EXPERIENCES OF GENERAL EDUCATION ELEMENTARY INCLUSION CO-TEACHERS

IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sherrie Ann Robbins

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

March, 2014

EXPERIENCES OF GENERAL EDUCATION ELEMENTARY INCLUSION CO-TEACHERS

IN SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Sherrie Ann Robbins

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University
March, 2014

APPROVED BY:

Dr. Gina Grogan, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Dr. James Zabloski, Ed.D., Committee Member

Dr. Suzy Besson-Martilotta, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott B. Watson, PhD, Associate Dean of Advanced Programs

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of general education elementary school inclusion co-teachers in schools that are successful with their special education population as defined by Adequate Yearly Progress and most recently, the College and Career Ready Performance Index. The participants were employed in a district in the metro Atlanta area. The primary research question was, "What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met Adequate Yearly Progress and College and Career Ready Performance Index for students with disabilities?" The three sub-questions addressed the self-efficacy, motivation, and perceptions of the teachers. Data collection included interviews, participant journals, and a focus group. Analysis followed procedures for a transcendental phenomenological study as outlined by Moustakas (1994). Four themes emerged regarding their experiences: (a) putting forth the effort to be life-long learners, (b) valuing the power of relationships, (c) thriving off of student success, and (d) setting aside frustrations and understanding the big picture.

Keywords: inclusion, co-teaching, elementary, perceptions, self-efficacy, phenomenological, general education, special education, Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI)

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my amazing and growing family. When I started this journey, I received constant and continuous encouragement from my husband, Kevin. As time went on, we had our first daughter, Josclyn. While hard to find balance in life, looking into Josclyn's eyes provided me the strength to continue on, wishing that one day those eyes would look proudly at her mom for completing such a task. Most recently, our family grew with the addition of our twin daughters, Annsley and Breann. Their early arrival came right in the "thick" of dissertation, providing a special challenge that proved my strength and determination, as well as my husband's dedication to this journey. Through this dissertation process, I have grown as a scholar, a wife, a mother, and most certainly as a child of God. It was a challenge with many late nights, but from the amazing outcomes and impact, I wouldn't have it any other way. I love you four to the moon and back!

Acknowledgements

This journey would not have been possible without the involvement, support and guidance of so many special people in my life. I would like to thank the participants of this study who gave their time freely and their thoughts openly. It was truly an unselfish act and they have become my education heroes.

There are several faculty members I would like to thank as well. First, thank you to Dr. Gina Grogan, my chair and guide through this journey. Her timely feedback, constant encouragement, and words of wisdom became my step-by-step guide to success. Dr. Zabloski's expertise in qualitative research was invaluable and quick response time was appreciated greatly—thank you so much. Deep gratitude goes to Dr. Suzy Besson-Martilotta. I would have never made it to "Kansas" without her advice, encouragement, and overall guidance. Lastly, but certainly not least, I want to thank Dr. Lucinda Spaulding, my professor and guide for EDUC 919 and 980, and later my research consultant. There is no doubt in my mind that my success is a direct reflection of the high expectations she sets for her students.

I would also like to thank some close friends. Thank you to my dissertation buddy, Cheri Long. She was always just a text, email, or phone call away to answer questions, advise, and simply listen! Also, Amy Brooks who willingly stepped in as mom when I needed to work and be away from my kids. I thank her for her countless hours of loving the girls! And lastly, to the best friends a girl could ask for, my family! Thank you to Dad, Teresa, Debbie, Matt, Joey, Eliza, Kevin, Rik, and my precious angel in heaven, Mom. Their love and support fuels me!

I thank my Heavenly Father for placing these amazing people in my life. I know it was not by chance. I am forever grateful for you all!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA)

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC)

Regular Education Initiative (REI)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities have been the focus of education reform for decades. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002 made the general curriculum and state standards available to students with disabilities, holding these students as accountable on yearly assessments as their peers who are non-disabled. In addition, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 focused on students with disabilities being educated with their non-disabled peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). For many, LRE is the inclusion co-taught classroom.

Since these changes, research on best practices for inclusive co-taught classrooms has emerged. (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). In addition, studies on the effectiveness of inclusion and co-teaching were done (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). Many researchers argued that teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching were critical to its success (Damore & Murray, 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Folin & Chambers, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Male, 2011; Solis et al., 2012), therefore turning the attention of research to teachers' perceptions.

What humans perceive to be true becomes their reality (Potgieter, 2011). For this reason, the perceptions of teachers were the focus of numerous studies. The importance of teacher perceptions could not be ignored because of the impact these perceptions had on motivation, decision making, self-efficacy, and attitude. These factors, in turn, impacted instructional fidelity and ultimately, student outcomes (Solis et al., 2012).

Background

The manner in which students with disabilities have been educated in the United States has changed immensely in the past 100 years. Recently, the NCLB (2002) and the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 came into law. Since the passing of these two laws, an increasing number of students with disabilities are educated with their peers who are non-disabled in the general education classroom (Gordon, 2006; Smith, 2005). However, while inclusion increased, the amount of teacher training on inclusive practices did not increase significantly, leaving general education teachers feeling underprepared to meet the needs of their special education students (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Male, 2011). This led to negative teacher perceptions of various critical aspects and features of inclusion and co-teaching. Many of these features were cited by researchers as imperative for successful implementation such as true collaboration, administrative support, and teacher training (Murawski & Swason, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012).

Studies on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching found that teachers had a positive perception of the overall concept (Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). However, there were several areas of concern where teachers' perceptions were consistently negative, such as lack of professional development, support from school leaders, and communication between co-teachers (Murawski & Swason, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). "There are factors that impact the inclusive environment, and these factors can affect how teachers perceive their classroom" (Leatherman, 2007, p. 594). Despite this, teachers still persevere in their role as inclusion co-teachers. This research study addressed general education elementary inclusion co-teachers'

perceptions at a school setting that has shown success with its students with disabilities population. From Albert Bandura's (1986, 1999, 2002) social cognitive theory, it is known that environment shapes teachers' perceptions, self-efficacy, and motivation. Theoretically, being a part of a successful school positively affects teachers' perceptions. If this is true, then further investigation of these "successful" schools can lead to positive changes in the implementation of special education services and support provided to teachers.

Since the passing of NCLB, the accountability system utilized to track the progress of academic success of all public schools and students across the nation is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (NCLB, 2002). AYP requires schools to report standardized assessment results for the entire student body, including subgroups such as students with disabilities, racial and ethnic groups, students with limited English proficiency, and students with a low socio-economic status. Schools are required to show continuous progress with each category (NCLB, 2002; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). The consequences of not meeting AYP are severe and include the right of parents to transfer students to another school, school staff replacement, new curriculum implementation, or state/charter take-over (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007).

However, there is continuing debate on what actually constitutes success for students with disabilities in the education community (Bowen & Rude, 2006; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). This has to do with the tension between NCLB (2002) and IDEA (2004). NCLB (2002) focuses on a narrow, "one size fits all" approach to accountability. The academic standards, assessments to determine standard mastery, and level needed to be proficient are, overall, the same for all students. The law also requires all students to be performing on grade level in reading and math to be considered academically successful. On the contrary, IDEA (2004) focuses on student achievement being measured by the success of the IEP goals, not by a

standardized assessment (Vannest, Mahadevan, Mason, & Temple-Harvey, 2009). IDEA (2004) is not only focused on academic standards, but also social, behavioral, and life-skill preparedness. These constructs are not part of the standardized accountability assessments utilized in the United States.

AYP is currently in a state of transition. Since the 2012-2013 school year, schools no longer are held accountable through AYP. The federal government turned over control of tracking progress to individual states. States are still required to report assessment scores; however, individual states are currently working on their own systems, many of them using AYP as a template and guide.

The participants of this study worked in a school in the state of Georgia. Starting in the 2011-2012 school year, Georgia reported its standardized testing results using the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). While there are differences in calculations and reports between AYP and CCRPI, both are similar in their core foundation. They both are used as a tool to track the progress of schools using standardized test scores, including that of specific populations such as students with disabilities. The main purpose of the switch to CCRPI was to better align with the new curriculum standards set by the Common Core State Standards. Common Core represents standards that are part of the options for use across the United States. As of the 2013-2013 school year, 45 states, including Georgia, had adopted Common Core as their primary curriculum standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2013).

Despite known issues with AYP as accountability for students with disabilities, it was used for the purpose of operationalizing success for this study for three distinct reasons. First, it is nationally known and understood. The common language provides opportunities for findings to be transferred to other settings across the country. Second, while controversial, AYP is the

current reality of the nation's accountability system. Despite its critics throughout the years, it is still the federally mandated way to report academic achievement. Third, because it is the system that has been in place for the past several years, historical data on successful schools can universally and consistently be found. While the accountability system is changing, historical data is needed for this study, so CCRPI was used as a secondary source to verify schools' success with students with disabilities.

Situation to Self

I have worked as an educator in various elementary schools for the past 15 years and served in the role of an inclusion co-teacher for four years. My most recent teaching experience was as a fifth-grade literacy teacher in an elementary school that has met AYP in all subgroups, every year. Although I have experiences as an inclusion co-teacher, I was a non-participant observer throughout the experiences of the participants.

The goal of the research was not to advocate, but rather describe the experiences of others. Using a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2007), I attempted to better understand the environment similar to the ones in which I have worked. Through interactions with the participants, I drew meaning from the complex views of others' experiences. Using the ontological philosophical assumption, I was aware that different realities existed and reported on the multiple realities of the participants using their words. Through the development of themes constructed during data analysis, I described their experiences using participants' quotes. Despite a great effort to bracket out my experiences as an inclusion co-teacher, I was aware of the axiological view and understood that my personal experiences may have biased the research interpretations, as Cresswell (2007) pointed out as necessary. With an epistemological view, I spent time with participants listening to their perspectives, mostly in the environment in which

they taught. This allowed me to focus on their experiences and to understand the phenomena from their perspectives.

Problem Statement

Several studies were conducted regarding teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching (Bessette, 2008; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007). These studies varied from being general in nature (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002) to targeting a specific population such as teachers in urban schools (Damore & Murray, 2009) or high schools (Ernst & Rodgers, 2009). Overall, the results showed numerous issues with inclusion and co-teaching, citing elements such as a lack of time for collaboration with co-teachers, inadequate support from school leaders, and poor training of teachers as key factors in negative perceptions (Murawski & Swason, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). These were some of the same elements cited by researchers as being critical to the success of inclusion and co-teaching (Friend et al., 2010; Santoli et al., 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). While research on the topic has been conducted, few studies specifically targeted the perceptions of teachers who worked in schools that had shown success with their students with disabilities. Research focused on the attitudes, motivation, and self-efficacy of general education inclusion co-teachers who worked in such a setting was needed to fill this gap.

With the mandates and expectation set through NCLB and IDEA, success for students with disabilities can arguably be defined by students' proficiency on standardized assessments. Data shows that students with disabilities are often not successful on such assessments. The Data Accountability Center (2012) showed that in the 2010-2011 school year, the average percent of students in grades 3-8 who received a proficient score on reading assessments was 37%

nationally. An even lower percentage (35%) of students with disabilities in grades 3-8 received a proficient score on math assessment for the 2010-2011 school year.

As stated previously, success with students with disabilities for this study was measured using AYP and CCRPI. Targeting perceptions of teachers at schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities is important due to its uniqueness, because meeting AYP for students with disabilities is a challenge. For example, the state of Georgia as a whole did not meet AYP with its students with disabilities subgroup in the 2008-2009, 2009-2010, or 2010-2011 school years, despite meeting AYP in all other subgroups (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). In addition, there was a difference statewide for those same years between the total population of students meeting or exceeding the standard of expectation and students with disabilities meeting or exceeding the standard of expectation of 23.1% in both reading and math. Lastly, in 2010-2011, the number of schools not making AYP across the state solely based on students with disabilities was 106 out of 503. Assessment results were reported using the CCRPI starting in the 2012-2013 school year. Using this data, once again students with disabilities subgroup for the state of Georgia did not meet the state performance target in any subject area (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

There is a focus in Georgia to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers who are non-disabled. Using data from 2011, only 75.4% of students with disabilities were proficient in reading, as compared to 92.8% of the total population. In addition, only 63.8% of students with disabilities were proficient in math, as compared to 84.1% of the total population. Furthermore, students with disabilities had the lowest proficiency rate in all subject areas among all subgroups as defined by the CCRPI, including that of economically disadvantaged and English language learners (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe experiences of general education elementary school inclusion co-teachers in schools that were successful (as defined by AYP and CCRPI) with its students with disabilities. The participants were employed in a single school district in the metro Atlanta area. Inclusion and co-teaching was defined as a general education and special education teacher working collaboratively with a specific class that was made up of both general education and special education students. Success with the special education population was defined as meeting AYP in the students with disabilities subgroup for three consecutive years and earning green or yellow flags in the students with disabilities subgroup for CCRPI.

Significance of the Study

Empirically, this study was significant because it added to the literature on perceptions of teachers on inclusion and co-teaching. While numerous studies have been conducted in the area of inclusion and co-teaching (Bassette, 2008; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012), there exists a lack of literature on teacher perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching at schools that have shown academic success with students with disabilities. Researchers have targeted specific populations in their studies on teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, including preservice teachers (Ji-Ryun, 2011; Jung, 2007; Mdikana, Ntshangase, & Mayekiso, 2007), elementary, middle, or high schools specifically (DeSimone & Parmar, 2006; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Hammond & Ingalls, 2003), and urban schools (Damore & Murray, 2009). This study added to the body of literature, targeting an unresearched group of teachers and their experiences as inclusion co-teachers. Further investigation of inclusion and co-teaching needs to be conducted because "No experience

is ever finished or exhausted. New and fresh meanings are forever in the world...there is no limit to our knowledge or experience of any idea" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 65).

Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986, 1999, 2002) explains that environment influences a person's motivation, self-efficacy, and overall perceptions. Within social cognitive theory is the idea of the collective agency and the collective self-efficacy. Collective agency is the shared beliefs of a group, and collective self-efficacy is the belief of the group's ability to achieve desired outcomes. The collective agency is powerful in terms of its impact on the group's motivation and success. Results of studies focused on teacher perceptions toward inclusion and co-teaching showed that teachers' areas of concerns included such factors as inadequate support, lack of time, and poor training (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). Conducting research at schools that have historically been successful with students with disabilities showed the perceptions of teachers who shared the experience of being inclusion co-teachers in successful schools regarding these constructs. In terms of theoretical significance, this study showed that the teacher's environment, or collective agency, impacted their experience as shown through their personal self-efficacy, motivation, and perceptions.

Attitudes and perceptions of teachers have long been the focus of educational research because they are known to be key components to successful implementation of reform (Santoli et al., 2008). In the research of teachers' experiences as inclusion co-teachers, there are many areas in which they hold negative perceptions. This research study explained the experiences of general education inclusion co-teachers in successful schools. If teachers' perceptions were positive, further investigation of these specific schools should be undertaken because this would have significant impact on elementary schools' implementation of special education services and

support provided to teachers. This study was specifically important to this region of Georgia because its success overall with students with disabilities was unique. The district as a whole made AYP in the students with disabilities subgroup, with 16 out of the 20 elementary schools meeting this distinction in the 2010-2011 school year (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Meanwhile, the state of Georgia as a whole did not make AYP with its students with disabilities subgroup for that same year.

Research Questions

There was one central question that encompassed the full purpose of the study: What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusive and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities? The goal of this question was to obtain "comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 105). Developing the answer for this required a full understanding of the shared experience of the participants, as told from each individual perspective in order to obtain the full essence of the teachers' experiences and behavior.

To fully answer the central question, three sub-questions were developed. They were determined using constructs of Albert Bandura's (1977, 1999) social cognitive theory, which suggests that human behavior is learned by a person's observations and interactions with others and their environment (Bandura, 1986, 1999, 2002). Furthermore, learning is enhanced when a person has higher self-efficacy which in turn, increases motivation. These factors and influences shape a person's total perception. With the constructs of self-efficacy, motivation, and perceptions as a foundation for uncovering the participants' experiences, the following three sub-questions were used:

(a) How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the self-efficacy of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

This question was designed to better understand the participants' self-efficacy in meeting the needs of their special education students in terms of management, motivation, and academic success. A teacher's "self-efficacy refers to teacher's beliefs regarding their abilities to impact decision making in their school and to manage and motivate children in their classroom" (O'Connor, 2010, p. 192). In addition, "teachers who possessed low efficacy (i.e., beliefs about the impact of their teaching)… were generally less receptive to inclusion" (Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 285), thus leading to negative perceptions. Self-efficacy not only impacts motivation, but also overall performance, risk-taking, resourcefulness, level of thinking, commitment to task, effort, persistence, perseverance, perceptions of stressful situations, power over depression, and the ability to manage personal environments (Bandura, 1993, 2000). Success in the classroom is linked to high self-efficacy.

(b) How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the motivation of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

This question was designed to understand the participants' motivation to work with students with disabilities in the inclusion co-taught classroom and what factors shape their motivation. There is a direct link between teachers' perceptions and motivation; essentially, perceptions effect motivation (Potgieter, 2011). "Teachers' beliefs are likely to influence teachers' motivation and thus the quality of their practice" (Solis et al., 2012, p. 505). Social cognitive theory suggests that environment affects motivation. This study focused on schools that were

successful with students with disabilities. This is linked to the idea of the collective agency (Bandura, 1986, 2000) which states that people are affected by the motivation and success around them. In this case it is the unique setting of successful schools.

    (c) What are the perceptions and attitudes of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

    This research question was aimed at finding if similar results are true for teachers who work in schools that are successful with its students with disabilities population. "Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are an important component of inclusion to study, because if teachers do not accept inclusion, then their commitment to ensuring it is implemented successfully may be compromised" (Ernst & Rodgers, 2009, p. 306). As this study focused on successful schools, it was imperative to look at teachers' perceptions and attitudes as they have shown to be just as important a factor to success as knowledge and skill (Forlin & Chambers, 2011). Past research has shown that inclusion co-teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching were overall positive; however there were many critical aspects the teachers perceived negatively (Austin, 2001; Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ji-Ryun, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Solis et al., 2012).

Research Plan

    A qualitative study was necessary for this research as it explored a specific population of teachers and their shared experiences as elementary general education inclusion co-teachers. To describe the essence or total experience of the participants, it was important for individual voices of teachers with differing backgrounds to be heard through holistic accounts using multiple unique perspectives. The use of qualitative studies in the field of education has increased as the

need to understand educator's perceptions, attitudes, and self-efficacy become increasingly important and impactful (Scruggs et al., 2007).

A phenomenological design was a natural fit for this study as all the participants had lived a shared experience, namely being a general education inclusion co-teacher in a school making AYP and CCRPI with students with disabilities. Phenomenology provided rich, descriptive data that was needed to fully describe the experience as stated by the central research question. Data was collected until thematic saturation was reached, searching for commonalities between the participants. It was important to first focus on individual teacher perceptions and then move to a more broad study that focused on whole schools or the whole district. Transcendental phenomenology was utilized for this research study. In describing transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) stated:

> The researcher following a transcendental phenomenological approach engages in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated in order to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experiences and professional studies - to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated. (p. 22)

I do have experience as an inclusion co-teacher and worked in a setting that was successful with students with disabilities. Therefore the research reflected my "interest, involvement, and personal commitment" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 21) to the problem identified. However, those experiences will be bracketed out. This step was imperative to describe the experiences of the participants and not in making interpretations of the data using my own experiences.

Delimitations

There is controversy in special education regarding the testing of students with disabilities and whether it shows the child is successful (Bowen & Rude, 2006; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). Some questions currently being debated include: Has academic growth been made, or was the child able to pass a test with modifications? Is the child making progress toward academic growth for college or career readiness, or is the child simply being taught isolated skills and standards for a final assessment?

AYP has many critics as a whole, but especially when dealing with specific populations such as students with disabilities and English language learners In addition, many states are transitioning away from using AYP as yearly success indicators, and moving to other methods individualized state to state. . However, it was used in this study because of its national use, standard definition, and access to national data, as well as to be able to identify schools for inclusion in this study.

Inclusion and co-teaching have been defined by many experts (Friend et al., 2010; Solis et al., 2012). It has taken on many different forms with variations not only from state to state, but often school to school. For the purpose of this study, an inclusion co-taught classroom was one where students with disabilities were being educated alongside their peers who were non-disabled by one special education certified teacher and one general education certified teacher, teaching in the same room at the same time for at least one subject segment. While the co-teacher was only present at specific times of the day, the special education student received their primary instruction in the general education classroom. Exceptions to this included students leaving the classroom for other supports such as speech and language services.

Definitions

To assist the reader, the following are definitions and abbreviations of some technical words used in this dissertation.

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) – This nationally mandated accountability system is defined in NCLB. It focuses on the use of academic standards and standardized assessment, the achievement of all public school students, and outlines sanctions and rewards. In 2011, flexibility from this accountability system was granted to interested individual state in exchange for a state-developed accountability plan (No Child Left Behind, 2002).

College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) – The state of Georgia created this new accountability system under flexibility provided by Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to be utilized in place of AYP. It is a "comprehensive school improvement, accountability, and communication platform for all educational stakeholders that will promote college and career readiness for all Georgia public school students" (Georgia Department of Education, 2013, p. 1).

Co-teaching – A special education teacher and a general education teacher working collaboratively and sharing teaching responsibilities in the same classroom (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Disability – A student who has met the eligibility criteria in any of the following areas and needs special education and related services as determined by assessments and other measures given and discussed by qualified professions and the parents of the child (also known as the eligibility team): (a) autism spectrum disorder, (b) deaf/blind, (c) deaf/hard of hearing, (d) emotional and behavioral disorder, (e) intellectual disability, (f) orthopedic impairment, (g) other health impairment, (h) significant developmental delay, (i) specific learning disability, (j)

speech-language impairment, (k) traumatic brain injury, or (l) visual impairment (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) – Ensures that a free appropriate public education be available to all children between the ages of 3 and 21, including children with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Highly Qualified – As required by IDEA and defined in NCLB, all public special education teachers must be highly qualified in special education. These laws outline specific requirements that special education teachers must fulfill to become highly qualified (IDEA Partnership, 2012).

Inclusion – A students with disabilities being taught in the general education classroom with the non-disabled peers with any necessary accommodation, modifications or related services (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – Reauthorized in 2004, IDEA is federal law that ensures that students with disabilities receive needed services by governing how public schools provide early intervention, special education, and other related services. Services are provided to students from birth to age 21 (IDEA Partnership, 2012).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) – To the best extent possible, students with disabilities will be educated with their non-disabled peers. Students being removed from the regular class environment will only take place when a student with a disability education cannot be achieved successfully with the use of supplemental materials and services (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – Recently renamed Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 2011, NCLB was reauthorized in 2001 and was designed to close the

achievement gap through defined measures of accountability, flexibility and choice (Department of Education, 2012).

Response to Intervention (RTI) – A framework that explains the instruction and support provided to all students, with interventions for students that are struggling. With the use of progress monitoring assessment tools, struggling learners are tracked for progress. RTI is the system that is most currently used to begin determination of special education services (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

Special Education – A specially designed education to meet the needs of students with disabilities at no additional cost to parents (Georgia Department of Education, 2007).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of the current literature provides an understanding of the progression made in educating students with disabilities in the United States. Transformational change has occurred and these changes have been making a slow progression toward success (Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). However, teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching show there are still several areas for improvement. This literature review addresses the following components: (a) theoretical framework for this study, (b) historical overview of special education policy, (c) current trends in special education, (d) teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, and (e) implications for research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informs this study is Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. To best understand social cognitive theory in its entirety, it is important to recognize its deep roots in social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). These two theories will be explained separately.

Social Learning Theory

The concepts of social learning theory were first proposed in 1941 by Neal Miller and John Dollard. Social learning theory, as it is best known today, was revised and expanded to social cognitive theory by Albert Bandura (1977, 1986). However, to best understand the inner workings of social cognitive theory, it is important to identify its foundations in social learning theory.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) proposed the manner in which humans learn and develop, with a specific emphasis on social behavior. It stated that behavior was the result of one's interactions with people and situations. It focused on three main factors that shaped a

person's behavior. First, a person is highly influenced by their vicarious experiences. More specifically, it is observing others acting in a particular way, noting the consequences of their behavior. Second, behavior is learned by symbolic messages. This is learned through the actions of others, but the modeling of behavior is not live and real; rather it is learned through media and books. The last factor is the self-regulatory process. For this, a person makes a plan of action based on what is observed through the modeling and actual personal experiences.

Social learning theory has a direct link to the motivation of a person. Through the process described above, a person is able to become motivated by the consequences of eluding a similar behavior. Actions are guided by three different types of consequences or incentives. First, there are external reinforcements such as intrinsic and extrinsic incentives. Second, there are vicarious reinforcements, such as the observations of others having successes or failures. A combination of the two, external and vicarious reinforcers, has the greatest impact on motivation. The last aspect is self-reinforcement, which is when a person enhances and maintains personal behaviors through self-acknowledgment and rewards. A person will develop their motivation over time, for they do not respond to each situation separately, but process multiple events.

