A CASE STUDY TO DISCOVER THE FACTORS IMPACTING NORTH GEORGIA
SCHOOL LEADERS’ CHOICES IN ASSIGNMENT OF CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

by

Donna Rae Cherveny

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2016
A CASE STUDY TO DISCOVER THE FACTORS IMPACTING NORTH GEORGIA SCHOOL LEADERS’ CHOICES IN ASSIGNMENT OF CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

by Donna Rae Cherveny

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2016

APPROVED BY:

James Swezey, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Christy Hill, Ed.D., Committee Member

Craig Courbron, Ed.D., Committee Member

Scott Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Program
Abstract

Assignment of co-teaching partnerships fails to be recognized fully in the current base of literature. Literature documents the impact of teachers on educational environments and student success, hiring choices of school leaders, and the implementation of co-teaching; however, literature is lacking at the junction of these topics. The purpose of this qualitative collective case study was to discover the factors that impact choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Participants included 13 school leaders from 7 North Georgia school districts who are responsible for assigning co-teaching partnerships. Results of the study demonstrate that personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge of teachers are factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Implications of this study include measures for teachers seeking co-teaching positions, measures for school leaders in choosing co-teachers, and higher education faculty in preparing future co-teachers. In addition, the results of this study are applicable to William Glasser’s choice theory.

*Keywords: co-teaching, school leaders, choice theory, collective case study, teacher assignment, co-teacher partnership*


Dedication

Taking on a doctoral journey affects an entire family. I dedicate this dissertation manuscript to my family. My husband, Rob, has supported me in my educational endeavors, and I am eternally grateful for that. My children, Mason, Sawyer, and Lyla, have witnessed my dedication to the quest for knowledge and scholarship. Although they all suffered through a dirty house, a lot of sandwiches, and Mom’s eternal typing, each member of my family has never wavered in their support of me. For this support, I am profoundly thankful and dedicate this dissertation to them.
Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge Dr. James Swezey who has provided thoughtful and constructive criticism as the chair of my doctoral dissertation. Thank you for pushing me to strive for excellence while keeping me humble. Your guidance, wisdom, and honesty have been invaluable to me.

I would also like to acknowledge my committee members, Dr. Craig Courbron and Dr. Christy Hill. Dr. Hill’s positive energy motivated me to continue my doctoral journey at dark times. Her light affected every keystroke, and I appreciate every one. Dr. Courbron aided me in taking my manuscript from average to excellent. His wisdom and attention to detail has pushed me to reflect over and correct my own work so that it is worthy of his time. Good fortune rained down on me from Heaven when this committee was formed.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................................... 3
Dedication ....................................................................................................................................... 4
Acknowledgments .......................................................................................................................... 5
List of Tables ................................................................................................................................ 10

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................. 11
Overview ....................................................................................................................................... 11
Background .................................................................................................................................. 12
Situation to Self ............................................................................................................................ 15
Problem Statement ....................................................................................................................... 17
Purpose Statement ....................................................................................................................... 17
Significance of the Study ............................................................................................................. 17
Research Questions ...................................................................................................................... 19
  Central Question ....................................................................................................................... 19
  Subquestions ........................................................................................................................... 19
Research Plan ............................................................................................................................... 21
Delimitations and Limitations .................................................................................................... 22
Summary ....................................................................................................................................... 23

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW ......................................................................................... 24
Overview ....................................................................................................................................... 24
Search Process .............................................................................................................................. 24
Theoretical Framework ............................................................................................................... 26
Related Literature ....................................................................................................................... 35
  Teacher Impact ....................................................................................................................... 35
  School Leaders’ Choices ....................................................................................................... 39
List of Tables

Table 1: Co-teaching Models............................................................................................................... 52
Table 2: Participant Demographics.................................................................................................... 86
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

School success is deeply affected by school administrators (Tatlah, Iqbal, Amin, & Quraishi, 2014). Given the immense influence of school leaders on school success, the placement of effective faculty must be carefully considered by school leaders. According to the Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), almost 80% of special education students are served in a general education classroom for more than half of each school day. Based on this information, school leaders are not only faced with choosing appropriate placements for effective faculty, but must also consider faculty placement in co-teaching partnerships. In co-teaching partnerships, a regular education content teacher is paired with a special education teacher to co-plan, co-instruct, and co-assess students of varying abilities (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Accountability for school achievement rests on the shoulders of school leaders whose staffing decisions profoundly impact the school.

Factors that impact school leaders’ choices in the assignment of co-teaching partnerships are the focus of this multiple case study. According to Yin (2014), case study research allows for extensive and in-depth descriptions of a phenomenon. The factors shaping choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships deserve thorough research allowed through a collective case study approach (Yin, 2014). Additionally, the qualitative research is bounded by geographic location in addition to the participants’ experiences of assigning co-teaching partnerships in their respective schools, which denotes a case study approach to the qualitative research.

This chapter serves as an introduction to the qualitative research study. Several subsections are included such as a background, the purpose statement, the problem statement, the
significance of the study, and the research plan and questions. Additionally, an overview of the literature for grounding the case study is presented along with the situation of the study in the field of education.

**Background**

Co-teaching is prevalent in education and necessitated by the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms. Over 60% of students with disabilities were served in United States general education classrooms for more than 80% of their school day in 2010 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). In Georgia, the inclusion percentages are higher, boasting almost 80% of students spending at least half of their school day in general education classrooms (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). Nearly all states showed substantial growth in inclusion of special education students from 2007 to 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Due to the rise of special education students being educated in general education classrooms, co-teaching has become a prolific means of educating students with special needs.

Due to the widespread adoption of co-teaching, research must define what it means to have a co-teaching partnership in the classroom. Co-teaching, as defined by Friend et al. (2010), includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing general education and special education students. While Sileo (2011) compared a co-teaching partnership to a marriage, it may be more appropriately compared to an arranged marriage. School leaders determine faculty assignment to co-teaching partnerships, and faculty may not have input in these decisions (Cranston, 2012). Since school leaders make choices in co-teacher placement, the need for investigating the factors shaping these choices is critical.
Recent literature describes the profound impact of the teacher on student learning as well as the learning environment (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Sokal & Sharma, 2014). Mirza and Iqbal (2014) extended the scope of teacher impact to include students educated by co-teaching classrooms. Studies have noted the positive effect of co-teaching on student achievement in countries including the United States, the United Kingdom, China, Australia, and Canada (Mirza & Iqbal, 2014). Since teachers have such an overwhelming influence on student achievement and classroom environment, school leaders must carefully choose placement of faculty in regular classrooms and in co-teaching classrooms. Faculty who function as co-teachers impact the achievement and learning environment of regular and special education students, and therefore, care must be taken by school leaders when choosing which teachers are appointed to be co-teachers.

School leaders face pressure and accountability for effectively meeting the needs of the entire population of their students (Bourke & Brown, 2014). Choices made by school leaders affect school culture, school environment, and student achievement (Ball & Green, 2014; Tatlah et al., 2014). These choices include hiring and placement of faculty in classrooms. According to Ball and Green (2014), choices by school leaders must be rooted in student needs and faculty strengths. Given the sizeable number of special education students currently being educated in general education classrooms (National Center for Education Statistics, n. d., school leaders must make choices to best suit the needs of their special education students.

Informed leaders are the most effective leaders (Tatlah et al., 2014). School leaders must be highly cognizant of national and state laws pertaining to the fair and equitable education of all students (Bourke & Brown, 2014). Choosing teachers that are highly qualified to meet the needs of students may be a daunting task to school leaders, but hiring and placing faculty is a critical
role of school leaders (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). Ensuring faculty placement fits the needs of the school and students are an essential responsibility of school leaders (Cranston, 2012). Nichols and Sheffield (2014) proposed the role of hiring faculty by school leaders as being instrumental in the successful implementation of co-teaching classrooms. School leaders must be informed to make choices that best fit the needs of their individual schools.

In addition to the formidable task of hiring and assigning faculty in co-teaching partnerships, school leaders must continually support a co-teaching initiative in their respective schools. Faculty must trust in the leadership of school leaders while being supported in initiating or maintaining effective co-teaching relationships (Kliegl & Weaver, 2014). According to Lawter (2013), co-teaching relationships are unique because both partners must work together in developing instructional strategies, providing accommodations to special needs students, and maintaining classroom management principles. Co-teachers need professional development opportunities unique to their classroom situations in addition to common planning time (Randhare Ashton, 2014). School leaders not only place co-teachers, but school leaders must also support co-teachers.

Literature points to the distinct impact of the teacher on the learning environment (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014; Sokal & Sharma, 2014), the critical choices of school leaders (Ball & Green, 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014), and the necessitated support for co-teaching partnerships (Kliegl & Weaver, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Randhare Ashton, 2014). Concern should be present for the lack of intersection of these individual concepts. Literature is deficient in determining how school leaders make choices that affect so much through the
placement of co-teachers. According to Glasser (1988), choices follow a process that is driven by satisfying the basic needs of survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Research must be done to discover how school leaders use Glasser’s choice theory to make choices related to faculty assignment in co-teaching partnerships. The current literature serves as a springboard for researching the intersection of these concepts.

Situation to Self

I served the public as a middle grades mathematics co-teacher for six years. During that time, I shared the classroom with three different co-teachers and over 1,000 general and special education students. My motivation for this research study stems from my personal experiences as a co-teacher. As stated, I worked with three co-teachers of varying degrees of experience. While two of the collaborations could be viewed as positive and effective for our students, the third partnership could not boast the same. As I reflected over these three working relationships, I pondered why two of the relationships were so beneficial to students and rewarding for me, while the third was not.

