they “value our feedback,” and “respect what we do.” She highlighted the fact that the administrative team, “trusts that we’re doing, what’s best for us and our students.” As a result, she feels confident
employing strategies and co-teaching models that fit the needs of her students. Similarly, Kelsey concurred that she also had a positive working relationship with the administrative team. She noted that “everyone’s been really supportive of what we’ve done.” She went on to elaborate that anytime she and her co-teaching partner had questions or concerns, the administrative team has always been supportive of them. When asked about her relationship with the administrative team, Regina noted that she felt “comfortable” approaching administration and that they were “supportive.” However, in terms of supporting the co-teaching relationship, she noted that at times, she wished they looked more closely at the “weight of responsibility” that was put on some individuals. She elaborated that some co-teaching teams were given really large caseloads, and it can be “tricky” to service all of the varying abilities in that classroom. Conversely, while Sue believes that her opinions are valued by administrators, she felt that they could value her more as an employee and be more supportive. For example, Sue noted that when special education co-teachers are absent, a substitute is not provided. She believes that this sends a “strong message” to the school and parents that special education positions “are not needed.” She also noted that sometimes that the administrative team has “become so far removed that they forget what our daily challenges are.” Sue went on to elaborate that she feels “disheartened” because the administrative team does not conduct enough observations in the classroom. As a result, she said it is difficult for them to have a “good pulse” on the building and build relationships with both staff and students.

Parents. Another common sub-theme that emerged was parental relationships. The participants perceived that positive parental relationships were important in developing a positive, co-teaching environment. Overall, most of the participants perceived that they had a good working relationship with their students’ parents. For example, when asked about her
relationship with parents, Sue noted, “I have a great relationship with all parents.” However, the majority of the participants also noted that parents are often not educated about co-teaching, and this can lead to some confusion in the relationship. For example, Kelsey, a regular education teacher, noted: “there are parents who will see me as a lead teacher.” She went on to elaborate that as a result, most of the communication is directed towards her. This could cause a breakdown in communication because both co-teachers do not receive the same information from parents. Sue noted that a lot of times, a parent’s view “relies heavily on the way you present yourself with your co-teacher.” Therefore, Sue and Rose perceived it was beneficial to present yourselves as an equal and united front. By doing so early on, parents are more likely to communicate with both co-teachers, thereby strengthening their relationship.

Conclusions

The co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School noted that based on their experiences, building relationships was an important activity that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching. More specifically, the participants noted that building and fostering positive relationships with their co-teaching partners, their colleagues, administrative team, and parents were all important activities that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching.

It is evident that participants believe one of the most important relationships are the relationships between both co-teachers. In order for the co-teaching partnerships to be successful, they must have great communication, the ability to collaborate and share a similar philosophy of education, classroom management style, and personalities. Unfortunately, it is difficult to find a co-teaching pair with these qualities. Therefore, once a strong co-teaching partnership has been established, it is important that they stay together.
In addition to having a strong relationship with a co-teaching partner, co-teachers should also develop a strong relationship with their colleagues. In order to develop a strong working relationship with colleagues, they must first understand what co-teaching is and its purpose. Once they have the basic understanding, the collaboration between co-teachers and non-co-teachers becomes easier. They are able to rely on one another to share teaching strategies and collaborate on lessons.

Co-teachers must also foster a positive working relationship with their administrative team. When administrators are supportive of co-teaching, they are more apt to realize the importance of keeping co-teachers together, value the input of co-teachers, and understand the unique situations that can arise in a co-taught classroom. Therefore, developing a strong and supportive relationship with administrators is important to the success of a co-teaching relationship.

Lastly, parental support is important for co-teachers. Therefore, it is essential that parents understand what co-teaching is and how it can be beneficial for their child. When parents have a better understanding of co-teaching, they understand that both co-teachers are working together to assure that their child reaches their potential. It also helps keep lines of communication open between all key stakeholders.

**Theme Two: Communication**

During the interviews, participants were asked questions regarding how they communicate with different stakeholders and their perceptions of these communications. A common theme that was present throughout the interviews was that communication is instrumental in developing relationships and aid in the successful implementation of co-teaching
at Apple Valley Elementary School. Following is a breakdown of how the participants perceived their communication with various stakeholders.

**Co-teaching partner.** Open and ongoing dialogue between co-teaching partners is important for establishing a strong co-teaching relationship. Sue attributed ongoing communication as a key aspect of forming her relationship with her co-teaching partner. Sue noted that in addition to planning periods, she and her co-teaching partner often text, call, and email one another. She noted that this type of communication is not “a luxury.” She went on to explain, “I think that’s definitely a necessity to make the classroom run smooth and make our typical day be as typical as possible.” However, communication between Sue and her co-teaching partner does not stop there. Sue also acknowledged that: “there’s a lot of unspoken kind of words and signals that we use throughout the day.” The use of non-verbal signals was also noted during the observation of Sue and Regina’s implementation of the lesson. Several times throughout the lesson, the co-teaching pair glanced at one another, used hand signals, or nodded their heads. It was evident that they had established a way of communicating their thoughts to one another without disrupting the flow of the lesson. Rose also noted that nonverbal communication was important in her co-teaching relationship. She noted that facial cues and “eye contact were huge” when communicating with her co-teacher throughout a lesson.

Kelsey also made reference to the importance of communicating with her partner during her interviews. Kelsey noted that she and her co-teaching partner engage in “constant communication” throughout their day. She noted that the majority of the conversation revolves around planning, discussing what the day is going to look like, student progress, and student groupings. Kelsey stated that this ongoing conversation about students and student progress is important so, “we have an understanding of how everyone is doing.” However, Kelsey also
noted that, like any relationship, there are also disagreements. She noted, “there is definitely things that we disagree on. These were things that, you know, we kind of been able to bend and flex.” Kelsey went on to explain that it’s important to listen to one another and not become so rigid in your thinking that you can’t see your partner's point of view.

**Administration.** Ongoing dialogue between administrators and co-teachers is important when utilizing co-teaching as an instructional strategy. Sue noted that she wished administrators engaged in more dialogue with co-teachers and were more present in the classroom, so they have a better idea of students’ needs as well as the daily struggles of a co-taught classroom. She elaborated, “if a parent calls and says, ask a question about something that goes on, I just don’t think you’re able to answer those questions if you’re not present.” Therefore, Sue believed that in order to fully support co-teaching, the administrative team must be willing to be present in the classroom and observe instructional practice, student engagement, and student performance. By having a better understanding of students’ needs and struggles within the co-taught classroom, Sue believes that communication can be more effective and in the best interest of the children.

Rose also highlighted the importance of open communication between administration and co-teachers, especially in regard to students’ needs. During her interview, she was asked how the administration could better support co-teachers, she responded:

I think sometimes actually having those conversations with the classroom teachers and seeing what we're seeing. I mean, we have, and it's not just test results, but that is a defining thing. There are some kids who test well. There are profiles that are massively different from others. And to then think that that, I wouldn't call it one size fits all, but works for all of them. It doesn't.

She went on to explain that open communication is important because co-teachers can provide additional information about a student that a test cannot always provide. Rose believes that the
administration needs to be open to hearing all information about a child, not just testing results, before deciding on the best placement or supports for that child to be successful.

Additionally, Jennifer also expressed her desire to have more communication between co-teachers and administration, especially in terms of pairing co-teachers together. She noted:

One thing I wish were a little different were, their outlook on the partnership because I do think the partnership is so important. And I feel like, year to year, I'm, you know, hitting May and I don't know if I'm actually going to be working with the person who I've been with. Who I want to keep, you know, working with and perfecting our skills and our co-teaching. And it's always this uncertainty every year, where I feel like it should almost be like the opposite. Where it should be, like, I'm definitely working with this person, and it's a very small chance I'm going to have to move.

During her second interview, Kelsey also noted feeling concerned over the possibility of not working with the same co-teacher next year:

It's kind of frustrating when you do that — a constant reflection. You already have plans for next year. You know what you want to do better. And so, for that to be a question and to be disruptive, disrupted as a possibility of being disrupted, I think sometimes can really, um, can, it's, it makes you a little bit frustrated.

Kelsey went on to elaborate that she wished the administration would seek out feedback from the co-teachers about what was working well within the partnership or what could be improved upon. She perceived that having these types of conversations would be beneficial in alleviating some angst year to year.

Parents. Communication is an important aspect of building a strong relationship with parents. However, communication can be tricky in a co-taught classroom. Jennifer, a special education co-teacher, stated:

I think one thing that's hard is for the parents to understand is like I'm an equal part in the classroom. So, a lot of times like, you know, Kelsey, will get the emails, and she would you be like, oh, did you see this? Nope.
Sally, a special education teacher, also concurred that the majority of parent communication goes to her regular education co-teacher. She expressed, “a lot of the regular ed parents are kind of like, oh, they are your helper” and don’t always share information with her. Regina voiced the importance of both co-teachers being included on all conversations and shared how she and her co-teacher try to ensure that happens:

So, with parent communication, if they send us a message either through Remind or through email or whatever it is, we always cc one another. So even if that parent, you know, had just emailed me, we always just add the other person. So, we’re always on the same page and parents usually do since we have done that, they actually do, they just email both of us now.

Similarly, Sue acknowledged that the way a parent communicates with you and your co-teacher relies heavily on how you and your co-teacher present yourselves to parents. “You know, we're both on the emails. Um, you know, it's not like I'm the lead teacher, and you're the co-teacher or vice versa. Um, it definitely is, this is our classroom.” When co-teachers present themselves as a unit, parents are more likely to communicate openly with both co-teachers, thereby strengthening their relationship.

**Conclusions**

The co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School noted that based on their experiences, ongoing communication was an important activity that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching. More specifically, the participants noted that ongoing communication with key stakeholders is crucial to supporting the instructional strategy known as co-teaching. Therefore, it is essential that co-teachers learn how to communicate openly with key stakeholders. It was apparent from the interviews and observations that open and ongoing communication was especially important between co-teaching pairs. Co-teaching requires both teachers to be able to communicate effectively with one another to develop lesson
plans, discuss interventions and supports needed to support student achievement, and implement 
lessons so that an onlooker cannot distinguish between the two teachers.