In addition to motivation, the idea of self-efficacy plays an important role in Social learning theory. Self-efficacy is defined as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce desired outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 79). Self-efficacy plays an important role in behavior and motivation because it decreases fears, increases expectations, and overall determines effort and persistence. Self-efficacy is influenced by both personal performance accomplishments and vicarious experiences. Both experiencing and observing success will raise confidence and expectations.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory is an expansion of social learning theory. While some use the titles interchangeably, there are noticeable advancements in social cognitive theory, and it is the phrase currently used most often. The differences and extensions are explained below.

Social cognitive theory focuses on the interactions of three main factors that influence a person's unique behavior: Personal, behavioral, and environmental. Personal behaviors refer to biological events. Behavioral factors include personal experiences and outcomes. Environment factors are both the social and physical environment. These three factors are "triadic, dynamic, and reciprocal" (Bandura, 1986, p. 24) meaning they constantly influenced each other. No one factor is more important than the other.

Social cognitive theory puts a greater emphasis on self-efficacy, which "influences how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave" (Bandura, 1993, p. 118). People need to feel a strong self-efficacy, the belief they can be successful through their personal actions, to have the incentive and the motivation to act, according to Bandura (1999). Goal setting and personal evaluation of reaching goals is an important aspect of self-efficacy. Those with high self-efficacy usually set lofty goals and maintain motivation and perseverance even when goals are not obtained easily. Those who lack confidence tend to also slacken their efforts. Self-efficacy not only impacts motivation, but also overall performance, risk-taking, resourcefulness, level of thinking, commitment to task, effort, persistence, perseverance, perceptions of stressful situations, power over depression, and the ability to manage their personal environments (Bandura, 1993, 2000).

Social cognitive theory distinguishes between three different forms of agency: Personal, proxy, and collective (Bandura, 1986, 1999). Personal agency is the areas over which a person

has direct control; proxy agency refers to others acting on one's behalf; collective agency is the shared beliefs in a group's ability to achieve desired outcomes. Businesses, schools, and other organization have placed extensive focus on the collective agency.

Within the collective agency, attention is given to collective efficacy. It is important to note that collective efficacy is not equal to the combined total of the individual members. The collective agency refers to "people's shared beliefs in their collective power to produce desired outcomes" (Bandura, 1999, p. 34). Similar to personal self-efficacy, collective efficacy has a great impact on results and success. As the collective self-efficacy increases, the achievement rate increases as well. In addition, collective self-efficacy affects effort, staying power, encouragement, and use of resources, according to Bandura (2000).

Application of Theories

Social learning theory and social cognitive theory have both been pivotal in education. Curriculum developers, behavioral specialists, educational leaders, and educators have used the foundations of these theories to shape instruction and student interaction. Students become motivated when self-efficacy is greater. Teachers become models and guides for the classroom. Self-contained classrooms, mostly found in the elementary school, collaborate and work to build on the idea of the collective agency. Teachers work with students to set goals and teach self-regulatory skills (Linares et al., 2005; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, Bonner & Kovach, 1996).

Social cognitive theory has also been applied to group effectiveness in different settings. These include the business workplace (Prussia & Knincki, 1996) and sports teams (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrbach, & Mack, 2000). Social cognitive theory has been put to the test involving studies on health issues (Matrin-Ginis et al., 2001), social issues (Prati, 2012), and cultural issues (Lie, 1996).

The research proposed in this study focused on perceptions of general education inclusion co-teachers. Using the constructs outlined in social learning theory and social cognitive theory, motivation of the participants was examined. In addition, there was a focus on the collective agency and collective self-efficacy. All participants worked in schools that had shown success in meeting AYP with their special education population. According to the above theories, success increases motivation and self-efficacy. It was expected that working in a setting that was successful would show that participants would have high motivation and self-efficacy in being a general education inclusion co-teacher.

Historical Overview of Special Education Policy

"Over the past 20 years, a convergence of legislative pressure has challenged educators to find efficient yet effective ways to provide high-quality instruction for student with disabilities" (Solis et al., 2012, p. 498). Though the progress toward change in the manner in which students with disabilities are educated evolved over a long period of time, the revisions have been drastic (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Yell, Rogers, & Rodgers, 1998).

Individuals with Disabilities Legislation

While several legislative issues began to draw attention to special education issues, such as Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) and Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1972), significant impact began in 1973 with the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children (EHA) (Aron & Loprest, 2012). This law was the first to require schools that received federal funding to provide free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all students with disabilities (EHA, 1973). Before this law was enacted, 90% of children with disabilities were placed in state institutions and millions were not allowed in school or were denied needed special education services (Aron & Loprest, 2012;

Department of Education, 1999). Even though students were allowed to attend public school, there was little in the law to ensure a quality education for students with disabilities because the law did not focus on curriculum (Bowen & Rude, 2006; Winzer, 1993). "Many of the 3.5 million children with disabilities who did attend school were warehoused in segregated facilities with little or no effective instruction" (Arong & Loprest, 2012, p. 100).

In 1990, EHA was revised and named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Revisions focused on higher expectations for students with disabilities, increased parent and general education teacher involvement on decision making, and the inclusion of students in state and district assessment and reporting (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Department of Education, 1999; IDEA, 1997; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Yell et al., 1998.) A greater focus was placed on the curriculum for students with disabilities. At this point, students with disabilities were to have access to the general curriculum, meaning the same curriculum as non-disabled students, according to Bowen and Rude (2006). The latest revision to this law came in 2004 with the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). This law redefined family rights, FAPE, eligibility requirements, discipline issues, and early intervention. In addition, revisions were made to the concepts of the LRE and the use of Individualized Education Program (IEP) (IDEA, 2004; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Turnbull, 2005). Emphasis was placed on the use of "proven practices and materials" (Aron & Loprest, 2012, p. 100).

The use of the IEP began with EHA, but major revisions were made with IDEA (2004). It required that every student who had a disability be provided with an IEP, the guiding legal, instructional, and educational document for the student (Sayeski, 2009). The IEP was developed by a team that consisted of the special education teacher, general education teacher, parent(s) or guardian(s) of the students, a member from school leadership, and anyone else who could add

value to the decision making process. The document could be modified at any point, but the team needed to meet at least once a year to review the document and to make necessary revisions. The IEP included the strengths and weaknesses of the student, current level of performance information, educational goals and strategies, and accommodations and modifications needed for success. Lastly, the IEP determined placement, also known as the LRE (Aron & Loprest, 2012; IDEA, 1997; IDEA, 2004; IDEA Partnership, 2012, Sayeski, 2009).

The LRE describes the placement of students with disabilities in the same setting as their non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. The law under IDEA (2004) states "removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (IDEA, 2004, Section 612). To best determine placement, the IEP team considers all aspects of the child including current performance, strengths and weakness, needed accommodations, and benefits. Environments to consider include, but are not limited to, full inclusion in the general education classroom, a separate learning environment often called the resource room, a separate school, home-based education, or even a hospital setting (Algozzine, Harris, Mutua, Obiakor, & Rotatori, 2012; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). The less opportunity students with disabilities have to interact with their peers that are not disabled peers, the more restrictive the environment is deemed, for students receive the most social benefit from being in settings with their non-disabled peers (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

No Child Left Behind

While NCLB was not specifically a special education law, its impact on special education was significant. NCLB was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

and arguably one of the most powerful pieces of educational legislation in the history of the United States (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). The four main areas of focus contained in NCLB legislation were accountability, more local control and flexibility, parental involvement, and use of scientific, research-based instruction (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Solis et al,. 2012; Trunbull, 2005; Vannest et al., 2009; Yell et al,. 2006).

Accountability was by far the main feature of NCLB (Turnbull, 2005). Schools, school districts, and states were all held accountable for making sure that all students achieved growth, specifically in the area of reading and math. The first area of accountability was in teacher qualifications. All teachers needed to be considered highly qualified to teach in their current position, whether it be general education, content specific, or special education (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Trunbull, 2005; Vannest et al., 2009; Yell et al., 2006). Guidelines for what constituted "highly qualified" were provided.

Accountability, however, went far beyond staffing issues. NCLB (2002) mandated the assessment of all students to show academic progress and growth. Individual states had a lot of decision making power but had to include the following: Develop academic standards for learning, develop or adopt assessments to assess students' mastery of the standards, develop what constitutes proficiency for each standard, and develop a manner in which to report findings publicly (Yell et al., 2006). The goal of this type of accountability system was to eliminate the achievement gap between different types of students that was partially being caused by poorly defined academic standards, poor teachers, and low expectations for specific sub-groups such as students with disabilities and low income students (LaNear & Frattura, 2007).

While each state was given the flexibility to develop the specifics on their own, each school, district, and state was held accountable through a federal system called Adequate Yearly

Progress (AYP). AYP was considered "one of the most critical and perhaps one of the most complicated components of NCLB" (Bowen & Rude, 2006, p. 27). Through AYP, all schools would have to report their assessment results and show that all students were making gains in both reading and math using state developed measures to gauge students' progress (NCLB, 2002; Yell et al., 2006). The target goal increased each year with the national goal of having all students across the nation meet or exceed state standards by 2014. Schools were required to report progress and meet AYP targets for the student body as whole, and also for all specific subgroups. These groups included students in a low-socioeconomic status, different racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency. The purpose of this was to ensure that no students were being ignored or being held to a lower standard (NCLB, 2002; Yell et al., 2006). The consequences of not meeting AYP were severe and included the right of parents to transfer students to another school, school staff replacement, new curriculum implementation, or state/charter take-over (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007).

New flexible guidelines under NCLB allowed states to develop their own reporting system in place of AYP.

On September 23, 2011, the U.S. Department of Education offered each interested state education agency the opportunity to request flexibility on behalf of itself, its local educational agencies, and its schools, in order to better focus on improving students learning and increasing the quality of instruction (Department of Education, 2012, p. 11). States choosing this option needed to seek waivers of ten provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 (Department of Education, 2012).

The state of Georgia was one of 33 states that were approved for ESEA flexibility in 2011. Through this, accountability would no longer be reported through the use of AYP, but by using the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI). The CCRPI core value is about accountability that focuses on improvements rather than punishment. "It gives levers to effect change and yearly opportunity to measure the pace of change" (Georgia Department of Education, 2013, p. 6).

The CCRPI is a complex, comprehensive report card for schools, districts, and the state as a whole using several data points, including five indicators under Content Mastery, six indicators under Post Elementary School Readiness, and eight indicators for supplemental areas of growth. In terms of academic performance using standardized tests, only the five Content Mastery Standards are utilized and they make up 50% of the total score. In addition, Performance Targets have been established for individual subgroups based on current proficiency rates and goals to close the achievement gap. One such subgroup is students with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2013).

Summary of Current Legislation

There is a correlation between IDEA and NCLB. Both desire to provide stronger, more appropriate education to students with disabilities. Because of these two laws, a strong focus has been placed on the education of students with disabilities (Bassette, 2007). Perceptions of teachers and administrators show they feel NCLB in conjunction with IDEA does have some positive impact on students with disabilities. The areas of strongest support are the mandate for highly qualified teachers, the use of research-based strategies, and high standards for all students (Vannest et al., 2009).

Despite the attempt to create these two laws in a manner that complements each other, there exists a tension between the two (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Turnbull, 2009; Vannest et al., 2009; Yell et al., 2006). The NCLB focuses on a narrow one size fits all approach to accountability. The academic standards, assessments to gauge standard mastery, and level needed to be proficient are, overall, the same for all students. They are assessed using standardized tests. In contrast, IDEA focuses on the individual students. Unlike NCLB, IDEA takes into consideration a child's unique strengths and weaknesses as well as his or her current level of performance. In terms of students with disabilities, there are indications that educators and administers do not feel that these strict accountability regulations under NCLB have a positive impact on students with disabilities, according to Vannest, Mahadevan, Mason, and Temple-Harvey, 2009). There are times the current academic levels of those students with disabilities do not coincide with the mandated state standards, leaving students, parents, and educators frustrated because the focus is no longer on student progress, but rather on student performance (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). IDEA (2004) focuses on student achievement being measured by the success of the IEP goals, not by a standardized assessment (Vannest et al., 2009)

A lot of tension exists in what actually constitutes success for students with disabilities. Under NCLB a child needs to be performing on grade level to be considered academically successful. This places a large focus solely on academic standards. However, IDEA is not only focused on academic standards, but also social, behavioral, and life-skill preparedness. These constructs are not part of the accountability assessments created by the states. Teachers are left feeling they have failed their students with a disability if these students do not meet academic proficiency standards (IDEA, 2007, LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). A great concern

is that the use of high stakes tests narrows the curriculum to tested content only, despite students with disabilities needing other instruction, according to Bowen & Rude (2006). A consistent and accurate manner in which to truly assess students with disabilities achievement levels are still needed, say Aron & Loprest (2012).

Current Trends in Special Education

Identification of Students with Disabilities

Before the major changes of special education polity with the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, the manner in which students with disabilities were identified was through the discrepancy model (Aron & Loprest, 2012; O'Donell & Miller, 2011; Werts, Carpenter & Lambert, 2009). With this, students were given an ability test, usually in the form of an IQ assessment. The score of this assessment was compared to a student's actual achievement level, often in the form of a standardized test or classroom grades. The difference, or the discrepancy, between these two scores was calculated and decisions of whether or not a student qualified for special education services was determined.

There were many issues with using this model. The biggest challenge was a lack of fidelity across the country in terms of definitions and procedures (O'Donnell & Miller, 2011). For example, a state's' determination of how much of a discrepancy was needed to qualify for special education services varied greatly, as well as the formula for finding the discrepancy (O'Donnell & Miller, 2011; Werts et al., 2009). This led to additional problems with objective decision making an inconsistent implementation. In addition, there was controversy with IQ tests, in both type and accuracy (O'Donnell & Miller, 2011).

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, a new system in identifying students with disabilities was encouraged: Response to Intervention (RTI). RTI is based on the premise of

identifying students with learning issues early using a tiered approach to instructional

interventions that utilize scientific, researched-based lessons and interventions, according to

Aron and Loprest (2012). With a strong link between instruction and assessment, a student's

progress and growth is monitored continually and all decisions are based on data collection

(Aron & Loprest, 2012; O'Donnell & Miller, 2011).

RTI is based on a tiered approach to instruction (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Buffum, Matto,

& Weber, 2010; Werts et al., 2009). Tier 1 focuses on high quality instruction for all students in

the classroom. Tier 2 is the next step for identified students who are not responding to the

research based instruction provided in class. These students receive interventions that include

more frequency, smaller group size, or more intense interventions. Based on progress

monitoring, if a student is still found to not be making progress, he/she is moved to Tier 3. At

this level, more specialized and individualized instruction and interventions are provided. These

tiered steps would all be completed before a child is considered for special education testing and

services (Buffum et al., 2010; Werts et al., 2009). Decision making for student placement on the

different tiers is based on data collection through progress monitoring.

The purpose of moving from the discrepancy model to RTI was based on prevention and

more effective teaching (Jimenez, 2010). It was feared that some students were being labeled

with a disability due to a lack in quality instruction (Werts et al., 2009). Requiring educators to

use scientific, research based strategies would better ensure all students were receiving a quality

education. With the discrepancy model, it was felt that educators took too long to take action

with a student, often having the student fall behind or even fail. RTI provided interventions for

all students who show any level of stalled progress (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

While RTI is being developed and refined, its effectiveness is being determined through research. The RTI process has its issues and critics. Similar to the discrepancy model, there are many variations to how RTI is being implemented from state to state (O'Donnell & Miller, 2011; Werts et al., 2009). This lack of consistency comes in the form of actual implementation, tools used for assessment, and frequency, type, and location of interventions (O'Donnell & Miller, 2011). Also, the definition of "more intensive interventions" varies greatly (Werts et al, 2009). It can mean greater frequency, smaller groups, or a different approach. This also leads to schools having time and personnel issues, including when students will receive additional interventions and who will provide them (Werts et al., 2009). Another issue deals with the time it take for a child to move through the tiers, as time is needed to implement a variety of strategies and allow time for progress monitoring. In this time, a student may change teachers, which affects consistency. It is feared that this long lapse in time could delay students with disabilities from receiving needed services earlier (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Regardless of the system used to identify students with disabilities, there are specific impairments and disabilities defined by IDEA to meet eligibility for special education services. They are mental retardation (now known as intellectual disabilities), hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, and deaf-blindness. Specific learning disability is by far the most commonly diagnosed disability in schools today, followed by speech and language impairments (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Inclusion

The early history of special education was segregated in nature; however, in the past 35 years, there has been a shift to integration (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Winzer, 1993). Once FAPE

was mandated through EHA in 1975, the primary way students with disabilities received instruction was through a "pull out program", or in a special room, often called the resource room. Students were segregated from the general education population. It was promoted as necessary in that students with disabilities would receive instruction in a small class, be provided individualized instruction, be taught by a special education teachers, and the focus of instruction would be on social and life skills, according to Kavele and Forness (2000). Despite these goals, there was "no compelling body of evidence that showed segregated special education programs benefited students" (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007, p. 293). In fact, the programs were ineffective and did not meet the needs of special education students (Kavele & Forness, 2000; Santoli et al., 2008; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007).

While the idea of the LRE was first mentioned in the EHA (1975), it gained strong momentum with the Regular Education Initiative (REI) in 1986. This was introduced by Madeline Will, who worked with the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (Sailor & Roger, 2005; Santoli et al., 2008). With the introduction of REI, special education and general education, which had long been segregated, began to merge together (Winzer, 1993). This process was often referred to as mainstreaming. With mainstreaming, students with disabilities were integrated with non-disabled peers for parts of the day, but were still often pulled out for core academic subjects (Friend & Cook, 1996; Kavale & Forness, 2000).

Inclusion gained increasing momentum with the passing of NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA. NCLB required all students, including students with disabilities, to become proficient at general curriculum standards, which meant students with disabilities needed greater access to the general curriculum, according to Kavale and Forness (2000). This was coupled with a refined definition of LRE and poor research findings on pull out programs

(Kavale & Forness, 2000; Sailor & Roger, 2005; Santoli et al., 2008). As a result, the need for inclusion programs grew.

There are several definitions of inclusion. All definitions seem to agree that inclusion is students with disabilities learning with their non-disabled peers in a general education setting for most of the school day (Brucker, 1994; Leatherman, 2007; Pisha & Stahl, 2005; Solis et al., 2012). This means that students with disabilities participate in all of the classroom routines, structures, and activities (Leatherman, 2007). In essence, students with disabilities no longer leave the classroom for additional support; rather support is brought into the classroom, according to Brucker (1994). Support comes in the way of not just additional educators, but also materials such as large print and/or audio books, necessary technology, and other learning tools. It is important to note that a student can be following the inclusion model, but still need to leave the room for specific services such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, or counseling (Solis et al., 2012).

The role of the general education teacher changed as inclusion gained in popularity (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Pisha & Stahl, 2005). Teachers needed to ensure that the environment was appropriate for all learners, learning styles, and learning disabilities. This included being able to differentiate instruction and instructional activities. It required teachers to provide or create supplemental materials, accommodations, and modifications to instruction, assignments, assessments, and delivery techniques (Pisha & Stahl, 2005). In addition, general education teachers needed to be aware of different learning disabilities as well as policy issues such as following the IEP.

Just as with the pull out program and mainstreaming, the inclusion model has had its critics, especially in its beginning implementation phase (Kavale & Forness, 2000; Volonino &

Zigmond, 2007). A major focus was on attitudes of teachers, students, and administrators toward

inclusion, according to Kavale and Forness (2000). With teachers and students, attitudes differed

based on the severity of the disability; the more severe the disability, the poorer the attitude. For

teachers, it was thought that the more severe the disability, the more additional work required of

the teachers. For students, their peers with severe disabilities were perceived as to be getting

special treatment or tended to be a lack in social skills, making communication difficult.

Administrators looked at the logistics of inclusion as a negative issue, having to work with

personnel and time constraints. In addition, early indications showed that inclusion classroom

were not effective in helping students with disabilities achieve academic success. This was partly

due to a lack of modifications and differentiation made by the teachers (Algozzine et al., 2012;

Kavale & Forness, 2000; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007).

Several experts agreed that there were specific elements that need to be in place for

successful inclusion (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009;

Leatherman, 2007; Santoli et al., 2008, Werts et al., 2009). Strong administrative support is

critical. It is up to school leaders to build a culture that is accepting and supportive of inclusion

(Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Santoli et al., 2008). In addition, it is school leaders who make

decisions regarding inclusion class size and case load of special education teachers. With so

much for the general education teacher to know, teacher training is vital. This includes training

on such things as specific disabilities, instructional techniques, behavior management, co-

teaching or collaborative planning, and special education policy and law (Carpenter & Dyal,

2006; Leatherman, 2007; Santoli et al., 2008; Werts et al., 2009). In addition, there needs to be

proper support from the special education staff.

With inclusion, special education teachers become the experts in strategies, resources, and accommodations. Support staff needs to be able and willing to make recommendations and suggestions to general education teachers with proper planning time (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Santoli et al., 2008). Lastly, sufficient time needs to be provided for teachers to plan collaboratively, attend meetings, and modify instruction (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Santoli et al., 2008). Effective collaboration between the special education teacher and the general education teacher is a key factor to the success of inclusion (Carter et al., 2009; Paulsen, 2008).

While the definition of inclusion and what it looks like can vary from school to school, there are two main forms of inclusion support a child can receive from the special education teacher. First is the consultative model (Austin, 2001; Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Solis et al., 2012). With this, students with disabilities are learning in the general education classroom without direct support from the special education teacher being in the room (Solis et al., 2012). The special education teacher plans collaboratively with the general education teacher, providing suggestions and strategies that merge the content of the lessons with the individual needs of the students, according to Austin (2001) and Carpenter and Dyal (2006). The second form of support is the co-teaching model.

Co-teaching

Co-teaching is the most popular model used for inclusion support. It gained in popularity in recent years due to its compliance with federal regulations (Bassette, 2008; Friend & Cook, 1996; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chmberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Sccruggs et al., 20k07). Two teachers in the general education classroom instructing students with disabilities accomplished

the goals of the LRE from IDEA (2004) and the idea of access to the general curriculum for all students and highly qualified teachers from NCLB (2002).

While various definitions of co-teaching exist, it seems they all carry similar characteristics (Bouck, 2007; Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez, & Hartman, 2009; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Solis et al., 2012; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). Co-teaching exists when two or more teachers work collaboratively in the same general education classroom to jointly provide instruction to a heterogeneous group of students, both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Most often, the co-teachers are made up of one general education teacher and one special education teacher, both being equal in status. It can, however, be another specialist in the school building.

There are six main approaches, or models, to co-teaching (Algozzine et al., 2012; Bessette, 2008; Bouck, 2007; Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). They are:

(a) One teach-One assist: With this model, one of the co-teachers takes the lead on instructing the whole class while the other teacher monitors students and assists in learning as needed.

(b) Station Teaching: This entails both co-teachers working with a small group of students in a station or center. Groups of students may also be working independently. All students rotate through the stations.

(c) Parallel Teaching: This method has both teachers delivering the same lesson, at the same time, each to half of the class.

48

(d) Alternative Teaching: This approach has one teacher providing the primary instruction to most of the class while the other teacher provides instruction to a small group to pre-teach, re-reach, or modify learning.

(e) Team Teaching: Also known as interactive teaching, co-teachers using this approach both actively deliver instruction, often times taking turns every few minutes as the lead teacher.

(f) One Teach – One Observe: While one teacher is providing instruction to the class, the other teacher is observing targeted students. Observations are usually specifically designed to identify behaviors, patterns, attention, etc.

Co-teachers should decide collaboratively which approach to use, and the decision should be based on a variety of factors (Bouck, 2007; Hang & Rabren, 2009). Most importantly, the needs and characteristics of the students should be examined. In addition, co-teachers need to take into account any time constraints, instructional goals of the lesson, and the lesson content, according to Bouck (2007). Also, the strengths of both co-teachers should be considered (Volonion & Zigmond, 2007).

There are several needed factors to make co-teaching successful. The first is teacher compatibility (Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). The teachers involved need to build a positive relationship based on trust and respect. It is helpful if the teachers share a common philosophy of teaching and behavior management. Also, adequate planning time is essential (Bouck, 2007; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). Co-teachers should plan weekly, discussing such things as lessons, lesson delivery, resources, student achievement, teacher roles, and areas of concern. This time should be used to celebrate successes as well. Because the co-teaching relationship is

so complex, on-going professional development is necessary (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). Training on effective planning practices, co-teaching models, communication skills, instructional techniques, special education policy, and specific disabilities are just a few suggestions of training that are required for success in co-teaching.

Lastly, a key factor in co-teaching is strong administrative support (Bouck, 2007; Carter, 2009; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). Administrators have control over important factors such as scheduling, planning times, and balancing student placement in co-taught classrooms. In addition, school leaders can seek willing teachers to take on the co-teaching role. As well, administrators can build a culture where value is placed on inclusion and co-teaching.