As a public educator, I always sought to provide students with the most comprehensive educational experiences while maintaining a comfortable learning environment. The negativity of a single co-teaching partnership may have adversely affected what I worked so hard to build for my students. There was a definite difference in the classroom climate and achievement of students when I was part of an effective co-teaching partnership versus an ineffective co-teaching partnership. These differences caused me to question if the relationship between each of the co-teachers and me impacted the learning atmosphere. This further led me to consider how it was determined that each of the special education teachers were placed with me, the general education teacher. Did the school leaders base their choices on any criteria? Was
consideration given to personal characteristics and professional experiences when creating the partnerships? Questions such as these caused me to seek answers in literature as to how school leaders choose co-teaching partnerships.

Now I am a college professor who instructs teacher candidates. I have continued to question choices by school leaders in placement of co-teachers, but my shift in vocation now includes how this information may affect teacher candidates. I believe that teacher candidates should receive ample classroom instruction related to co-teaching, but these teacher candidates also need to participate in collaborative teaching environments prior to graduation. Obstacles faced by co-teachers may be different than those faced by teachers without co-teachers. In addition to the rookie teacher’s learning curve in a new job, he or she may be faced with sharing every aspect of the classroom and the students. In my opinion, it is imperative that teacher candidates understand the roles of co-teachers and embrace the true sense of co-teaching where both teachers plan, instruct, and assess all students in the classroom. I have a passion for effective co-teaching for the benefit of our students as well as for aiding in retention of quality teachers in our classrooms. This passion stems from my experiences as a co-teacher and those experiences with teacher candidates.

My study seeks to investigate the choices of school leaders in placing co-teachers in partnerships. My philosophical assumption was ontological in that I believe multiple participants in the study provided multiple views of reality related to their choices in assigning co-teachers. I have relied on the participants’ views to guide the discussion in the study. Thus, I incorporated a constructivist paradigm into my study. My background as a former co-teacher shaped my interpretation (Creswell, 2007) of the views presented by participants. Although I have not been a school administrator, I have been a co-teacher; therefore, I am motivated to
understand how school leaders choose these important partnerships for certain teachers but not for others.

**Problem Statement**

The problem is a lack of empirical evidence defining the factors shaping how school leaders choose co-teaching partnerships. While research documents the choices of school leaders in hiring faculty (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014) and the support of co-teachers by school leaders (Kliegl & Weaver, 2014; Randhare Ashton, 2014), a gap exists in that studies have neglected to explore the choices of school leaders in assigning faculty to co-teaching partnerships. Studies define the profound impact of co-teaching on student success (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014), but no obtainable research has been undertaken to explore how school leaders pair co-teachers.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this case study was to discover the factors impacting choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. The factors impacting choices are defined as those characteristics attempting to “satisfy one or more of five basic needs that are written into our genetic structure” (Glasser, 1988, p. 18).

**Significance of the Study**

Literature clearly documents the impact of the teacher on student achievement (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014; Sokal & Sharma, 2014). Literature also presents empirical evidence of factors impacting hiring choices of faculty by school leaders (Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2011; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Carlyon & Fisher, 2012; Hynes, Sullivan, & Yeager, 2011; Nichols & Sheffield,
Additionally, research on administrative support of co-teaching partnerships in schools and effective practices of co-teachers abounds (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Carlyon & Fisher, 2012; Friend et al., 2010; Kliegl & Weaver, 2014; Lawter, 2013; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Randhare Ashton, 2014; Sileo, 2011). The current research helped fill the gaps in literature at the crossroads of these concepts and clearly situates itself for a substantial impact on the literature base.

The qualitative research study stands to contribute to the body of literature on current educational practices in addition to multiple groups of constituents such as school administrators, classroom educators, and teacher candidates. First, current administrators clearly note the importance of effective teachers in the classroom (Cranston, 2012), but school leaders may have not explored how they make the choices of selecting the most effective teacher for inclusive classrooms. As a result of this research, school leaders may be encouraged to make that exploration when participating in the current research study in addition to refining the factors shaping their choices. Secondly, classroom educators will benefit from the research in that factors shaping choices of school administrators may be brought to light creating a deeper understanding of the factors shaping choices of school leaders in faculty assignment. Finally, the research situates itself to also benefit schools of higher education. Through gaining an understanding of what factors impact school leaders’ choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships, teacher candidates and their college professors can better prepare for the assignment of newly hired teachers into co-teaching partnerships. The research study results stand to benefit school leaders, current teachers, and higher education groups as well as plugging holes in the current base of educational literature.

The research study results not only contribute to the knowledge base for various groups
of people while filling education-based literature gaps, but the study results also root itself in the choice theory proposed by William Glasser (1988). For this reason, results from the study will also have an impact on theoretical studies of the choice theory. Although choice theory has been applied to educational realms such as the classroom (Glasser, 1988), the research has allowed for furtherance of the theory into the choices of school leaders when placing co-teachers in their respective schools. Due to the roots of choice theory in education along with the study through qualitative research, the research lends itself to the theoretical application of the choice theory.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships?

Subquestions

RQ1: What personal characteristics of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?

RQ2: What professional experiences of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?

RQ3: What certifications and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?

Research questions form the foundation of the qualitative multiple case study. For the research study, the research questions were derived from the literature while seeking to fill existing gaps in the literature. The central research question sought factors that impact choices of school leaders. According to Mertz (2010), school leaders are the foremost decision makers for each school. Additionally, the choices with which school leaders are faced impact the entire
school population and community (Khan & Iqbal, 2013; Murray, 2014; Senechal, 2013). One such choice faced by school leaders is the assignment of teachers to grade and subject level classrooms (Murray, 2014). Since teachers are in a position to profoundly impact student success (Cranston, 2012; Eryilmaz, 2014; Knoell & Crow, 2013), choices of school leaders regarding their faculty can influence school culture, faculty perceptions, and the wellbeing of students (Khan & Iqbal, 2013; Mertz, 2010; Murray, 2014; Senechal, 2013). Current literature addresses the choices of school leaders in the hiring of faculty and the assignment of teachers to single teacher classrooms, but there is a distinct gap in the literature on the assignment of teachers to co-teaching classrooms.

The current research subquestions were derived from literature documenting the factors of school leaders in hiring and assigning teachers to single teacher classrooms. According to Cranston (2012) and Mertz (2010), school leaders seek teachers who are a good fit for their school, while Bourke and Brown (2014) discovered that strong personal characteristics affected school leaders’ choices. Additionally, Bigham, Lively, and Toole (2014) found that school leaders considered a teacher’s professional demeanor and open mindedness when making choices on hiring and assigning teachers. The first subquestion was grounded in the literature that describes how school leaders make choices with personal characteristics of teachers in mind. The second subquestion was rooted in the literature provided by Rutledge, Harris, and Ingle (2010) and Dillon, McCaughtry, and Hummel (2010) who each documented the influence of a teacher’s professional experience on the choices of school leaders in hiring and assigning teachers. In addition to personal characteristics and professional experiences of teachers impacting school leaders’ choices, Bourke and Brown (2014) found that school leaders also seek teachers with high levels of competency in content. Ball and Green (2014) added to that when
they stated that school leaders seek new hires that will strengthen the knowledge base of the current faculty. For this reason, the final subquestion of this study involved the influence of teacher certifications and content knowledge.

Each of the research questions for this qualitative study was grounded in the literature. Due to the fact that no other study has explored the factors that impact choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships, literature citing factors that affected other faculty choices of school leaders was utilized. The literature pointed to choices of school leaders regarding faculty as being influenced by personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge of teachers. For this reason, the questions of this research study included each of these components.

**Research Plan**

The research study followed a qualitative research design. According to Yin (2011), one of the five features that distinguishes qualitative research is “contributing insights into existing or emerging concepts that may help to explain human social behavior” (p. 8). The study sought to understand the concept of factors shaping choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

Within the realm of qualitative research, the study followed a collective case study design. The nature of the research questions denoted a case study model as well as the exploration of a phenomenon (Yin, 2014). The phenomenon of factors shaping choices by school leaders required in-depth and extensive description to fully comprehend the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Additionally, Yin (2014) stated that collective case studies utilize multiple cases to draw a cross-case conclusion based on the information from all cases researched. The research used multiple cases in the form of participants representing different school districts. While the
qualitative study was bound by the location of North Georgia, the study was additionally bound by the shared experiences of the school leaders as each had experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching assignments.

As a collective case study under the qualitative design, the research study took place online and in each participant’s home school. Participants were school leaders who identified themselves as having experienced the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships. Data collection methods utilized were individual interviews, online asynchronous text-only focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires. Once collected, data was analyzed using coding and thematic derivation for results as recommended by Yin (2011).

**Delimitations and Limitations**

Delimitations of the research study included the setting, the selection of participants, and the phenomenon of the study. The setting of each participant’s home school office was selected to provide participants greater comfort in hopes of eliciting more open discussion of the phenomenon. Participants must have experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching assignments to be included in the study. Also, the phenomenon was defined as choices regarding co-teaching assignments in contrast to regular teaching assignments. A final delimitation of the study was the choice of the researcher to explore the factors shaping choices of school leaders rather than the process undertaken by the school leaders in making choices.