Additionally, co-teachers must develop strong, on-going communication with parents. Since many of 
the students have various learning, social, and emotional needs in the co-taught 
classroom, it is essential that the co-teachers are able to articulate what supports are in place for 
each child as well as how each child is progressing. They must also be ready to have some 
difficult conversations with parents should issues arise. By having strong and open 
communication with parents from the beginning, it can strengthen the parent-teacher relationship 
and make it easier to have more difficult conversations should any issues arise.

Lastly, co-teachers must develop on-going communication with their administrative 
team. By working with the administrative team and keeping the lines of communication open, it 
ensures several things. First, co-teachers are able to keep administrators abreast of any 
situations, concerns, or questions they may have about their students. Second, by keeping lines 
of communication open between co-teachers and administration, it allows co-teachers to express 
any issues or concerns they are having within their partnership and hopefully gain support from 
their administrative team. Lastly, open lines of communication between co-teachers and the 
administrative team help ensure that the co-teachers and administrative team are on the same 
page when conducting meetings with parents.

**Theme Three: Professional Development**

Ongoing professional development is needed to help improve co-teaching practices. 
When asked about professional development opportunities provided by the district, Sue 
responded, “There's not been much professional development. Um, I do feel that's lacking.” 
Similarly, when Rose was asked the same question, she stated, “Wait, well, nothing. Anything
professional development I wouldn't say came at from the district at all.” Those participants who have received professional development in co-teaching have done so on their own or when working in other districts. For example, Sally stated she attended a one-day “BER co-teaching workshop” and “read a book.” Similarly, Rose noted she attended “a BER workshop or something similar for a day. Um, I have done webinars, and I did a, we did like some book study type stuff like that. We read articles and things, but it was mostly on the fly type, stuff like that.” Conversely, Sue noted:

In my previous district, we had, um, a professional development, um, done by a woman that is very well respected in the area of inclusion. And, um, she did the training, um, over the course of several years within our district. Um, the primary part of the training was to go over what is co-teaching, what can it look like, what should it look like? Um, kind of went through the fundamentals of it. And then from that, um, we move forward to her coming in and observing a classroom. You’d talked to her about what you wanted her to focus on. She kind of gave you some good feedback, and um collaborated with you. Sue went on to elaborate that this particular professional development was six years long. She noted that this on-going type of professional development was more meaningful than the “one and done” workshops you often attend. Jennifer also attended an ongoing professional development series on co-teaching that mostly focused on different co-teaching models. Unlike Sue, Jennifer had very different feelings about her on-going professional development offering. Jennifer expressed, “unfortunately, I didn't really think it was a quality PD.” Jennifer elaborated that she wished the professional development offering included more diverse topics such as “relationship building and how to plan together, how to implement lessons together, how to kind of relinquish some of that control and trust your partner.”

Conclusions

The co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School noted that based on their experiences, professional development was an important activity that helped to support the
instructional practice known as co-teaching. In fact, many of the participants welcomed the opportunity to engage in professional development opportunities and expressed their interest in furthering their knowledge of co-teaching. Unfortunately, while the participants valued professional development opportunities in co-teaching, it was evident by their responses that co-teachers do not receive enough co-teaching professional development opportunities through the district. Therefore, it appears as though the school district needs to make an effort to provide meaningful on-going professional development centered on co-teaching and co-teaching practices. According to the participants, this on-going professional development should be focused on how to plan effectively for a co-taught classroom, how to implement lessons in a co-taught classroom, and how to develop and maintain relationships with your co-teachers. Furthermore, implementing district-wide PD on co-teaching will help ensure that all staff members have a thorough understanding of co-teaching, and they are all on the same page.

**Theme Four: Makeup of Co-Taught Classrooms**

When determining the student make-up of co-taught classrooms, there are several considerations that should be considered. When reflecting on the make-up of her classes, Rose noted:

> I feel like inclusion is a wonderful instructional practice and teaching model for this, for kids with a certain profile and just, I mean this year it's okay, but we've had years with kids that have significant, not only academic concerns about cognitive ability where it was, it's not the right fit.

She went on to elaborate that a co-teaching setting isn’t always the best placement for a child with a learning disability. She noted that in previous years, she had students with significant academic delays, and they are performing several grade levels below their peers. In these instances, Rose strongly believes that a different placement should be considered so that the
child can receive appropriate services. Similarly, Regina noted that the administration doesn’t always take into consideration each child’s learning needs. More specifically, Regina stated:

I don't know if they truly see the severity of some students' learning needs. And I think they should look at that a little bit more because some students may not fit that model. They may be more successful in a different type of setting.

Kelsey also commented on the composition of the classroom during her interviews. More specifically, she stated:

I do feel strongly that it is very, very important to consider, um, the composition of the population in a co-taught classroom. Um, I do not think that higher flyers should be in a co-taught classroom. I think it's very difficult to service that wide spectrum of, of, you know, students and achievers.

Kelsey also discussed the importance of making sure that the same regular education students or role models are not placed in a co-taught classroom year after year. Kelsey believed that when there is a wide spectrum of abilities in the co-taught classroom, those high-flyers may not be challenged enough. Therefore, Kelsey urges teachers and administrators also pay attention to the frequency in which the regular education students also get placed in a co-taught classroom.

Conclusions

The co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School noted that, based on their experiences, it was important to consider the student make-up of a co-taught classroom. Co-taught classrooms often bring together students with a wide variety of social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs. According to the participants’ responses, it is evident that administrators need to pay more attention to the student composition of each co-taught classroom. Currently, co-teachers feel there is a wide range of abilities in the co-taught classroom. As a result, co-teachers find it difficult to meet all their students’ needs. The
participants believed that by creating a classroom with similar academic profiles, they would be able to better service all of the children.

**Theme Five: Co-Teaching Definition**

It is clear that the participants each had varying views of what co-teaching is. When asked to define co-teaching, Rose responded:

Co-teaching would be the shared responsibility of students and their education and their education. So, anything that goes along with that, whether it's planning for lessons, meeting the needs of the students, carrying out instruction, um, doing any assessing of the students.

Similarly, Sue agreed that co-teaching was a partnership. She then elaborated, “A collaboration between two highly qualified professionals working in the same setting.” Sally also defined co-teaching as “Collaboration, working together, trying to meet the needs of all students. Teamwork makes the dream.” Kelsey also had a similar definition of what she believed co-teaching was.

She also believed that co-teaching involved a “partnership” where both teachers “shared equal responsibility” for educating the students and ensuring their accommodations are met. However, she went on to explain:

One of my philosophies looking at co-teaching is that, um, anyone who enters the room that is unfamiliar with, with the teachers in the room should not be able to tell who is the special education teacher and who is the regular education teacher.

Jennifer also had a slightly different definition of what she believed co-teaching was. She explained:

To me, co-teaching is a model where students who are on an IEP can be completely serviced within their general education classroom. Um, obviously not taking into account any separate minutes that might occur within the C-Grid of their IEP. Um, I think co-teaching, um, at its basis, is that, but I think co-teaching, more importantly, is bringing together two people with maybe different teaching styles to try to reach a broader group of students.

Regina’s definition of co-teaching was a combination of the above definitions. She stated:
Co-teaching is working together with another person. Um, both always being on the same page with curriculum, with behaviors, with your students' social, emotional, and academic needs. I think it's really important when you co-teach that you have a strong relationship with your partner, you understand each other, and you want it to be as natural to the students as possible. And that's something that you build on too over the years. But co-teaching I think is, you know when the children can't tell you which, who's the main teacher, quote-unquote, you know, they can't differentiate who is the regular ed and then the special ed. And I know our students, they, they see us as equals.

It is evident, based on the participant’s definitions of co-teaching, that they all have a similar understanding of what co-teaching is. However, when asked what they thought the district and school’s definition of co-teaching was, none of the participants were able to articulate what their definition was. In fact, when asked about the district’s definition of co-teaching, Sue stated:

I think some would view it as I've said, two professionals in a classroom teaching kind of with the children at the center. Um, I feel other, um, professionals feel it as meeting minutes that are on a plan, and when those minutes are met, this special education teacher can be utilized elsewhere.

Kesley went on to state, “it would be nice if it was explained somewhere, whether it be like in the handbook, you know, um, in the philosophy.” She believed that having the definition somewhere would help parents and others become aware of what co-teaching was in the school and or district.

Conclusions

Based on participants’ experiences with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School, it is evident that the school and district have not articulated a clear definition of what co-teaching is and what it should look like when it is implemented within a classroom. For example, several participants noted that the school and district had not provided teachers or parents with a definition of co-teaching. When there is not a clear definition, it leaves room for everyone to adopt their own variation of what co-teaching is. This can lead to confusion and uncertainty of
how co-teaching should be carried out. Furthermore, it is confusing to parents when they hear multiple definitions, and their children experience multiple variations of what their teachers believe co-teaching is. Therefore, it is important to develop a clear definition of what co-teaching is and provide supports to teachers so that it can be implemented effectively throughout the school and district.

**Summary**

The aim of this study was to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engaged in co-teaching. To gain a better understanding of the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers, the participants engaged in two individual semi-structured interviews, an observation of a lesson planning session, an observation of the lesson being implemented, and a debriefing session with each co-teaching pair. After careful analysis of the data, five findings emerged in relation to the research question.

**Finding One: Teachers Perceived that Strong Relationships Were Essential**

It is evident that participants value strong relationships with all stakeholders. Throughout the interviews, the teachers expressed the need to develop and maintain strong relationships with their co-teaching partner, colleagues, the administrative team, and parents. In terms of their relationship with their co-teaching partner, they believed that in order for the co-teaching partnerships to be successful, they must have great communication, the ability to collaborate and share a similar philosophy of education, classroom management style, and personalities. Additionally, the participants expressed that it takes a great deal of time and effort to develop such a relationship with their co-teaching partner. Therefore, the participants believed that
administrators should not switch up the co-teaching teams unless there is a problem within the team that cannot be fixed or negatively impacts student learning.

In addition to building strong relationships with their co-teaching partner, the participants also expressed the importance of developing a strong relationship with their colleagues. The participants believed that a strong relationship with their colleagues afforded them the opportunity to collaborate on lessons and special projects. Moreover, it also allowed the co-teachers and colleagues to problem solve and share instructional strategies that may benefit their students.