Collaboration has been a key characteristic in special education for quite some time (Friend et al., 2010). For example, IEP teams collaborate to develop the best plan for individual student growth. Also, parents and school staff collaborate to make critical decisions such as the LRE. Arguably collaboration in special education has never been as critical as now, especially with the popularity of co-teaching (Bouck, 2007; Carter et al., 2009; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Paulsen, 2008; Solis et al., 2012; Tannock, 2009; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). The co-teacher relationship is complex and in need of constant attention (Bouck, 2007, Friend & Cook, 1996). In terms of co-teaching, collaboration is defined as the on-going, interactive process of two co-equal education professionals with differing areas of expertise who work together toward a common goal (Carter et. al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Paulsen, 2008).

Friend and Cook (1996) identified six necessary elements of collaboration. They are: (a) voluntary, (b) parity, (c) mutual goals, (d) shared responsibility and decision making, (e) shared

resources, and (f) shared accountability. For successful collaboration of co-teachers, effective

communication is essential (Bouck, 2007; Conderman et al., 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009;

Kohler-Evans, 2006; Paulsen, 2008; Solis et al., 2012; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). Teachers

need to begin their co-teaching journey sharing their personal philosophies of learning, behavior,

assessment, and grading, according to Bouck (2007). While it is great if philosophies are similar,

understanding each other's differences can help to avoid conflict and confusion. It is also critical

for co-teachers to define their individual roles and responsibilities (Bouck, 2007; Conderman et

al., 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009). While this should be done at the start of the co-teaching

relationship, it also needs to be addressed continuously, as different models of co-teaching are

used and the dynamics and needs of the class shift. Despite the best communication, there is no

doubt that some conflict will arise. Co-teachers must problem solve together as part of the

collaboration process (Algozzine et al., 2012; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Solis et al., 2012). This

requires co-teachers to actively listen to each other's opinions (Tannock, 2009) and learn to

negotiate with one another, according to Bouck (2007).

Each member of the co-teaching partnership brings their individual strengths to the

collaboration process. It is important for co-teachers to use each other's expertise to benefit

student learning (Algozzine et al., 2012; Paulsen, 2008; Solis et al., 2012). For example, special

education teachers are usually the experts in specific disabilities, modifications,

accommodations, and legal issues, while general education teachers tend to be curriculum and

large group classroom management experts (Sayeki, 2009). While these are generalizations, it is

important for co-teachers to get to know each other through observation and conversation, and

tap into each other's areas of expertise. While strengths in teachers vary, it is critical that both

teachers become masters of the students' learning standards as well as the different models, or approaches, to co-teaching (Algozzine et al., 2012; Paulsen, 2008; Solis et al., 2012).

Through collaboration, co-teachers must share with each other. This includes tangible items, such as supplies, space, materials, and other resources (Bouck, 2007; Carter et al., 2009; Kohler-Evans, 2006). It is also important for co-teachers to share their personal feelings such as goals, concerns, and their belief systems (Carter et al., 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009). As noted above, each co-teacher has individual strengths. This knowledge of skills and strategies must also be shared with one another for growth and development of the students, as well as the teachers (Hang & Rabren, 2009). Because co-teachers share students and student accountability (Bouck, 2007; Carter et al., 2009), they should also share decision making, leadership roles, instruction, and behavior management. Being able to share requires that co-teachers build trust and respect for one another (Paulsen, 2008; Tannock, 2009).

The last factor of effective collaboration with co-teaching is the need for consistent and on-going professional development (Algozzine et al., 2012; Friend & Cook, 2006; Friend et al., 2012; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). "As expectations for professional collaboration in educating students with disabilities increase, the needs for professionals to participate in a wide range of staff development efforts also increase" (Friend & Cook, 1996, p. 55). Topics included training on co-teaching strategies including co-teaching approaches, communication skills, (Volonion & Zigmond, 2007), conducting effective planning meetings (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Tannock, 2009), problem solving techniques, and models of collaboration (Carter et al., 2009). Friend and Cook (1996) suggest starting with a needs assessment to pinpoint areas of collaboration to address.

Effectiveness of Inclusion and Co-teaching

Despite the wealth of information regarding effective co-teaching, "teacher's practices were strikingly different than what has been envisioned in the literature" (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007, p. 296). The ideals that have been set forth are far from the reality in today's classroom (Bessette, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). The effectiveness of co-teaching is unknown and currently being researched and studied, but the discrepancy among implementation of co-teaching through the country is leading to varied results of investigations (Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabrn, 2009; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). However, major barriers to success have been identified.

One barrier to success is a lack of planning time (Carter, et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). "School professionals repeatedly express dismay that collaboration is not possible without time for shared planning" (Friend & Cook, 1996, p. 78). As stated above, collaboration plays a huge role in co-teaching success, especially in the beginning stages of a co-teaching relationship. The basic conversations needed, from sharing to planning to problem solving, simply are not happening due to issues of time. Often times, the special education teacher works with several co-teachers, leaving it troublesome to effectively plan with all their co-teachers. A lack of planning time is often seen as stemming from a lack of administrative support (Bassette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). School leaders need to be advocates of the co-teaching relationship, making time for planning and collaboration a priority (Paulsen, 2008). Friend and Cook (1996) suggest using early release/late arrival times or the use of substitutes as a way to ensure planning time.

Also noted in the research is insufficient training (Friend & Cook, 1996; Friend et al., 2010; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). The areas of training needed for successful implementation of co-teaching practices are vast. These include training on collaboration practices, including how to attend to philosophical discrepancies, problem solve, negotiate, communicate effectively, and flexible thinking (Carter et al., 2009; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). In addition, training lacks in more strategy application areas, such as approaches to co-teaching, instructional techniques, and student grouping suggestions (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007). There is also a lack of understanding, especially with general education teachers, on disabilities and legislation regarding students with disabilities. This lack of training is again often seen as due to a lack of administrative support (Bassette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012).

Undefined roles and goals is another issue (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007). This can lead to a lack of shared responsibility (Tannock, 2009). Issues over who is responsible for behavior management, grading papers, and parent communication are often undefined. At times, co-teachers split these responsibilities up, with the general education teacher taking on these roles for non-disabled peers and the special education teacher focused solely on students with disabilities. This leads to an environment that is exclusive when the ultimate goal is to be inclusive (Tannock, 2009). Having defined roles in the co-teaching relationship increases the success of the partnership and student learning as each teacher becomes focused on their role, becoming an expert rather than being overwhelmed with multiple roles according to Bouck (2007).

Lastly, equality in the partnership of collaboration has not been achieved (Bessette, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). The most often used approach to co-teaching is the one teach-one assist, usually taking place with the general education teacher in the lead and the special education teacher walking around the classroom (Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). When this approach is overused, the general education teacher becomes dominant in the relationship and the special education teacher slips into the role of an assistant or helper. The special education teacher's role is then no longer on instruction, but is underutilized by working mostly on preparation and grading papers (Bassette, 2008; Friend et al., 2010). This has been attributed to general education teachers' lack of confidence that the special education teacher has a satisfactory knowledge of the content and standards (Bassette, 2008; Tannock, 2009). Despite the reasons, the unevenness in the co-teaching partnership weakens the relationship and teachers must work to find parity (Kohler-Evans, 2006).

Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion and Co-Teaching

The importance of teachers' perceptions cannot be ignored because of the impact it has on motivation, decision making, and attitude. "The perception we have of something in fact far outweighs its reality when coming to a decision, for in our mind, the perception is the reality" (Potgieter, 2011, p 38). What teachers think to be true in terms of inclusion and co-teaching, despite if they really are the veracity, is the truth in their mind. "If you perceive the world around you to be full of obstacles, then that's your reality. If you perceive the world around you to be full of choices and challenges that you can rise above, then that's your reality" (Potgieter, 2011, p. 38).

Many researchers argue that teacher perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching are critical to its success (Damore & Murray, 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Male, 2011; Solis et al., 2012). As noted above, there are many factors for successful inclusion and co-teaching. Each one of these factors can impact the perceptions of teachers (Leatherman, 2007). What teachers believe to be true, their perceptions will impact their attitude, and in turn their motivation, commitment, and quality of their teaching (Ernst & Rodger, 2009; Solis et al., 2012). Willingness to implement inclusion practices is one of the most important predictors of success, and that is why it is critical to examine teacher perceptions, according to Damore and Murray (2009. Teachers with positive attitudes toward inclusion are more likely to use research-based, effective tools for inclusion and co-teaching than teachers with negative attitudes (Ernst & Rodgers, 2009). Some would even argue that teachers' attitudes and motivation due to perceptions will have more impact on successful inclusion and co-teaching than knowledge, experience, and skill (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Male, 2011).

In terms of inclusion and co-teaching, researchers found a few general factors that affect a teacher's perception of inclusion and co-teaching (Carter et al., 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Ji-Ryun, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Solis et al., 2012). First, the severity of a student's disability or the type of disability has been found to be an influencing factor (Carter et al., 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Ji-Ryun, 2011; Solis et al., 2012). Typically, the more severe or limiting the disability, the less positively a teacher viewed inclusion and co-teaching. The same was true for teachers who worked with students with severe emotional, behavioral, or social issues. The amount of experience a person has working with individuals with disabilities also influences perceptions (Carter et al., 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Leatherman, 2007). Typically, the more experience general education

teachers had with students with disabilities, the more positive their perceptions, although this was not found in all cases, as Forlin and Chambers (2011) and Valeo (2008) found in their research. Lastly, gender of the teacher was thought to have a slight impact on teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, with females having a slightly more positive attitude than males (Ernst & Rodgers, 2009).

Positive Perceptions of Inclusion and Co-teaching

Teacher perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching have been under examination for quite some time. A positive trend is that teachers' attitudes to these areas seemed to have improved over time (Solis et al., 2012). Moreover, when examining inclusion and co-teaching in general, teachers had an overall positive perspective (Austin, 2001; Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ji-Ryun, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Solis et al., 2012). Studies found that inclusion co-teachers feel the inclusion and co-taught classroom has a positive impact on children with disabilities, value the practice of inclusion, and would volunteer to be an inclusion co-teacher in the future (Damore & Murray, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007).

There are clear areas in which teachers had the most positive perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching. First, teachers perceived the social benefits for both children with disabilities (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012) and their peers without disabilities (Austin, 2001; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). Merging the two groups of students in one classroom helped develop tolerance and acceptance of each other's differences (Austin, 2001; Horne & Timmons, 2008). Non-disabled students became role models for students with disabilities. Working in collaborative groups fostered social skills (Horne &

Timmons, 2008; Scruggs, 2007; Solis et al., 2012). It was noted, however, that the social benefits tended to decrease as students' age increased (Solis et al., 2012).

Another clear area of positive perceptions by teachers was an increase in their personal professional development and growth. Teachers felt they exited the experience a better teacher (Austin, 2001; Leatherman, 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007). Specifically, teachers grew in the area of classroom management as the dynamics of student personalities shifted, according to Austin (2001). In addition, teachers learned how to make curriculum adaptations, often learning from collaboration partnerships (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007). Teachers learned to use different instructional approaches, moving more toward cooperative learning and strategic groups, rather than relying on whole class instruction, according to Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007). Lastly, teachers felt their content knowledge of the subjects they taught also increased (Scruggs et al., 2007).

Teachers' perceptions of students' outcomes are mixed (Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ross-Hill, 2009; Solis et al, 2012). When perceptions of student outcomes were positive, teachers felt that the needs of students with disabilities were being met in the inclusive co-taught classroom. Studies noted that students with disabilities felt more confident, learned more, and had better behavior (Hang & Rabren, 2009). In addition, it was perceived that students with disabilities improved academically (Hang & Rabren, 2009). Scruggs et al., (2007) felt this was attributed to the extra attention and different instructional approaches students with disabilities received by having more than one teacher in the inclusive co-taught classroom.

Negative Perceptions of Inclusion and Co-teaching

While teachers' perception of inclusion and co-teaching in general tended to be positive overall, there are specific areas and circumstances where perceptions were negative. The

concerns raised by teachers are items that are fixable; however, they are also some of the critical aspects of inclusion and co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008).

Teachers had a negative perception of the co-teaching relationship (Bessette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008) and did not feel that they had mastered the collaboration process (Bessette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Damore & Murray, 2009; Valeo, 2008). Roles in the relationship were undefined (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Valeo, 2008), and more work fell on the shoulders of the general education teacher (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007). Collaboration was not focused on innovative, individualized instruction, and teachers were not using collaboration time to change instructional practices (Male, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007). More often, the special education teacher simply provided accommodations and tried to seamlessly fit into traditional classroom methods. When issues in the collaboration process arose, teachers did not know how to address them positively and proactively (Bessette, 2008). An issue of time for true collaboration was a common theme and perceived negatively (Horne & Timmons, 2008; Valeo, 2008). Teachers felt that weekly planning time with their co-teacher was essential, but often not utilized (Hang & Rabren, 2009).

Negative perceptions regarding a lack of resources were also cited in several studies. This included both material resources (Damore & Murray, 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Male, 2011; Solis et al., 2012) and human resources (Solis et al., 2012). Material resources included items such as assistive technology, specialized materials such as specially designed paper, and items for physical accommodations such as large print books. Human resources went beyond just the special education co-teacher and included other specialists such as school counselors, school psychologists, speech teachers, and occupational therapists. Interestingly, teachers' perceptions

showed they felt there were more resources available to them compared to what they utilized (Damore & Murray, 2009).

Administrator understanding of and support for the inclusion and co-teaching model was negatively perceived (Bessette, 2008; Forlin & Chambers, 2001; Glazzard, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007; Male, 2011; Valeo, 2008). Teachers felt that their leadership team did not understand the demands on inclusion co-teachers, like instructional modifications, time for additional responsibilities such as IEP collaboration, co-teacher planning, and extra communication with parents (Glazzard, 2011). Simply put, inclusion co-teachers did not feel supported as seen by issues with scheduling, large class sizes, and lack of designated time for collaborative planning (Bessette, 2008; Valeo 2008). In addition, teachers felt that many leaders did not understand the importance of proper placement of children, often just assuming the LRE for all children was the inclusive co-taught classroom, according to Bessette (2008).

Despite there being a strong link between perceived levels of knowledge and understanding of inclusion and co-teaching practices and teacher effectiveness (Ermst & Rodger, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011), inadequate teacher training is negatively perceived by teachers. "We are struck by the number of general education teachers who do not perceive they are adequately prepared to teach individuals with disabilities in their classroom" (Solis et al., 2012, p. 508). Training is needed on instructional techniques (Carter et al., 2009) as well as understanding disabilities (Horne & Timmons, 2008). The impact of professional development on teachers' perceptions was noted by Ross-Hill (2009) and Male (2011), whose research showed that perceptions of inclusion was more positive after being offered specific professional development. Training should not be a one-time offering, rather continuous and supportive opportunities (Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Mdikana, Ntshangase, & Mayekiso, 2007).

It was noted above that teachers' perceptions of students' outcomes were mixed (Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ross-Hill, 2009; Solis et al., 2012). When perceptions of student outcomes were negative, teachers felt they did not have the time to address the individual needs of students with disabilities (Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008). Many teachers perceived the curriculum demands being too difficult for the ability level of their students with disabilities (Male, 2011; Valeo, 2008). With a hyper focus on curriculum standards and not on individual needs, teachers felt they did not have time to focus on other needed skills for development, such as social or emotional support (Male, 2011). For this reason, teachers felt more time and attention needed to be given to LRE determination and guidelines (Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008).

Summary

Meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities is a complex issue. Through legislation over the last 30 years, the manner in which students with disabilities are educated has been positively impacted. The most recent changes came with the combination of NCLB and IDEA. More students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum, are held to higher standards, and are being taught in the inclusive co-taught classroom as their LRE. Positive results have been proven over time with these changes.

Despite the positive momentum of the education of students with disabilities, the literature shows there are great improvements that still need to be made. Since teachers' perceptions of current trends play such an important role in successful execution, it is imperative that this remain a focus of future research. It has been shown there are specific areas of inclusion and co-teaching that teachers perceive negatively. Unfortunately, many of these areas are the same ones that experts have identified as being critical components of successful inclusion and co-teaching practices.

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of general education inclusion co-teachers in schools that have been identified as successful in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, success being measured by AYP and CCRPI goals for the students with disabilities subgroup. Success and perceptions seem to be in partnership, and in turn perceptions influence motivation, self-efficacy, and overall attitudes. With attention paid to critical areas of inclusion and co-teaching as well as areas identified in the literature as being negatively perceived, perceptions of general education inclusion co-teachers will be analyzed through this qualitative, phenomenological study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of being a general education elementary school inclusion co-teacher in schools that are successful with their special education population. This chapter explains the overall design of the study including the choice and rational for the district selected, participant criteria, plan for data collection, and data analysis. Attention is given to the trustworthiness of the study, as well as to ethical considerations.

Design

A qualitative, phenomenological design was used for this research as it explores a specific population of teachers and their shared experiences as elementary general education inclusion and co-teachers who work in schools that are successful with meeting AYP with their students with disabilities. A qualitative study was necessary for this research as it explored a specific population of teachers and their shared experiences as elementary general education inclusion co-teachers. To describe the essence, or total experience, of the participants, it was important for their individual voices to be heard through holistic accounts, using multiple unique perspectives and differing backgrounds. While opinions could be gained through quantitative analysis, using such a technique would not provide the opportunity to focus on the "wholeness of the experience" as described by the participants, for I was "searching for meanings and essences of experiences, rather than measurement and explanations" (Moustkas, 1994, p. 21).

This study used the phenomenological approach. "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary sources of knowledge, the course that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). The experiences of teachers were examined, as told through their viewpoint, making phenomenology a natural fit. All participants shared a unique experience: That of being

a general education inclusion co-teacher in a school that was successful with its students with disabilities population. Success was defined according to the number of students with disabilities who met or exceed the standards. Personal interest is a key factor in phenomenology, according to Moustakas (1994). In addition, phenomenology strives to develop findings that spark future research (Moustakas, 1994). This was an experience I had a personal interest in because I have taken on such a role. Through this study, I hoped to discover elementary teachers' perceptions toward working as an inclusion co-teacher, as it related to the schools that were successful with its population of students with disabilities. If perceptions were positive, the schools themselves could be further examined, looking for reasons for this difference. Lastly, phenomenology seeks to understand the wholeness of an experience, looking at it from many different angles and voices. Reflection and examination was continued through participant descriptions until the essence of the shared experience could be reported says Moustakas (1994).

Specifically, transcendental phenomenology was utilized. Despite personal experiences with a topic, transcendental phenomenology attempts discovery with a fresh perspective, eliminating all bias, prejudgment, and assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). For this to happen, researchers must engage in *epoche*, where they set aside their preconceived notions, attempting to examine data from a pure state through a process called bracketing (Moustakes, 1994). The goal was to describe the experiences of general education inclusion co-teachers as opposed to interpreting the given data from the viewpoint of my own experiences. Having personal experience as an inclusion co-teacher, as well as working in a school that was successful with students with disabilities, this was a necessary step for this study.

Research Questions

There was one central question to the research that encompassed the full purpose of the study. The central research question was: What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities? Developing the answer for this required a full understanding of the shared experience of the participants, as told from each individual perspective. To fully answer the central question, three sub-questions were developed.

A. How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the self-efficacy of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

B. How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the motivation of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

C. What are the perceptions and attitudes of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

Setting

The setting of the study was elementary schools in a metro Atlanta suburb school district. For confidentiality reasons, a pseudonym was used for the name of the district and for the specific schools. The setting was purposefully selected (Creswell, 2007) for its unique success with students with disabilities. This metro Atlanta district met AYP for students with disabilities. This was unique for its location because the state of Georgia as a whole did not make AYP for students with disabilities. Furthermore, the district was bordered by five other metro Atlanta

schools districts, all of which also did not make AYP in the 2010-2011 school year for students with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2012).

Flames County School District consisted of a total of 36 schools; 20 of those being elementary schools. Total student enrollment was 38,820 students and it had grown 118% since 2000. In 2011, there were a total of 5,074 students with disabilities. While several ethnic groups were represented across the district, the large majority of students were Caucasian (75%), with Hispanic students being the second highest (12%). The district boasted that 100% of teachers were highly qualified in accordance with No Child Left Behind regulations. Of the 36 schools, seven were Title One schools. The district as a whole had a free and reduced lunch population of approximately 8,000 students, or 20% (Forsyth County Schools, 2012).

Within the district, elementary schools were selected using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007). First, schools selected had made AYP in the students with disabilities subgroup for the last three consecutive years of using AYP, which included 2009-2010; 2010-2011; and 2011-2012 school years. This ensured that AYP success was a trend in the school and part of the culture, not just a one-time experience. From this narrowed-down list of possible schools, those with the highest percentage of students with disabilities who met or exceeded standards were targeted, as well as two of the three Title 1 schools. The list of schools was then checked to be sure they met their needed percentage of students with disabilities using the CCRPI data, which was public information found on the Georgia Department of Education website. Teachers from five out of the ten qualified elementary schools were represented for the study. Additional information of the five schools is represented in Table 1. Schools were selected after IRB approval.

Table 1

School Demographics
(N = 6)

Name	Title 1	Free and Reduced Lunch	ESOL	Student Demographic	CCRPI Flags for SWD	AYP for SWD	Participants
Barringer Elementary	No	9%	5%	White: 56% Black: 4% Hispanic: 7% Asian: 30%	Green: 5 Yellow: 0 Red: 0	Yes	3
Briarwood Elementary	No	36%	9%	White – 77% Black – 1% Hispanic – 18% Asian – 1%	Green: 4 Yellow: 1 Red: 0	Yes	3
Endhaven Elementary	Yes	43%	10%	White – 81% Black – 1% Hispanic – 15% Asian – <1%	Green: 0 Yellow: 5 Red: 0	Yes	2
Pineville Elementary	No	7%	4%	White – 49% Black – <1% Hispanic – 4% Asian – 40%	Green: 5 Yellow: 0 Red: 0	Yes	1
Shaull Elementary	No	4%	2%	White – 83% Black – 2% Hispanic – 4% Asian – 9%	Green: 5 Yellow: 0 Red: 0	Yes	3
Westwood Elementary	Yes	41%	30%	White – 42% Black – 8% Hispanic – 36% Asian – 9%	Green: 1 Yellow: 4 Red: 0	Yes	1

Note. Data for Free and Reduced Lunch, ESOL, Student Demographics, and CCRPI provided for 2011-2012 school year.

Participants

Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2007) was used to ensure all participants were able to

clearly articulate their views on the shared experience of being a general education inclusion co-

teacher in schools that were successful in meeting AYP with their students with disabilities

population. More specifically, criterion sampling was necessary for quality assurance, making certain that all of the participants were able to provide rich, descriptive data. The ideal criteria for participants included the following:

a. Certified general education teachers who were not also certified in special education

b. Certified general education teachers who had at least two full years of experience as an elementary school inclusion co-teacher

c. Certified general education teachers who had at least two years of experience in an elementary school setting but not as an inclusion co-teacher

d. Certified general education teachers who had been employed for at least two years in a school that had historically met AYP for student with disabilities

These delimitations were set purposefully. Dual certified teachers in general education and special education may have had differing opinions of inclusive co-taught classrooms due to training, experience, and knowledge. The criteria of having at least two full years as an inclusion co-teacher and two full years working in a school that had been successful with its students with disabilities ensured that the participants had enough experience to add to the body of data being collected. Lastly, requiring that participants had at least two years of experience in an elementary school not as an inclusion co-teacher made certain that teachers could see the role as an inclusion co-teacher as unique from a general education teacher who worked in the classroom independently.

For the purpose of maximum variation in sampling (Creswell, 2007), I strived to have a mix of gender, race, and experience levels; however, the majority of participants were Caucasian females, because this was representative of the majority of elementary school teachers in the

selected district for the study (Forsyth County Schools, 2012). Participant demographics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Information
(N = 13)

Name	Race	Grade	Current School	Teaching Experience	Inclusion Experience	Highest Degree
Allie	Caucasian	K	13	13	6	Bachelors
Ann	Caucasian	4	2	10	9	Masters
Beth	Caucasian	5	11	24	4	Ed. Specialist
Charlotte	Caucasian	K	14	14	7	Bachelors
Debbie	Caucasian	1	7	15	2	Specialist
Eliza	Caucasian	3	13	25	7	Bachelors
Janeen	Caucasian	2	8	10	6	Masters
Jessica	Caucasian	3	9	16	2	Bachelors
Joe	Caucasian	5	7	12	7	Bachelors
Linda	Caucasian	1	7	15	6	Masters
Penny	Caucasian	2	5	8	3	Bachelors
Sue	Caucasian	1	8	8	4	Masters
Tracy	Caucasian	2	10	11	3	Masters

Note. Current School, Teaching Experience, and Inclusion Experience reported in number of years.

After gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval as well as approval from the district superintendent, special education coordinators were contacted at the selected school sites. This information was gained through public staff directories of each elementary school. The contact person at each site either provided a list of possible participants from their school, forwarded on the study information to participants, put me in touch directly with a participant, or declined my offer for various reasons). From there, I sent an email or letter explaining the study and criteria to possible candidates, and providing contact information for those interested. All

participants signed an informed consent which included the purpose, overview of the design, risks, and benefits of participation, according to Kvale (1996) (see Appendix D). The total number of participants was 13. I continued to seek and interview participants until thematic saturation was achieved, which is the point in the process "when additional data collection and analysis no longer contribute anything new about the phenomenon under investigation" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010, p. 150).