Limitations to the research study included the lack of generalizability of the results due to the research design being a collective case study (Yin, 2011). In addition, limitations to the study included the participants’ personal feelings or attitudes regarding the co-teaching model as an effective means of inclusive education. These limitations could not be controlled by the researcher.
Summary

This first chapter has presented an overview of the relevant literature while situating the current research study to fill the gaps in the existing literature. School leader choices, in addition to the widespread use of co-teaching, were discussed along with provisions for a problem statement, a purpose statement, and research questions. Motivation for the researcher in selection of the research study was explained as well as discussion of the research plan including delimitations and limitations. Chapter Two will present a review of the literature underpinning the research study, including empirical evidence and the theoretical basis of the study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The qualitative multiple case research study was guided by the lack of empirical studies regarding the assignment of general education and special education teachers as co-teachers. While evidence points to the impact of the teacher on student success (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014; Sokal & Sharma, 2014), the choices of school leaders in assigning teachers to grade levels (Ball & Green, 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012), and the choices encountered by school leaders when hiring and assigning general faculty (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014), there is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating these concepts within the realm of co-teaching. This gap in the literature guided the initial research process into the crossroads of co-teaching and choices of school leaders in assigning co-teaching partnerships. This chapter describes the search process for relevant literature, the theoretical framework underpinning the study, and the review of literature including each of the paths leading to the crossroads of choices by school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

Search Process

This research study evolved from a meticulous review of current literature. Multiple avenues of research were conducted including professional journals and dissertations. According to Yin (2011), it is critical to retrieve recent publications regarding the study topic in order to be certain of no duplications of published studies. Reviewing the current knowledge base of a subject aids the researcher in developing a new study of professional significance that is poised to make a weighty contribution to the field of study (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005; Yin, 2011).

Beginning with a broad scan of current literature that led to a focused review of literature
constructed a strong basis for this research study (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005). For this reason, I began my research with the initial topic of co-teaching in mind. Through a broad scan of the current literature base, abounding evidence was discovered for the generalized theme of co-teaching. From the impact of the teacher on classroom climate (Sokal & Sharma, 2014) and student achievement (Mirza & Iqbal, 2014), a gap in the literature evolved as to the pairing of co-teachers. Following this path, I was able to discover studies regarding the hiring and assignment of teachers in general (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). However, there was a definitive lack in tying these hiring and assignments to the realm of co-teaching. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), the identification of the common threads leading to the development of a research study is critical. Through my initial broad scan of co-teaching, I was able to narrow my topic of study to the choices in pairing co-teachers in the classroom.

Upon further study through a focused review of the literature, consideration was given to the path of exploration of pairing co-teachers. For this endeavor, I opted to utilize the resources of Liberty University’s online library services. I was able to access multiple databases including the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Academic Search Complete in order to encounter a plethora of opportunities for investigation into the pairing of co-teachers. Using Boolean search terms (Gall et al., 2007) such as “co-teaching,” “teacher assignment,” and “teacher placement,” I located and read articles surrounding my topic. The concern I found was that no single term was collectively noted for pairing co-teachers. This sparked my interest in seeking synonyms for “teacher,” “co-teacher,” and “teacher assignment.” I furthered my search to include the terms of “educator,” “inclusion,” “inclusive teacher,” “inclusive educator,” “collaborative teacher,” “collaborative teaching,” “teacher placement,” “teacher sorting,” and
“faculty sorting.” Using Boolean operator terms, noted by Gall et al. (2007) as “a term that specifies a logical relationship among search terms” (p. 103), I searched for relationships between each of the aforementioned terms. Additionally, publication dates were limited to research within the last five years to maintain the most current literature as recommended by Gall et al.

Through my extensive search of the literature, I gathered information from research journals, public presentations, and published dissertations. Each of these not only provided greater knowledge on the topic, but many of the resources also provided references to additional sources for review. According to Gall et al. (2007), utilizing the resources of published manuscripts can aid in extending the research process.

During the research process, I created an annotated bibliography that included pertinent information that could benefit my research study. I utilized EndNote to maintain a list of all resources while classifying the various resources into folders. Glatthorn and Joyner (2005) recommended a strong filing system that allows for organization of multiple resources. Additionally, I created a brief overview page of each resource with reference information, research questions, methodology, findings, and personal reactions to the manuscript.

**Theoretical Framework**

Choice theory was developed by William Glasser (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Glasser dedicated his life to educating society on the principles of choice theory. According to the William Glasser Institute (2010), Glasser had performed such lifelong duties such as psychiatric counseling, lecturing, consulting, and authoring. Additionally, Glasser was an educated chemical engineer prior to his involvement in psychiatry (William Glasser Institute, 2010). William Glasser believed in choice theory and its implications for making societal
relationships prosper.

Choice theory is rooted in reality therapy, which was also developed by William Glasser in 1965 (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Reality therapy gave way to control theory which was eventually renamed choice theory. Reality therapy sought to reconnect personal relationships that had become unsatisfying (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Counselors and therapists were trained in the implementation of reality therapy in couples and group therapy sessions (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Glasser educated the therapists to encourage subjects to focus on the present while maintaining patience and support for their fellow subjects (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Placing blame and complaining of situations were not allowed in therapy sessions (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Instead, therapists were to educate subjects on the concept of total behavior as a means for rectifying unsatisfactory relationships (William Glasser Institute, 2010). The subjects were to focus on specific current issues with their partner while determining a specified plan to overcome the issues and reconnect with their partner (William Glasser Institute, 2010). According to Bradley (2014), “reality therapy can help an individual regain control of their lives, instead of letting their emotions run the show” (p. 6). Furthermore, Bradley proposed that reality therapy is more than a technique used in psychiatric therapy. Bradley stated that reality therapy is applicable to life in addition to psychological deficits. Glasser not only developed this theory, but he sought to implement it in psychiatric counseling through educating others about reality therapy for the reconnection of personal relationships that may have gone awry.

Reality therapy created the spark for William Glasser to develop his control theory in 1978 (William Glasser Institute, 2010). In 1996, Glasser altered the verbiage of his theory to be called *choice theory* rather than *control theory* with a few minor adjustments (Bradley, 2014).
While control theory and choice theory maintain the same basic components, Glasser determined the term should be changed to *choice theory* due to the fact that many people found the term of *control theory* to be misleading and difficult to accept (Glasser, 1988). According to Glasser (1994), control theory was originally denoted as such, because the basis was that all humans desire control over their own actions and choices. The theory’s name was changed to *choice theory* because “the guiding principle of the theory has always been that people have choices in life and these choices guide said life” (Bradley, 2014, p. 6). The simple modification of the theory’s name ceased much of the misunderstanding and difficulty of acceptance (Glasser, 2011).

The William Glasser Institute (2010) defined the rudimentary characteristics of choice theory. Choice theory is based on the idea that all people do is behave, while almost all of the behaviors exhibited by an individual are chosen by the individual (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Additionally, Glasser stated that all humans are striving to satisfy five basic needs (William Glasser Institute, 2010, para. 2) that influence all behavioral choices we make. According to Henderson, Robey, Dunham and Dermer (2013), the past is not a concern for choice theory, but choice theory instead seeks to focus on present situations and behaviors.

According to Glasser (1994), “you cannot make anyone do what he or she does not want to do” (p. 48), but individuals make their own personal choices to satisfy their specific needs (Glasser, 1994). In this area, Glasser (2011) deemed that each of us is “internally motivated to choose behaviors that will help us get what we want without destroying the relationships we value” (p. 34). Each person is responsible for personal choices that control present situations and relationships (Bradley, 2014). An individual is strictly responsible for personal choices, while not being responsible for other individuals’ choices (Henderson et al., 2013). Since Henderson
et al. (2013) stated that meaningful and satisfying relationships are a necessity, problems arise when an individual’s choices result in an unsatisfying relationship. Choice theory seeks to describe how all behavior is chosen by an individual and how that behavior may affect those in relationships with the individual.

While the underpinning basis of choice theory is that all behavior is chosen by the individual, Glasser proposed that choices were dependent on the individual’s personal needs (Glasser, 1988). These needs are genetically programmed into each of us, and each individual is born with the motivation to satisfy these needs (Glasser, 1988). The means by which the needs are satisfied vary from individual to individual, while the needs may be met diversely at different points in an individual’s life (Glasser, 2011). All human behavior is an attempt to satisfy one of these needs (Glasser, 2011). When an individual is feeling “bad, sad, mad, or any other less-than effective feeling, it is because one of these basic needs is not being met” (Henderson et al., 2013, p. 40). In order for an individual to be happy, that individual’s needs must be met to the intensity of the individual’s desire (Henderson et al., 2013). Therefore, satisfying our needs is the target of our lives (Glasser, 1994).

Satisfaction of needs must derive from an understanding of the genetically embedded needs within each individual (Glasser, 1988). The first of these needs is survival, which Bradley (2014) noted as the only need with which humans struggle. This can include the basic needs of food, shelter, and water (Glasser, 1997). Once this basic need of survival is satisfied, an individual will seek satisfaction of the other four needs. Glasser (1994) stated that it is useless to discuss survival as it the original need from which all other needs derived.

Glasser (1994) determined that the other four needs of love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun deserved greater attention. The need for love and belonging drives an
individual to makes choices so the individual will feel part of a group or feel cared for by others (Glasser, 2011). According to Bradley (2014), “love and belonging is a psychological need and is considered the primary need in humans” (p. 7). Friendship and the sense of belonging to a group drive choices in human behavior (Glasser, 1994).

The next inherent need in humans is power which includes feelings of accomplishment, success, recognition, and respect (Bradley, 2014). Power can be neither classified as good or bad, according to Glasser (1988). Cultural implications may affect the open desire for power, which in turn affects the view of power as good or bad. Glasser stated that power is a need that lacks morality. Power can be satisfied through varying means according to the individual. Whether viewed positively or negatively, power continues to be a basic human need according to choice theory (Glasser, 1988).