The participants also expressed their desire to build and/or maintain a strong relationship with their administrative team. The participants believed that a strong relationship with their administrative team was essential for several reasons. First, the participants believed that a strong relationship with their administrative team would allow them to have an on-going dialogue about their students and allow them to advocate for their various needs. Second, the participants believed that a strong relationship with their administrative team could be beneficial to help them overcome any issues that may arise in the partnership. Lastly, by developing a strong relationship with their administrative team, the participants believed that the administrative team would support them in regards to decisions made in their classroom.

Finally, the participants believed that it was important to develop and maintain a strong relationship with parents. The participants believed that parents play a crucial role in education and provide valuable insights into students. When working in a co-taught classroom, the participants believed that it was important to explain what co-teaching is and how it can benefit their child. Moreover, they believed that a strong relationship was essential for garnering their support.
Finding Two: Teachers Believe that On-Going Communication Between all Stakeholders is Important

Communication is important and necessary in all relationships. Throughout the interviews and observations, it was apparent that the co-teachers valued open and ongoing communication with their co-teaching partner. Communication in a co-teaching relationship is important because both teachers must be on the same page at all times. This requires them to share their visions, teaching philosophies, discipline procedures, strengths, and weaknesses. Additionally, both co-teachers must be able to voice when they agree or disagree with their partner in a respectful manner. Finally, the co-teachers need to be able to communicate effectively with one another to develop lesson plans, discuss interventions, and supports needed to support student achievement. By doing so, the co-teachers are able to implement lessons, make suggestions for future lessons, and discuss student learning.

In addition to valuing open communication with their co-teaching partner, the participants also valued open communication between their colleagues. The participants perceived that by fostering on-going, open dialogue with their colleagues, they would develop a working relationship that encouraged working together and sharing ideas with one another. The teachers noted that they valued their colleagues’ opinions and work. Additionally, the teachers perceived that sharing lessons, discussing student data, and reflecting on practices could lead to improvements in their instruction.

The teachers also expressed the importance of developing and maintaining an open dialogue with parents. Since a co-taught classroom is comprised of students with a variety of needs, it is important to articulate how the student is doing, concerns that the teachers may have, areas of strength they have noticed, and suggestions for how to support classroom efforts at
home. Furthermore, by developing on-going communication from the beginning, parents are less likely to be surprised when teachers advocate for further supports or issues that may arise.

Lastly, co-teachers expressed the importance of developing on-going communication with their administrative team. The co-teachers perceived that by opening lines of communication with their administrative team, it would allow the co-teachers to keep administrators informed of any situations or concerns they may have regarding students. This can prevent administrators from being surprised by co-teacher’s recommendations to explore a different educational setting or services for students. Second, by keeping lines of communication open between co-teachers and administration, it allows co-teachers to express any issues or concerns they are having within their partnership and hopefully gain support from their administrative team. Lastly, open lines of communication between co-teachers and the administrative team help ensure that the administrators are able to support teachers when they bring a concern to the attention of parents.

Finding Three: Teachers Perceived that More Co-Teaching Professional Development was Needed

The majority of the teachers voiced that they have not had a lot of professional development on co-teaching. Moreover, the teachers that did attend professional development opportunities found the professional development was not useful. Therefore, the teachers stated that co-teachers could benefit from on-going professional development offered by the district. More specifically, they explained that the professional development should be focused on how to plan effectively for a co-taught classroom, how to implement lessons in a co-taught classroom, and how to develop and maintain relationships with your co-teachers.

Finding Four: The Student Make-Up of Co-Taught Classrooms Need to be Examined
Teachers stated that co-taught classrooms are comprised of students that have a wide range of abilities. They went on to explain that it is often difficult to meet students’ needs when there are students who are at opposite ends of the spectrum. To better serve the students in a co-taught classroom, the participants believed that the administration should pay more attention to the composition of the co-taught classrooms. More specifically, some teachers expressed that academically high-flyers should not be placed in the co-taught classroom. Instead, the participants advocated for placing students with similar academic profiles in the co-taught classroom. By doing so, the participants perceived that they would better be able to meet the needs of their students.

**Finding Five: The Participants Perceived that There Wasn’t a Clear Definition of Co-Teaching**

Participants acknowledged that they are not aware of what the school or district's definition of co-teaching is. Additionally, the participants acknowledged that they are not clear about what co-teaching should look like when it is being implemented in the classroom. Moreover, each of the participants had varying definitions of what they believed co-teaching was. Without a clear definition of what co-teaching is and how it should be implemented in the classroom, teachers are left to do what they perceive as best practice. When teachers lack the knowledge needed to implement co-teaching effectively, students can suffer. Therefore, it is important to develop a clear definition of what co-teaching is and provide supports to teachers so that it can be implemented effectively throughout the school and district.

The following chapter will provide recommendations for improvements based on the findings. Additionally, possible future research endeavors will be discussed.
Chapter Five: Summary, Findings, Recommendations, and Conclusions

Chapter five is divided into three major sections. The first section, titled Overview, will provide a summary of the study. The second section, titled Presentation of the Findings, will discuss the findings based on the major themes discussed in chapter three. The third section, titled Conclusions, will provide a summary of the conclusions from this study.

Overview of the Study

This section is divided into six main sections that will provide the reader with an overview of the study. The first section, titled Review of the Problem of Practice, is a brief summary of this study’s problem of practice. The second section, titled Review of the Research Question, states the research question that guided this study. The third section, Review of the Methodology, will provide an overview of the methodology, case study, and why it was chosen for this study. The fourth section, titled Review of the Theoretical Framework, is an overview of Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which was the framework that guided this study. The fourth section, titled Review of the Research Site, describes where the study was conducted. The fifth section, titled Review of the participants, provides a brief description of the participants that participated in this study. The last section, titled Review of Data Collection and Analysis, is an overview of the data collection methods used for this study and how data analysis was conducted.

Review of the Problem of Practice

This qualitative case study was designed to understand the activities and experiences of Apple Valley Elementary School teachers who engaged in co-teaching. Co-teaching has been a widely used instructional strategy at Apple Valley Elementary School for several years. At Apple Valley Elementary School, co-teaching involves a special education teacher and a regular
education teacher working together to deliver instruction, provide support, and assess students’
progress. These co-taught classrooms are comprised of students both with and without learning
disabilities. State testing results indicate that students with learning disabilities are performing
below their peers without learning disabilities. Additionally, teachers have expressed that they
have had little to no formal training in co-teaching. Given the lack of training for co-teachers
and low-test scores for students with disabilities, it was imperative to gain a better understanding
of current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School. Therefore, semi-structured
interviews and observations were conducted with participants to elicit thoughts on their activities
and experiences related to co-teaching. The collected data was then analyzed to gain a deeper
understanding of the activities and experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary
School. The information was then utilized to make recommendations on how to improve current
co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School.

Review of the Research Question

This qualitative case study was conducted to answer the following question:
How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences
with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

Review of the Methodology

The utilization of a case study approach was instrumental in framing this study. For
example, the influence of a case study approach can be noted in the research question.
According to Yin (2018), a case study is best utilized when the researcher is attempting to
answer a ‘how’ or ‘why’ question (Yin, 2018). This was taken into consideration as the
researcher formulated the research question. Additionally, the case study approach influenced
the selection of participants, research site, phenomena under study, the data gathering methods, and data analysis processes that were utilized.

**Review of the Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that guided this study was Engeström’s Second Generation Activity Theory. Engeström’s Second Generation Activity Theory examines an activity system as a whole and focuses on the interactions which take place within the system. Engeström, therefore, believed it was important to consider the multiple perspectives of individuals and the collective actions of individuals within the activity system including the tools that they were utilizing, the rules that they had to abide by, and how work was divided up amongst the members of the activity system (Engeström, 2001).

Second Generation Activity Theory was selected as a theoretical framework for this study because it allowed for a deeper understanding of the activities and experiences of co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School. Since co-teaching is a complex instructional strategy (Friend et al., 2010), it was important to utilize a theoretical framework that allowed the researcher to gain a better understanding of such a complex phenomenon through the perspectives of multiple individuals (Foot, 2014). Additionally, by framing all interview questions utilizing Second Generation Activity Theory, the researcher was able to gain an in-depth understanding of the various components that comprised the co-teaching activity system. This in-depth understanding of the activity system was achieved by framing the interview questions in a way that allowed the participants to describe their experiences and compare them to previous experiences with co-teaching. Additionally, the questions were framed to engage participants in reflective thinking about their co-teaching practices, interactions, and utilization of various resources. Lastly, by critically examining how the subjects, co-teachers, interact with each of the components of the
activity system, it allowed for a deeper understanding of the various components that comprise the co-teaching model at Apple Valley Elementary School, so that recommendations can be made to improve current co-teaching practices.

**Review of the Research Site**

Apple Valley Elementary School is located in the northeastern region of the United States. Approximately 600 students attend this k-5 Title I public elementary school. Similar to other public schools, Apple Valley Elementary School services students with a wide variety of diverse learning needs. Some of these students require additional support, which cannot be met within the traditional classroom. Therefore, eight of the classrooms at Apple Valley Elementary have been designated as co-taught classrooms to serve these students better. The co-taught classrooms at Apple Valley Elementary each have two full-time teachers who are responsible for educating the children in their class. One of the teachers is a certified regular education teacher, while the other is a certified special education teacher. This study focused on six co-teaching pairs who are currently teaching in a co-taught classroom and have a minimum of two years of co-teaching experience at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Review of the Participants**

Participants for this study were selected utilizing purposeful homogeneous sampling. When utilizing purposeful sampling, it is important to select participants who will be able to provide rich data and insights into the research problem under investigation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A homogeneous sample was also utilized for this study. A homogeneous sample refers to a group of individuals who share a similar background or experience (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Based on these criteria, an initial purposeful sample included sixteen co-teachers, as this is the total number of co-teachers employed by Apple Valley Elementary
School. Criterion sampling was then utilized to narrow the sample size to include participants who could provide rich data for this study. According to Patton (2002), when utilizing criterion sampling, it is important to select participants based on their ability to meet specific criteria. The following three criteria requirements were utilized to narrow down the participants of this study: 1) The participants must be current co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, 2) The participants must have at least two years of co-teaching experience at Apple Valley Elementary School, 3) The participant cannot be the researcher. After applying these criteria, twelve participants were eligible to participate in this study. A recruitment letter was sent via email to twelve individuals. A total of six participants, three co-teaching pairs, volunteered for this study. The co-teaching pairs consisted of one regular education teacher and one special education teacher who worked in the same classroom setting for the entire workday. All co-teachers were assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity.