The Researcher's Role

In a qualitative study, it is imperative for researchers to explain their role as the *human instrument* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This includes an explanation of the researcher's current employment status, connections to the research, participants, or research site, as well as a clarification of any potential biases. In terms of a transcendental phenomenological study, Moustakas (1994) suggested researchers bracket out their experiences to describe the experiences of the participants and not make interpretations of the data based on their own experiences.

I have 15 years of experience as an educator, working primarily in the elementary setting in various schools, districts, and states. I most recently worked as a fifth grade literacy teacher in an elementary school that was a part of the district being utilized in this study, but I did not work in the district during the course of this research. While I currently do not work with special education students, I previously served in the role of an inclusion co-teacher for four years.

At the point of starting as an inclusion co-teacher, I had already earned a Master's degree in education, National Board certification from the National Boards for Professional Teaching Standards, won Teacher of the Year for my school, and received positive feedback from administrators and parents from informal and formal observations. Because of all this, my

confidence and self-efficacy as a knowledgeable, well trained, and effective teacher was high. As I began my journey as an inclusion co-teacher, that slowly began to change. I had never received training on co-teaching strategies, IEP meetings, or strategies for working with specific learning disabilities. I felt incompetent several times when parents would ask me specific questions relating to their child's disabilities, such as suggestions for work they could do at home to aid with dyslexia or processing issues. I was fortunate to work with a special education co-teacher who was patient and helpful through my learning curve. However, I did find that she was so overwhelmed with her schedule, case load, and meetings that she was not able to provide me the time I thought was necessary for us to be fully functioning. At that point, my perception of inclusion and co-teaching was somewhat negative. I could clearly see the benefits for students socially, but was always worried that the current structure and routine implemented was not fully meeting academic needs of our students. Even though I felt low self-efficacy, my inclusion co-teacher and I received high accolades from school leadership for collaboration and success. All of our students with disabilities did meet or exceed standard on state assessments that particular year. Despite our success and recognition, this particular special education co-teacher and I were not able to co-teach together the following year due to scheduling issues. Unfortunately, the feeling of having to start over with another co-teacher with a different philosophy, teaching style, and experience level had a negative impact on my perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching. My motivation for this study was to understand the experiences of teachers who were in a similar situation: An experienced teacher working with a co-teacher in an inclusion classroom, at an AYP successful school.

Data Collection

The goal of the study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants, including their perspectives, experiences, and perceptions. To accomplish this, three main forms of data were collected: Interviews, participant journals, and a focus group. Data collection did not begin until approval from the IRB at Liberty University was obtained, as well as district approval from the superintendent.

Interviews

The main form of data collection was individual interviews with the participants. "Interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived worlds, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (Kvale, 1996, p. 105). The interviews were set up as informal, interactive conversations (Moustakas, 1994). A set of basic open-ended questions was prepared for all interviews, but flexibility in conversation to develop naturally was encouraged (Patton, 2002).

The interviews began with an informal conversation, designed to create a relaxing and open mood. To start, participants were asked for background information regarding their years of experience in the field of education. From there, participants were asked to think about their experiences as an inclusion co-teacher and to describe the experience fully (Moustakas, 1994). Core interview questions followed and were developed based on key constructs identified in the literature review, as well as the research questions posed in this study. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by myself. Unless requested by the participant to be held in an alternative location, all interviews took place in the participant's classroom and were conducted face to face with no other students or adults present. Environment can influence response, and

this was the participants' ultimate comfort zone. Follow-up questions with participants were implemented when necessary.

As seen in Appendix B, there were 17 total interview questions. The questions were developed first by looking at the research questions posed for this study. They were posed in a logical order with like ideas clumped together. For example, questions six through nine discussed preparedness of becoming an inclusion co-teacher. Questions six, seven, eight, nine, and seventeen were focused on better understanding the participants' self-efficacy as a general education inclusion co-teacher. Questions five, fourteen, and fifteen focused on participants' motivation as a general education inclusion co-teacher. Lastly questions ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, and sixteen focused on participants' perceptions and attitudes of inclusion and co-teaching.

The questions chosen under each of the above categories were based on key constructs uncovered in the literature review. Questions four, eleven, and seventeen were broad and were designed to better understand the experiences of the participants as general education inclusion co-teachers. Responses were varied and provided information for many of the different constructs identified below.

More specifically, however, questions ten and sixteen related to the teachers' perceptions of benefits of the inclusion program. The literature showed that there were social benefits for both children with disabilities (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012) and their peers without disabilities (Austin, 2001; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). In addition, teachers felt that they also personally benefited from being an inclusion co-teacher in the areas of classroom management, curriculum adaptations, and collaboration (Austin, 2001; Leatherman, 2007; Scruggs et al., 2007). Lastly, the literature reported mixed

perceptions on the academic benefits for special education students (Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ross-Hill, 2009; Solis et al, 2012).

Questions six, seven, eight and nine were designed to focus on participant preparedness. Much of the literature on inclusion and co-teaching focused on teacher preparedness. Research showed that teachers did not feel adequately prepared to meet the needs of their special education population (Friend & Cook, 1996; Friend et al., 2010; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012). This included education on collaboration (Carter et al., 2009; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007), strategy application (Friend et al., 2010; Scruggs et al., 2007), as well as understanding of disabilities and the law (Bassette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012).

A closely connected factor to being prepared as a general education inclusion co-teacher was adequate support in terms of human resources such as leadership and material resources. Administrators' understanding of and support for the inclusion and co-teaching model was negatively perceived (Bessette, 2008; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Glazzard, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007; Male, 2011; Valeo, 2008). Negative perceptions regarding a lack of material resources were also reported (Damore & Murray, 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Male, 2011; Solis et al., 2012). Questions five, fourteen, and fifteen were designed to focus on support.

Much of the literature was dominated by the relationship between co-teachers. Teachers reported a lack of time for true collaboration (Carter et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Solis et al., 2012; Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007) and undefined roles and inequality in the partnership (Bessette, 2008; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Scruggs et al., Tannock, 2009; Volonion & Zigmond, 2007).

Overall, perceptions of the co-teaching relationship were negative (Bessette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009; Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008). Questions twelve and thirteen were designed to better understand participants' views on their relationship with their co-teacher(s).

Participant Journals

Each participant was provided a journal in an effort to gain additional information not discussed in the interview. Participants were encouraged to journal when they had an experience with inclusion and co-teaching that elicited an emotion. The pages of the journal were pre-labeled with the words Success, Frustrations, Thoughts, Questions, and On My Mind. The labels were designed to act as prompts and encouragement for journaling. Participants were told that any form of written response—such as notes and prose—was acceptable, and were given reassurance that spelling, neatness, and grammatical errors were not of concern. Participants were reminded that pseudonyms and changes to identifying details would be used in the final version of the dissertation for any details in written notes that might possibly identify them or any of their students. They kept the journals for approximately five weeks, and were sent a reminder of encouragement to journal once a week. All participants were provided a hard copy journal, but an e-journal was also available for those who would rather type. All participants chose the hard copy. While all journals were collected, one participant did not journal any thoughts in the five-week time frame.

Focus Group

A focus group was the last data collection piece. Selection was based on participants' willingness and availability to attend the focus group, for all participants were invited to join. An initial invitation was made to each participant at the conclusion of their individual interview. An

email invitation was sent to all participants two weeks before the focus group. A reminder was sent two days before and the day of the focus group. Eight participants were in the focus group. The focus group was conducted after all individual interviews were completed. The reason for this was because focus group questions were based on the individual interview data collected and addressed gaps, areas needing further clarification or deeper meaning, and additional perspectives. Questions were designed to gather additional information on common themes and gaps found in data collection of interviews. Also, "because the respondents can talk to and hear each other, they are likely to express feelings or opinions that might not emerge" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2010, p. 349) during individual interviews. The focus group was conducted via conference all phone line.

Data Analysis

Data analysis procedures followed Moustakas' (1994) recommendations for a transcendental phenomenological study. The following data analysis steps were used. First, I bracketed out my personal experiences as an elementary inclusion co-teacher, fully explaining my past history, personal views, and frustrations earlier in Chapter Three. This step, referred to as epoche, is where a researcher sets aside his or her preconceived notions, attempting to examine data from a pure state (Moustakas, 1994). The goal of this step was to "arrive at an unprejudiced description of the essence of the phenomena" (Kvale, 1996, p. 54). While it is impossible to delete all pre-assumptions, this step is designed to identify them forthright to identify possible bias (Kvale, 1996; Moustakas, 1994). Second, transcriptions of all interviews and the focus group were completed. In addition, all handwritten journal were typed for the purpose of analysis. For verification of accuracy, member checks were also be conducted.

Horizonalization was conducted, identifying all significant statements through all sets of data and eliminating overlapping ones. This was done using the Qualitative Data Analysis software, Atlis.ti. Once all significant statements were identified, I went back through and coded each of them. In the end, 37 codes were developed. I began to develop clusters of meaning using the coded statements. Themes, or meaning units, were developed after much analysis. A description of *what* the participants experience was derived, also known as textural descriptions. The *what* includes, "What is the nature of the phenomenon? What are its qualities? What appears at different times under various conditions?" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78). From there, a description of *how* the participants experienced inclusion and co-teaching was developed, also known as structural descriptions. "This means turning one's focal attention to the conditions . . . the feelings, sense experiences, and thoughts (Moustakas, 1994, p. 78). In the end, the essence description was written as the research questions were answered, which was the final conclusion of the total experience of being a general education elementary inclusion co-teacher in a school that had been successful with its students with disabilities subgroup. The essence was a true blending of the textural and structural descriptions, as they had a continuous relationship with one another, thought of as "the appearance and the hidden coming together to create the fullness in understanding" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness focuses on four areas: Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). To address all areas, this research employed four different strategies. They include member checks, an audit trail, triangulation, and detailed descriptions.

Member Checks

With a focus on credibility, member checks took place during the research. First, all transcripts of interviews, journals, and the focus group were sent to the participants for verification to be sure the transcripts were accurate. In addition, analysis and final conclusions were shared with participants. Feedback was requested and any areas of concerns, mostly of mistakes in transcription, were addressed.

Audit Trail

With a focus on dependability and confirmability, a clear and accurate audit trail was kept. All research steps were documented and examples of transcripts, journals, and audit trail were included in the appendix. Records of raw data, transcripts, and analysis products were kept in a locked file cabinet and will remain there for a period of at least three years. All computer files and transcripts were on a password protected computer. An expert reviewer was used in this process. The expert reviewer holds a doctorate degree and is employed in the field of education.

Triangulation

Triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection" (Creswell, 2007, p. 252). There are three methods of data collection: Interview, focus group, and participant journals. Triangulation addressed the credibility and dependability.

Detailed and Thick Descriptions

Detailed and thick descriptions were provided for both the setting and participants. The setting included information on both the district as a whole, as well as the selected schools. The criteria for the participants as well as their specific demographics were thoroughly explained. Lastly, thick descriptions of the findings were reported.

Ethical Considerations

With the greatest area of concern being for the research participants, the following ethical provisions were taken. Confidentiality was maintained so that "private data indentifying the subjects will not be reported" (Kvale, 1996, p. 56). Teachers might have feared repercussions from the community, school administration, co-teachers, and district leaders. For that reason, pseudonyms were used for the district, schools, and all participants. Thus, teachers could voice concerns about a lack of resources, support, time to plan, and issues with working with special education teachers. In addition, all transcripts and voice recordings were secured in a lock box, and all digital records were kept under password protection. All journals were placed in a locked file cabinet, and electronic files were password protected.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe experiences of general education elementary school inclusion co-teachers in schools that were successful as defined by Adequate Yearly Progress and College and Career Readiness Performance Index, with its students with disabilities. "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source that cannot be doubted" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52). Phenomenology provides rich, descriptive data that is needed to fully describe the experience. The findings that follow are a holistic and synthesized analysis of the participants' voices using interviews, individual journals, and a collective focus group.

Chapter Four includes an overview of the research questions and a brief introduction to each of the participants. From there, the themes that were extrapolated from the significant statements are presented and supported through the words of the participants. Lastly, the research questions are explicatingly answered.

There is one central question to the research that encompasses the full purpose of the study. The central research question is: What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities? Developing the answer for this required a full understanding of the shared experience of the participants as told from each individual perspective. To fully answer the central question, three sub-questions were developed.

A. How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the self-efficacy of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

B. How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the motivation of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

C. What are the perceptions and attitudes of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

Participants

In total, there were 13 participants for this study. All the participants were teachers for at least one full year in their current *successful* school. Success was defined by meeting AYP and CCRPI in the students with disabilities subgroup. When seeking participants, 10 schools were targeted due to their high scores in the students with disabilities population according to AYP and CCRPI, including two Title 1 schools. The participants represented six of those 10 schools, with no more than three participants from any one specific school.

All of the participants were in at least their second year as an inclusion co-teacher and had a minimum of eight years of teaching experience in the elementary school setting. None of the participants held a degree in special education. Lastly, all participants were employed in a school that had met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities for at least four consecutive years.

Allie

Allie is a kindergarten teacher. She has worked in the elementary school setting for 13 years, all of them being at this current successful school. She has been an inclusion co-teacher on and off for six years. Before becoming an elementary school teacher, Allie taught pre-Kindergarten for five years and worked in travel management for 20 years. She currently holds a

bachelor's degree in Education. Allie asked to take on the role as an inclusion co-teacher due to her past experience with special needs kids. "I did a lot of volunteer work with special needs kids when I was in college and that's something that I've always found rewarding." I met with Allie in her classroom after school on a Monday. During her interview, her para-professional was present in the room, which we all agreed was all right. Because she has a kindergarten para-professional, there are three co-teachers present in the classroom at certain times in the day: herself, her paraprofessional, and her special education co-teacher. When asked if managing so many adults in the classroom was challenging, she responded:

> Not at all because we're all on the same page. We differentiate in here and we just kind
> of know our roles. That's the beauty of working at (this school), is the people you work
> with because we all get along very well.

Ann

I met with Ann on a Sunday afternoon at Starbucks. Due to having young children at home and a full schedule at school, meeting during the school day was difficult. Ann is a fourth grade teacher. This is her 10th year as an elementary school teacher, but she has had a very diverse experience. Ann has taught in two different states but three different school districts. She served as an inclusion co-teacher in all of them. She became an inclusion co-teacher her very first year of teaching, but it was not the best experience.

> She (my co-teacher) had been teaching probably 20 or 30 years, and felt like the kids
> should just do whatever she told them to. She did not work together with me, as far as
> lesson planning was concerned, and that was my first year teaching so I didn't really
> know any different.

Despite that, Ann continued to be an inclusion co-teacher for nine more years. Ann has been at her current school for two years and was asked to be the general education inclusion co-teacher right from the start due to her previous experience. Ann has a unique challenge this year in that she has two different co-teachers that come to her room each day. During this study, Ann was honored with becoming Teacher of the Year at her school. Ann has a bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and a master's degree in Reading Education.

Beth

Beth is a highly educated and tenured teacher. She earned a bachelor's and master's degree in Early Childhood Education, a specialist degree in Creative Arts and Instruction, and has her Gifted and Math endorsements. She has been an inclusion co-teacher for both third and fifth grade, but currently teaches fifth grade math only. Beth has been at her current school for 11 of her 24 years of teaching. This is her fourth year as an inclusion co-teacher. The first year, Beth was asked by administration if she would be the inclusion co-teacher, and since that time, Beth volunteers for the role each year because of how much she enjoys it. She stated with a laugh, "I really do love it. I mean, as a matter of fact, I volunteer to be inclusion." I met with Beth after school in her classroom on a Wednesday afternoon. It was obvious how busy Beth's school life is, for during our 35 minutes together, her phone rang once, a colleague came to ask her a question, and her co-teacher came to "hammer some things out" in regards to a retest that was coming up. She explained, "Some are, they are just still struggling so we are trying to figure out what else can we do to get them prepared for the retest."

Charlotte

Charlotte is a soft spoken and gentle kindergarten teacher. Due to scheduling conflicts, we met for our individual interview at a Starbucks on a Saturday afternoon during one of her

breaks from school with her two year old son. Charlotte has been at the same school for all 14 years of her teaching career. Of those, she has been an inclusion co-teacher for seven. The first year, Charlotte was asked by her principal to be the general education inclusion co-teacher. "After I was asked, you know, it was just a given that I was going to do. But, you know, I love it." In the past seven years, Charlotte has not been an inclusion co-teacher only once, due to a maternity leave. She loves her role as an inclusion co-teacher so much that she recalls the conversation with her assistant principal and her agreeing with "I know it's going to hurt you to not do it" that one year. Charlotte currently has a bachelor's degree in education, and feels that a lot of her drive to continue on is due to the wonderful co-teachers she has worked with.

> I am very lucky to work with such sweet, um, supportive, what can I do for you? What can I do for your kids? So selfless, so, um, wonderful. And it just depends on who you are with, you know, and oh my goodness, I am with the top of line right now.

Debbie

Debbie is a first grade teacher. In total, she has been teaching for 15 years; everything from pre-k to third grade in three different counties in Georgia. She has worked with students with disabilities in different ways, but is currently in her second year as a general education inclusion co-teacher. Debbie holds a bachelor's degree in Education, a master's degree in Teaching, and a specialist degree in Education. I met with Debbie on a Monday afternoon in her classroom after her students had left for the day. Debbie was asked by her administration to become an inclusion co-teacher the first time. Since then, she simply finds out if that is what she is doing when she gets her roster at the beginning of the year. Even though Debbie has only been in the role for two years, she has had three different co-teachers. This year, she has a certified co-teacher for one segment and a para-professional for a second. The last year she was in the role,

she had a different co-teacher. Debbie shared her secret to success as a general education inclusion co-teacher. "I pray. I pray each morning for patience. You need patience".

Eliza

Eliza is one of the more tenured teachers who participated in the study. She has taught for the past 25 years, working in two different states, three districts, and four schools. Eliza has been at the current successful school for 13 years and seven of those years have been as a general education inclusion co-teacher. She currently has a bachelor's degree in Education. Eliza jokingly calls herself the "chosen one" for her first year as inclusion co-teacher she was simply chosen by her administration. It was not a role she volunteered for. When I asked her if she would want to continue in this role in the future, she responded "I am okay with it now because I feel comfortable with it. I feel like I have enough experience now with it. I can, when I go to them or when I say there is a problem here or this child, whatever the case may be, I feel that they listen to me and I have enough confidence and experience to speak to them about it." The interview with Eliza took place in her classroom after school one Wednesday. She had a few answers already prepared because she asked for the questions in advance. However, we had a wonderful and thorough conversation.

Janeen

Janeen teaches second grade this year. With a bachelor's degree in Communication, Janeen did not start out in the field of education. After earning a second bachelor's degree in Education, she has now been a teacher for 10 years. She has been working at this successful school for eight years, and as a general education inclusion co-teacher for six. She has since earned a master's degree in Technology in Education. Janeen was asked by her administrative staff if she would be interested in being the general education inclusion co-teacher and now it is

just assumed that she will continue on in the roll. Because Janeen has students who have Individual Education Program (IEP) and receive English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) services, there are often support staff in and out of her room. It is overwhelming to have what is essentially a "half and half class". She states, "Between SSTs, IEPs and, ESOL about 12 of my kids need progress monitoring and services." My interview with Janeen took place in her classroom after a full day of teaching and an hour session with students for afterschool tutoring. After the conclusion of our session, Janeen was meeting with a colleague to discuss reading assessments, making for a very long day.

Jessica

I met with Jessica in her classroom during her lunch time and we had an honest and funny conversation. Jessica has been teaching for 16 years and has been at her current successful school for nine. She currently holds a bachelor's degree in education. This is her second year as a general education inclusion co-teacher. This year, she is a third grade teacher. Her past experience was in kindergarten. When I asked Jessica how she became an inclusion co-teacher she joked, "I don't know! I just found it when I got my class roster." I responded saying she was the chosen one and she responded, "Or the one that doesn't say no." Jessica has a unique situation in that some of her special education math students come to her from a different third grade classroom to receive their services. She described:

> This year, I teach kids that come from other classes into this room, and that is a struggle because, you know, just with, scheduling. Some days they don't come. Some days they do. Some days they are 20 minutes late. Um, so it just puts me in a bind, and I have to find, you know, activities for 20 minutes or then I have to re-do the lesson because they are the kids that need it.

86

Joe

Joe is the only male participant in the study. He is currently a fifth grade math and science teacher. This role is ironic for Joe in that he holds a bachelor's degree, not only in Education, but also History and claims he was "such a horrific math student". This marks Joe's 12th year of teaching, with the past seven years at this successful school. All seven years, Joe has been a general education inclusion co-teacher in some capacity. He has served in the role co-teaching with an ESOL, Title 1, and special education co-teacher. He honestly and simply explained how he became a general education inclusion co-teacher. "That was just they came and said you are going to teach the special ed population, and I said okay." I met with Joe at the end of a busy school day. Our meeting was sandwiched between a parent-teacher conference and a brief meeting with his assistant principal. Joe was recently honored with Teacher of the Year for his school.

Linda

I had a heartfelt conversation with Linda, a first grade teacher. Linda has been teaching for 15 years. This is her seventh year at this successful school and sixth year as a general education inclusion co-teacher. I met with Linda in her classroom during the school day while her students were at a special area class. Because of our time limits, Linda asked for the questions in advance and was well prepared. Linda was clear on her motivation for being a general education inclusion co-teacher.

> It wasn't until my daughter who's in seventh grade now, was in second grade. She was actually diagnosed with OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder) and anxiety and language processing, so that just kind of opened up my world to what kind of services she received. And what's better, you know, it just made her life better and I saw what was going on in

the classroom and I thought, you know, I need to give back. I need to figure out a way

how I can really jump on board.

At that time, Linda volunteered to be an inclusion co-teacher and only takes a break to give other

teachers on her grade level a chance to have the experience. Linda has both a bachelor's and

master's degree in education.

Penny

Penny is a passionate and eager second grade teacher of eight years. With a bachelor's

degree in Education, Penny has a desire to pursue higher education. She had been a general

education inclusion co-teacher for three years, and it was a role she volunteered for at first and

now "it just kind of sticks". Penny describes her early experience, "My first year teaching as an

inclusion teacher was probably the hardest year I ever had professionally, um, because of the

emotional and behavioral needs. And I did feel, um, woefully unprepared."

Despite that, she loves her role and wants to continue "because I love them, and at the

end of the day, there was growth and there was progress and the greatest thing about that year

was that I learned that success looks different for every child." Penny is the only participant who

has had the same co-teacher for the past three years. I met with Penny in her classroom at the end

of the school day and after a school leadership meeting.

Sue

Sue is an energetic first grade teacher. She has been teaching first grade at the same

school for all eight years of her career. Half of those years have been as a general education

inclusion co-teacher. In her young career, Sue has earned a bachelor's and master's degree in

Early Childhood Education, and has been awarded Teacher of the Year for her school. I met with

Sue after school on the same afternoon that her students threw her a surprise party in celebration

for her upcoming wedding the following week. Sue became an inclusion co-teacher after being asked by her assistant principal.

> I love it and so after that first year I actually wrote on my um, my intent form that I love doing the co-teaching class and I would love to continue if they felt like it was a good fit for me, so, it's just kind of been ever since.

However, despite her love and passion for inclusion co-teaching, she has a current situation in her room with extreme behavior issues that may lead her to asking for some time away. In her journal she wrote:

> I think I may ask for a break from inclusion. It makes me sad, though, because some of my <u>very</u> <u>favorite</u> students ever were my special ed students. I don't want to miss out on them, but I can't take another year of the extreme situations – those where there are <u>extreme</u> behavior problems.

Tracy

Tracy is a second grade teacher. She has worked as the inclusion co-teacher for three years, but not in a row. She has been employed at her current successful school for 10 years. When asked how she became the inclusion co-teacher, she laughed and answered, "It just showed up on my class roster that day. Yep, there you go!" Tracy has a bachelor's degree in Early Childhood Education and a Master's in Elementary Reading and Literacy. I interviewed Tracy in her classroom after school one Thursday. Tracy was clear on her secret to success of being a general education inclusion co-teacher: Befriending your special education co-teacher. She made comments throughout the interview, such as, "Develop that relationship with your co-teacher for sure, because they are going to be your best support; your best resource." And "I make best friends with my special ed teachers and I call them. I ask them what works for them."

Themes

After all data collection pieces were collected and transcribed, which included the interviews, the focus group, and the journals, significant statements were identified. Each of those significant statements were coded, and from the codes four themes emerged. They are (a) Putting forth the effort to be life-long learners; (b) Valuing the power of relationships; (c) Thriving off of student success; and (d) Setting aside frustrations and understanding the big picture. The following section provides information regarding each developed theme.

Putting Forth the Effort to be Life-long Learners

This was the first theme identified. This emerged in several ways throughout the process. As well, there were different areas that seemed to be a part of this first theme.