The final two genetic needs are freedom and fun. Freedom is more universal to all creatures in that it involves the expression of ideas, choices, and creativity (Bradley, 2014). In contrast to the need for power, freedom is more culturally acceptable as only a minute number of cultures view the need for freedom as negative (Glasser, 1988). The need for fun is equally viewed as culturally acceptable, and the need for fun can “balance a lot of misery” (Glasser, 1988, p. 36). Freedom and fun combined with a sense of belonging and power are the five basic needs that are genetically programmed into each individual at birth (Glasser, 1988).

According to Glasser (1997), denying the satisfaction of these needs is futile. Each individual is internally motivated to select behaviors that will aid in satisfying the basic needs. The satisfaction of all five basic needs is idealized by Glasser (1988) as an individual’s quality world. Each individual has a different quality world due to each individual having dissimilar satisfaction requirements for an individualized quality world (Glasser, 2011). According to
Bradley (2014), an individual’s quality world is a “place in our minds where we store everything that makes, or that we believe would make, us happy and satisfied” (p. 7). An individual stores mental pictures or images of what is perceived as satisfying one of the five basic needs (Glasser, 2011). Believing an individual’s memory is the same as an individual’s quality world is a misconception (Glasser, 2011). According to Glasser (2011), “the quality world in my head is a small, selective part of my total memory” (p. 16) that houses at least a single image that satisfies each of the five basic needs. Bradley described an individual’s quality world as a “photo album or inspiration board” (p. 7) of an individual’s wants and needs.

With wants and needs posted on this mental quality world board, Glasser (1994) proposed that an individual seeks to parallel the real world with his or her own quality world, and, subconsciously, that individual is constantly comparing the two worlds (Glasser, 2011). The truth is that often the pictures in an individual’s quality world may not be readily available in the real world, but the quality world represents the particular life you want to live (Glasser, 2011). An individual’s own quality world may change over time due to evolving wants for satisfying basic needs (Glasser, 2011). As the person progresses through life, pictures in the quality world may no longer be as satisfying as they once were, and the individual will replace the pictures with new, more satisfying images (Glasser, 2011). If there is an absence of an image for satisfying a basic need, “the need that is unsatisfied will drive us first to look for a picture that may satisfy it and then for a way to make satisfying contact with whatever it is in the real world that the picture represents” (Glasser, 2011, p. 17). According to Glasser (2011), an individual’s quality world is unique and must seek to satisfy the five basic needs of all humans.

One of the essential beliefs of choice theory is that all humans do is behave (Glasser, 2011). All behavior is comprised of four components: acting, thinking, feeling, and physiology
Acting and thinking are considered to be voluntary while feeling and physiology are involuntary (Glasser, 1994). According to Bradley (2014), an individual’s acting and thinking control feelings and physiology. The four components work together to form an individual’s total behavior (Glasser, 1994), and Glasser (1988) stated that “whatever total behavior we choose, it is always our best attempt to gain effective control of our lives, which means to reduce the difference between what we want at the time and what we see is available in the real world” (p. 57). Combining the four components of actions, thoughts, feelings, and physiology, Glasser (1994) proposed the concept of total behavior in choice theory.

From the satisfaction of five basic needs to the concept of an individual’s total behavior, Glasser (1994) has demonstrated the applicability of choice theory to multiple disciplines. In the business realm, Glasser authored a text regarding the implementation of choice theory for managers. For this application of choice theory, one of the main constructs remains that managers make choices for their own behavior while the workers choose their own behavior (Glasser, 1994). Each individual is responsible for his own needs-satisfying choices. Glasser pointed out that the success of a manager is dependent on the behaviors chosen by the manager and affects the quality of the organization.

Glasser (1994) provided practices for implementing choice theory in management to create a more stable and quality work environment. Workers should be engaged in continual open discussion regarding their thoughts on how to complete the organization’s work while the manager models appropriate choices to increase the workers’ control over the organization’s work (Glasser, 1994). The manager moves from the role of boss to that of a lead manager by instructing workers to inspect their own work and seek continual improvement for the advancement of the organization (Glasser, 1994). These practices provide satisfaction of the
power, freedom, and fun needs of the workers. According to Glasser, the “need for power is satisfied when a worker believes people will listen” (p. 56). In addition, “the more a manager can combine learning and laughter into the process of teaching workers how to improve what they do, the more quality will be achieved” (Glasser, 1994, p. 56). Through implementation of choice theory, managers can increase the quality of work for their organization which is one of the roles of management (Glasser, 1994).

Having stated the ultimate goal of managers is to produce quality work, Glasser (1994) proposed that managers move from being “grim and domineering” (p.56) to creating an environment free of coercion (Glasser, 1994) because increased quality of work can be noted by workers who feel encouraged and appreciated (Glasser, 1994). By shifting the managerial role to one adhering to choice theory principles, the manager will create an atmosphere of friendship and belonging (Glasser, 1994) for the workers, which directly affects the quality of work produced. According to Glasser, quality work only happens when workers believe they are cared about personally. The role of the manager is to educate the workers on performing quality work, but the workers make the ultimate decision to do quality work in order for the company to succeed (Glasser, 1994). Managers adopting choice theory principles stand to gain quality work from their employees through seeking to satisfy the basic needs of the employees (Glasser, 1994).

In addition to the business realm, choice theory pertains to education as Glasser (1988) applied the theory to the classroom and suggested that the current state of education can be improved through this application. Students need to feel that the work they do in school is satisfying their basic needs. Glasser proposed that students who are not achieving academic goals will openly admit that each could achieve those goals through producing higher quality
work. The problem lies in the fact that students do not find the classwork to be gratifying to their needs (Glasser, 1988). According to Glasser, “students function no differently in school than anywhere else; they attempt to fulfill whatever need they detect is most unsatisfied at the time” (p. 18).

To ensure the students’ needs are met, schools should incorporate small learning teams of students who work together in classrooms (Glasser, 1988). According to Glasser (1988), learning teams will enable students to satisfy their needs of love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. Students gain a sense of belonging by working together in teams in addition to satisfying the need for power by depending on the team instead of only depending on the teacher (Glasser, 1988). According to Glasser, “belonging provides the initial motivation for students to work and learn that knowledge is power and seek to work harder” (p. 81). Learning teams not only satisfy the needs of belonging and power, but also satisfy the needs of freedom and fun (Glasser, 1988). When students are given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning to fellow classmates and the teacher, the students’ needs of freedom are satisfied. Just as humans are social creatures by nature, students satisfy the need for fun by social interactions with their peers, which can be accomplished through the implementation of learning teams (Glasser, 1988). Furthermore, Glasser promoted that discipline issues of students would be nonexistent if educators and students utilized the choice theory in designing classrooms. According to Glasser, discipline problems only happen when students are placed into classes where they do not experience satisfaction of their needs.

In conclusion, choice theory, developed by William Glasser, promotes the responsibility of each individual in choosing actions and thoughts that affect personal feelings and physiology (William Glasser Institute, 2010). Every individual has a unique quality world where pictures of
needs-satisfying situations are stored, and choice theory proposed that the needs that must be satisfied include survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun (Glasser, 2011). Each of these needs is genetically programmed into an individual, but the individual determines the personal satisfaction measures for meeting each of these needs and stores these images in their quality world (Glasser, 2011). William Glasser applied choice theory to the business world by suggesting a shift from authoritarian managers to lead-managers allows employees opportunity to satisfy their own basic needs and increase the quality of their work (Glasser, 1994). A second application of choice theory that Glasser promoted was in the educational system. Glasser (1994) stated that schools should implement choice theory in the classroom through the addition of learning teams of students. If this were to occur, the needs of students would be more readily met affording the students a sense of belonging, freedom, and power through the adoption of the learning team environment (Glasser, 1994).

**Related Literature**

Empirical research pertaining to teacher impact, school leaders’ choices, and co-teaching are each described in the following sections. According to Glatthorn and Joyner (2005), conceptual organization of literature research involves “a conceptual analysis in which you identify the major concepts or factors appearing in the literature” (p. 119), and conceptual organization is the most commonly used organizational method. The literature relating to this qualitative case study has been organized by the concepts of teacher impact, school leaders’ choices, and co-teaching.

**Teacher Impact**

Students in today’s education classrooms face many challenges, but the teacher greatly affects the manner in which students overcome these challenges. Mertz (2010) stated that
teachers play a crucial role in student learning. According to Cranston (2012), “good teachers have a profound effect on student success” (p. 1), but Cranston neglected to mention the effect of perceived poor teachers on student success. A positive emotional classroom climate has been noted to increase student motivation, but this climate has not been proven to affect achievement (Allen et al., 2013). Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) cited a study that a positive emotional school climate provided students with improvements in school behavior and achievement. Furthermore, Mirza and Iqbal (2014) demonstrated through empirical study that co-teaching positively impacts student success. According to Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013), “teachers are key decision makers and are in unique positions to shape or refine inclusive practices” (p. 158). This section of the review provides literature to support the impact of the teacher on classroom climate, student achievement, and student engagement.

Leadership in the classroom begins with the teacher (Ratcliff, Carroll, & Hunt, 2014). Eryilmaz (2014) studied the impact of the simple amicability of the teacher on student success. Personality traits such as extroversion, conscientiousness, agreeableness, emotional stability, openness to experience, and amicability demonstrated by the teacher were found to have a positive effect on student achievement, student learning, and student motivation (Eryilmaz, 2014). Each of these simple traits of a teacher can influence the perceived support and possible success of a student (Eryilmaz, 2014). Mazer (2013) added to this literature knowledge base by documenting that teachers who demonstrate immediacy in the classroom contribute to a positive learning experience for students through motivating students and sparking the emotional interests of students. Humphries, Strickland, and Keenan (2014) expounded that the teacher is the fundamental influence on the social and emotional development of students. Additionally, Humphries et al. discovered that teachers more grossly impact student success than even parental
responsiveness to the student’s learning. The literature certainly documents the impact of the teacher on the learning and achievement of students.