First co-teaching pair: Sally and Rose.

Sally. Sally is a licensed special educator who currently holds her master’s degree. Sally is a veteran special educator at Apple Valley Elementary School. Sally has taught for over ten years in a variety of special education settings, including a resource room and a substantially separate classroom. She is currently employed as a fifth-grade special education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

Rose. Rose is a regular education teacher who currently holds her master’s degree. Rose is a veteran regular educator at Apple Valley Elementary School. Rose has over fifteen years of teaching experience. During this time, she has taught in a variety of settings, including a regular education classroom, an inclusion classroom, and a co-taught classroom. While working in these settings, she has worked closely with both special
educators and a variety of interventionists. Rose currently works as a fifth-grade regular education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Second co-teaching pair: Jennifer and Kelsey.**

*Jennifer.* Jennifer has a master’s degree and currently works as a special education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School. She has been employed at Apple Valley Elementary School for over five years. During this time, she has worked in a variety of positions that have afforded her the opportunity to work with regular education teachers, special education teachers, interventionists, and support staff. She currently works as a fourth-grade special education teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

*Kelsey.* Kelsey has a master’s degree and has been an educator for over fifteen years. She has been a regular education co-teacher for the majority of her career. Kelsey enjoys co-teaching and sharing her classroom with another educator. She is currently employed by Apple Valley Elementary School as a fourth-grade regular education co-teacher.

**Third co-teaching pair: Sue and Regina.**

*Sue.* Sue is a veteran teacher who has been teaching for over 20 years. Sue holds a master’s degree and is currently employed by Apple Valley Elementary School as a special education teacher. Throughout her teaching career, Sue has taught in a variety of settings, including a substantially separate setting and a co-taught setting. Additionally, Sue has been a teacher of students with severe autism. Sue is currently a third-grade special education teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

*Regina.* Regina is a veteran regular education teacher who holds a master’s
degree. Regina has been teaching for approximately ten years in a variety of settings and grade levels. She is currently a third-grade regular education co-teacher at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Review of Data Collection and Analysis**

A qualitative single case study design was employed to understand the participant’s activities and experiences with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. Semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted as part of the data gathering process. The interview data were transcribed utilizing the online transcription service, Temi.com. Once the transcriptions were received, they were double-checked for accuracy. If discrepancies were found between the transcripts and audio, changes were made to the transcripts to ensure accuracy. Additionally, notes taken during the observations were typed and expanded upon.

Next, the data was then analyzed using In Vivo Coding. According to Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014), In Vivo coding, utilizes participant’s words and phrases as codes. Therefore, the researcher selected keywords and or phrases from each transcribed line of text. These keywords were highlighted and then placed in quotation marks at the end of each line. After the first cycle of coding was complete, all of the codes were placed on index cards in preparation for the second cycle of coding. As part of the second cycle of coding, each of the index cards with the In Vivo Codes was read and then grouped together according to similarities. This process of reading and grouping similar codes continued until five major pattern codes or themes emerged.

**Presentation of the Findings**

This section is divided into five major sections. The five sections are divided into the major themes that emerged as a result of the coding process, and the findings for each theme are discussed. The five major themes presented are:
1. Strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents are essential.

2. Ongoing communication between co-teaching partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues is imperative for supporting the instructional practice known as co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

3. More professional development should be provided for co-teachers.

4. Administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding placement for students who are being placed in the co-taught classroom.

5. A clear definition of what co-teaching looks like at Apple Valley Elementary School should be established.

After each finding is presented, a detailed explanation of how the finding relates to the research question, theoretical framework, and literature. Next, implications for practice and future research are provided.

**Finding One: Relationships**

The theme of relationships was prevalent throughout the interviews and was also noted during the observations that were conducted. After completing the data analysis in relation to relationships, the following finding emerged:

1. Strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents are essential.

**How the Finding is Related to the Research Question**

The first finding of this study was that strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents are essential. Throughout the study, the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School described their experiences and activities related to the
relationships they engage in while co-teaching. As a result of the participants’ responses, it was evident that building relationships were an important activity that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching. More specifically, the participants noted that building and fostering positive relationships with their co-teaching partners, their colleagues, administrative team, and parents were all important activities that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching. Therefore, the co-teacher’s descriptions of their experiences and activities with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School highlighted the importance of the activity building relationships in order to support co-teaching efforts.

**How the Finding is Related to the Theoretical Framework**

This finding confirms Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which recognizes that relationships within an activity system play a vital role in accomplishing the goal of the activity system. Moreover, it confirms Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory that while individual activities are important, it is more important to understand how each individual interacts with one another to accomplish the activity (Engstrom, 2001). This notion is exemplified throughout this study. For example, the co-teachers in this study repeatedly reiterated that strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents were essential.

The following sections are divided into the different key stakeholders that the participants focused on during their interviews and observations. This will help the reader gain a better understanding of the importance that these relationships play within the activity system, which is co-teaching.

*Relationships with co-teachers within the activity system.* The co-teachers who were
interviewed for this study all expressed that they believed their co-teaching partner was a good match. However, they noted that their partnerships did not grow overnight, and initially, some co-teachers expressed initial doubt about the pairing. All of the co-teaching pairs expressed that it took a great deal of time to develop a relationship where both co-teachers felt comfortable expressing themselves within the partnership. In fact, the majority of the co-teachers reported that they dedicated time outside of work hours strictly to developing their relationship with their co-teaching partner. By devoting time to developing their relationship, the co-teachers reported that they felt that their relationship was strengthened because they felt more comfortable voicing their opinions, sharing their teacher workload, and discussing issues that arose during the workday.

While the co-teachers believed they and their co-teaching partner were a good match, the majority of the co-teaching teams reported that they did not have a say in who they would be paired with. Instead, they noted that the administrative team formed the partnerships and then later told them that is who they would be working with. Additionally, many of the participants reported that year after year, they were unsure if they will be staying with their current co-teaching partner or if they would be told to switch partners and or grade levels. The participants noted that the uncertainty of not knowing whom they were working with every year caused them undue angst and put a strain on their current co-teaching relationships. They also voiced that they wished the future of their partnership would not be a question unless they or their partner voiced they were unhappy, or the partnership was no longer working.

Additionally, the co-teachers also reported that a teacher’s personality played a large role in creating a successful working partnership. Several of the participants noted that personality differences are difficult to overcome, especially if those personality differences are
coupled with differences in educational philosophies. Moreover, several of the participants believed that personality differences were a major reason why some of their past co-teaching relationships were not successful.

**Relationships with their colleagues within the activity system.** The participants also noted that strong working relationships with their colleagues were an important component that helped to ensure the success of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. All of the participants noted that it was helpful to have the support and understanding of their fellow colleagues. They noted that when they have the support and understanding of colleagues, it makes it easier to brainstorm solutions to problems. Additionally, it also helps when colleagues understand the unique challenges that co-teaching presents and are able to help advocate for additional supports for students within the co-taught classroom. The participants believed that fostering strong working relationships with their colleagues benefited the implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Relationship with their administrative team within the activity system.** Another vital component of the relationship theme was the co-teacher’s relationship with the administrative team. Throughout the interviews, the participants highlighted the importance of having a positive working relationship with their administrators. The participants felt that when they had a positive relationship with their administrators, they could express themselves and advocate for their students, knowing that their administrative team supported them and co-teaching. The participants believed that building a positive relationship with their administrators was a key component in ensuring that co-teaching was successful at Apple Valley Elementary School.
Relationships with families within the activity system. Lastly, the participants expressed the importance of building positive working relationships with families. The majority of the participants noted that they had positive working relationships with their parents. For example, the participants felt comfortable keeping parents abreast as to what was happening in the classroom and the progress their child was making. They also felt as though parents felt comfortable coming to the participants when something needed to be clarified or they had a question. However, the majority of the participants noted that parents are not very educated about co-teaching. They reported that this could have a negative effect as the parents do not treat both co-teachers equally. For example, parents may only communicate with one of the teachers versus speaking to both co-teachers, so they are both aware of any issues or concerns the parents may have. This could result in a breakdown of communication and lead to misconceptions or misinformation. The participants agreed that it was important that all parents at Apple Valley Elementary School are informed about co-teaching since it is such a widely used instructional model at the school. The participants believed that when parents have a better understanding of what co-teaching is, how it is implemented, and the roles of the co-teachers, it can help to ensure the successful implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

Summary of How Finding One Relates to Activity Theory

As theorized by Engstrom (2001), the interrelation amongst individuals within a system is an important factor to consider when examining the activities of a system. While it is important to note how each individual acts within a system, it is much more important to understand how the individuals within the system work together to complete an activity. Using Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, this study has thoroughly examined the relationships that contribute to the implementation of co-teaching. The findings revealed that
relationships amongst co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents play an important factor in the successful implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

Summary of How Finding One Relates to the Literature

Similar to the findings, the literature supports the need for co-teachers to develop and maintain strong relationships with key stakeholders in order for co-teaching to be successful. The following sections are divided into the different key stakeholders that the participants focused on during their interviews and observations. Each of the sections will detail how the participants’ relationships with the key stakeholders are related to the literature. This will help the reader gain a better understanding of the importance that these relationships play within the activity system, co-teaching, and how the theme of relationships is situated within the current literature.

Relationships with co-teachers and how it relates to the literature. As previously stated, the finding of this study revealed that developing strong co-teacher relationships was crucial. However, this study found that there were several factors that could hinder a strong relationship from forming. These factors included not being part of the decision-making process when being paired with their co-teacher, co-teacher’s personalities, and the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will remain with their co-teaching partner year after year.