Inadequate preparedness. Lack of teacher preparedness to take on the role as a general education inclusion co-teacher was a focus of both the individual interviews and focus group conversation. This was because past research showed that teachers had a negative perception of adequate teacher training in terms of both college preparation and professional development (Ermst & Rodger, 2009; Forlin & Chambers, 2011). The participants in this study had an overwhelming feeling of being inadequately prepared. As stated in her introduction, Penny claimed she was "woefully" unprepared. Similarly, Tracy shared in the focus group, "When I got placed in this role I definitely hadn't had any training or anything on it." Three of the teachers shared the feelings of fear of being a general education inclusion co-teacher for the first year. For example, Charlotte expressed, "I was afraid." Debbie described it as "scared of, of not knowing what to do with that type of students." Eliza said, "It was scary, or a little intimidating." Janeen used the simile "It was like walking in blind" to describe her first year.

College preparation. In terms of college preparation, Allie, Charlotte, Eliza, Janeen, Joe, Tracy, and Sue reported no college preparation courses in terms of inclusion and co-teaching. Beth, one of the more tenured teachers laughed when asked about this. "I had zero prep, um, because there was no such thing as inclusion when I started teaching." Ann, Beth, Debbie, Jessica, Penny, and Linda all recalled a class or two on special education, but none they found helpful for being an inclusion co-teacher. As Jessica stated, "I think we had to take a couple of special ed classes, um, but again, nothing really prepares you for it until you're involved in it, you know."

Professional development. Even more overwhelming was data showing the lack of professional development since becoming a general education inclusion co-teacher. Allie, Ann, Beth, Charlotte, Debbie, Janeen, Jessica, Joe, Linda, Sue, and Tracy all reported no professional development that had aided them in this role. Tracy remarked, "As far as like training or anything like that, no, I definitely hadn't had anything that had really prepared me for what to do." Ann shared, "they really gear special education staff development just toward special education teachers." Both Eliza and Linda recalled a professional development session they found helpful. Linda talked about:

> …an off sight workshop up in (a neighboring city) one day with one of the inclusion teachers, and that was very helpful, because it was more about team teaching and sharing the classroom to make it look seamless where certain kids were not targeted you know.

In the focus group, Eliza disclosed:

> I did go to one workshop that, um, that was on autism kids and what to implement into a classroom. I would say that was probably very beneficial given that those kids come in and you do have to deal with those kids differently. And, so that was quite helpful.

Areas of confidence. While the overwhelming feeling was that of not being prepared to take on the role of inclusion and co-teaching, four participants shared specific areas where they did feel confident. Ann shared, "With the students I was fine. With the co-teacher, I was not." Sue had similar thoughts, "I felt prepared as far as working with the kids" mostly due to her student teaching experience where special education students were in her class. Allie also expressed more confidence with working with the kids because she "did a lot of volunteer work with special needs kids when I was in college." Janeen stated, "I felt that I had some background knowledge to accommodate and how to handle them and things like that."

Self-learning. Despite these overwhelming reports of lack of professional development, inadequate college preparation, and feelings of apprehension their first year, the participants still felt successful in this role as a general education inclusion co-teacher because they were committed to learn and grow in their profession. They were willing and driven to engage in their own research and also to learn from others. In addition, these teachers agreed that learning through experience was the most beneficial education.

Personal research. Six participants told about conducting their own personal research on a specific student or a specific disability. For example, Beth said:

> I read a lot on my own. Especially if I have a student with a specific, like I had a student with…pervasive developmental delay…so I will on my own go look into that. I've had other kids with things like sensory issues…I will want to know more about and see how they best learn, so I will go learn more about it. So I will go and dig on my own, too, to see what I can do.

Debbie nonchalantly stated, "I read up on them and learn as much as I can." Janeen opened up and expressed:

As different students come with different conditions, I have then done the research about what that is before they come. You know, like the autism; like anxiety issues and how to handle that in the classroom. So I have done the research.

On the same lines, Jessica commented, "You go and find strategies and you research and, you know, you find ways that these kids learn best on your own time." Penny talked about it two different times in her interview, first saying, "I have done some professional research myself" and later continued with "I will do the research. I will find out what needs to be done for those kids." In a self-discovery moment, Sue hesitantly remarked, "I guess I kind of go out and kind of seek information. I am one of those people that always want to do the best that I can, and so I'll, I'll read." Lastly, Tracy stated, "I definitely look stuff up on the internet."

Learning from others. In their quest for knowledge, these teachers often turned to those they were surrounded by, understanding the power of learning from the expertise of others. When I asked what advice he would give to future general education inclusion co-teachers, Joe responded, "Don't just use your own ideas. Use from other people." Allie suggested "asking other people that have done this longer. Get their advice" and later in the interview reiterated, "don't be afraid to ask questions". Linda agreed, adding in, "listen to what others say." Implementing their own advice, Joe and Ann cited examples of their own learning through teacher observation. Ann mentioned, "Teacher observation really has made a big difference" and Joe added that it "becomes watching other people do it and seeing what they did right and what they did wrong."

By and large, these teachers learned the most from their special education co-teachers. In the focus group, Allie shared, "I've been fortunate to do inclusion with teachers who have a lot of experience so that has been my best education" and in her interview expressed similar

93

thoughts about her co-teacher, "She was kind of a mentor to me. She really kind of prepared me for the next step." Similarly, Ann stated, "Having experience with the inclusion teachers who are great special ed teachers, uh, that's made a huge difference. I learned a lot from how she interacted with kids." Penny boasted the best preparations came from:

> …the inclusion teacher I am with. [She] was a wealth of knowledge and would share with me. You know, if I came to them and said, this is what I need, this is what I am struggling with, they would help me."

Sue declared, "The best thing for me has been talking to the special ed teacher I work with. That has been the most helpful. Getting their feedback." and later in the interview continued, "I am probably a better teacher now because I've learned from a co-teacher". During the focus group, Tracy communicated:

> I've learned so many strategies that really benefit my other low level learners that may not be special ed students, but they, the strategies that I see my co-teacher using really do help a lot of my other kids, too. I have gained a wealth of knowledge from them.

She further explained her secret to success in her interview as she laughed "I make best friends with my special ed teachers and I call them. I ask them what works for them. What are they doing in their classroom?"

Learning from experience. These teachers used experience as a means of learning as well. This included drawing from past experiences, learning from personal experiences, and the education that they received from their current and daily experiences as a general education inclusion co-teacher. Debbie, Eliza, Janeen, and Tracy all discussed how they learned from past experiences of simply being a general education teacher. In her interview, Debbie shared:

There are things that are good, that you just apply. Things you know work for kids, for all kids not just special ed kids, and, experience of doing it. I learned from, let say, great things from the Ron Clark Academy. They are just good things that work for all students, good strategies. So, I think experience plays a big part.

Later she continued, "Just applying what you know…the special education kids, they are kids, they learn, um, they need the same things. So just good teaching; good strategies." Similarly, Tracy mentioned, "I felt like my years experience had prepared me for working with those students. I just kind of went off of the experience that I already had." Eliza shared, "They're characteristics in me that I didn't realize lend itself to an inclusion teacher" citing specifically working with "various cultures at very different schools."

Joe, Linda, and Janeen all explained how they learned from their personal experiences. Specially, Joe recalled struggles he had as a child in school and how he used those struggles to shape how he taught the struggling learners in his class:

You have to put yourself in that kid's position. Um, probably the biggest factor was me being such a horrific math student. So being able to know what their struggles were and understanding what wasn't explained well to me so I could explain it to them. And, approaching it more from, not a teacher perspective, but a student perspective. And being able to do it that way.

Janeen told of a similar idea during her interview:

I am a visual learner. So to me, someone just standing there talking to me the whole time just doesn't do anything for me. I need that, so I brought my likes and dislikes as a student into my classroom. And I think that then lends itself to benefiting the students that need it visually, auditory, you know, they need it several ways.

Linda once again communicated the story of her daughter who receives special education services. She continuously learned from her daughter's experiences and brought that into the classroom. For she explained:

I just take my own life experiences and I think that's important. I share with the parents quite often, you know, my daughter has this going on. This is what I see with her, um, just giving suggestions and I just think parents are able to connect to that and I am able to connect with the kids more, because I am understanding them a little more, as a parent, that has to have a child with services.

As life-long learners, these teachers acknowledged that their own personal education and professional development came over time through their experiences in the role. As Allie stated in her interview, "I believe that my biggest education is just doing it and getting to know my kids and getting to know what their individual needs are." During the focus group, Ann offered, "I would say that the more experience that the teachers have with teaching inclusion, the less stress it probably is" after she similarly stated in the interview, "I think experience is a lot of it". Eliza focused on education through experience during the focus group, saying "I have become comfortable in the role because I have done it for several years." Joe summarized it perfectly when he claimed, "It's been real world, out there, do it, figure it out. When it doesn't work, what are you going to do to make it work?" This experience and desire to learn pushed these general education inclusion co-teachers to continue despite their lack of preparedness to start. As Allie stated, "Doing it for one year prepared me to want to move on and do it more."

Valuing the Power of Relationships

This was the second overarching theme that emerged. Past research showed that teachers had a negative perception of the co-teaching relationship (Bessette, 2008; Carter et al., 2009;

Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008). However, in stark contrast, the participants in this study embraced and acknowledged the power of a cohesive relationship with their co-teacher or co-teachers. Through experience, they saw the multiple benefits of having a co-teacher in the classroom, respected their role and knowledge, and learned from them through observation and conversation. This was true despite feeling underprepared to work with a co-teacher.

Description of the relationship. Every participant viewed their relationship with their current co-teacher or co-teachers in a positive light. Throughout the interview, Allie spoke multiple times about her strong relationship with her co-teacher. "The people are what make this job, beyond the children of course, that make what I do such a pleasure to be here every day. You feel that bond, that love and that cohesion, and it's a good thing." Later in the interview, she continued, "We are all such a good team and it really helps the children." Ann stated, "I have a really great inclusion teacher", and later in the interview continued, "We get along, which is positive. You kind of have to get along for it to work." Beth not only expressed satisfaction with her current co-teacher, but past ones as well. "I have liked every single co-teacher that I have worked with. Just a good rapport." Later in the interview she remarked, "It's just very, very fortunate, with people I have worked with." Even though Debbie had two resource teachers and one para-professional, she maintained a positive relationship with all three. "They are so great. They are just so awesome. They are all great with the kids. They jump in; they…help out." Jessica shared that her relationship with her co-teacher "…is good. We are even friends outside of school." Joe agreed with, "Co-teacher this year is great. You know, he's very flexible." Linda had two co-teachers that year and reported:

I have a very good rapport with the teachers. We understand each other and we bounce

ideas off of each other. We have a great relationship and it's because we both want

what's best for the kids. We just work very well together.

Penny was one of the few participants who has had the same co-teacher for all her years of co-teaching. She happily reported, "We've become best friends" and later continued, "We believe similar things, we teach in a similar style…We both love what we do." She expressed with those sentiments in the focus group, sharing, "I know that she is there for me if I need her and she knows the same about me." Sue excitedly voiced, "Oh my gosh, I love her. She is one of my really, really good friends." Tracey, who also had had multiple co-teachers said, "Everyone that I've worked with for the most part, it's been great." In her journal, she wrote, "Having support staff that you trust and work well with is essential to the success of this model." Penny, along with Janeen and Eliza, all joking referred to the relationship as a marriage.

Fostering the relationship. These positive relationships did not just come haphazardly. It was clear the participants understood the value in investing in this crucial relationship. When asked what advice she would give to new general education inclusion co-teachers, Ann suggested, "Get to know your inclusion teacher. Make sure you are on the same page, as far as like classroom discipline or expectations." Tracy agreed in her interview, suggesting to "develop that relationship with your co-teacher" even saying "I make best friends with my special ed teachers." In her interview, Eliza noted, "You have to have the give and take and you have to…learn each other. You have to find that good working relationship." Later she continued, "Teaching inclusion requires a delicate partnership. You must let your guard down." Janeen discussed the topic several times, first saying, "The first thing is not the kids. The first thing is you have to create a relationship with your co-teacher." She later stated:

98

To me that's the biggest thing; is figuring, um, creating, the relationship and figuring out

what works best between the two of you so that you can best benefit the class. Because if

the two of you aren't meshing, it's, it's not going to work for the kids.

During the focus group, Allie recommended that co-teachers "communicate honestly with each

other and gain mutual respect" which was responded to by other participants chiming in, "I

agree".

Professional benefits. The participants in the study discussed the numerous professional

benefits of having a co-teacher in the classroom. As Penny explained:

I love to have another professional opinion when I am worried about a child or when I

want to run something past somebody else. I love that there is another person who loves

the children as much as I do and knows them as well as I do.

Later, she continued, "It's good in the sense that it lowers the pupil-teacher ratio. Again, you

have two professionals putting their years of experience together doing what's best for kids."

Similarly, Debbie wrote in her journal, "It was so nice to discuss my thoughts/observations and

brainstorm some new ways to try and reach my kids that I'm not reaching". Later she stated in

the focus group interview, "I love having someone else who knows the child as much as I do so

that we can…it's another person to bounce ideas off of." Linda added:

It's good to have more hands in the room. And I am able to bounce ideas off the inclusion

teachers, the co-teachers and so forth, and we just go back and forth and share ideas that

maybe I wouldn't have thought of differently, instead of take on the teaching roll as well.

So I just think it is a great benefit because it is a different set of eyes and ears and

teaching strategies that all kids get to get.

Beth summarized the professional benefits when she stated, "I almost feel like I am getting away with something, because, ah, I get that extra teacher in here! I love bouncing ideas off of people."

The participants often brought up the benefits of a co-teacher in terms of effectively delivering instruction. For example, Jessica wrote in her journal under *Successes*, "Having another teacher to help accommodate and re-teach standards when needed." Linda also wrote, "I am so fortunate to have a wonderful co-teacher who supports small group teaching to help these kids grow." In her interview, Penny stated, "I have another professional in the room with me to teach small groups of children", and later discussed in the focus group, "I love having more than just myself in the classroom so we can break them into smaller groups and to have that support." Debbie agreed, adding, "I love being able to work together with another professional and divide the children up and have smaller groups. That to me benefits all of the children."

The participants in the study exhibited respect for their inclusion co-teachers and the knowledge they brought to the classroom. In her interview, Charlotte shared, "The co-teachers are phenomenal." During her interview, Sue talked about her co-teachers saying, "I just have the most respect for special ed teachers. They have so many strategies and you know, things to pull from." Beth stated:

> I like the special ed teachers because they have more deeper knowledge of a student that can help me in planning curriculum or figuring out strategies, or what have you. And also, I can use them as a resource for strategies to help these kids.

Thriving off of Student Success

This was the third theme that came out in the process. During the individual interviews, there was one topic that brought out the most emotion in the participants. Sometimes that

emotion was pride and joy; other times it was self-doubt and guilt. That topic was the students. The idea that these teachers kept students in their hearts and minds was further solidified by what was shared in their journals. Little was written about IEP meetings, co-teachers, and trainings. When asked to free write about their challenges, successes, frustrations, and questions, the topics of most journals was consistently students. The participants in this study thrived off of the students.

   Rationale for co-teaching. The consistent conclusion of why these teachers were general education inclusion co-teachers, despite the challenges, lack of training, and extra work, was because of the rewarding value. Allie went as far to use the word "rewarding" three times in her interview and Tracy did twice. Joe, Janeen, Jessica, Penny, and Charlotte all explicitly stated that the role was rewarding. Others used the word "love" when talking about the role or the students. The three word phrase, "I love it" was used by Ann in her journal, and Beth, Charlotte, Linda, Penny, and Sue in the interviews. Expanding on it further, Linda wrote in her journal, "It's all worth it. Just knowing I am part of their journey is awesome. Each little success is meaningful to all of us who love these kids." After Penny shared how hard her first year as a general education inclusion co-teacher was, I asked why she did it again. She responded, "Because I love them. And at the end of the day, there was growth and there was progress." These teachers talked about their special education students with joy. With a smile, Sue declared, "Oh my gosh, some of my favorite kids and the neatest experiences that I've had as a teacher were because I have had the inclusion class and I got to work with different special ed kids." Tracy responded in the focus group, "I love, love working with those kids that you can see so much growth from." And in her journal, Allie wrote, "When a child finally 'gets it' – what a wonderful thing to see."

Benefits for students. The participants shared countless examples of benefits for all of the students in their classroom; the special education students as well as their peers who were non-disabled. Penny, Linda, and Sue all explicitly stated that in their interviews. By and large, the success stories that were told were not academic, but more so socially and emotionally achievements. For example, Allie, Ann, and Janeen voiced how they saw the confidence of their special education students grow. Janeen discussed, "By second grade, they're starting to feel like they're dumb, kind of why should I try, and so I work real hard on letting them know that they are just as smart as anyone else." In her journal, Tracy shared, "It is incredible to see my boys progress in their weaker areas. Academics are a challenge, but we also spend a lot of time working on communication, social skills, understanding our emotions & following directions" and then later wrote, "We are walking in the line" with a smile face next to it. Linda wrote in her journal, her special ed students "feel comfortable in the classroom environment. The kids are engaging in social conversations." The general education students are also growing socially and emotionally as well. Ann remarked:

> They are being exposed to students who are different, and who do have special needs and are not watching those children be ostracized in a negative way. I think it's good for them to see that not all children, even if they are different, are treated in a negative manner when they have that kind of behavior.

Charlotte shared, "The kids are going to learn acceptance and love and trust." Similarly, Penny said, "It's good for the typical peer to learn that compassion." Lastly, Tracy explained:

> General ed students learn that empathy, and it gives them the opportunity to be a leader, and provide support. Sometimes, the students who are even lower performers, they get to be a helper and a mentor to someone that might be an inclusion student because they feel

like they have the leadership role. You really see those caring qualities come out in your

other students.

The participants attributed some of the success and benefits to all students to having two

teachers in the room. Joe joked, "It's talking head syndrome. They get to hear it from two

different people. I think there is no greater benefit than that." Ann stated about having two co-

teachers, "Having three teachers throughout the day gives the chance, gives the students a chance

to maybe make a special connection with a teacher and that can sometimes be a great release for

the kids." Eliza explained in her journal, "It's much better for students considering the ratio is 2

teachers to 22 students." In the focus group, Penny claimed, "I love being able to work together

with another professional and divide the children up and have smaller group settings that to me

benefit all of the children."

While success could be attributed to having more than one teacher, a common theme with

the participants was the need to get to know each student individually. Ann explained in her

interview:

I think that I really try to understand them; their strengths and their weaknesses so that I

can best meet their needs. The first couple months of school I would just go out of my

way to get to know them.

Charlotte recommended:

Just getting to know the kids. I think just figuring out what they like and what they

respond to….forming a solid relationship where they can trust me. I really let them know

how much I love them and care about them.

Debbie advised to future general education inclusion co-teaches:

Take the time to get to know the kids. I make them feel like, like they really are part of

the class. They don't feel ostracized by the difference….Get to know your students; know

who they are as a person and as a learner.

Jessica talked about it a few times in her interview, stating such things as "interaction with the

kids – the interaction with them. You know, the conversations…the time spent with them" and

later added, "I have a connection with them." Linda remarked that, through experience, she

learned to be "more aware of what the kids needed" and continued, "just the experience of

having it year after year and just seeing my daughter in that role, I really want to make that deep

connection and make sure that I can do all that I can." Sue explained two different times that she

"tunes" into the needs of her students.

The participants felt that knowing and building relationships with their students was so

important because they knew that there was no one type of student with disability. With a deep

breath, Eliza exclaimed:

The different kids, because there is not just one special ed child that comes in the

classroom and they all meet that characteristic. There are so many to learn, all the

different characteristics and the different ways to deal with the different disabilities.

As Charlotte stated, "there are so many different personalities"; Penny claimed, "And like

anything else, no (student with a disability) is the same. You have to continue to look at the

children as individuals"; and Tracy said, "each child is so different". Knowing each child

individually allowed the teachers to apply Joe's secret to success, "You have to put yourself in

the kid's position…approach it more from, not a teacher perspective, but a student perspective"

and as Penny suggested, "Understanding that child and being able to help them right where they

are" allows the teachers to know that "success looks different for different types of children."

In an effort to better understand, honor, and meet the various needs of the students in

104

their class, many of the teachers expressed the importance of small groups and differentiated instruction. For most participants, this fit right into their current style of teaching, especially for the participants in the early elementary field. Penny, a second grade teacher, shared that "being and inclusion teacher has caused me to grow and improve my abilities to differentiate for my students" and later she discussed that she has "differentiated spelling groups and differentiated reading groups and differentiated math groups, and I have good solid data that is driving that instructional and the math groups are fluid so they change depending on what skill I am teaching." Linda, a first grade teacher, claimed, "I am already doing so many small group and interventions to help all children" and later stated a strength of hers was "accommodating the kids and working in small groups based on their needs". Allie, a kindergarten teacher, explained:

> My method of teaching is all small group, and I have an enormous amount of help
> because I have inclusion. I have resource that comes in. So, there are a couple of blocks
> during the day that I have three people and sometimes four. Um, to lead small groups, so
> that's, ah, a real big advantage. They have a lot of co-teaching going on in here.

Sue, a first grade teacher, mentioned, "I do a lot of small groups anyway in my classroom" and that "giving them the small group, individualized instruction" is where she is most successful.

Self-doubt and guilt. Since the participants cared so deeply for their students, there were certainly times of self-doubt and guilt. Guilt was a common theme in my interview with Beth. Throughout, she made comments such as, "It's hard watching a child struggle and you don't know how to help. I struggle with feeling guilty that, that I am not meeting their needs", and "I don't want to fail them." Penny wrote in her journal "I often wonder if what I offer my students is enough". Debbie shared in her interview, "It's hard when you feel like you just can't give them that, what they need." In her journal, Ann told about a student with disability in math

learning double digit multiplication. You can hear her sorrow as she wrote, "One of my LD students doesn't understand the process at all. I worked one on one w/ him for over 4 days & he was pulled for resource with the Sp Ed teacher. He still doesn't understand. Poor guy." Alli wrote under the frustration section in her journal, "When nothing seems to work – no matter what you try!"

Similarly, I could hear the frustration in Charlotte's voice when she discussed some behavior issues with a student, "What's not sinking in with him? Why is it not enough?" and later continued, "It just drives me crazy that I can't figure out why is he still doing that. Why does he still do all those things?" In her journal, Ann shared a story about behavior issues with one of her students with autism. "I think I have to do more redirecting to accommodate behavioral issues rather than accommodate lessons. How is it fair to my students, both regular ed and LD that their learning is impacted by the autistic students' behavior issues."

As already reported, the participants felt that inclusion was beneficial for all students, but there was quite a bit of guilt regarding the students who were not in the special education program. Janeen shares with a mix of sadness and frustration:

> Some days I feel like my higher kids don't get me, because I have to make sure the
>
> federal mandated, the special ed, the inclusion kids, are getting what they have to have.
>
> And so my higher kids are, may not be, be getting as much of me.

On the same lines, Tracy remarked in her interview, "I am not getting around and getting one-on-one time with my other kids as much as those kids are getting, so that is definitely a downfall." In her journal, she wrote, "How do we balance the needs of one child vs. the needs & rights of his/reg. ed. peers? How do you measure the potential benefits gained for one v/s the potential consequences for everyone else?" Penny said:

Being able to provide enough of yourself to every one of those children. Um, much like

as a mom, you know, you often feel like you're robbing Peter to pay Paul. I'll have a

good day with this group of children, but did I do enough for this group of children.

In her journal, Sue wrote about inclusion being a distraction for her students.

I feel like I haven't been able to think clearly for the past years I've done inclusion…the

extra noises/extra voices from support staff redirecting their students makes me lose my

train of thought. If I'm being distracted, what's it like for the 6&7 year olds?

Sue concluded the journal entry with a sad face.

Setting Aside Frustrations and Understanding the Big Picture

This was the fourth theme to emerge from looking at the data. There were several areas

that emerged as concerns for the participants. However, they were unanimous in their efforts to

understand that they did not know the entirety of the big picture for their school districts.

Identified frustrations. Every participant had frustrations about their role as a general

education inclusion co-teacher. One of those shared frustrations was the amount of extra time,

meetings, and work that went into the role. In her interview, Tracy used the exact same phrase

two different times. "It's just a lot more work". In her journal under frustrations, she wrote,

"Meetings! Meetings! Meetings! – And paperwork!!" Similarly, Janeen simply stated, "It is a

little more paperwork and meeting times." When asked about her biggest challenge, Linda

answered:

I would have to say scheduling. Scheduling all the meetings, um, you know this year in

particular, because I also have a resource child who is pulled out for resource, and I have

the inclusion segments for my other children, so just working everything.

However, despite the extra work that the role required, these participants continued in the

role year after year, many of them volunteering to do inclusion. Why? Because they loved the kids and they accepted that extra work was part of the job. As Beth stated:

> I know I have a lot of IEP meetings, which that might be another thing, but it's just the necessary, it's just what you have to deal with because when you take on inclusion you got the big long meetings that you got, you have to attend.

Later in her journal, she wrote "I spend a lot of time in meetings, but I know they are necessary."