A positive climate is essential for student academic success (Cox, 2014). According to Humphries et al. (2014), the climate of the classroom can either support or deter the students in their learning endeavors. Given the need for a positive classroom climate, which is facilitated by the teacher (Bourke & Brown, 2014), Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) studied the effects of teacher-student classroom relationships on the learning and achievement of students. Correlations were revealed between teacher student relationships and dropout rates, student achievement, and student discipline (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013). Allen et al. (2013) supported this revelation through documenting that students having strong connections with teachers demonstrated long term academic success. Additionally, Allen et al. noted that students learn at a deeper level when supported by the teacher. To further demonstrate the impact of the teacher on the classroom climate and, in turn, the success of students, Knoell and Crow (2013) conducted a study of students and teachers from diverse schools with results that pointed directly to the profound influence of the teacher on the students’ learning. Through building strong teacher student relationships, the teachers of participants in the study by Knoell and Crow were able to motivate positive student behavior while learning was taking place. According to Cox (2014), “personal relationships that nurture and edify seem to allow the natural motivation to learn to blossom forth” (p. 221).

In addition to influencing the climate of the classroom and the achievement of students, teachers impact student engagement. According to Humphries et al. (2014), student engagement and academic achievement are positively correlated to teachers who are socially, emotionally, and academically responsive to students’ needs. Coincidentally, Frisby, Berger, Burchett,
Herovic, and Strawser (2014) supported this discovery with a study documenting the connectedness of students to the classroom as influencing the engagement of students. Not only did Frisby et al. find the connectedness of students to influence engagement, but Frisby et al. also found that teachers who were sensitive to seating arrangements of students demonstrated higher levels of student engagement. Eryilmaz (2014) documented increased levels of engagement and participation from students when teachers demonstrated personality traits deemed likeable by students. Each of these factors is directly tied to the influence of the teacher on student engagement and offer literature supporting the impact of the teacher.

Teacher-student relationships are not the only influence on the classroom climate. Ratcliff et al. (2014) discovered the effect of teacher behavior on the climate of the classroom. Teacher behavior regarding classroom management impacts the learning atmosphere (Ratcliff et al., 2014). Ratcliff et al. studied the phenomenon of teacher retreating which was defined as “a behavior that occurs in the classroom when a teacher backs down after one or more students undermine the teacher’s authority by failing to comply” (p. 169). Teacher retreating significantly influences the climate negatively (Ratcliff et al., 2014). According to Ratcliff et al., group goals are achieved when the students and the teacher work together, but when the teacher retreats, the group goals suffer. The cohesion of the classroom is negatively affected through a single behavior of the teacher.

Furthermore, Mazer (2013) studied the relationship between teacher nonverbal immediacy behaviors and student motivation and interest. Teacher nonverbal immediacy behaviors include “the use of eye contact, movement, facial expressions, and vocal variety” (Mazer, 2013, p. 88). Frisby et al. (2014) echoed the sentiments of Mazer. Frisby et al. concluded that the facial expressions of teachers are directly related to the perceived climate of
the classroom and ultimately the success of the students in the classroom. A positive rapport perceived by students encouraged them to participate in class more fully while feeling safe in their surroundings (Frisby et al., 2014). Each of these pieces of literature offer empirical evidence to support the impact of the teacher on the classroom climate and the students.

Not only do teachers impact the learning environment through behaviors and actions, but teachers also impact the learning and achievement of students through their content knowledge. According to Mahadeo, Manthey, and Brewe (2013), increased content knowledge positively influenced student achievement. The content knowledge of the teacher was studied and found to directly affect posttest scores for students (Mahadeo et al., 2013). This illustrates another factor in the impact of the teacher on the classroom.

The teacher is pivotal in the direction of a student’s education. If students are to learn, the “emotional quality of the classroom is the key” (Allen et al., 2013, p. 79), and teachers set the tone for the classroom and its climate (Bourke & Brown, 2014). Through demonstrating sensitivity to student learning and engagement needs (Allen et al., 2013), teachers are the most influential variable in determining student success. The impact of the teacher is far reaching and profoundly supported by current literature.

School Leaders’ Choices

While the teacher greatly impacts the students’ success, it is the task of school leaders to make choices impacting the overall school. Khan and Iqbal (2013) promoted the school leader’s role to be multi-dimensional with responsibilities for the entire school population. School leaders promote the overall culture of the school through implementation of educational objectives, encouragement of community and parental involvement, and assignment of faculty (Khan & Iqbal, 2013). Each of these choices is influenced by the state and national
accountability described in educational policies (Murray, 2014). School leaders face choices that affect the entire school population and community in addition to maintaining adherence to educational laws (Murray, 2014). This section of the literature review presents evidence documenting the role of school leaders in making choices for schools.

School leaders are held accountable for the effectiveness of their school (Khan & Iqbal, 2013), which only increases the pressures associated with making sound choices for educational endeavors. According to Khan and Iqbal (2014), school leaders are saddled with the task of improving schools through their choices in order to create an effective learning environment. Coupling these pressures with the necessity of making data driven choices to meet the need of current educational mandates exemplifies the critical role of school leaders (Murray, 2014). According to Mertz (2010), the “demands for accountability, linked as they are to high-stakes testing and undergirded by national pressure to meet No Child Left Behind standards, place a heavy burden on principals” (p. 184). School leaders must make data driven choices, which has “become part of the lexicon of the American educator” in the current educational realm (Murray, 2014, p. 16). According to Murray (2014), school leaders utilize data, such as student achievement scores, as a driving factor in making choices regarding school policy implementation as well as satisfying accountability requirements placed upon them by state and national governments. The most effective means for addressing educational mandates is the use of data collected from student achievement assessments (Murray, 2014). The accountability for school effectiveness radiates down to the school leaders making choices for their schools.

School leaders are held accountable for all school constituents, but Senechal (2013) also characterized the role of school leaders as being riddled with responsibility. Responsibility is defined as “internal self-guidance” and “involves full mind and conscience as well as external
performance of duty” (Senechal, 2013, p. 47). School leaders are responsible for the entire school population, including students, faculty, and staff (Khan & Iqbal, 2013), and this responsibility manifests through pressure for school leaders to increase student achievement (Rutledge, Harris, & Ingle, 2010). Toss in the federal mandates for including special education students in the least restrictive learning environment, and the school leader may feel even greater burden through implementing school inclusion policies (Farrell, 2012). Accountability and responsibility are evidenced by current literature as concerns by school leaders when choices must be made.

In addition to the accountability for the entire school population, school leaders must make choices regarding hiring and assignment of teachers, which can be viewed as a daunting task (Bourke & Brown, 2014). According to Mertz (2010), the factors determining how teachers are chosen have a significant effect on student learning and teacher instructional effectiveness. School leaders must make decisive choices considering the comprehensive needs of all school constituents (Cranston, 2012). Not only are principals responsible for hiring faculty, but these school leaders choose the assignment of faculty members to grade and subject levels (Ball & Green, 2014). According to Mertz, “a compelling case can be made for teacher selection as a leader practice with profound implications for affecting student learning” (p. 186).

According to Rutledge et al. (2010), school leaders seek candidates who share professional characteristics that match with the school’s accountability goals”. Based on a study by Rutledge et al., a majority of school leaders make choices for hiring teachers based on the pressures to improve the standardized assessment scores of students. Additionally, all participants, which were school leaders in the study by Rutledge et al., stated they were pressured to improve student achievement and hire teachers who understand that the demands of
accountability are highly influential in faculty hiring choices (Rutledge et al., 2010). Compile these tasks with the pressures of accountability for NCLB, student achievement, and school climate to make for a monstrous criticality of choices made by school leaders.

Hiring faculty for their respective schools is an essential task for school leaders (Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). Without faculty, the school would not exist. According to Cranston (2012), school leaders seek to hire teachers they consider a good fit for their school. A study by Mertz (2010) corroborated this notion of seeking teachers who are fitting to the school. Mertz (2010) stated that principals in the study did not use a rational decision-making model when making hiring choices. The participants of the study followed more of an intuitive decision model in seeking teachers who were the best fit for the position (Mertz, 2010). Additionally, school leaders have been noted as seeking faculty candidates who will be poised to contribute positively to the success of the school (Hynes et al., 2011). According to Mertz, “when principals and others involved in the teacher selection process choose from among potential applicants, they are afforded an extraordinary opportunity to influence what goes on in the instructional program” (p. 203).

When making choices in hiring faculty, school leaders must seek new teachers that will strengthen the current faculty (Ball & Green, 2014). For this to occur, a proficient understanding of the current faculty and its needs is necessary for school leaders (Ball & Green, 2014). This understanding shifts from school year to school year. According to Carlyon and Fisher (2012), school leaders view hiring new faculty as either a management process or a “strategic process that had long term impact on the school and staff” (p. 75). Either way, school leaders are responsible for hiring faculty according to the particular needs of the school and the student body at the time of hire (Ball & Green, 2014). Ultimately, choices of school leaders in hiring faculty
should be driven by the needs of the entire school population; accountability for the success or failure of the school rests in these monumental choices (Bourke & Brown, 2014). Bourke and Brown (2014) proposed that hiring faculty is the most important task of an administrator. According to Bourke and Brown, principals sought new faculty who demonstrated strong personal character and competency in knowledge, along with a perceived likeness in educational philosophy with that which drives the school.