One of the problems identified in this study was having administrators in charge of pairing co-teachers. A study conducted by Kamens et al. (2013) found that administrators are often the individuals responsible for forming co-teaching partnerships. The study found that most often, administrators pair co-teachers based on their personalities, compatibility, the strengths and weaknesses of both teachers, their willingness to co-teach, and scheduling. Although the study found that administrators are often the ones responsible for pairing co-
teachers, the study also found that administrators often lack knowledge about co-teaching and how-to best support co-teaching teams (Kamens et al., 2013).

Similarly, a study by Bronson and Denith (2014), found that the co-teaching team being studied was placed together solely because the administrator thought the two teachers would get along. Unfortunately, this co-teaching team had very little support from the building administrator and was left to figure things out for themselves. The co-teaching pair admittedly faced many difficult situations in the ten years they were together. However, they noted that they were able to prevail because the co-teachers had similar beliefs, and in the end, they were willing to collaborate, compromise, and get along with one another (Bronson & Denith, 2014).

The importance of teacher compatibility in a co-teaching team was also highlighted by a study conducted by Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008). The study examined a rural school district that was in its second year of implementing a co-teaching program. The study found that co-teaching partnerships were most successful when both teachers have similar personalities. This is because co-teaching requires teachers to make many decisions about their students and solve problems that may arise throughout the day. The participants reported that making these decisions could be challenging, especially if one partner dominates all decisions or shuts down their partner's ideas. Therefore, the study found that co-teachers should be matched based on personality. Moreover, the study showed that co-teaching partnerships often experience success when they had a previous relationship with one another and held similar beliefs prior to co-teaching. Lastly, the participants of the study believed that co-teachers should be given the opportunity to choose their co-teaching partner instead of being placed together by an administrator (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008).

Furthermore, a study conducted by Krammer, Rossman, Gastager, and Gasteiger
Klicpera (2018), examined co-teaching teams that were formed by administrators and co-teaching teams that were self-selected. The study findings revealed that the co-teaching teams that were given the freedom to choose their partner scored higher than the co-teaching teams formed by an administrator in the following categories: enjoyment with co-teaching, working with their co-teaching partner, and sharing of responsibilities between the co-teachers. The researchers of this study recommend that co-teachers should be able to choose their co-teaching partners because it improves their overall outlook on co-teaching. However, the researchers note that the study findings did not show a significant difference between self-selected teams and the administrator selected teams in regards to their successfulness or effectiveness as a team (Krammer et al., 2018).

Lastly, the participants of this study voiced their concern over not knowing who their co-teaching partner would be each year. The participants voiced that this uncertainty was problematic because it caused a lot of stress to the co-teaching team and hindered their ability to plan for the following year. The co-teachers in this study believed that the co-teaching partnerships should stay together unless there was an issue between the pair, or they decided their partnership was no longer a good fit. A study conducted by Smith (2012) examined fifth-grade co-teachers and their perceptions regarding what makes a co-teaching partnership successful and how current co-teaching practices at the research site could be improved upon. The study found that the participants believed that the longer a co-teaching team was together, the more successful they will be. Therefore, the findings of the Smith study support keeping co-teachers together as long as possible.

**Relationships with colleagues and how it relates to the literature.** The participants of this study noted that their relationships with their colleagues were important, that they valued
their colleagues’ opinions and often look to their colleagues for advice. Additionally, the participants in this study believed it was important to have the support of their colleagues. They noted that their colleague support was helpful when trying to advocate for students or additional classroom supports. This finding extends current research by examining how colleagues outside of the co-teaching partnership affect the implementation of co-teaching. The current studies have examined the effects of co-teacher’s relationships with administrators and their co-teaching partners but neglect to examine the effects of the co-teacher’s relationships with their colleagues.

**Relationships with the administrative team and how it relates to the literature.** The findings from this study revealed that co-teachers believe that their relationship with their administrative team is important. These findings are supported by a study conducted by Pratt (2014), which found that administrative support was crucial to helping co-teaching teams overcome obstacles (Pratt, 2014). Similarly, a study conducted by Waddy (2010) found that co-teachers need administrative support in order to help facilitate the implementation of co-teaching instructional strategies (Waddy, 2010).

However, not all administrators are equipped to support co-teaching teams. A study conducted by Kamens et al. (2013) examined the evaluation and supervision of co-teaching teams. The findings of the study found that administrators often lacked the knowledge needed to support co-teaching teams. Additionally, the results of the survey found that the level of administrator support throughout the district was inconsistent. When the administrators were surveyed about how they support their co-teaching teams, most of them responded that they notify co-teachers of upcoming professional development opportunities. Additionally, the administrators who were surveyed also expressed that they help support co-teachers by giving them the opportunity to visit and observe other co-teachers, providing common-planning time,
by evaluating co-teachers, and by meeting with co-teachers. However, the researchers found that these supports were often inconsistent. Additionally, the administrators’ lack of knowledge about co-teaching made it difficult for them to recommend how to improve co-teaching practice and support co-teaching teams.

**Relationship with parents and how it relates to the literature.** The findings from this study found that co-teachers believed that parental support was important for developing a positive co-teaching environment. The co-teachers believed that these strong relationships were important because they helped keep lines of communication open and made it easier to have conversations about their child’s progress. Current studies on co-teaching have examined the effects of co-teachers’ relationships with administrators (Kamens et al., 2014; Pratt, 2014; Waddy, 2010) and their co-teaching partners (Bronsen & Denith, 2014; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Kamens et al., 2014; Krammer et al., 2018; Smith, 2012) but neglect to examine the effects of the co-teachers’ relationships with parents. Therefore, the findings of this study extend current research by examining how relationships with parents can affect the implementation of co-teaching.

**Implications for practice**

The first finding of this case study, which centered around relationships, generated several implications for practice. The following sections are divided into the different key stakeholders that the participants focused on during their interviews and observations. This will help the reader understand how the implications for practice are directly related to the findings.

**Relationships with co-teachers and implications for practice.** Regarding, co-teaching relationships, this study found that co-teachers wanted an opportunity to speak with their administrators about who their co-teaching partner will be. Therefore, a suggestion for
improvement is to have administrators at Apple Valley Elementary School hold an informal meeting with current and potential co-teachers. At this meeting, potential co-teachers can voice their concerns and enthusiasm about co-teaching. More importantly, it will allow potential co-teachers an opportunity to express what types of personalities and work ethics they feel would be a good match for them. Additionally, it would allow current co-teachers an opportunity to voice what has worked well and what has hindered past co-teaching relationships. Also, it would be important for administrators to meet with current co-teachers to discuss what is working well, issues that they are having, or if they feel co-teaching is not the best fit for them. These types of discussions may help administrators make more informed decisions regarding co-teaching partnerships and may help ease some of the angst teachers are feeling.

**Relationships with colleagues and implications for practice.** This case study found that the participants valued their relationships with their colleagues. More specifically, the participants appreciated that their colleagues were willing to listen, offer advice, and support them and their students. Additionally, the co-teachers believed that they were able to help their non-co-teaching colleagues by providing them with support and advice. The co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School are fortunate to have weekly common planning time with their grade-level teachers. This time can be utilized to strengthen their relationships, offer support, and encouragement. Additionally, it can be a time to share ideas on how to reach all students and improve instruction.

While co-teachers are given the time to meet with grade-level colleagues, there is little time for them to meet with other service providers. Therefore, a potential area for improvement would be to provide all co-teachers an opportunity to meet with other service providers. This could help facilitate discussions about how to best meet the needs of students in the co-taught
classroom. Additionally, this time can provide an opportunity for service providers to share what they have been working on with students in their classrooms or any areas of strength or concern they have noted with the students that they serve. These types of discussions can help strengthen co-teacher’s relationships with their colleagues and help to improve classroom instruction.

**Relationships with the administrative team and implications for practice.** The findings of this study revealed that participants believed having the support of their administrative team was important when implementing co-teaching. The co-teachers in this study expressed that they believed they had a positive relationship with their administrators. This was evidenced by the co-teachers expressing that they felt comfortable advocating for their students because they knew that the administrative team supported co-teaching efforts.

While it appears as though co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have a positive working relationship with their administrative team, additional efforts could be made for improvement. One suggestion for improvement would be to provide a monthly or bi-monthly opportunity for all co-teachers to meet with the administration to discuss needs, concerns, or issues related to co-teaching. This would provide an opportunity for administrators to help support co-teachers as they brainstorm ways to overcome these issues. A second suggestion for improvement would be for the administrative team to encourage co-teachers to visit other co-teaching teams both in and out of the district. After the visits, the co-teachers can sit down with the administration and discuss their big take-aways. This can help open up the dialogue between administration and teachers. Furthermore, the information gained from the observations could provide insights into how to improve current co-teaching practices.

**Relationships with families and implications for practice.** The co-teachers in the study noted that a positive relationship with parents was helpful in fostering a positive co-
teaching environment. Throughout the study, the majority of co-teachers believed that parents were supportive of co-teaching efforts. However, they also noted that many parents did not know what co-teaching was and what role each of the teachers played in the co-teaching relationship. The co-teachers went on to report that this has led to a negative relationship with some parents. For example, parents may not treat both co-teachers equally or may only communicate with one of the teachers. As a result, two areas of improvement are suggested.

First, to help improve the co-teacher’s relationship with families, it is important for the school to provide information to families about co-teaching. One way this can be achieved is by describing the different types of classrooms at Apple Valley Elementary School on the school website. Another way this can be achieved is by holding a family information night for all students who are in co-taught classrooms.

Secondly, co-teachers could also provide information to parents about co-teaching and what it looks like in their classroom. This can be done in the welcome letter that is sent home to families at the beginning of the year or during the open house. More importantly, teachers could also use these opportunities to discuss that their child is lucky enough to have two qualified teachers teaching their child this year. They could utilize this time to stress the importance that all communication is directed towards both teachers. This can help ensure that everyone is on the same page.

**Implications for Future Research**

Although there is a number of research studies that examine co-teacher’s relationships with administrators and their co-teaching partners, it would be beneficial to the existing body of literature to explore co-teacher’s relationships with families and colleagues. Future research may want to focus on the following questions:
1. How can co-teachers build relationships with their students and their families?
2. How can co-teachers and their colleagues support co-teaching efforts?
3. What supports can be put in place to help foster a positive co-teaching environment for students, staff, and families?