Another area of concern for teachers was not having enough support in their classroom, or even their co-teacher not consistently showing up. Allie phrased it, "maybe not having a hand, enough hands" as she was talking about special situations as they arose. Ann hesitantly expressed, "They [school decision makers] often pull special ed teachers for test bubbling answers and um, small group testing." She also wrote about a situation in her journal where her co-teacher was dealing with another situation and she was left to teach a challenging math lesson to a class that included four high needs autistic students. Eliza stated, "Sometimes you can't count on them [your co-teacher] at that, because for whatever reason, travel time from classroom to classroom or something came up with another child in a classroom." When asked about downfalls of inclusion, Joe stated, "Staffing. There is not enough staff at, at this school." While participants discussed these issues, however, it was not out of deep frustration. It was stated more of a fact. This is the way it was and they even defended it. For example, after sharing about times that her co-teacher did not come, Janeen quickly added, "but she is also department head for special ed, so anytime that she is not with me, she is handling department chair issues, monitoring other, other teachers in special ed." and later continued, "because they are a certain child's case worker, and it's more than just the children in my class. She may have two or three grade levels". Similarly, when Jessica discussed the few times that her co-teacher was late or

didn't show up, she followed it with, "they are pulled in, you know, a million different directions." Tracy pointed out, "It's just the personnel constraints that we have."

Sympathy for co-teacher. During the individual interviews, I asked the participants about planning. Not one reported a common, consistent planning time. Every participant claimed they planned via email. Other common responses to how the co-teachers "plan" included telling their co-teacher as they walked in, discussions during transition times in the classroom, and a phone call after school or even on the weekends. Despite the literature showing that time for true collaboration was a common negatively perceived theme (Horne & Timmons, 2008; Valeo, 2008), the participants in this study did not seem bothered by it. They instead showed compassion for their co-teachers busy schedules. Joe stated about his co-teacher, "he is constantly on the move". Beth talked about her co-teacher's hectic schedule quite a bit, first saying, "The special education teachers have their own meetings and things so I know it is very hard for them to plan together, even though we want to" and later continued, "She has been inundated. She's got even more (meetings). So her time is very tied up trying to, you know, have all her different meetings and things." Ann mentioned, "Their schedule is not necessarily aligned with mine." As I dug a little deeper on the subject during the focus group, the participants were once again understanding and sympathetic. Janeen shared:

> It's a situation where I sympathize with them. I realize that they are not just with me. I am not their only case load. So, you know, I have to understand that their time is, is blocked minute to minute throughout the day. I would love to have her all day and then to have our planning time together and plan units together, but I realize her time is stretched.

Penny then replied:

It's just not very worrisome for me. Like you said, it's just one of those things I accept as a fact. I understand, um, like you were saying that there are only so many, um, special ed co-teachers in the building. Their time is best served working with children.

Allie, Ann, Debbie, and Eliza also responded that lack of planning time was not a worrisome issue for them.

Understanding. In speaking with participants, it was clear that they understand that they, along with their current inclusion class, were just a small part of a much bigger entity. They truly saw many of these frustrations and challenges, as well as others, as fact. Penny expressed, "A piece of me, too understands, too, that as a teacher, I don't see the whole big piece of the pie. I do trust that they know what's best and I do what I am asked to do." When asking if they wished they had more of a say or voice, the majority answer was no. Janeen shared in her interview:

I am considered the general ed, so things that are done, are done through the special education department. And not having a special education certification, you know, I guess I am not considered part of the special ed department either. I am the classroom teacher.

Sue answered:

I feel like I have a voice when it comes down to my kids and what's going on in my room. But I've never really, I've never really, I just never felt the need to, because I don't know what's going on in the other rooms. You know, I know what is going on in my room and this situation. And I do let them know how I feel about that, but as far as the rest of the school, I don't know.

During the focus group, Debbie shared, "I am fine with the amount of voice I am given because I don't feel like I know special education as well as the people in charge. I don't feel like I am as

specialized in it." Eliza claimed that she was fine with the voice she has because she could express herself about what was going on in her class. "There may be a solution for it at that time, there may not, but they hear me and respect it. And um, I feel like I can go to them [decision makers]." During her interview, Linda also said, "I think the decisions are made above me. And when it is something that I need to know that's important, they include me on that. I definitely give my feedback."

Exception. There was one common frustration that was brought up by several participants that contradicted their understanding nature. When talking about inclusion being the appropriate setting for a child, I could sense a true frustration and even tension in several of the participants. As Allie stated:

> The biggest downfall that I see is that if there is an issue in the inclusion classroom, and you know in your heart that that child would benefit so much better in a, a different type of a setting. It takes an incredible amount of time and red tape to get the best, um, for that child.

Beth brought it up twice in her interview.

> I do believe that some of the students I serve are mismatched for this program, um, and that, that causes great stress. Because the ones who I feel it is tailored for, not that they get neglected, but I don't think I can help them in the way I want to help them. Because the ones who are in here that require an exorbitant amount of time and hand holding and strategies get a lion's share of my attention. I mean the purpose of inclusion was to help students that just need that little support. They're, they're almost there, they just need that little support to keep them with their peers; their fifth grade peers. Um, so I do struggle with feeling guilty, that, that I am not meeting their needs.

111

Later, Beth talked about the consequences on the child if they were in a misplaced setting.

> When I feel that a child may be misplaced. We are seeing a lot of struggle and then they are losing their confidence. Where they have had the confidence built up, because they had a lot of scaffolding, a lot of support, and then even though they have support in here, the expectation is so much higher, and, and so, now they're, they're feeling bad. They are. And I am feeling bad, that I am, I feel like I am causing this pain, and I can't figure out how to fix this.

Charlotte declared:

> But sometimes it's obvious. It just doesn't work. And in those factors, after you've tried and tried, you need to go onto something else. I do feel like it's important to have awareness of, okay, we've tried and tried and tried and implemented, implemented, implemented. Obviously this is not the best situation.

In talking about her hardest year as a general education inclusion co-teacher, Penny stated, "That year that was so difficult. There were some kids who, who didn't need inclusion. It wasn't the best for them. Sometimes we look at it as a one size fits all". When asked about the benefits of inclusion, Sue replied, "I feel like everybody benefits when it's the right setting. When it's the right placement for them", however, she earlier shared about a student, "I don't feel that this is the most appropriate setting." Lastly, Tracy answered:

> It may not necessarily be the best setting for them, because they are included because we want them to have that typical peer experience and they want them to have the socialization with kids their age, but academically it is so far beyond what they are capable of, that having them in the classroom is just not going to benefit them academically.

Later in the interview she stated "I think it's not always appropriate and it (inclusion) may be overused." The big frustration for the participants was not that the child was placed in the wrong setting, but the amount of time and effort it took to get it changed. Many of these frustrations came out in their journal. Allie wrote, "It often takes too much time to place children where they will be best served." Sue wrote, "Why does it take so long to have students who are clearly in the wrong placement removed?"

Academic concerns were often the reason the participants felt a child might have been misplaced, but overwhelmingly so, extreme behaviors were noted. Allie brought up "behavior issues" several times in our interview. She wrote in her journal, "When an inclusion child is experiencing extreme behavior issues, is it really the best option?" Also in her journal, Ann wrote, "Having four autistic students in one class in addition to SpEd, EBD, and ESOL – it can be frustrating to gain attention & re-direct." She then continued, "I do more to accommodate behavioral issues rather and accommodate lessons." In her interview, Sue discussed behavior as a concern several times. First, she shared, "The things that frustrate me are when students are placed in here who have extreme behaviors, and then it distracts everybody else from learning." When asked about her biggest challenges, she replied "Behaviors. Students who had different big behavior issues…I don't feel that this is the most appropriate setting." Later, when asked about the downfalls of inclusion, she quickly replied, "mainly the behaviors, you know, when there are just extremely, extremely distracting behaviors or aggressive behaviors". In her journal she wrote about possibly needing to take a break from inclusion co-teaching because of an issue with extreme behavior.

Shedding light to the behavior issues, Penny said:

Sometimes it is not the best fit for a child. And we force it and then I think that is what

can sometimes create some of the behavioral challenges, is if a child doesn't feel

comfortable in that setting and we continue to put them there. That's why I think you see

a lot of the, you know, the behaviors, the acting out behaviors. Because they are not

comfortable.

Research Question Results

There was one central question that was designed to address the full purpose of the study:

What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms

in schools that have met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities? This question is best

answered through reporting the findings of the three sub-questions. In this section, the

experiences of general education inclusion co-teachers in this study are described through the

answers to the sub-questions.

Sub-Question One: How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the self-

efficacy of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful

with their population of students with disabilities?

Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief in their own ability. Self-efficacy is powerful in

that it impacts motivation, performance, commitment, perceptions, and persistence. This

question was designed to better understand the participants' self-efficacy in meeting the needs of

their special education students in terms of management, motivation, and academic success.

While identifying areas of self-doubt, overall the participants in this study had a high self-

efficacy as a general education inclusion co-teacher, and their self-efficacy grew with

experience.

Every participant was able to identify and willing to share areas of strength as a general

education inclusion co-teacher. Mostly, these teachers identified they had the flexibility

114

necessary for the role. Participants were willing to try new ways and approaches when things were not working, go through times of trial and error, and change approaches spontaneously or over the course of a year. These teachers felt they had the patience necessary to work with a class of such diverse learners. The participants shared how they loved their students and had the passion needed. Lastly, they had the ability and desire to build positive relationships with their students and their co-teachers, allowing for students' individual needs to be met through differentiation, small group instruction, and a divide and conquer approach.

There were areas of self-doubt and lower self-efficacy, but it did not appear to be a discouragement to the participants, but rather a motivation. Many talked about going out and seeking answers through personal research, observing other teachers, talking with parents of students, and just asking a lot of questions to the professionals they valued. Participants also acknowledged that their abilities were enhanced and grew with each year in the role. As a matter of fact, the teacher with the most years of experience as a general education inclusion co-teacher even remarked she would be more uncomfortable not having the inclusion class at this point since she had been doing it for so long.

The two participants in the study with the least amount of experience as a general education inclusion co-teacher had a much lower self-efficacy than the participant with the most experience. For example, Jessica--who was in her second year as an inclusion co-teacher-- explained one of her weaknesses was "kind of understanding what my job is" and later said "It's just that I didn't know and I still don't know what the role is of an inclusion teacher….is this what it's supposed to look like?" One of her concerns was "fear that they aren't going to pass". Also in her second year as an inclusion co-teacher, Debbie admitted, "I am not quite sure I am successful…I am still learning. Still trying. I know I have a lot to go".

Sub-Question Two. How do experiences in inclusion and co-teaching influence the motivation of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

The theoretical framework for this study was social cognitive theory which suggests that behavior is the results of one's interaction with people and situations, and a person is motivated by the consequences of eluding a similar behavior, according to Bandura (1977, 1986, 2000). More specifically, actions are guided by three different types of consequences or incentives: External reinforcement, vicarious reinforcements, and self-reinforcements (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 2000). This question was designed to understand the participants' motivation to work with students with disabilities in the inclusion co-taught classroom and what factors shape their motivation. The results of this study showed that participants were motivated by their students, their co-teachers, and their desire to continuously learn and grow as an educator.

External reinforcements included both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Through the data collection analysis, it was extremely clear that the participants of this study were motivated by their students. The intrinsic motivation was the rewarding feeling they described. Participants lit up when talking about the social, emotional, and academic growth of their students. Dominating their journals were success stories of students making great progress. Participants were aware that their efforts become successes in their students, even if they need to define success differently for their students with disabilities.

Vicarious reinforcements included the observations and interactions of others having success or failures. The participants of this study were clearly motivated by the human support they had, especially by their co-teachers. During the focus group, I specifically asked why they continued on in the role despite the many challenges. Acknowledging the rewards of teaching a

116

student with disabilities first, the conversation was quickly dominated by the co-teaching experience and working with others. Participants learned from their co-teachers through conversations and observation. They felt more confidence in making decisions with another professional rather than on their own. They often sought the advice of others, not just their co-teachers and made decisions based off of those experiences, including teacher observation.

Self-reinforcement refers to the refining of personal behavior through self-acknowledgement and rewards. As life-long learners, the reward was the personal professional growth experienced as they work in the role. Each year, each student, and each challenge provided professional development in the area of inclusion co-teaching. Every participant was able to self-identify areas of strengths as a general education inclusion co-teacher, mostly citing examples of knowing each student academically and socially, meeting individual needs through differentiation, and the ability to be flexible. Being asked by school decision makers to continue on in the role was a form of acknowledgement from others and was also motivating to the participants. In the words of many, they were the "chosen one" and this show of confidence from others motivating.

Sub-Question Three. What are the perceptions and attitudes of general education elementary school co-teachers in schools that are successful with their population of students with disabilities?

Research has shown that inclusion teachers had areas where there were positive perceptions and attitudes, as well as negative ones (Austin, 2001; Damore & Murray, 2009; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Ji-Ryun, 2011; Leatherman, 2007; Solis et al., 2012). This research question was aimed at finding if similar results were true for teachers who worked in schools that were successful with its students with disabilities population. The

perceptions and attitudes of the general education elementary school co-teachers in this study were overall positive, with one major negative area of concern.

Areas of positive perceptions and attitudes noted in the literature included the social benefits for students and the personal professional growth for teachers (Austin, 2001; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007). In these two areas, the participants in this study also had positive perceptions and attitudes. Social growth for students was noted by all participants. This growth included that of the general education students as well as the students with disabilities. More specifically, students with disabilities looked to the general education students as role models for learning and behavior. They were learning social skills simply by engaging in a variety of different social interactions with other students through academic and personal conversations. Many participants talked about the confidence of their students with disabilities growing as they were supported by two teachers in their learning, and many individual academic needs were being met in small group instruction. Confidence also grew because students with disabilities felt included as a member of the class instead of feeling ostracized or singled out by being in a pull-out program. The general education students also showed a lot of social growth as they learned compassion, understanding, and empathy of individual differences. Confidence in general education students also grew because they were often the leaders in academic and social partnerships.

Areas of negative perceptions and attitudes noted in the literature included the co-teaching relationship, lack of resources, teacher training, and administrative support (Damore & Murray, 2009; Horne & Timmons, 2008; Leatherman, 2007; Male, 2011; Scruggs et al., 2007; Valeo, 2008). In contrast to the research, the participants of this study had overall positive perceptions and attitudes on these exact constructs. While there were some examples given by

participants of negative co-teaching experiences, they all seemed to be in the past. The participants in this study reported their current relationship with their co-teacher resembled a good marriage; many discussed how they had become close friends with their co-teacher and that they have a solid working relationship. The participants showed care and concern over the high demands placed on their co-teachers. No participants reported a lack of resources, in both material and human resources. In fact, most felt they were supported and often turned to others for guidance and with questions. While the participants overall felt that administration was making decisions without their consistent, direct input, the overall feeling was that of a supportive administration that would listen to concerns as they arise. Although the participants reported a lack of training and professional development; it was not a concern to them as they agreed that hands-on experience while being supported was the best learning.

There was one clear area where the participants had negative perceptions and attitudes; that was appropriate setting and extreme behavior issues. Teachers felt that the placement of students needed to be looked at more carefully, on an individual basis, and in addition, placement in the inclusion classroom was overused. More so, participants were extremely frustrated with the amount of time it took to get the child a more appropriate placement. This was largely the case when discussing extreme disruptive behavior issues.

Summary

The purpose of this study is defined in the central research question: What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met AYP and CCRPI for students with disabilities? Through in-depth interviews, participant journals, and a focus group, I was able to identify four main themes. They were: a) Putting forth the effort to be life-long learners; (b) Valuing the power of relationships; c)

119

Thriving off of student success; and (d) Setting aside frustrations and understanding the big picture. From the data, the three sub-questions were able to be answered. The summary of the findings serves as the answer to the purpose of the study; the central research question is of the essence of being a general education inclusion co-teacher in successful schools.

The textural description focuses on what the participants experienced. The participants of this study felt supported in this complex role. This support came from school leaders, but more so from their inclusion co-teacher(s). The participants valued their co-teachers' opinion, expertise, and relationship. The structural description focuses on how the participants continue on in the role and ensure students success. Findings show that the participants continued to foster their relationships with their co-teachers, continued on with self-learning through experience and research, and maintain a high level of flexibility as a general education inclusion co-teacher.

 In essence, the participants in this study embraced, and in the words of many of them, "love" their role as a general education inclusion co-teacher. They found a true intrinsic reward as their students made progress and showed success academically, socially, and emotionally. They often loved the personal gains they made as an educator, learning from each student, from each year's experience, and from each relationship built. While they were able to identify areas of self-doubt, they looked at those as growth areas and a challenge. They recognized that overcoming challenges led to knowledge gained, for both them and their students. They wanted to learn, and they did learn: From their successes, their challenges, and from the learning community in which they taught.

Through the words of the participants, it was found that they looked at the role of an inclusion co-teacher to be an honor and privilege, as all but one was asked by administration to do it. Being the "chosen one" reminded them that they were trusted by school leaders to guide

and teach a dynamic group of students. There was confidence in their skills and abilities, and that notion was motivating. The participants also felt it was a privilege to have a co-teacher: someone to look to for answers; someone to divide and conquer; a friend in the classroom; a partner in instruction.

The selflessness of the participants was clear. They all identified challenges and frustration as the general education inclusion co-teacher. They knew their job was more time intensive than others. They understood that working with such a diverse population of students was mentally difficult as well, for it brought to the surface areas of guilt and uncertainty. However, despite this, the participants willingly continued on in the role year after year. They did it because they put their personal time and feelings aside, and made it second to their students' needs.

The experiences of being a general education inclusion co-teacher changed from day to day and from teacher to teacher. The participants' perceptions and attitudes toward inclusion and co-teaching were overall positive when students were placed in the appropriate environment. They felt that they had the overall skills to be successful when supported by others. They were motivated by their students' successes and their relationships with their co-teachers.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide insight on the conclusions drawn from the study. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of being a general education inclusion co-teacher in a school that has shown success with its students with disabilities population. Success, for the purpose of this study, was defined by meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) in the students with disabilities sub-group. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings. Following the summary, implications of the study are provided including theoretical, empirical, and practical implications. Lastly, limitations and recommendations for future research are provided.

Summary of the Findings

The data analysis followed the recommendations by Moustakas (1994) for a transcendental phenomenological study. Using the words of the 13 participants from their in-depth interviews, journals, and focus group, four themes emerged. They were (a) putting forth the effort to be life-long learners, (b) valuing the power of relationships, (c) thriving off of student success, and (d) setting aside frustrations and understanding the big picture.

The first theme was putting forth the effort to be life-long learners. While they were not prepared to take on the role of a general education inclusion co-teacher through college preparation or professional development, the participants were successful because they willingly and independently learned what they needed to know to meet their students' individual needs. They did thorough personal research, observed colleagues, and sought answers from others around them, most specifically their co-teacher. They learned about specific disabilities, different strategies, and even about the specific student.

The second theme was valuing the power of relationships. The participants understood that their relationship with their co-teacher was the key to success. Because of that, they took the time to foster that relationship. They set a partnership founded on mutual respect and communication. They were empathetic to their co-teachers' hectic schedules. They collaborated to make decisions regarding their students. The co-teachers were looked to with respect and as experts. Most built relationships that became friendships, some of which were described as a marriage.

The third theme was thriving off of student success. The participants of the study were proud of the gains that their students had or were currently making. They provided examples of students growing academically, socially, and emotionally. While recognizing that being a general education inclusion co-teacher came with extra work and special challenges, the participants continued on because they were motivated by the success of their students. Because of their drive for student success, the participants showed guilt when speaking of particular students or situations, such as taking a day off. When talking about their students, emotions in the participant's words were obvious.

The fourth theme was setting aside frustrations and understanding the big picture. The participants of the study shared frustrations and challenges of being a general education inclusion co-teacher. For example, they spoke of the time constraints of additional meetings and paperwork and lack of time to plan with their co-teacher. However, when digging deeper, they also accepted many of these frustrations as fact and with understanding. For example, they realized that additional planning time with their co-teacher was not possible due to their co-teachers demanding and overbooked schedule. They understood budget issues on the district level. While there was more work, such as the necessity of attending IEP meetings, they felt that

the extra work was necessary. The challenges existed, but they understood why and did not get overly emotional about them.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical framework used in this study was Albert Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory. It was a natural fit as the study aimed to explain the experiences of being a general education inclusion co-teacher with a focus on self-efficacy, motivation, and perceptions. Social cognitive theory addresses self-efficacy and its impact on motivation, goal setting, confidence, and perseverance, according to Bandura (1993, 1999, 2000). Furthermore, social cognitive theory discusses the personal agency, proxy agency, and the collective agency. For the purpose of this study, the collective agency was examined, which refers to the shared beliefs in a group's ability. Overall, the theory states that success increases motivation, both personally and collectively. The participants all worked in a successful school and have shown success themselves as a general education inclusion co-teacher.

As shown in the results, the participants of this study had an overall high self-efficacy in their abilities to meet the needs of their students. Participants were able to share areas of strengths and stories of success. When discussing self-doubt and lack of knowledge, rather than be discouraged, the participants were actually more motivated to seek solutions and answers. This falls in line with social cognitive theory which suggests that people with a higher self-efficacy have a decrease in fears and an increase in expectations (Bandura, 1977, 1993, 1999). It also states that experiencing and observing success will increase self-efficacy. The participants in this study discussed how they observed other teachers, both general education and special education teachers, to help them as general education inclusion co-teachers. In addition, they expressed that their experience in the role was the best way to gain professional development and

build self-confidence. They also were comfortable in their abilities to research information on their own. Many participants reported feeling scared and nervous as a novice general education inclusion co-teacher, but through raw experience, those feelings subsided.

Social cognitive theory states that self-efficacy is so powerful that it affects motivation, among other things. As a person gains confidence in their abilities to accomplish a task, the more motivated they become. This motivation is fueled by success. In the case of the participants, their success was defined by the success of their students. The motivation to continue on as a general education inclusion co-teacher was the increased academic achievement and emotional and social development of their students. As their students showed this success, the participants were motivated to keep working.

The co-teacher relationship absolutely played a large role in the findings of this study. The participants had respect for their co-teacher(s), looked to them for guidance and as an expert, and took the time needed to foster the relationship. This is a direct link to the collective agency and the collective self-efficacy. The participants and the co-teacher had a relationship with the mutual goal of student success. They believed that together, they could make the best decisions for their students and meet their needs through teamwork.

There were indications in the results, that the success of the school impacted the participants' behavior. While discussions with participants focused more on their own individual classrooms, their own individual students, and their own individual relationship with their co-teacher, the participants did have a respect for being a small piece of a larger picture and discussed feeling supported by their community, specifically their administration and co-teacher. This was especially true when specific problems or situations arose.

Empirical Implications

The course of special education has made dramatic changes over the last century, most recently with the combination of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004. With these great changes come numerous research studies on best practices. While there are numerous studies on inclusion and co-teaching, there was a lack of literature focused on schools that are successful with their students with disabilities.

Research reported that for successful inclusion and co-teaching, there needed to be administrative support, professional development, supportive special education staff, and time for collaboration (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Carter et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Santoli et al., 2008, Solis et al., 2012; Werts et al., 2009). Despite these suggestions by experts, past research showed that teachers had negative perceptions in many of these same areas. For example, teachers did not feel well supported by their co-teachers or administration and felt there was a lack of teacher training and planning time. (Carpenter & Dyal, 2006; Carter et al., 2009; Friend & Cook, 1996; Friend et al., 2010; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Leatherman, 2007; Paulsen, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Santoli et al., 2008, Solis et al., 2012; Werts et al., 2009).

The results of this study differ somewhat from past research. The participants of this study did feel they were supported by their administration. They also reported great collaborative relationships with their co-teachers, despite a lack of planning time. They did report a lack of professional development; however, it was interestingly not negatively perceived. This was due to the fact that the participants in this study had multiple years of experience in the role, and they overwhelmingly felt that experience was the best professional development. In some ways, they

created their own professional development through experience and personal research and now feel prepared. The same was true regarding lack of planning time with co-teachers. Participants reported there was little time for planning provided, but it was not negatively perceived. It was accepted with understanding and sympathy for their co-teachers' busy schedules.

Past research showed that teacher perception of inclusion was impacted by the severity of the disability (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The same held true for teachers who worked with students with severe emotional, behavioral, or social issues. The amount of experience a person had working with individuals with disabilities also influenced perceptions (Carter et al., 2009; Ernst & Rodgers, 2009; Leatherman, 2007). While no participants seemed to be professionally impacted by the severity of the disability, it was clear that teachers were concerned about extreme behavior issues. Participants often questioned if the inclusion setting was the proper placement for a child with such disruptive behaviors. Furthermore, the literature revealed issues teachers had with students whose current academic needs could not be properly met in the inclusion setting (LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Yell et al., 2006). There were similar results in this study.

Overall, teachers who worked in successful schools had a higher perception of various aspects of inclusion and co-teaching than the results of past studies showed. Participants in successful schools felt more supported by administration and their co-teacher. There were not negative perceptions of planning and professional development, even though a lack of planning time existed. However, these teachers did feel grave concern over proper use of the least restrictive environment placement procedures, specifically the inability to move a child who was struggling with severe behavior issues.

<center>**Practical Implications**</center>

From the findings in the study, there are recommendations made to specific educational professionals. First, recommendations to school administrators are provided, specifically with the selection of general education inclusion co-teachers. Then, recommendations for general education inclusion co-teachers are stated. This is done through direct quotations from the participants.