With all constituents being affected by choices of school leaders, the stakes are high in the selection of new faculty members. According to Dillon, McCaughtry, and Hummel (2010), research is lacking in the specific hiring criteria utilized by school leaders. Mertz (2010) echoed this sentiment. As one of the few researchers delving into teacher hiring, Dillon et al. completed a study to determine what criteria is most used when hiring new faculty members. School leaders considered previous successful teaching experience, collaborative willingness, passion for education, content knowledge, and classroom management skills when faced with hiring choices (Bigham et al., 2014; Dillon et al., 2010; Khan & Iqbal, 2014). Based on the current literature, studies have developed that are grounded in the literature gaps noted by Dillon et al. Each of these more current studies sought to define the criteria for hiring new faculty by school leaders.

Dillon et al. (2010) found that previous successful teaching experience was the most influential factor affecting administrators’ hiring choices of new faculty. Bigham et al. (2014) contradicted this finding with a study that noted passion for educating students to be the most crucial factor in hiring choices. Following teaching experience, Dillon et al. documented the applicant’s cooperating teacher’s evaluation, samples of teaching/management skill, and professional recommendations carried substantial credence when hiring faculty for physical
education teaching positions. Bigham et al. discovered that personal characteristics of the applicant, such as professional demeanor and open mindedness, affect hiring choices as well. The conclusions from Bigham et al. and Dillon et al. influenced the current research study in that factors considered for hiring new faculty may translate to assignment of educators to co-teaching positions.

Not only are school leaders responsible for hiring new faculty, but school leaders are also responsible for assigning new and current faculty to grade and subject classrooms (Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013; Khan & Iqbal, 2014). According to Kalogrides et al. (2013), several factors may impact choices for classroom assignments, and parents are one group that may impact the assignment of teachers to classrooms. Since school leaders are responsible for the entire school population, parental involvement must be considered (Kalogrides et al., 2013). In addition to parental input, school leaders also make assignment choices based on teacher preferences (Kalogrides et al., 2013). According to Kalogrides et al., some course assignments are more desirable to teachers than others. Along with the combined influences of parents and teachers, school leaders also consider the organization of the school, because retention of employees may be a factor in class assignment of teachers (Kalogrides et al., 2013). Carlyon and Fisher (2012) echoed this sentiment by stating that teacher assignment greatly impacts the long term effectiveness for the school. Kalogrides et al. concluded that teacher assignment results from “a complex process whereby school leaders attempt to respond to teacher, parent, and organizational preferences” (p. 121), and Carlyon and Fisher noted a strategic approach to decisions for teacher placement. In the study by Carlyon and Fisher, administrators sought to ensure teachers’ needs were met and courses were assigned to teachers with strong content and pedagogical knowledge of the subject. Results from studies by Carlyon and Fisher and
Kalogrides et al. illustrate the choices of school leaders to be multifaceted with implications for multiple educational constituents.

Even though these choices of which new teachers to hire and how to place teachers are highly critical, there is a lack of research on the hiring and placement practices of school leaders in regards to meeting the parameters of No Child Left Behind, commonly referred to as NCLB, (Bourke & Brown, 2014). NCLB requires students to be taught by highly qualified teachers (Bourke & Brown, 2014), and this must be a consideration for future research as noted by Bourke and Brown (2014). Additionally, Bourke and Brown echoed the sentiments of Cranston (2012) about the lack of literature specifically supporting the hiring of faculty in regards to NCLB mandates. According to Cranston, school leaders are coming to the realization of faculty hiring choices being rooted in the reality of which candidates best fit the needs of the school.

This leads the discussion to how school leaders make choices in hiring new faculty to be part of co-teaching teams. The literature points to the fact that careful consideration must be taken when choosing new faculty, but the lack of literature on how those choices affect subgroups of students, such as special education and English language learners, is alarming. These choices of school leaders may directly affect the successful implementation of co-teaching classrooms. This coupled with the profound impact of the teacher on a student’s success intensifies the need for research in the areas of hiring and assigning faculty to co-teaching positions (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014; Sokal & Sharma, 2014).

**Co-teaching**

School leaders make the choices regarding hiring and assigning faculty (Bourke & Brown, 2014), and it is noted that the teacher is a primary influence of student success (Allen et
al., 2013). How does this relate to co-teaching? Co-teaching is a “worldwide reform strategy intended to include students with different abilities in mainstream regular schools” (Ahmmed, Sharma, & Deppeler, 2012), but there is a distinct lack of literature on how these influential teachers are hired and assigned by school leaders. Research is formidable on the positive perceptions of teachers and administrators alike in regards to co-teaching (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Thomas, 2014; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011), but little attention has been given on how these partnerships are formed.

To better understand the concept of co-teaching, a little history must first be shared. According to Friend, Reising, and Cook (1993), co-teaching developed from the concept of team teaching which initiated in the 1950s. Team teaching gained popularity over the next two decades with a goal of creating student centered learning environments (Friend et al., 1993). In the 1990s, the practice continued to evolve with the phrase of collaborative teaching or co-teaching gaining popularity (Friend et al., 1993). The reason for the change of phrasing was to distinguish co-teaching from team teaching in that co-teaching implicates two teachers sharing responsibility for students in a single classroom (Friend et al., 1993). According to Friend et al. (1993), the practice of co-teaching developed and extended to encompass the increasing need to educate special education students in the general education classroom. Co-teaching has a long history that originated in the concept of team teaching during the 1950s (Friend et al., 1993).

Co-teaching prospered following the turn of the century. In 2002, NCLB legislation was passed and mandated increasing expectations for all students to be proficient in reading and mathematics (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.). According to the Georgia Department of Education (n.d.), standards for academic instruction and assessment systems were deemed
necessary by NCLB legislation in addition to the assessment of educational institutions to prove adequate yearly progress (AYP) based on standardized student assessments. NCLB was directly tied to the legislation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) from the 1970s (Hamman, Lechtenberger, Griffin-Shirley, & Zhou, 2013). IDEA requires that “students who receive special education services be served in settings that are as inclusive as possible” (Hamman et al., 2013, p. 252) or the least restrictive environment (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). According to Moorehead and Grillo (2013), “the accountability standards in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act set the stage for more students with special needs to be included in general education classrooms” (p. 50). Each of these pieces of national legislation supported the need for co-teaching.

Legislation may have provided a need for co-teaching, but a single definition and interpretation are not simply stated in the literature. Common components of definitions for co-teaching derived from literature include the collaborative efforts of two teachers in the general education classroom along with students having disabilities and students not having disabilities (Chanmugam & Gerlach, 2013; Dusty & Schneider, 2012; Hamman et al., 2013; Petrick, 2014; Rimpola, 2014; Walters & Misra, 2013). According to Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013), “collaboration is not a task or an action, but rather an engagement style for professionals” (p. 158). In the United States, “more than six million students receive special education support and services in general education classrooms” (Dusty & Schneider, 2012, p. 36). Hamilton-Jones and Moore reported that “nationwide data showed that 57% of students with disabilities spend 80% of their school day in general education settings” (p. 157). The purpose of co-teaching is far simpler than the definition or the interpretation. According to Rimpola (2014), ensuring an
effective collaborative partnership that creates a positive learning environment for all students should be the chief expectation of co-teachers. Petrick (2014) echoed this sentiment in stating that the goal of the co-teaching team is “to work together effectively, minimize conflict, and commit to the best practices to help meet students’ unique learning styles and needs in the inclusive classroom setting” (p. 16).

Given the history and loosely compiled definition of co-teaching, attention must be turned to the benefits of co-teaching. Teachers and students alike are affected by the co-teaching classroom. According to DeLuca (2013), “results from numerous studies have identified significant benefits of inclusive education on reducing the achievement gap, promoting student self-perceptions and wellbeing, and supporting a social integrated community of learning” (p. 7). In my own review of the literature, I discovered conflicting information regarding the student benefits of co-teaching. While DeLuca claimed student benefits from receiving instruction in a co-taught classroom, Friend et al. (2010) cited two studies where little to no difference was noted in student achievement based on co-teaching instruction. According to Friend et al., studies denoted an increase on report card grades and attendance for students with disabilities receiving instruction in the co-taught classroom, but no difference was noted on high stakes testing in comparison to students with disabilities receiving instruction in a resource classroom. In fact, Friend et al. went on further to cite that neither general education nor special education students produced higher testing scores after receiving instruction in a co-taught classroom. The explanation provided by Friend et al. for the lack of increased student achievement boiled down to co-teachers not being fully and correctly trained on the implementation of co-teaching. Additionally, noted improvement in social skills of all students was perceived as a benefit of co-teaching (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011).
In addition to exploring the benefits for students, teacher benefits were also investigated through the current literature. A study by Fenty and McDuffie-Landrum (2011) utilized observations and interviews of three sets of co-teachers to determine the levels of collaboration achieved, along with benefits reaped from instructing students in a co-teaching environment. Benefits noted by the participants included increased student support, increased teacher support, increased differentiation opportunities, and increased chances for teachers to interact with students individually. Additionally, Seymour and Seymour (2013) noted benefits of co-teaching to include the ability to provide more applicable feedback to students and the expansion of instructional methods through peer review and collaboration. Benefits from co-teaching were derived from studies where co-teachers were interviewed, thus providing perceived benefits of being in a co-teaching partnership (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Seymour & Seymour, 2013).

With a feel for the history and benefits of co-teaching, attention should be directed towards the perceptions of inclusion. Inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is becoming more and more prevalent (Moorehead & Grillo, 2013). According to Beacham and Rouse (2012) and Shaukat, Sharma, and Furlonger (2013), student teachers show favorable perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching. McCray and McHatton (2011) reported that increased coursework preparing student teachers for co-teaching experiences positively affected the perceptions of inclusion held by the student teachers. Shaukat et al. studied the factors affecting the perceptions of inclusion by student teachers. From each of these studies, it can be concluded that student teachers value training in inclusion and that directly influences their perceptions of co-teaching.