Finding Two: Communication

In reference to the theme communication, the following finding emerged:

1. Ongoing communication between co-teaching partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues is imperative for supporting the instructional practice known as co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

How the Finding is Related to the Research Question

The second finding that emerged was that ongoing communication between co-teaching partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues is imperative for supporting the instructional practice known as co-teaching. Throughout the interviews, the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School described their activities and experiences with communication as it relates to co-teaching. After analyzing their descriptions, it was evident that ongoing communication was an important activity that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching.

More specifically, the participants noted that ongoing communication with key stakeholders is crucial to supporting the instructional strategy known as co-teaching. Therefore, the co-teachers’ experiences with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School highlighted the importance of the activity building relationships in order to support co-teaching efforts.

How the Finding is Related to the Theoretical Framework

This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which views the interactions and communication that happens amongst individuals and objects as necessary
components for a successful activity system. It is through these interactions that relationships within the activity system are built and ultimately aid in meeting the goal of the activity system (Engstrom, 2001). The aforementioned finding exemplifies Engstrom’s theory. For example, the finding revealed that communication between all stakeholders was key to the successful implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

The following sections are divided into the different key stakeholders that the participants focused on during their interviews and observations. This will help the reader gain a better understanding of the importance that communication plays in each relationship within the activity system, co-teaching.

**Communication with co-teaching partners within the activity system.** The co-teachers in this study stressed the importance of ongoing communication and the vital role it plays within their co-teaching relationships. The participants all expressed that constant communication between themselves and their co-teaching partners was crucial. This ongoing dialogue helped both co-teachers understand the lesson being taught, the different roles the co-teachers were going to take during each lesson, the progress each of the students within their co-taught classroom was making, and an opportunity to debrief about the day. Additionally, the co-teachers expressed that this ongoing communication was helpful in fostering their working and personal relationships with one another. Many of the co-teachers noted that often, this dialogue took place before or after the workday via phone conversations, texting, and emails. The co-teachers noted that while they are given prep time together, that time is often devoted to touching base with related service providers, responding to parent emails, or helping students who may need to debrief or regain control of their emotions so they can rejoin their peers in activities outside of the classroom. Therefore, the participants noted that they often resort to quick
conversations in passing and non-verbal communications throughout the day to relay important information that is essential to the lesson being implemented. Although the teachers expressed some frustration in the lack of time they can devote to communication in the workday, they all agreed that setting time aside to listen and have on-going conversations with their co-teaching partner was essential to the implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

**Communication with the administrative team within the activity system.** The participants of this study also expressed the importance of communicating with their administrative team. The majority of the participants believed open and on-going dialogue with their administrative team was important because of the unique challenges that co-teaching presents. For example, one of the participants noted that ongoing communication with co-teaching partnerships was important because it allowed the administrator to understand how the strengths and weaknesses of each co-teaching pair. This information could then be used to help support and help them grow as co-teachers. These ongoing conversations could also facilitate discussions about whether the co-teaching partnership is working or perhaps a new partnership should be arranged for the following academic year.

Additionally, participants noted that ongoing dialogue with administrators should also involve the students within the co-taught classroom. Some participants believed that it was essential to know the students of the co-taught classroom, how they perform on a daily basis, and their strengths and needs. One of the participants noted that she was frequently part of an IEP (individualized education plan) or RTI (response to intervention) meeting where test results were presented. She noted that sometimes, although a student may perform well on an evaluative test or subtest, it isn’t always an accurate depiction of what they see on a daily basis inside the classroom. She highlighted the importance of at least listening to what the co-teachers were
seeing and the additional data they were able to provide about the student besides the eligibility testing or district testing measures. She believed that if administrators had these ongoing conversations, they would have a more holistic understanding of each child and their needs. This type of communication may lead to a more productive conversation about how to best serve the child so that all their needs are met.

**Communication with parents within the activity system.** Lastly, the participants all discussed the importance of ongoing communication with the parents of their students. All of the participants believed that open, honest, and ongoing dialogue with parents is essential. During the interviews, many of the participants stated that how they present themselves early on in the school year can set the tone for the interactions that will occur for the remainder of the year. Therefore, the participants believed it was important to start off the school year with a welcome letter. In the welcome letter, the participants described what co-teaching is and, more importantly, that both adults in the classroom are teachers. The teachers also requested that parents address both teachers, especially when using email or apps that facilitate communication between parents and teachers. They went on to explain that doing so allows both teachers to know what is going on with the students. Moreover, when everyone is included in the conversation, it helps to ensure that everyone is on the same page and aware of any concerns that either the co-teachers or parents may have and how they can best be addressed.

**How the Finding Relates to the Literature**

This study found that ongoing communication between co-teaching partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues is imperative for the successful implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. This finding extends the current literature on co-
teaching because current studies on co-teaching fail to examine the effects of communication with various stakeholders on co-teaching.

**Implications for Practice**

The second finding of this case study, which centered around communication, generated several implications for practice. The following sections are divided into the different key stakeholders that the participants focused on during their interviews and observations. This will help the reader understand how the implications for practice are directly related to the findings.

**Communication with co-teachers and implications for practice.** Regarding the participants’ communications with their co-teaching partner, this study found that co-teachers valued opportunities to communicate with their co-teaching partners. Therefore, a suggestion for improvement is to have daily common planning time set aside for all co-teachers. Currently, not all co-teaching teams have daily planning time in their schedule. It is evidenced by the co-teachers’ responses that daily communication is essential for supporting co-teaching practices. During the interviews, the participants noted that they often utilize common planning time to develop lessons together. This helps ensure that both co-teachers are on the same page and have a solid plan as to how they are going to deliver instruction, provide supports to students, and meet specific teaching standards. Additionally, teachers reported that they utilize common planning time to communicate with parents, administration, or support service providers. By providing co-teachers with daily common planning time, it will also help to improve communication between key stakeholders and help ensure that they are all informed of student progress or concerns they may have regarding a student’s progress. They can then utilize the common planning time to develop additional supports that may be necessary to help that child succeed.
Moreover, it is evidenced by their responses, that the amount of time allocated to common planning time is not enough. The co-teachers in this study noted that they often plan outside of the time provided by the school. For example, the participants noted that they utilized text, emails, and phone calls to one another after school hours in order to continue planning or to finalize plans. Therefore, a second recommendation would be to increase the allotted common planning time for co-teachers. This would allow both co-teachers more time to plan for lessons to ensure they are differentiated to meet student needs. Moreover, it would provide time for teachers to decide what co-teaching model would be best for each lesson and to discuss student progress.

**Communication with colleagues and implications for practice.** This case study found that the participants valued opportunities to communicate with their colleagues. The co-teachers from this study noted that they appreciated the time to meet with colleagues. Currently, Apple Valley Elementary School teachers are given common planning time once a week. This time is dedicated to plan with their grade level colleagues, offer advice, support, and help problem-solve situations that arise in classrooms. However, special support colleagues are often not included in these common planning times. This can make it difficult to discuss issues or to plan with support specialists. Therefore, a recommendation for improvement would be to include an opportunity for support specialists to join grade-level meetings at least once a month. This would provide co-teachers and other grade level teachers the opportunity to discuss the progress of students that are being serviced by the support specialists. Moreover, it could provide an opportunity for the support specialist to recommend accommodations that teachers can try to best support students whom they serve. These types of discussions can help strengthen communication between co-teachers and their colleagues while also helping to improve instruction.
Communication with the administrative team and implications for practice. The findings of this study revealed that participants believed that it was important for co-teachers to have ongoing and open communication with their administrative team. While many of the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School have expressed that they feel comfortable communicating with their administrative team, additional efforts could be made for improvement. One suggestion for improvement would be to provide a monthly or bi-monthly opportunity for all co-teachers to meet with the administration to discuss needs, concerns, or issues related to co-teaching. This would provide an opportunity for administrators to help support co-teachers as they brainstorm ways to overcome these issues.

A second suggestion for improvement would be for the administrative team to visit the co-taught classrooms more frequently both on a formal and informal basis. This would help administrators realize the strengths and areas of improvement for each co-teaching team. The administrative team could then utilize this information to develop professional development opportunities centered around each team's area of improvement. Moreover, it can help the administrative team realize the different challenges and obstacles co-teachers face. The administrative team can then meet with the co-teaching teams individually or as a group to brainstorm different ways in which they can support the co-teachers to overcome these challenges.

Communication with families and implications for practice. The co-teachers in the study noted that ongoing, open communication with parents was helpful in fostering a positive co-teaching environment. Throughout the study, the majority of co-teachers believed that parents were supportive of co-teaching efforts. However, they also noted that, at times, there seemed to be a lapse in communication. For example, the co-teachers reported that many parents
did not know what co-teaching was and what role each of the teachers played in the co-teaching relationship. This led to some miscommunication and often times someone being left out of the conversation entirely. Therefore, some suggestions for improvement are noted.

First, to help improve the co-teacher’s communication with families, it is suggested that the teachers utilize a district-approved communication tool, such as Remind, to help keep both co-teachers and parents on the same page. When communication is directed towards all parties, it helps prevent miscommunication and ensures that all parties are fully informed of what is happening.

A second recommendation for improvement would be to utilize information nights, open house, welcome letters, and parent-teacher conferences to inform parents about co-teaching. This would familiarize the parents with what co-teaching looks like in their classroom and the role that co-teachers play in educating their children. They can also utilize this time to stress the importance that all communication is directed towards both teachers. This can help ensure that everyone is on the same page.

**Implications for Future Research**

Since no studies were found on the importance of communication with various stakeholders, it would be beneficial to the existing body of literature to explore co-teacher’s communication with key stakeholders. Future research may want to focus on the following questions:

1. How can co-teachers support communication efforts with parents?
2. How can co-teachers support communication efforts with their administrative team?
3. How can co-teachers support communication with their colleagues?
4. What can administrators do to support ongoing communication between co-teachers and key stakeholders?

**Finding Three: Professional Development**

The following finding emerged in regards to the theme of professional development:

1. More professional development should be provided for co-teachers.

**How the Finding is Related to the Research Question**

The third finding of this study was that more professional development should be provided for co-teachers. During the interview process, the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School described their experiences and activities related to co-teaching professional development opportunities. After analyzing their experiences and activities with co-teaching professional development, it was evident that co-teaching professional development was an important activity that helped to support the instructional practice known as co-teaching. In fact, many of the participants welcomed the opportunity to engage in professional development opportunities and expressed their interest in furthering their knowledge of co-teaching. Unfortunately, while the participants valued professional development opportunities in co-teaching, it was evident by their responses that co-teachers do not receive enough co-teaching professional development opportunities through the district.