Recommendations for Administrators

In getting to know the participants in this study through their interviews, journals, and the focus group, common themes emerges on their personalities, their teaching styles, and the environment in which they teach. While the study did not focus on administrative decisions, a clear profile of what leads to a successful inclusion co-teaching environment became clear. For that reason, the following recommendations are given to administrators and/or school decision makers in terms of special education.

Listen and respond. The teachers in this study did not feel they had a large voice in school-wide decisions in terms of the special education program; however, they did not perceive it negatively. This was largely because they felt they were listened to and supported when problems or issues did arise. They reported that they trusted that the best interest of their classroom and their students was always in the decision maker's mind.

Closely collaborate with special education staff. The participants in this study had a great respect for their special education co-teachers. They valued their knowledge and opinions, and felt safe in their presence. Administrators must ensure their special education co-teachers are equipped to warrant such respect. They need to model leadership, provide training that is necessary, and empower the special education co-teachers to make decisions. Collaborating with

<center>128</center>

the special education staff will also help administration keep a pulse on the inclusion program as a whole, allowing administrators to timely tackle problems or concerns.

Strategic staffing. Administrators need to be vigilant in their selection of teachers for the role of general education inclusion co-teacher. All but one participant was handpicked by administration, showing they had the qualities necessary. Administrators must select a teacher who wants to be challenged and is willing to learn and grow. In addition, the teacher must be able to share their classroom and their students, meaning they need to have trust in others' abilities. Lastly, the teachers selected must have a wide variety of teaching skills and the flexibility and willingness to change and adapt with the environment.

Provide time for planning. Although the participants in this study had positive perceptions of inclusion and co-teacher without have a consistent planning time, this is still being recommended for administrators. It was not that the participants did not feel it was necessary, but more that they understood why it was difficult. When participants did speak of planning time, it was in a positive manner. For example, Debbie discussed in her journal and the focus group the benefits of the time that was given through the use of a substitute for her and her co-teacher to meet during the school day for an extended period of time. Janeen stated in the focus group that it was not worrisome that she did not have a common planning time, but she continued, "Could we be better if we had more planning time? We probably could." Ann excitedly shared how her co-teacher the previous year had time to plan together because the scheduled allowed for it. Lastly, Penny explained that her co-teacher was able to meet with her during a common lunch time their first year and that it was beneficial.

Recommendations for General Education Inclusion Co-teachers

In addition to recommendations for administrators, there are recommendations for future and current general education inclusion co-teachers. These come from the voice of the participants. In their interviews, they were asked: "If you could give advice to other general education inclusion co-teacher, what would that be?"

Allie responded,

> You need a whole bucket full of patience. Ah, depend on others that might have different perspectives on how to handle a situation. Um, and don't be afraid to ask questions. Um, don't be afraid to depend on the experience of others, and um, it will all be okay. Just a lot of love. A lot of love.

Ann said, "Probably first to first sit down and get to know your inclusion teacher, um, to make sure you are on the same page, as far as like classroom discipline or expectations."

Beth suggested:

> Be prepared for that it might take a little more extra time, but they are going to get there. They'll get there. Um, and that it is nice to have, you will like having that other person in the classroom. If nothing else, when that something funny happens, you can look at each other, laugh, have that inside chuckle to each other.

Charlotte's advice was:

> Just um, have an open mind. Don't go in with any preconceptions…Just one step at a time; one day at a time. So, if something doesn't work, try something new. Um, give them time to try and learn a new concept. Just try and be consistent with, but just keep building on, and building on that and just let them know how much you love them every single second.

Debbie responded:

> I would say really get to know your students; to know each kid. Read up on them and learn as much as you can…I would say the teacher has to know them as best they can to be able to, to, to meet their needs. Know who they are as a person, as a learner. It's just so important to take that time.

Eliza stated:

> I would say be flexible. You have, you have to be flexible with, ah, students as well as with the second teacher coming into your room and your space. Expect the need to change, either on the fly or the next day or whatever it is, there is going to be some things that don't work as with in a classroom that is not inclusion, sometimes that happens. But, um, the other thing is, it's another person in your space. You have to realize, I always think about this, um, you're both human. I am going to make mistakes in front of you. It happens; it's not the end of the world. Those types of things. Um, let your guard down. Just let your guard down and just be yourself. You have to do that as if that person is in there as your partner.

Janeen shared, "You have to be willing to look at things from all different angles. Because, what works for this kid, is not, may not work for this kid. And so you've got to be open and flexible."

Jessica recommended:

> You do have to have a relationship with the other teacher. Um, you have to be organized. And you kind of have to take a deep breath and kind of a, it will be okay, I mean the kids are going to get it, you just can't get frustrated.

Joe had two pieces of advice:

Never lower your expectations for a, you know, a co-taught student. You set the same

expectations for every student and they are required to work to that expectation…Then, it

would be try to, try to incorporate as many different ideas as you can. Don't just use your

own, use from other people.

Linda said:

Share the teaching. Share the knowledge and just be accepting. And, to know that these

kids have struggles. Um, and to know that in your mind ahead of time that they are not

always going to reach the highest goals, but as long as they're making progress and

showing they can do these things, it's okay.

Penny responded, "I would say to, to be kind to themselves. And, to understand that, you know,

as long as you love the kids and try to meet everybody's needs, that you are, that that is enough."

Sue stated, "be open with administration about what's going on, be honest about what's going on

in the classroom." Tracy disclosed, "develop that relationship with your co-teacher for sure,

because they are going to be your best support; your best resource."

Limitations

The limitations of a study refer to characteristics that may have impacted the results of

the study and limit the ability to generalize the findings. One of the limitations of this study deals

with the demographics of the participants. All were identified as Caucasian and there was only

one male participant. This was due to the elementary school teacher demographics of the

purposefully selected district. Past research has found that males have a slightly more negative

attitude and perception of inclusion and co-teaching, according to Ernst and Rodgers (2009).

Another limitation of the study was in the sampling process. In order to find participants,

an email was sent to the schools' special education coordinator. For most schools, that person

was in an administrative position. It is possible that the administrators only contacted possible candidates at their school that they felt may represent inclusion co-teaching at its the best, rather than opening up the research to all possible candidates. Also, participation in the study was completely voluntary. The findings showed that the participants of this study were life-long learners. The hopes of professional development may have been why they volunteered to participate.

The last limitation of the study deals with the location. While the demographics of the schools differ greatly in race and socio-economic statues, all the participants worked in schools located in one particular district. Results may be due to district policies that shaped individual teacher perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, not the school culture. However, this district was targeted for its overall success with students with disabilities. Since administrators, special education teachers, and other district personnel were not part of the study, these factors remain unknown.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research study focused on the experiences of being a general education inclusion co-teacher. Future research in the same district should focus on three different participant sets. First, I recommend research on the experiences of special education inclusion co-teachers to understand the perceptions from their role. Also, general education inclusion co-teachers who had dual certification in special education were purposefully excluded from this study because experience and prior knowledge can influence attitudes and perceptions. There were a number of willing participants for this study who were not included due to having dual certification. A study focused on just general education inclusion co-teachers with dual certification is recommended to see how their experiences differ. Lastly, the behaviors and decision making of

administrators regarding the special education inclusion program is recommended for future

research, since they are perceived to be the decision makers. Also, it is recommended this study

be done at the middle and high school level in this district for they have the same success,

according to AYP and CCRPI, with their students with disabilities population.

Because it was found that the participants of this study had more positive perceptions and

attitudes toward inclusion co-teaching constructs than past research, future research should focus

on why these teachers held these perceptions. A case study of the district that includes the

combination of general education inclusion co-teachers, special education inclusion co-teachers,

administrators, and district personnel could be conducted. Such a study might uncover factors

that make the district successful in meeting the needs of their special education population.

The overuse of inclusion as the least restrictive environment was a common theme in the

data. This was often due to extreme behavior issues. Future research on teachers' perceptions and

attitudes on the least restrictive environment is also recommended.

As stated in the themes, the participants valued relationships, especially with their

students. The impact of developing and maintaining a positive relationship with students yielded

benefits told through their stories. Future research on student-teacher relationships specifically as

it relates to general education inclusion co-teachers is recommended.

Final Comments

The purpose of the study was to describe the experiences of being a general education

inclusion co-teacher in successful schools, as defined by AYP and CCRPI, using the voice of the

participants to tell their story. The hope was to discover their perceptions, attitudes, motivation

and self-efficacy and that goal was achieved through interviews, journals, and the focus group.

The experiences of these 13 participants could fill a series of books with chapters labeled

Successes, Frustrations, Challenges, and Rewards. While their experiences could produce

countless stories, there were common themes that emerged. There have been many studies on

inclusion and co-teaching over the past several years, but the unique findings of this study add to

the existing literature as it focused on a unique population of teachers – those who taught in

schools where students with special needs were academically successful. As the world of special

education evolves, what defines success in inclusion and co-teaching does as well. This leads to

the need for continued research, such as this one, in the future.

REFERENCES

Algozzine, B., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Obiakor, F. E., & Rotatori, A. (2012). Making inclusion work in general education classrooms. *Education & Treatment of Children*, *35*(3), 477 - 490.

Aron, L., & Loprest, P. (2012). Disability and the education system. *The Future of Children*, *22*(1), 97-119.

Austin, V.L. (2001). Teachers' beliefs about co-teaching. *Remedial and Special Education*, *22*(4), 245-255.

Avramidis, E. & Norwich, B. (2002). Teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion: A review of the literature. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 17*(2), 129-147.

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Upper Saddle River: NJ: Pearson Education Company.

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action: A social cognitive theory.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1993). Perceived self-efficacy in cognitive development and functioning. *Educational Psychologist*, *28*(2), 117-148.

Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology*, *2*(1), 21-41.

Bandura, A. (2000). Exercise of human agency through collective efficacy. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *9*(3), 75-78.

Bandura, A. (2002). Social cognitive theory in cultural context. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, *51*(2), 269-290.

Bessette, H. J. (2008). Using students' drawings to elicit general and special educators' perceptions of co-teaching. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *24*(5), 1376-1396. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2007.06.007

Bouck, E. (2007). Co-teaching…not just a textbook term: Implications for practice. *Preventing School Failure, 51*(2), 46-51.

Bowen, S.K. & Rude, H.A. (2006). Assessment and students with disabilities: Issues and challenges with educational reform. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, *25*(3), 24-30.

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Brucker, P.O. (1994). The advantages of inclusion for students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 27*(9), 581-582.

Buffum, A., Matto, M., & Weber, C. (2010). The why behind RTI. *Educational Leadership*, *68*(2), 10-16.

Carpenter, L.B. & Dyal, A. (2006). Secondary inclusion: Strategies for implementing the consultative teacher model. *Education, 127*(3), 344-350.

Carter, N., Prater, M., Jackson, A., & Marchant, M. (2009). Educators' perceptions of collaborative planning processes for students with disabilities. *Preventing School Failure*, *54*(1), 60-70.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2013). Retrieved from http://www.corestandards.org.

Conderman, G., Johnston-Rodriguez, S. & Hartman, P. (2009). Communicating and collaborating in co-taught classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus, 5*(5), 2-17.

Creswell, J. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among the five approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Damore, S. J., & Murray, C. (2009). Urban elementary school teachers' perspectives regarding

    collaborative teaching practices. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(4), 234-244. doi:

    10.1177/0741932508321007

Data Accountability Center. (2012). *Participation and performance of students with disabilities*

    on state assessments. Retrieved from https://www.ideadata.org/PartBData.asp.

Department of Education. (1999). *IDEA '97: General information*. Retrieved from

    http://www2.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/geninfo.html.

Department of Education. (2012). *ESEA flexibility: Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from

    http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/esea-flexibility/index.html#

DeSimone, J. R., & Parmar, R. S. (2006). Middle school mathematics teachers' beliefs about

    inclusion of students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research &*

    Practice, 21(2), 98-110.

Ernst, C., & Rogers, M. R. (2009). Development of the inclusion attitude scale for high school

    teachers. *Journal of Applied School Psychology*, *25*(3), 305-322.

Friend, M. & Cook, L. (1996). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*. White

    Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.

Friend, M., Cook, L., Hurley-Chamberlain, D., & Shamberger, C. (2010). Co-teaching: An

    illustration of the complexity of collaboration in special education. *Journal of*

    Educational and Psychological Consultation, 20, 9-27.

Forlin, C., & Chambers, D. (2011). Teacher preparation for inclusive education: increasing

    knowledge but raising concerns. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, *39*(1), 17-

    32.

Forsyth County Schools (2012). *Quick facts*. Retrieved from Forsyth County Schools:

    http://www.forsyth.k12.ga.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=591

Gall, M.D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2010). *Applying Educational Research.* Boston, MA:

    Pearson Education, Inc.

Georgia Department of Education (2007). *Special education services and supports*. Retrieved

    from the Georgia Department of Education: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-

    Instruction-and-Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/default.aspx.

Georgia Department of Education (2012). *Adequate yearly progress*. Retrieved from the Georgia

    Department of Education: http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/AYP/Pages/default.aspx

Georgia Department of Education (2013). *Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance

    Index: CCRPI Overview.* Retrieved from

    http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/CCRPI/Pages/default.aspx.

Glazzard, J. (2011). Perceptions of the barriers to effective inclusion in one primary school:

    voices of teachers and teaching assistant. *Support for Learning, 26*(2), 56-63.

Gordon, S. (2006). Making sense of the inclusion debate under IDEA. *Brigham Young

    University Education & Law Journal, 1,* 189-225.

Hammond, H. & Ingalls, L. (2003). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion: Survey results from

    elementary school teachers in three southwestern rural school districts. *Rural Special

    Education Quarterly*, *22*(2), 24-30.

Hang, Q. & Rabren, K. (2009). An examination of co-teaching: Perspectives and efficacy

    indicators. *Remedial and Special Education*, *30*(5), 259-268.

Horne, P. E., & Timmons, V. (2008). Making it work: Teachers' perspectives on inclusion.

    International Journal of Inclusive Education, *13*(3), 273-286.

IDEA Partnerships. (2012). *The families and advocates partnership for education*. Retrieved

     from http://www.ideapartnership.org/

Ji-Ryun, K. (2011). Influence of teacher preparation programs on preservice teachers' attitudes

     toward inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *15*(3), 355-377.

Jung, W. S. (2007). Pre-service teacher training for successful inclusion. *Education*, *128*(1), 106-

     113.

Katsiyannis, A., Zhang, D., Ryan, J.B., & Jones, J. (2007). High-stakes testing and students with

     disabilities: Challenges and promises. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 18*(3), 160-

     167.

Kavale, K.A. & Forness, S.R. (2000). History, rhetoric, and reality: Analysis of the inclusion

     debate. *Remedial and Special Education*, *21(*5), 279-296.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand

     Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Kohler-Evans, P.A. (2006). Co-teaching: How to make this marriage work in front of the kids.

     Education, 127(2), 260-264.

LaNear, J. & Frattura, E. (2007). Getting the stories straight: Allowing different voices to tell an

     'effective history' of special education law in the United States. *Education and the Law,*

     19(2), 87-109.

Leatherman, J.M. (2007). I just see all children as children: Teachers' perceptions about

     inclusion. *The Qualitative Report*, *12*(4), 594-512.

Lie, J. (1996). Globalization and its discontents. *Contemporary Sociology, 25*, 585-587.

Linares, L. O., Rosbruch, N., Stern, M. B., Edwards, M. E., Walker, G., Abikoff, H. B., Alvir, J.M. (2005). Developing cognitive-social-emotional competencies to enhance academic learning. *Psychology in the Schools, 42*, 405–417.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Male, D. B. (2011). The impact of a professional development programs on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *Support for Learning*, *26*: 182–186. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-9604.2011.01500.x.

Mdikana, A., Ntshangase, S., & Mayekiso, T. (2007). Preservice educators' attitudes towards inclusive education. *International Journal of Special Education, 22(1)*, 125-131.

Moritz, S. E. Feltz, D. L., Farbach, K. R., & Mack, D. E. (2000). The relation of self-efficacy measures to sports performance: A meta-analytic review. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 71*, 280-294.

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Murawski, W. W. & Swason, H. L. (2001). A meta-analysis of co-teaching: Where are the data? *Remedial and Special Education*, *22*(5), 258-267.

O'Connor, E. (2010). Teacher–child relationships as dynamic systems. *Journal of School Psychology, 48*(3), 187-218. doi: 10.1016/j.jsp.2010.01.001

O'Donnell, P. S. & Miller, D. N. (2011). Identifying students with specific learning disabilities: School psychologists' acceptability of the discrepancy model versus response to intervention. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies, 22*(2), 83-94.

Pajares, F. (1996). Self–efficacy beliefs in academic settings. *Review of Educational Research, 66*, 543–578.

Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Paulsen, K.J. (2008). School-based collaboration: An introduction to the collaboration column. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 43*(5), 313-315.

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 343 F. Supp. 279 (E.D. Pa 1972).

Pisha, B., & Stahl, S. (2005). The promise of new learning environments for students with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 41*(2), 67-75.

Potgieter, D. (2011). What's your perception? Belief = reality. *Accountancy SA,* 38-39.

Prati, G. (2012). A social cognitive learning theory of homophobic aggression among adolescents. *School Psychology Review*, *41*(4), 413-428.

Prussia, G. E. & Knincki, A. J. (1996). A motivational investigation of group effectiveness using social-cognitive theory. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *81*(2), 187-198. doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.81.2.187

Ross-Hill, R. (2009). Teacher attitude towards inclusion practices and special needs students. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, *9*(3), 188-198. doi:10.1111/j.1471-3802.2009.01135.x

Rozalski, M., Stewart, A., & Miller, J. (2010). How to determine the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. *Exceptionalities, 18*(3), 151-163.

Sailor, W. & Roger, B. (2005). Rethinking inclusion: Schoolwide applications. *Phi Delta Kappan, 86*(7), 503-509.

Santoli, S.P., Sachs, J., Romey, E.A., & McClurg, S. (2008). A successful formula for middle-school inclusion: Collaboration, time, and administrative support. *Research in Middle Level Education Online, 32*(2), 1-13.

Sayeski, K.L. (2009). Defining special educators' tools: The building blocks of effective collaboration. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 45*(1), 38-44.

Schwandt, T. A., Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2007). Judging interpretations: But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, *2007*(114), 11-25. doi: 10.1002/ev.223

Scruggs, T.E., Mastropieri, M.A., & McDuffie, K.A. (2007). Co-teaching in inclusive classrooms: A metasynthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children, 73(*4), 392-416.

Smith, T. E. (2005). IDEA 2004: Another round in the reauthorization process. *Remedial and Special Education*, *20*(6), 314-321.

Solis, M., Vaughn, S., Swanson, E., & McCulley, L. (2012). Collaborative models of instruction: The empirical foundations of inclusion and co-teaching. *Psychology in the Schools*, *49*(5), 498-510. doi:10.1002/pits.21606

Tannock, M.T. (2009). Tangible and intangible elements of collaborative teaching. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *44*(3), 173-178.

Turnbull, H.R. Individual Interview. (2005). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reauthorization: Accountability and personal responsibility. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(6), 320-326.

Turnbull, H. R. (2009). Today's policy contexts for special education and students with specific learning disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 32*(1), 3-9.

United States. Congress.(1973). *Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1973* (Public L.

 No. 94-142).

United States. Congress. (1997). *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of*

 1997 (IDEA) (Pub. L. No. 105-17).

United States. Congress. (2002). *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* (Pub. L. No. 107-

 110).

United States. Congress. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of

 2004 (IDEA) (Pub. L. No. 108-446).

Valeo, A. (2008). Inclusive education support Systems: Teacher and administrator views.

 International Journal of Special Education, 23(2), 8-16.

Vannest, K.J., Mahadevan, L., Mason, B.A., & Temple-Harvey, K.K. (2009). Educator and

 administrator perceptions of the impact of the No Child Left Behind on special

 populations. *Remedial and Special Education, 30(3)*, 148-159.

Volonino, V. & Zigmond, N. (2007). Promoting research-based practices through inclusion.

 Theory into Practice, 46(4), 291-300.

Werts, M.G., Carpenter, E., & Lambert, M. (2009). What special education directors say about

 RTI. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *32*(4), 245-255.

Winzer, M.A. (1993). *The history of special education: From isolation to integration.*

 Washington, D.C.: Gallaudet University Press.

Yell, M. L., Rogers, D., & Rodgers, E. (1998). The legal history of special education. *Remedial*

 & Special Education, *19*(4), 219.

Yell, M. L., Katsiyannas, L., Shiner, J. G. (2006). The No Child Left Behind Act, Adequate Yearly Progress, and students with disabilities. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 38*(4), 32-39.

Zimmerman, B. J., Bonner, S., & Kovach, R. (1996). *Developing self-regulated learners: Beyond achievement to self-efficacy.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Appendix A

Liberty University IRB Approval

September 11, 2013

Sherrie Robbins IRB Approval 1665.091113: Experiences of General Education Elementary Inclusion Co-Teachers in Successful Schools as Defined by Adequate Yearly Progress with Students with Disabilities

Dear Sherrie,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Please retain this letter for your records. Also, if you are conducting research as part of the requirements for a master's thesis or doctoral dissertation, this approval letter should be included as an appendix to your completed thesis or dissertation.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.
Professor, IRB Chair
Counseling

(434) 592-4054

LIBERTY
U N I V E R S I T Y.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. How long have you been a general education inclusion teacher?

3. How long have you been a teacher in this identified "successful" school?

4. Openly and freely, describe your experiences as a general education inclusion co-teacher.

5. How did you become an inclusion co-teacher at this school?

6. Think back to your preservice teaching education. What factors prepared you to become a general education inclusion co-teacher?

7. When you first began your journey as an elementary inclusion co-teacher, did you feel adequately prepared? If so, what had the greatest influence on your preparedness? If not, what areas did you lack?

8. In terms of professional development, what factors enhanced your ability as a general education inclusion co-teacher?

9. What other factors prepared you to become a general education inclusion co-teacher?

10. What areas of inclusion and co-teaching do you feel you are most successful? What contributes to that success?

11. What are your biggest challenges as an inclusion co-teacher?

12. How and when do you collaborate with the special education teacher?

13. How would you describe your relationship with your co-teachers thinking in terms of your success and your challenges?

14. Discuss your role in shaping the inclusion program at the school? If you do not have a role, who are the decision makers?

15. What role do your school leaders play in terms of special education and inclusion services?

16. From your perspective, what are the benefits of inclusion? What are the downfalls?

17. If you could give advice to other general education inclusion co-teachers, what would that be?

Appendix C

Focus Group Questions

Introduction by Focus Group Leader (PI): The purpose of this focus group is to gather additional information on the experiences of being a general education inclusion co-teacher. After talking with all the participants during their individual interviews, common themes emerged, and there were big areas where I feel could use more of a focus. For the sake of confidentiality and anonymity, we will use your pseudonym name. To start, let's go around the group and introduce yourself using your pseudonym, the grade you teach, and how long you have been a general education inclusion co-teacher.

As you answer questions and add to the conversation, please say your "name" each time. It is not a problem if you forget, but it will help with an accurate transcription.

1. There are many different challenges of being a general education inclusion co-teacher, and yet, you all have been in this role for more than one year. What motivates you to continue on as a general education inclusion co-teacher, despite these challenges?

2. A lack of structured planning time for you and your co-teacher was a common theme. Let's talk more about this. On a scale of 1-10, how worrisome is this to you? Explain. What is the impact of this? If you could give a suggestion to school decision makers regarding the topic, what would that be?

3. Most of you reported very little professional development since you have become a general education inclusion co-teacher. Let's talk more about this. On a scale of 1-10, how worrisome is this to you? Explain. What is the impact of this? If you would like more professional development, what type of information would you like to see offered?

4. Despite a lack of reported professional development and little college preparation for this role, you are successful general education inclusion co-teachers. What are the big factors that have contributed to that success? What do you feel is the biggest skill a general education co-teacher needs to be successful?

5. The vast majority of you reported a positive relationship with your co-teacher or co-teachers. What, in your opinion, are essential characteristics for a solid, positive relationship?

6. Through the interviews, I learned that the general education inclusion co-teacher often does not have a big role in shaping the inclusion program at the school level. Let's focus on that for a few minutes. Do you wish you had more of a voice? If you had a bigger role, what input would you give as a top priority?

7. Do you feel supported by school decision makers in your role as a general education inclusion co-teacher?

Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Experiences of General Education Elementary Inclusion Co-teachers
Sherrie Robbins
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study on the experiences of elementary school general education inclusion co-teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an elementary school general education inclusion co-teacher in a school that has been successful with its students with disabilities population. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Sherrie Robbins, doctoral candidate with the Department of Education at Liberty University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to answer the question "What are the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms is school that have met AYP for students with disabilities?" To best understand these experiences, focus will be put on the self-efficacy, motivation, and perceptions of participants.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. You will participate in a one-on-one interview. The interviews will take place in your classroom, another agreed upon location, or via phone. It is expected for the interview to last no more than one hour. All interviews will be audio recorded in order to transcribe the interviews accurately.
2. In addition, you will be provided a journal with an option of hardcopy or electronic. Pages of the journal will be pre-labeled with (1) Successes, (2) Frustrations, (3) Thoughts, (4) Questions, and (5) On My Mind. You are asked to journal your thoughts regarding inclusion and co-teaching for a five week period. There are no minimum or maximum requirements. Any form of written response is acceptable (i.e., notes, prose, etc.). Spelling, neatness, and grammatical errors are not of concern.
3. Lastly, you will be invited to be a part of a focus group, based on willingness and your availability. The focus group will take place at the public library or through electronic media. It is expected to last no more than one hour. The focus group will be audio recorded for accuracy in transcription.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks and is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. If the researcher becomes privy to information that requires mandatory reporting for child abuse, the proper steps will be taken by the researcher.