Multiple studies cited similar reports of perceptions of teachers regarding inclusion
In contrast to the studies that noted positive teacher perceptions of inclusion, studies by Chhabra, Srivastava, and Srivastava (2010) and Hunter-Johnson, Newton, and Cambridge-Johnson (2014) found teachers to have negative perceptions of inclusion. From these studies reflecting both positive and negative perceptions of inclusion, commonalities reported include the concept of inclusive education training for teachers, prior experience with students having disabilities, and types of disabilities among students (Sokal & Sharma, 2014; Solis et al., 2012). Ball and Green (2014) noted that school administrators also held negative perceptions of including students with more severe and profound disabilities. According to Alquraini (2012), factors demonstrating an effect on teacher perceptions of inclusion include the gender of the teacher. Female teachers held more positive perceptions of inclusion than male teachers (Alquraini, 2012). Additionally, MacFarlane and Woolfson (2013) found that general education teachers with more experience working with special education students demonstrated a decreased willingness to become inclusion teachers. Many teachers used the absence of appropriate training in inclusive education as a means for explaining the lack of desire for being an inclusive teacher (Habtes et al., 2012). According to Solis et al. (2012), the perceptions held by teachers affect the success of the co-teaching relationship as well as the inclusion classroom climate. For this reason, perceptions of teachers have been included in the current review of literature.

Given the effect of training on teacher perceptions of inclusion, studies cite the need for professional development and administrative support to educate teachers on the procedures and benefits of co-teaching (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Forlin et al., 2011; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Randhare Ashton, 2014; Solis et al., 2012). An intense degree of collaboration and cooperation
between co-teachers is essential and must be developed (Solis et al., 2012). Proper training is a necessity because “unfortunately, the skills to become an effective collaborator are not at all intuitive” (Weiss, Pellegrino, Regan, & Mann, 2015, p. 89). Weiss et al. (2015) recommended the implementation of collaboration training at the college level in order for teacher candidates to experience collaborative efforts prior to entering the educational workforce. As teachers are more commonly expected to collaborate in schools, teacher education programs must feel obligated to include collaborative practice within the teacher candidate curriculum (Weiss et al., 2015). According to Solis et al. (2012), teachers feel unprepared for the realm of co-teaching and effectively educating general education students along with special education students. Moorehead and Grillo (2013) cited the limited experience and lack of professional development for co-teachers in effective preparation for co-teaching classrooms of diverse learners.

In order to effectively train teachers to assume co-teaching roles, potential co-teachers should be provided with information on different models of co-teaching. Friend et al. (2010) proposed six models of co-teaching, but variations of the models are expected and accepted as well by Friend et al. (2010). No singular model should be utilized exclusively throughout the academic school year (Friend et al., 2010). According to Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013), teachers must contemplate the lesson objective and needs of students when determining which model to use for a lesson. Flexibility in the use of multiple models of co-teaching must be utilized to ensure that a wide variety of learner needs are met (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013). The six models of co-teaching, described by Friend et al. (2010), are located in Table 1.

Learning the models of co-teaching is not enough. Roles of the co-teachers were found to create challenges for co-teaching partnerships (Chanmugam & Gerlach, 2013; Solis et al., 2012). Moorehead and Grillo (2013) stated that when co-teaching roles are undefined, confusion
**Table 1**

*Co-teaching Models*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description of Model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>One teach, one observe</strong></td>
<td>One teacher leads large-group instruction while the other gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One teach, one assist</strong></td>
<td>One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates among the students offering individual assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Station teaching</strong></td>
<td>Instruction is divided into three nonsequential parts and students, likewise divided into three groups, rotate from station to station being taught by the teachers at two stations and working independently at the third</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parallel teaching</strong></td>
<td>Two teachers, each with half the class group, present the same material for the primary purpose of fostering instructional differentiation and increasing student participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alternative teaching</strong></td>
<td>One teacher works with most students while the other works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, assessment, preteaching, or another purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Team teaching</strong></td>
<td>Both teachers lead large-group instruction by both lecturing, representing opposing views in a debate, illustrating two ways to solve a problem, and so on</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

may occur. Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013) proposed that co-teachers should devise a strategy for sharing classroom responsibilities and consider using a co-teaching planning framework to guide this process. However, the most critical factor is that both co-teachers
participate in making classroom decisions and feel comfortable with the division of responsibilities (Hamilton-Jones & Moore, 2013). Without a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, co-teaching partnerships may suffer.

In the current literature, the most often referenced disgruntlement of co-teaching roles and responsibilities occurred with special education teachers. According to Pugach and Winn (2011), special education teachers predominantly play a subordinate role for instruction in the inclusion classroom which can manifest as stress to the co-teaching relationship. In a study by Farrell (2012), Irish special education teachers, referred to as support teachers, described themselves only in terms of a supporting role of the general education teacher instead of being part of any co-teaching relationship. The study participants considered their contributions to be “providing support and encouragement when required, enhancing teachers’ skills and abilities in the classroom, acting as an advocate for pupils, making critical decisions around dissemination of information, and addressing resistance on the part of some teaching staff” (Farrell, 2012, p. 100). Failure to delineate roles so that both teachers perceive themselves as being involved in instruction can lead to challenges in the co-teaching partnership.

Roles and responsibilities are not the only challenges of a co-teaching partnership. Other challenges such as the presence of common planning time and compatibility of co-teachers were found to affect the co-teaching effectiveness (Chanmugam & Gerlach, 2013; Dusty & Schneider, 2012; Petrick, 2014; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Rimpola, 2014). Fenty and McDuffie-Landrum (2011) noted in their study that special education teachers viewed a lack of common planning time as a negative aspect of co-teaching, while Friend et al. (2010) described the lack of common planning time as a challenge. Teachers, as well as administrators, must “have a solid understanding of special education laws, research-based practices related to special education,
and the instructional challenges faced by teachers who work with students with disabilities” (Ball & Green, 2014, p. 59). Many of these challenges can be overcome with effective administrative support and committed co-teachers.

In conjunction with the perceptions and challenges of co-teaching, the pairing of co-teachers must be investigated. Current literature demonstrates a deficiency in studies to this end. According to Petrick (2014), administrators characteristically select co-teachers rather than allowing possible co-teaching partnerships to volunteer. Compatibility of the co-teachers is noted as crucial for an effective inclusive classroom (Chanmugam & Gerlach, 2013; Dusty & Schneider, 2012; Petrick, 2014; Pugach & Winn, 2011). According to Petrick, quarrels are minimized when co-teachers are compatible. Hamilton-Jones and Moore (2013) promoted the reflection of the co-teaching relationship by making data driven decisions based on student achievement. In a study by Brinkman and Twiford (2012), regular and special education teachers were interviewed to determine what skills were important to fostering successful co-teaching experiences. Communication was cited as the foremost characteristic necessary for developing and maintaining an effective co-teaching relationship (Brinkman & Twiford, 2012). Other skills documented in the study by Brinkman and Twiford included the ability to differentiate instruction and utilize collected data for driving future instruction. This leads to a gap in current literature. Skills and characteristics necessary for successful co-teachers were documented over and over. Methods for implementing co-teaching were also documented over and over. Through an intense review of literature, a lack of empirical evidence supporting how co-teachers are paired surfaced.

While literature abounds on the concept of co-teaching, the pairing of co-teachers has been rarely explored. Current literature provides for definitions, implementation techniques,
administrative support practices, and perceptions of inclusion and co-teaching, but the choices of school leaders in pairing co-teachers is sparse. According to Friend et al. (2010), “the intuitive appeal of co-teaching belies the challenges faced in its design, implementation, and evaluation” (p. 10). According to Kliegl and Weaver (2014), co-teaching has demonstrated enhancements in student-teacher relationships and student communication skills, but no studies have addressed how these highly-influential teachers are brought together. Co-teachers experience greater communication and collaboration, leading to greater opportunities for increasing best instructional practices and gaining multiple perspectives (Bronson & Dentith, 2014). Co-teaching has consistently proven beneficial for students and teachers, but choices of school leaders must be explored since the criticality of co-teacher pairings is so evident due to the impact of the teacher, the perceptions of inclusion, and the accountability for all student learning.

**Summary**

This chapter has provided a theoretical framework for situating the results of this research study in the field of education. Additionally, a review of relevant literature guiding the study has been presented. Finally, a gap in the current literature base has been derived from the literature thus providing a need for the research study.

Current literature is highly involved when it comes to co-teaching. There are multiple avenues in co-teaching that have been explored through research to date. From perceptions of teachers and students about inclusion to empirical data identifying the implications of co-teaching, the educational world is inundated with research literature on co-teaching. The problem lies in the fact that there is a distinct lack of literature regarding assignment of teachers into co-teaching partnerships. An abundance of literature exists on how school leaders hire and assign teachers to regular classrooms and how school leaders make choices affecting the school
culture. Yet, there is a lack of literature at the crossroads of these co-teaching concepts, and this gap is what the research study results fill.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

In this chapter, the qualitative research design is discussed, in addition to the researcher’s role in the study, the setting, and the participants. Following those sections, data collection methods are articulated along with data analysis methods. Trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the research study conclude this chapter. The purpose of this third chapter is to reiterate the nature and purpose of the qualitative research study, offering more detailed information regarding the methods utilized for conducting the research.

Design

The research study followed a qualitative research design. According to Yin (2011), qualitative research “represents an attractive and fruitful way of doing research” (p. 6). Qualitative research allows the researcher to build “a complex, holistic picture” while investigating a social or human problem (Creswell, 2007, p. 249).