**How the Finding is Related to the Theoretical Framework**

This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which views the tools as an important component for a successful activity system. Engstrom believed that it was important to understand how individuals within the system utilized or interacted with the tools in order to accomplish the goal of the activity system (Engstrom, 2001). The aforementioned finding exemplifies Engstrom’s theory. For example, the finding revealed that
many of the participants believed that ongoing professional development in co-teaching was imperative to improving the implementation of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School.

The majority of the co-teachers interviewed believed that ongoing professional development in co-teaching is needed in order for co-teachers to improve their co-teaching practices and best serve the needs of their students. Despite this acknowledgment, the majority of the co-teachers expressed that they have never attended a school or district, which provided professional development on co-teaching. Many of the participants elaborated that they had to seek out their own professional development opportunities related to co-teaching or have been fortunate enough to have taken professional development opportunities provided by former districts they worked at. Moreover, many of the participants believed that the ongoing district or school provided professional development would be more beneficial than a one and done workshop. One participant believed that offering ongoing professional development provided by the district or school could help facilitate discussions around best co-teaching practices. Additionally, it would also allow co-teachers the opportunity to try something they learned during the professional development sessions with the support of administrators and colleagues who also attended the same sessions. The co-teachers could also use future professional development sessions to debrief and discuss how the implementation went and brainstorm ways that it could be improved upon in the future.

**How the Finding Relates to the Literature**

Similar to the findings of this study, the literature also supports the need for co-teachers to engage in on-going professional development opportunities. A study conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004) found that the majority of the participants expressed that they felt unprepared to meet the challenges associated with co-teaching. The participants expressed that they believed
professional development could help them overcome these challenges (Keefe & Moore, 2004). Similarly, studies conducted by Kroger et al. (2012) and Panscofar and Petroff (2016) also found that teachers needed additional training in co-teaching (Kroeger et al., 2012; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Additionally, studies conducted by Embury and Dinneson (2012) and Tzivinikou (2015), found that teachers who received professional development in co-teaching were more likely to utilize a variety of co-teaching models and had a better attitude towards co-teaching (Embury & Dinnesen, 2012; Tzivinikou, 2015). Therefore, the current literature supports the need for on-going professional development that is focused on co-teaching.

**Implications for Practice**

The third finding of this case study, which focused on professional development, generated the following implication for practice. Teachers and administrators should engage in on-going professional development. Therefore, the district or school should provide teachers and administrators with on-going professional development on co-teaching. These ongoing co-teaching professional development series could address some of the issues discussed by the participants of this study. Following are some topics that could be addressed in the on-going professional development series:

1. Developing relationships with your co-teaching partner
2. Overcoming differences and issues that arise in your co-teaching relationship
3. Developing strong relationships with families
4. Communicating effectively with parents, administrators, and colleagues
5. Supporting co-teachers efforts to implement co-teaching
6. Best practices for co-teachers to implement in their classroom

**Implications for Future Research**
Currently, there are a number of research studies that support the need for co-teacher’s to engage in professional development on co-teaching. However, future research may want to focus on the following questions to extend the current literature base:

1. How does on-going professional development on co-teaching effect co-teaching partnerships?
2. How can pre-service teacher programs prepare teachers for co-teaching?
3. How can co-teaching professional development series best support administrators who supervise, evaluate, and support co-teachers?
4. How can administrators best support co-teaching teams?
5. What is the most effective professional development for co-teachers?
6. How can a school best support effective co-teaching practices?

**Finding Four: The Make-up of Co-Taught Classrooms**

Regarding the theme of students who comprise the co-taught classrooms, the following finding emerged:

1. Administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding placement for students who are being placed in the co-taught classroom.

**How the Finding is Related to the Research Question**

The fourth finding of this study was that administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding placement for students who are being placed in the co-taught classroom. Throughout the study, the participants were asked to describe their activities and experiences with co-teaching. As the participants reflected on their activities and experiences within their classroom, a common theme that arose was the general make-up of the students that comprised the co-taught classroom. More specifically, the co-teachers at Apple
Valley Elementary School noted that, based on their experiences, it was important to consider the student make-up of a co-taught classroom. The co-teachers in this study noted that when a classroom is comprised of students who are extremely high and low academically, it can be difficult to meet their academic needs. This finding goes against current research on student grouping. Therefore, the co-teachers at Apple Valley Elementary should engage in activities such as professional development, research, and book talks to learn more about current research and educational practices related to the students that comprise the make-up of a classroom.

**How the Finding is Related to the Theoretical Framework**

This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which suggested that the individuals that comprise an activity system can influence the outcome. Engstrom believed that it was important to understand how individuals within the system interacted with one another in order to accomplish the goal of the activity system (Engstrom, 2001). The co-teachers in this study believed that administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding which students should be placed in the co-taught classroom. Based on their experiences, the co-teachers believed that the make-up of students within the co-taught classroom affected their ability to reach their goal.

**How the Finding is Related to the Literature**

Contrary to this study’s findings, the literature supports the need for students of various abilities to be in the same classroom. A study conducted by Buttaro and Catsambis (2019) examined the long-term effects of within-class ability grouping. Ability grouping refers to placing students with the same academic profile together. The findings from this study indicate that when kindergarten students were placed in a low ability group, they were more likely to be placed in lower-level courses when they reach the upper grades. Similarly, kindergarten students
who were placed in a high ability group were more likely to be placed in higher-level courses when they reach the upper grades. Moreover, the study found that the more often the students are placed in these ability groups year after year, the more profound their educational paths become.

Similarly, a study conducted by Roberts-Holmes and Kitto (2019) examined ability grouping amongst students in the early grades. As part of the study, the researchers observed the same lesson in three different classes: a lower ability class, a middle ability class, and a high-ability class. The lower-ability class was partly taught by a teaching assistant that was more concerned with behavior than with students understanding the concept. In the middle-level ability class, the students were taught by a teacher who encouraged students to utilize their peers as exemplars. In this example, the students from the lower level ability group were confined by their teaching assistant, who insisted on a particular answer from each student. Whereas, the middle ability group, had the freedom to use their peers as a resource to improve their writing. Moreover, in the high-ability group, students were encouraged to share their experiences with the topic, which fostered more dialogue and vocabulary use between students. Consequently, the study found that students who were placed in the lower level ability classes lacked the tools and resources needed to participate in the higher-level discourses and restricted their ability to participate in future higher-level discourses (Roberts-Holmes and Kitto, 2019).

In conclusion, current literature does not support ability grouping within a classroom setting. Instead, they note that ability grouping may cause lasting negative effects and prohibit the ability of students to close gaps in their learning. As a result, current research does not support the need to create classrooms based on similar academic abilities.

**Implications for Practice**
The fourth finding of this case study, which focused on classroom composition, generated the following implication for practice. Based on current research, it is advisable that classrooms are not homogenously grouped based on their academic performance. Instead, students should be heterogeneously grouped within a classroom. Therefore, it is recommended that all teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School be educated on best practices in relation to classroom composition and groupings. This can be done through professional development offerings, book or journal talks, and staff meetings.

It is also recommended that co-teachers have the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and administration to help solve some problems they are currently facing in their classrooms, which are heterogeneously grouped. By providing co-teachers with an opportunity to discuss issues they are facing in a non-evaluative and supportive environment, they may be better able to address the issues they are facing in the classroom and improve their instructional practices.

**Implications for Future Research**

Currently, there are a number of research studies that support the need for classrooms to be heterogeneously grouped. However, future research may want to focus on the following questions to extend the current literature base:

1. What are the best instructional practices for a heterogeneously created co-taught classroom?
2. How can co-teachers reach all learners?
3. What is considered the best ratio for students with disabilities vs. students without disabilities?
Finding Five: Co-teaching definition

Regarding the theme of defining co-teaching, the following finding emerged:

1. A clear definition of what co-teaching looks like at Apple Valley Elementary School should be established.

How the Finding is Related to the Research Question

The fifth finding that emerged was that there should be a clear definition of co-teaching should look like at Apple Valley Elementary School. Based on participants’ description of their experiences and activities with co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School, it is evident that the school and district have not articulated a clear definition of what co-teaching is and what it should look like when it is implemented within a classroom. Therefore, it is suggested that administrators and teachers engage in activities such as research and meetings to develop a clear definition of what co-teaching is and what it should look like when being implemented at Apple Valley Elementary School.

How the Finding is Related to the Theoretical Framework

This finding expands upon Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which notes that rules, activities, tools, and individuals comprise an activity system. Based on the finding of this study, Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory should be expanded upon to include a clear definition of the activity being performed. This study found that a clear definition of the activity should be created to help ensure that all individuals within the activity system have a clear understanding of the activity.

How the Finding is Related to the Literature

Similar to the findings of this study, the literature has also supported the need to define co-teaching. Most researchers agree that co-teaching teaching involves two or more educators
who work together to plan, deliver instruction, and assess students who have a wide range of abilities within the same classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Villa et al., 2013). Yet, studies have found that despite the similarities in definition, co-teaching is implemented differently from one place to the next. Therefore, research has noted the importance of defining co-teaching according to the setting in which co-teaching is taken place (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012).

**Implications for Practice**

The fifth finding of this case study, which focused on generating a definition for co-teaching, has the following implication for practice. It is recommended that administrators and teachers sit down to discuss what co-teaching is, what it looks like, and best practices. From there, the administrators and teachers can develop a definition of what co-teaching is and looks like at Apple Valley Elementary School. This definition can then be disseminated to parents and the community via the school website or informational nights. Teachers can then reiterate these points during an open house, their welcome letters, or parent-teacher conferences. Lastly, supports should be put in place to help co-teachers implement the school’s definition of co-teaching.