The benefits to participation are a greater self-awareness of your role as a general education inclusion co-teacher. The self reflections required by the interview, journals, and focus group could bring about positive change in daily practice and/or perceptions of inclusion. You will also be adding to the body of literature that exists on teachers' perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, which could prompt change in best practices in the field of special education services.

Compensation:

You will not receive payment or any type of compensation for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. For this study, pseudonyms will be used for the district, schools, and all participants. All transcripts and voice recordings will be secured in a lock box, and all digital records will be kept under password protection. Only the researcher will have access to the transcriptions. All journals will be placed in a locked file cabinet and electronic files will be password protected. All files will be securely destroyed three years after the publication of the results. There are limits of the confidentiality in that the researcher cannot assure that all participants of the focus group will maintain the participants' confidentiality and privacy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Forsyth County Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Sherrie Robbins. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (omitted) or srobbins2@liberty.edu. This study is being advised by Dr. Gina Grogan with Liberty University and can be reached at gldildine@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ By checking this box, I understand and agree to be audio-recorded during the interview and/or the focus group.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers: 1665.091113

IRB Expiration Date: 09/11/2014

Appendix E

District Consent Form

September 3, 2013

Sherrie Robbins

Dear Ms. Robbins:

RE: Research Study Approval – Experiences of General Education Elementary Inclusion Co-Teachers

This letter provides written approval for your qualitative research study which will look at the experiences of general education teachers in inclusion and co-teaching classrooms in schools that have met AYP for students with disabilities within [ ] As stated in your letter to me, participation should be considered voluntary and data will be collected through one-on-one interviews, journals, and focus groups. Your study sounds very interesting, and I applaud your efforts of continued education. If I can provide additional information to support this approval, please be encouraged to contact me at [ ]

Respectfully Submitted,

Superintendent

Sample Journal Page – Transcribed and Original

<u>Successes</u>
9/23/13 - While all that was taking place on LD girl still understood the assignment & so did an autistic student. Yay!

- Made a new chart for autistic student with temper tantrums and it seems to be working really well.
- My students started a poetry book of five poems. Two of my autistic students are LD for writing. One of the boys was beyond thrilled to write poems for his book. Throughout the process he was excited to write a book and even typed up the poems on his computer for his final copy b'c he wanted his book to "look pretty". I think he was so into his book b'c he was able to write about whatever he wanted.
- During science/ss I have 8 spec ed student. 4 autistic, 1 EBD, and 3 LD. We have been studying about Native Americans and I brought the school iPads in for an activity. Every student was engaged in the beginning. Unfortunately 3 of the students lost interest for lack of tech. knowledge. 2 of my LD student really enjoyed the activity and were very independent.
- I incorporate Scholastic News magazine for each student in class. The magazines are on current events. 2 of my autistic students really enjoy reading & participating during reading when we work on them.
- The two girls in my class that are L.D. have made <u>so </u>much growth during our calendar math sessions. Both girls participate <u>every</u> day and have built *so* much confidence. They know that they are smart. I love it!
- One of the autistic boys really enjoys calendar math and will volunteer very frequently. It's nice to see him come out of his shell a bit.
- One of my students was heavily relaying on his peer to help him complete his vocabulary notes. I told him that if he didn't finish on his own he would miss part of his recess. That seemed to encourage him to complete his work without wasting time and needing too many redirections. Sometimes I'll take whatever works.
- My students did a writing activity in the book "Knuffle Bunny". All of my kids loved it and brought in their own Knuffle Bunny. The two boys that leave for writing (pull-out resource) were so interested in our activity that the Sp. Ed. teacher did the same lesson with them in her small group. I'm so glad they were encouraged.
- EBD student enjoys our class and hasn't had any problems when he's in our room. He also participants and wants to interact with my students.
- The Sp. Ed. and autistic students all participated in our Poetry Celebration by reading their poems in front of a large audience using a microphone.

Successes

9-23-13 - While all that was taking place on LD girl still understood the assignment & so did an "autistic student. Yay!

- Made a new chart for autistic student with temper tantrums and it seems to be working really well.

- My students started a poetry book of five poems. Two of my autistic students are LD for writing. One of the boys was beyond thrilled to write poems for his book. Throughout the process he was excited to write a book and even typed up the poems on his computer for his final copy b'c he wanted his book to "look pretty." I think he was so into his book b'c he was able to write about whatever he wanted.

- During science/S.S. I have 8 sped students. 4 autistic, 1 EBD, and 3 LD. We have been studying about Native Americans and I brought the school iPads in for an activity. Every student was engaged in the beginning. Unfortunately 3 of the students lost interest for lack of tech. knowledge. 2 of my LD students really enjoyed the activity and were very independent.

- I incorporate a Scholastic News magazine for each student in class. The magazines are on current events. 2 of my autistic students really enjoy reading & participating during reading when we work on them.

- The two girls in my class that are L.D. have made so much growth during our Calendar Math sessions. Both girls participate every day and have built so much confidence. They know that they are smart. I love it!

- One of my autistic boys really enjoys Calendar Math and will volunteer very frequently. It's nice to

Successes cont.

see him come out of his shell a bit.

-One of my students was heavily relying on his peer to help him complete his vocabulary notes. I told him that if he didn't finish on his own he would miss part of his recess. That seemed to encourage him to complete his work without wasting time and needing too many redirectives. Sometimes I'll take whatever works.

-My students did a writing activity on the book "Knuffle Bunny". All of my kids loved it and brought in their own Knuffle Bunny. The two boys that leave for writing (pull-out resource) were so interested in our activity that the SpEd teacher did the same lesson with them in her small group. I'm so glad they were encouraged.

- EBD student enjoys our class and hasn't had any problems when he's in our room. He also participates and wants to interact with my students.

- The SpEd and autistic students all participated in our Poetry Celebration by reading their poems in front of a large audience using a microphone.

Appendix G

Sample Transcription Excerpt

Me: So just openly and freely describe your experiences as a general education inclusion co-teacher?

Penny: I love it! Um, I like to teach in a differentiated manner. I like to teach with small groups, and so I love that I have another professional in the room with me to teach small groups of children. Not just the children who are labeled as needing such assistance. Um, I love to have another professional opinion when I am worried about a child or when I want to run something past somebody else. I love that there is another person who loves the children as much as I do and knows them as well as I do. So, um, are there some challenges? Yes, of course. Um, is it worth it? Yes!

Me: That's great. How did you become an inclusion co-teacher that first year here at (this school)?

Penny: Um, there was a lovely teacher whom I respect very much on the grade level who moved into a special education role, and um, I told my assistant principal, (name deleted), that I, that I, would like an opportunity. Um, I enjoy working with a struggling learner. I, I like with the gifted learner as well, but, um, I think I am compassionate and, again, I really like to differentiate. So um, it was something that I was, that I wanted to try.

Me: Excellent. And, and, each year do you just openly volunteer?

Penny: No, It just kinds stick. (Laughing) Once you…it seems that once you do it, it just kind of sticks.

Me: Um, the next, next couple questions are about being prepared, for this role.

Penny: okay

Me: So thinking back to preservice teaching, your college years, what factors prepared you for being an inclusion co-teacher?

Penny: Not many. (Laughing) At all.

Me: Course work?

Penny: Uh-emm. (Shaking head no) Nothing, and um, in fact my first year teaching as an inclusion teacher was probably the hardest year I ever had professionally. Um, because of the emotional and behavioral needs. And I did feel, um, woefully unprepared, and um, very, you know, just bad about myself. That I didn't bring enough to the table to help those children. Again, not academically, but the socio-emotional piece of it.

Me: Absolutely. Um, since you've become and inclusion co-teacher, professional development: have there been factors that have helped you further along in, in this journey?

Penny: I have done some professional research myself. Um, but there is nothing, um, specifically I would say that they, that the county's done. I don't have any separate meetings as an inclusion teacher or any different learning because I am an inclusion teacher.

Me: Right. Um, one of the questions actually just comes out and says, did you feel adequately prepared and no, clearly, you don't.

Penny: (Laughing) No.

Me: Um, and we talked about the, the, the emotional and behavioral needs. Is there any other areas you just feel like you lacked, especially now, retrospectively looking back over the last three years?

Penny: Um, I guess maybe the, the greatest challenge is meeting the great variety of needs. Um, I have never believed in teaching to the middle. But, when you have a non reader in the same classroom as a child who reads at the fourth or fifth grade level and then everything in-between, being able to provide enough of yourself to every one of those children. Um, much like as a mom, you know, you often feel like you're robbing Peter to pay Paul. I'll have a good day with this group of children, but did I do enough for this group of children. Um, and we are all learning a great deal about differentiation, now. And I continue to learn more and more each day. But, I would say that's the greatest challenge is meeting all the needs.

Me: And, although you didn't feel prepared, and although you said it was one of your hardest years, you know, personally, what made you do it again?

Penny: Because I loved them…and at the end of the day, there was growth and there was progress and the greatest thing about that year was that I learned that success looks different for every child. Um, and I kind of learned a lot about myself. That I, I, can handle it. That I will dig down. I will do the research. I will find out what needs to be done for those kids. And anybody here in this building and anybody in the county if I ask them, they, they will help me.

M: Ya. That's great. One of the factors you mentioned is that you will go out and do research yourself, and that's really what helps prepare you. Any other big factors that helps you along in this role, feel prepared

Penny: Probably my support staff. You know, the inclusion teacher I am with, um, was a wealth of knowledge and would share with me and my administrators. You know, if I came to them and said, this is what I need, this is what I am struggling with, they would help me.

Appendix H

Audit Trail

Date	Task	Reflective Notes
August 29, 2013	Proposal Defense	Great questions and feedback. Approval to submit application to IRB.
September 3, 2013	Received district approval for research from superintendent	
September 11, 2013	Received IRB approval	Process took two and half weeks with two sets of revisions required.
September 11, 2013	Contacted schools' special education coordinators for possible candidate contact information via email	
September 12-September 30, 2013	Continued with follow-up emails with special education coordinators, administration, and other support staff.	It's been very hard to get the names of teachers who may qualify for the study. School leaders are very protective of their staff and their time.
September 22 – November 18, 2013	Sent out and received Consent Forms from participants	Ann's was signed at my first interview on 9/22. The rest were mailed to participants with a self-addressed, stamped envelope for participants to return. All but 3 were mailed back. Tracy, Charlotte, and Penny also signed them when we met for the interview.
September 22 – November 18, 2013	Conducted individual interviews – distributed Journals at the conclusion of the interview	Ann's interview took place at Starbucks in September. The remainder of the participants requested to wait until the conclusion of first quarter report cards and conferences. All but Ann's and Charlotte's interviews took place in the participant's classroom either during or right after school.
October 29, 2013 – January 3, 2014	Collected participant journals	All participants returned their journals. All but 1 journaled at least one time.
January 9, 2014	Sent invitation email for the focus group	

January 13, 2014	Sent follow-up to participants who did not respond to the original focus group invitation email	
January 16, 2014	Conducted Focus Group	Excellent call and conversation with eight participants.
January 16-31, 2014	Data Analysis and data findings	Thankful for Atlas.ti program for data management. It was very helpful for writing results and retrieving data quickly.
January 31, 2014	Submitted to chair	Made recommended revisions and edits to chapters 4 and 5. Gave permission to send to the committee.
February 15, 2014	Submitted to committee members	Feedback on both edits and revisions. Very impressed to get information on not just chapters 4 and 5, but the whole document.
February 20, 2014	Submitted to research consultant	With all committee and chair revisions and edits made, draft was sent to RC. Great revision suggests to chapter 4 on organization. Other minor revisions throughout 3, 4, and 5.
March 14, 2014	Pre-defense call with committee	All committee members provided great feedback on slides and presentation of information. Questions to prepare me were asked. Lots of work to do before the final defense.
March 21, 2014	Final Dissertation Defense	Whew! Passed with minor revisions and edits still needed. Lots of nerves with it being streamed online, the presence of the Dean of Doctoral Research, 7 live students and of course my committee. Much relief now being Dr. Robbins!

Appendix I

Examples of Coded Transcripts using Atlis.ti
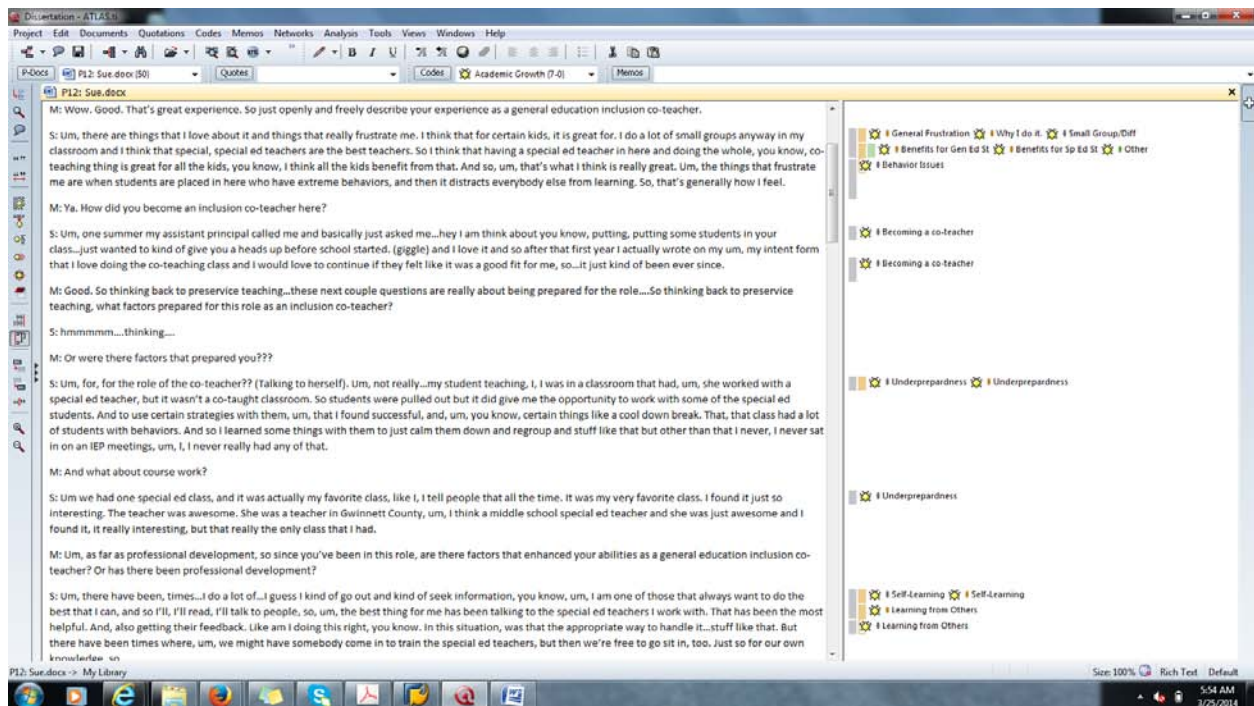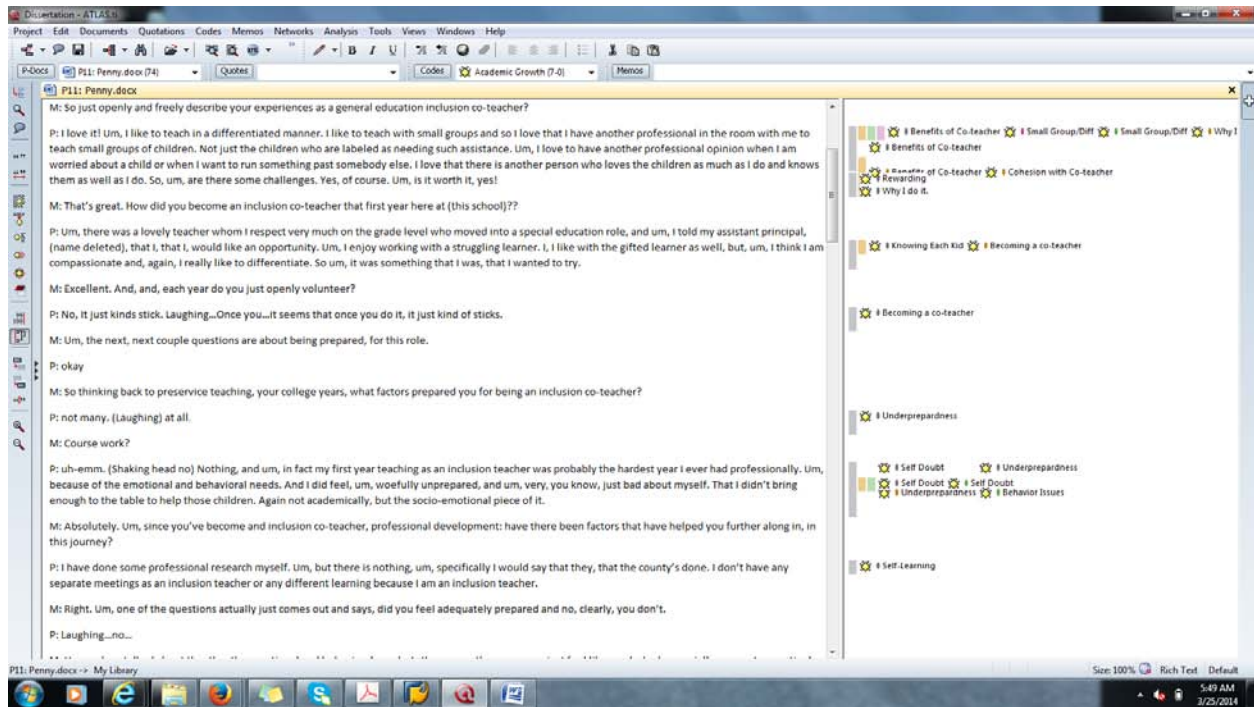
P28: Focus Group Transcription.docx

Me: Okay, perfect. Um, there are, um, we talked in our interviews very much so about there being so many challenges about being a general education inclusion co-teacher. And yet, all of you guys on the phone, all of you ladies on the phone, have done this more than one year. And a lot of times, volunteering for the role. So, despite all of these challenges, what are the big factors that motivate you to continue on as inclusion co-teacher?

This is Penny. I will go with one, um, that I enjoy. Of course, the rewards of teaching the struggling learner um, are very rewarding, but also I love having a support person in my classroom. I love being able to work together with another professional and divide the children up and have smaller group settings that to me benefit all of the children. Not just the children who are receiving services.

This is Alli talking. I agree with, um, you very much on that. And, uh, and not only do I have one support person in my school, but I have several different support people coming in and pulling out throughout the day, and we are all such a good team and it really helps the children, I feel.

Two people talking at the same time...."oh sorry, go ahead".

This is Debbie and I was going to say the exact same thing. I love having more than just myself in the classroom so we can break them into smaller groups and to have that support.

This is Tracy and, um, I piggy back on everything that you all just said, I love, I love working with those kids that you can see so much growth from, but also working with the, um, the inclusion teachers, I've learned so many strategies that really benefit my other low level learners that may not be special ed students, but they, the strategies that that I see my co-teachers using really do help a lot of my other kids, too. So, as a teacher, I have gained a wealth of knowledge from them.

This is Ann and, um, obviously I agree with the way that the students have been successful and the relationship that we build but I also have found that having a large autistic class this year, um the students have a tendency to respond to different personalities. So having three teachers throughout the day gives the chance, gives the students a chance to maybe make a special connection with a teacher and that can sometimes be a great, um, let down for the kids if they have anxiety that builds up, or what not, but kind of let you play good cop, bad cop throughout the day, too.

This is Eliza, um, I would agree with what all of you have said, um, I would also say I have become comfortable in the role because I have done it for several years. So at this point it's hard to not have, for me, be comfortable with not having someone co-teach with. And likewise, there is more than one person that comes in my class, so along with what some of you said about the different strategies, that's beneficial and it's really nice to see the success that these kids can have in the co-taught...in the inclusion class.

This is Debbie again, and um, to piggy back on that, I also love having someone else that knows the child as much as I do so that we can...it's another person to bounce ideas off of. Especially when things aren't working and like if you are worried that something else is the problem. Instead of just having to rely on yourself for that opinion, you have somebody else's opinion.

ME: Great! Speaking of your co-teachers, I would say, almost every single interview it came up that there was a lack of structured planning time for you and your co-teachers. Um, I think every single one of you said you plan via email, a lot of you on the weekends, um, and side conversations as your co-teachers' are coming in and out. I just want to talk more about how worrisome that is to you. You know, more so, its its, you kind of all said it like, it's a fact. That's just the way

Codes (right margin):
- Benefits of Co-teacher — Rewarding
- Benefits for Gen Ed St
- Benefits for Sp Ed St
- Benefits of Co-teacher
- Cohesion with Co-teacher
- Benefits of Co-teacher
- Why I do it.
- Benefits for Gen Ed St
- Benefits for Sp Ed St
- Learning from Others — Learning from Others
- Benefits for Sp Ed St
- Gaining Experience
- Cohesion with Co-teacher
- Gaining Experience
- Benefits of Co-teacher

P15: AnnJournal.docx

Successes
- While all that was taking place on LD girl still understood the assignment & so did an autistic student. Yay!
- Made a new chart for autistic student with temper tantrums and it seems to be working really well.
- My students started a poetry book of five poems. Two of my autistic students are LD for writing. One of the boys was beyond thrilled to write poems for his book. Throughout the process he was excited to write a book and even typed up the poems on his computer for his final copy b'c he wanted his book to "look pretty". I think he was so into his book b'c he was able to write about whatever he wanted.
- During science/ss I have 8 spec ed student. 4 autistic, 1 EBD, and 3 LD. We have been studying about Native Americans and I brought the school iPads in for an activity. Every student was engaged in the beginning. Unfortunately 3 of the students lost interest for lack of tech. knowledge. 2 of my LD student really enjoyed the activity and were very independent.
- I incorporate Scholastic News magazine for each student in class. The magazines are on current events. 2 of my autistic students really enjoy reading & participating during reading when we work on them.
- The two girls in my class that are L.D. have made so much growth during our calendar math sessions. Both girls participate every day and have built so much confidence. They know that they are smart. I love it!
- One of the autistic boys really enjoys calendar math and will volunteer very frequently. It's nice to see him come out of his shell a bit.
- One of my students was heavily relaying on his peer to help him complete his vocabulary notes. I told him that if he didn't finish on his own he would miss part of his recess. That seemed to encourage him to complete his work without wasting time and needing too many redirections. Sometimes I'll take whatever works.
- My students did a writing activity in the book "Knuffle Bunny". All of my kids loved it and brought in their own Knuffle Bunny. The two boys that leave for writing (pull-out resource) were so interested in our activity that the Sp. Ed. teacher did the same lesson with them in her small group. I'm so glad they were encouraged.
- EBD student enjoys our class and hasn't had any problems when he's in our room. He also participants and wants to interact with my students.
- The Sp. Ed. and autistic students all participated in our Poetry Celebration by reading their poems in front of a large audience using a microphone.

Frustrations
- The students in my class for math are four autistic & three LD students. I have support for 45 minutes. The second 45 minute chunk of time the student ended up staying b'c SpEd teacher was in a meeting. Once autistic student (who is currently on an PBA for behavior) had a melt down & decided to throw a temper tantrum during math b'c he has to wake up too early this morning. Once autistic student stared new meds today and wasn't able to hold up his head or communicate verbally. The third issue (that was happened at the same time as the others) the student told me he couldn't participate b'c his brain wasn't working & he had been holding in a fart for too long. My frustration – I'm not able to meet the needs of my LD students & regular ed students.
- Have been teaching the same concept of double digit mult. For over five days. All stuns understand both (or one) method(s) – lattice & standard (27 students – 3 LD, 4 autistic/LD). One of my LD students doesn't understand the process at all. I worked one on one w/ him for over 4 days & he was pulled for resource with Sp Ed teacher. He still doesn't understand. Poor guy.
- During SS/Sci – it's difficult to refocus the students when they tune out or something disrupts their learning. Having 4 autistic students in one class in addition to SpEd, EBD, and ESOL – it can be frustrating to gain attention & redirect.
- I love that my kids love their Scholastic News but find it frustrating that I'm constantly collecting at the end of every class b'c they will misplace them if I

Codes (right margin):
- Autism
- Behavior Issues
- Academic Growth
- Social Growth
- Rewarding / Academic Growth — Why I do it.
- Social Growth
- Autism
- Social Growth
- General Frustration
- Negative Co-teaching Experience
- General Frustration — Guilt
- Autism
- Behavior Issues
- General Frustration