**Implications for Future Research**

Currently, there are many researchers who have defined co-teaching and what co-teaching should look like in classrooms. However, future research may want to focus on the following questions to extend the current literature base:

1. How is co-teaching different than other inclusion practices?
2. What supports can be put in place to help teachers implement co-teaching?
Conclusion

Today, it is becoming more popular for schools to utilize co-teaching to help meet the diverse needs of learners within a classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Howard & Potts, 2009; Lamport, Graves, & Ward, 2012; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). However, the implementation of co-teaching often comes with challenges. Therefore, this qualitative case study was designed to answer the following question: How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

Using Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory as a guide, interview questions were created to elicit data related to the research question. Additionally, observations were also utilized as a means for gathering data. The information collected was then analyzed for emerging themes. The themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis were relationships, communication, professional development, the make-up of co-taught classrooms, and the need to define co-teaching as it relates to Apple Valley Elementary School. Each of these themes was then analyzed to determine the findings of this study.

The first finding of the study was strong relationships between co-teachers, colleagues, administration, and parents are essential for supporting the instructional practice known as co-teaching. This finding confirms Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which recognizes that relationships within an activity system play a vital role in accomplishing the goal of the activity system. Additionally, this finding is also supported by the literature, which highlights the need for co-teachers to develop and maintain strong relationships with key stakeholders in order for co-teaching to be successful.

The second finding of the study was that ongoing communication between co-teaching
partners, administrators, parents, and colleagues are imperative for supporting the instructional practice known as co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which views the interactions and communication that happens amongst individuals and objects as necessary components for a successful activity system. Additionally, this finding extends the current literature on co-teaching because current studies on co-teaching fail to examine the effects of communication with various stakeholders on co-teaching.

The third finding of the study was that more professional development should be provided for co-teachers. This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which views tools as an important component for a successful activity system. Engstrom believed that it was important to understand how individuals within the system utilized or interacted with the tools in order to accomplish the goal of the activity system (Engstrom, 2001). The aforementioned finding exemplifies Engstrom’s theory because professional development is viewed as a tool that can help support and improve co-teaching efforts at Apple Valley Elementary School. Additionally, this finding is consistent with the literature, which also supports the need for on-going professional development in co-teaching.

The fourth finding of this study was that administrators and teachers should consider the students and their abilities when deciding the class placement of students. The teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School believed that the make-up of students placed in a co-taught classroom could affect student outcomes and achievement. This finding is aligned with Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which suggested that the individuals that comprise an activity system can influence the outcome. However, this finding is contrary to current literature, which does not support ability grouping within a classroom setting (Buttaro & Catsambis, 2019;
Roberts-Holmes & Kitto, 2019). Instead, current research on the topic notes that ability grouping may cause lasting negative effects and prohibit the ability of students to close gaps in their learning. As a result, current research does not support the need to create classrooms based on similar academic abilities.

The last finding of this study was that a clear definition of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School needs to be established. This finding expands upon Engstrom’s Second Generation Activity Theory, which notes that rules, activities, tools, and individuals comprise an activity system. This finding is also supported by current literature, which highlights the importance of not only defining co-teaching but also identifying what it should look like when it is implemented in the classroom.

Based on these findings, several recommendations were made to improve co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. Some of these recommendations include more opportunities for professional development, daily common planning time for co-teachers, opportunities for co-teachers to collaborate with support staff and colleagues, and meeting with administration to problem solve, discuss student progress, and initiate informal discussions centered around strategies for improving co-teaching in the classroom.

In conclusion, the results of this study are promising. Based on the experiences of teachers at Apple Valley Elementary School, it is apparent that there are many positive aspects of co-teaching at Apple Valley Elementary School. However, there are always opportunities for co-teachers to improve current co-teaching practices. The research data, which is supported by the theoretical framework and literature, indicate that if the suggestions for improvement are implemented, co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School will be strengthened.
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Appendix A

Central Research Question: How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities, interactions, and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

Interview Protocol

Part I: Introductory Session Objectives (5-7 minutes):

Prior to audiotaping, consent was given to record the interview. I had informed the participant that I would ask him/her consent again in the first few minutes of our interview.

Introductory Protocol

Good afternoon (participant’s pseudonym). I have asked you to speak with me today because of your background and experience with utilizing a co-teaching instructional model. My research project focuses on the activities, interactions, and experiences of regular education and special education teachers who implement co-teaching. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School. Hopefully, this will allow me to identify ways in which we can better support co-teaching partnerships at Apple Valley Elementary School. I would like to audiotape our conversation today to ensure that I have an accurate recording of our discussion. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank you very much, (participant’s pseudonym). If no, thank you, (participant’s pseudonym), for your time. I apologize for any inconvenience this meeting may have caused.].

During this interview, you may notice that I am taking notes. I will utilize these notes to help me remember and capture the important details of the interview. All hard copies of notes will be stored in the researcher’s personal locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s house which is locked and secured. In addition to the notes, I will also be utilizing two audio recording devices. However, I want to assure you that all responses will remain confidential and only pseudonyms will be utilized in my transcripts and audio. Although I am utilizing a transcription service, it is important to note that the transcriber will only have access to the participant’s pseudonyms. This will help ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants. Once received, I will check the transcriptions for accuracy and edit if needed to help ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. The electronic version of the transcripts will then be stored on my personal password-protected computer and my personal password-protected external storage device. Only I will have access to my password-protected computer, and my personal password-protected external storage device. Digital audio recordings will be destroyed once the interviews have been transcribed and approved by the primary researcher. Please be assured that all the information obtained as the result of our meeting will remain confidential.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop this interview at any time. Lastly, I do not intend to cause any harm as a result of this interview. Do you have any questions about the interview or how the information from this interview will be utilized? This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I will ask you several questions.
Please feel free to elaborate on your responses or add examples where you see fit. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Interviewee Background (5-10 minutes)

1. Can you please tell me about your work history?

2. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

3. Can you please provide me with a secure email address in the event I need to send you documents for you to review? Ie. Interview transcripts

Part III: Interview Questions related to Research Question (28-35 minutes)

1. Can you walk me through a typical work day?

2. How do you feel about co-teaching as an instructional strategy?

3. Can you please tell me about your experiences with co-teaching?

4. How do you think your peers view your job as a co-teacher?
   a. Do you feel they are supportive of co-teaching?
      i. Can you give me an example?

5. How do you think your administration views your job as a co-teacher?
   a. Do you feel they are supportive of co-teaching?
      i. Can you give me an example?

6. How do you think parents of your students view your job as a co-teacher?
   a. Do you feel they are supportive of co-teaching?
      i. Can you give me an example?

7. How would you describe your relationship with your co-teaching partner?
   a. Can you give me an example?

8. How would you describe your relationship with your building administrative team?

Ask the participant if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.
Appendix B

**Central Research Question:** How do Apple Valley Elementary School co-teachers describe their activities, interactions, and experiences with the instructional practice known as co-teaching?

**Interview Protocol**

Part I: Introductory Session Objectives (5-7 minutes):

Prior to audiotaping, consent was given to record the interview. I had informed the participant that I would ask him/her consent again in the first few minutes of our interview.

Introductory Protocol

Good afternoon (participant’s pseudonym). I have asked you to speak with me today because of your background and experience with utilizing a co-teaching instructional model. My research project focuses on the activities, interactions, and experiences of regular education and special education teachers who implement co-teaching. Through this study, I hope to gain more insight into the current co-teaching practices at Apple Valley Elementary School. Hopefully, this will allow me to identify ways in which we can better support co-teaching partnerships at Apple Valley Elementary School. I would like to audio tape our conversation today to ensure that I have an accurate recording of our discussion. Do I have your permission to record this interview? [if yes, thank you very much, (participant’s pseudonym). If no, thank you, (participant’s pseudonym), for your time. I apologize for any inconvenience this meeting may have caused.].

During this interview, you may notice that I am taking notes. I utilize these notes to help me remember and capture important details of the interview. All hard copies of notes will be stored in the researcher’s personal locked filing cabinet in the researcher’s house which is locked and secured. In addition to the notes, I will also be utilizing two audio recording devices. However, I want to assure you that all responses will remain confidential and only pseudonyms will be utilized in my transcripts and audio. Although I am utilizing a transcription service, it is important to note that the transcriber will only have access to the participant’s pseudonyms. This will help ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants. Once received, I will check the transcriptions for accuracy and edit if needed to help ensure the accuracy of the transcripts. The electronic version of the transcripts will then be stored on my personal password-protected computer, and my personal password protected external storage device. Only I will have access to my password-protected computer, and my personal password protected external storage device. Digital audio recordings will be destroyed once the interviews have been transcribed and approved by the primary researcher. Please be assured that all information obtained as the result of our meeting will remain confidential.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop this interview at any time. Lastly, I do not intend to cause any harm as a result of this interview. Do you have any questions about the interview or how the information from this interview will be utilized? This interview should last about 45 minutes. During this time, I will ask you several questions.
Please feel free to elaborate on your responses or add examples where you see fit. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part II: Interviewee Background (5-10 minutes)

1. Do you prefer to work alone or with other individuals? Why?

Part III: Interview Questions related to Research Question (28-35 minutes)

1. Can you describe your experiences with professional development on co-teaching?
   a. What were some of the strengths/weaknesses of the PD?

2. Can you walk me through a typical planning period with your co-teacher?
   a. Do you feel you have enough time for planning with your co-teacher? Why?
   b. Who develops the lesson plans? Why?
   c. How do you decide what to plan for/teach?
   d. How do you decide what co-teaching model to utilize? What are the co-teaching models used most frequently by you and your co-teaching partner?
   e. How do you and your co-teacher decide what roles you will both assume when implementing a lesson?

3. How would you describe your role in the co-teaching partnership?
   a. Can you provide an example?

4. How would you describe your partner's role in the co-teaching relationship?
   a. Can you provide an example?

5. Can you describe the division of labor between you and your co-teaching partner?
   a. What are your responsibilities in the partnership?
   b. What are your co-teaching partner's responsibilities in the partnership?
   c. How do you feel about the division of labor between you and your co-teaching partner?

6. How would you describe the division of labor between co-teachers and non-co-teachers?
   a. How are the responsibilities the same?
   b. How are the responsibilities different?

7. Can you describe the school’s expectation of co-teaching?

8. Can you describe the district’s expectations of co-teaching?

9. How do you feel co-teaching could be improved at Apple Valley Elementary School (pseudonym)?

Ask the participant if they have any questions and thank them for their participation.