To further refine the research design, a case study design methodology was followed. Creswell (2007) stated that case study research has a “long, distinguished history across many disciplines” (p. 73). The origins of case study research lie in anthropology and sociology (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). For the current research study, a case study design is critical in that it allowed the researcher to “retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” of participants making way for a rich, thick description of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014, p. 19).

More specifically, a collective case study, also called a multiple case study, was utilized for the research (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), a collective case study presents a stronger and more meaningful approach to the phenomenon. Collective case studies allow for a single issue to be researched through illustrations of multiple cases (Creswell, 2007). This
research study employed multiple cases, as each participant leads a different school or school
system where independent choices are made regarding assignment of co-teachers. Additionally,
the collective case study followed an instrumental approach as the attention was on a single issue
of factors impacting choices in assigning co-teachers rather than a single case itself (Creswell,
2007). This allowed for the individuals’ cases to be used as a means for more comprehensively
illustrating and understanding the phenomenon.

Research Questions

Central Question

What are the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when
assigning co-teaching partnerships in their respective schools?

Subquestions

RQ1: What personal characteristics of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching
assignments?

RQ2: What professional experiences of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-
teaching assignments?

RQ3: What certifications and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices
of co-teaching assignments?

Setting

The generalized setting for the research study was Georgia. Each of the school districts
represented belonged collectively to one of the 16 regional educational areas in Georgia.
Participants for this study hailed from a regional education area in northern Georgia.
Participants from both urban and rural school districts shared their experiences of pairing co-
teaching partners. Settings for the personal interviews were at each individual school or district
office, based on the participant’s position within the school system. In this particular regional educational area, there are a total of 13 school systems that represent a total of 141 individual schools. Schools within these districts are elementary, middle, high, or alternative education schools. For this study, 53 schools have their co-teaching partnerships chosen by one of the study participants.

For this collective case study, multiple settings were used for data collection. The settings were various elementary and middle schools in North Georgia in addition to district educational offices from seven school districts. Yin (2011) noted fieldwork in the form of interviews should take place in natural surroundings, so the interviews for data collection of this study were conducted at each participant’s home school or office. All interviews were conducted with only the interviewer and interviewee in attendance. The selection of participants affected which schools in North Georgia were part of the setting for the case study. There were seven districts included in the study which encompass 141 schools, and the participants in the study choose co-teaching assignments in 53 of those schools. Five districts were represented in personal interviews encompassing both urban and rural school districts.

Each participant determined which room of the school or district office was utilized for the interview. Participants who were school principals opted to use their offices on the school campuses, and participants who were district level special education directors opted to use their offices at the district board of education office buildings. All settings for interviews were quiet and secluded which is recommended by Creswell (2007). According to Creswell, a “quiet location free from distractions” (p. 133) may provide encouragement for the participant to speak more freely. Hesitant participants may yield less data, so a setting conducive to open discussion is best (Creswell, 2007). For this reason, participants completed the interviews at their home
school or district office, with only the interviewer and interviewee in attendance to encourage full participation and minimize disinclination in responses.

In addition to interviews being conducted at the participants’ home schools or district offices, participants were given the opportunity to provide data via an online asynchronous discussion board and an open-ended questionnaire. The online asynchronous discussion board was hosted by BoardHost, and the open-ended questionnaires were hosted by SurveyMonkey. Each of these data collection methods was completed by the participants in any personal setting that the participant chose. With data being collected in comfortable and participant-selected settings, the participants were more likely to share comprehensive data free from hesitations (Creswell, 2007).

Participants

For this qualitative collective case study, the participants were 13 school leaders who have experienced the phenomenon studied. The participants represented seven school districts, and some were district level administrators while others served as school principals. Principals are noted as the school leaders who offer the guiding force in their respective schools by possessing a multidimensional role (Khan & Iqbal, 2013; Senechal, 2013), where they are ultimately responsible for maintaining school culture (Khan & Iqbal, 2014), implementing school policy (Murray, 2014), and hiring and assigning faculty (Ball & Green, 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Kalogrides, Loeb, & Beteille, 2013; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). District level school leaders also perform many of the same duties on a wider scale that encompasses the entire school district. While these are not the only duties of a school leader, Bourke and Brown (2014) stated that hiring faculty is the most important task of a school principal. These choices made by school leaders affect the student learning environment (Khan & Iqbal, 2014), and must meet the
comprehensive needs of the entire school population (Cranston, 2012). Deriving from the literature, it can be determined that principals and district level administrators are the leaders of their schools and districts and possess the authority of teacher assignment. Therefore, six principals and seven district level administrators were the participants in this study.

Purposive sampling was used to select participants because purposive sampling allows the researcher to carefully select participants who have experience with the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). According to Yin (2011), purposive sampling is deliberate and will most likely “yield the most relevant and plentiful data” (p. 88). Bias may be reduced by the implementation of purposive sampling when the researcher chooses participants who offer “contrary evidence or views” (Yin, 2011, p. 88). For this study, 13 school leaders from multiple school districts agreed to participate, which offered a greater opportunity for diversity in participant responses. School leaders from a single district may follow a district policy that guides their choices in teacher assignment. Through the incorporation of multiple districts, the study included data from participants with conflicting views on co-teacher placement. Differing districts and differing professional titles of the participants helped ensure as diverse experiences of the phenomenon as possible.

Purposive sampling was chosen over convenience sampling because convenience sampling has the possibility of producing an unknown degree of incompleteness in participant responses (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011). Random sampling was also not selected for the study because the study findings were not generalized numerically to the entire population (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011). It was imperative to select participants who had experienced the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships and who represented diverse experiences. Convenience sampling and random sampling would not guarantee that each participant had experienced the
phenomenon; however, purposive criterion sampling ensured the phenomenon had been experienced by the participants (Creswell, 2007). For this reason, purposive sampling was used to select 13 school leaders as participants for the case study.

Due to the utilization of purposive sampling, Yin (2011) recommended the selection of participants at the broader level followed by the narrower level. Through the selection of participants from multiple school districts, this study addressed the broader level of participant selection. The intent was to increase the chances of getting thick and rich descriptions of personal experiences from multiple participants of multiple school districts. According to Yin, participants from multiple sites increase the confidence of the study, especially if common themes emerge from participants of diverse social and economic conditions. At the narrower level of participant selection, Yin suggested contemplation of the “study topic and depth of data collection” from each participant when determining the appropriate number of participants (p. 92). Based on the recommendations of Yin, the collective case study included 13 purposively selected school leaders from multiple school districts within North Georgia, particularly participants who had experienced the phenomenon and wished to participate in the study.

For the selection of participants, with approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A), I made an initial contact with district school superintendents asking for permission to contact school leaders in their districts. I used email to contact some superintendents and followed up with a telephone conversation. Seven school district superintendents granted approval for me to contact their school district leaders to solicit participants for the research study. Following superintendent approval, an email was sent to all district level administrators and school principals from the approved districts in North Georgia. The initial email, found in Appendix B, contained an introduction of me, an explanation of the
research study, and a copy of the participant consent form, which included an area for school leaders to verify each had experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching partnerships. This email was sent to purposively-selected possible participants who represented seven different school districts. Sampling choices were not based on gender, race, or years of experience. The only characteristic determining the eligibility of participants was having experienced the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships. Even though sampling choices were unaffected by gender or years of experience, the sample included a variety of each. Ten of the participants were females, and three participants were males. Six participants had at least a decade of experience in their current school leadership positions. The least experience was one year, and the greatest experience was 15 years. All of the participants had a background in education prior to taking on their school leadership roles. A full description of the participants can be found in the fourth chapter of this manuscript.

Procedures

Procedures for this collective case study began with obtaining approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A). Following approval, I conducted a pilot study with a former school principal who had experienced the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships. The pilot study took place at the former principal’s business office. After the pilot study was completed, revisions to the interview questions were deemed unnecessary.

Following the pilot study, I began to contact possible participants. I sent out the initial email (see Appendix B), providing potential participants with an introduction of me, a description of the study, and a participant consent form (see Appendices C and D). On the consent form, school leaders were asked for verification of having experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching partnerships. School leaders who chose to participate had the option to
electronically sign the consent form and return to me via email or physically sign it and fax it to me.

For the school leaders who gave consent to participate in the research study, I sent a second email delineating their duties as noted in their signed consent form. This email was in two formats based on the participant’s signed consent form (see Appendices E and F). I sent a follow up email both expressing appreciation and requesting an interview date, time, and location. This follow up email included information for the participants to create login information for the asynchronous discussion board along with the dates the discussion board was available. Additionally, this email also contained information about accessing and completing the online questionnaire at their leisure.

I collected data via interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires. The interviews were professionally transcribed by a third party vendor. Member checks of the transcribed interviews were available to participants to offer the opportunity for participants to clarify or elaborate on any issues arising from the member check. As for the asynchronous discussion board, participants were free to login, review, and comment as many times as they desired during the period the discussion board was available. This allowed each participant to clarify or expound on any of their posts or on the posts of other participants.

Once all data was collected via each of the three methods, I began analysis of the data following a method proposed by Yin (2011). All data was compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted prior to drawing conclusions based on the data (Yin, 2011). The procedures in this section outlined the steps followed to successfully conduct this collective case study, beginning with securing approval to commence research all the way to analyzing the data collected.
The Researcher’s Role

My role in this research study was that of an interpreter as I wished to understand and describe the factors impacting choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. I was the human instrument through which the collected data was filtered and analyzed. For this reason, I brought certain biases or assumptions to the research study. I was a co-teacher for six years in a public middle school mathematics classroom. My experience was shared with three different co-teachers of varying personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge. Two of my former co-teachers were what I considered to be highly effective in classroom management, content knowledge, and student relations. For this reason, I have brought bias to the study because I feel that I have some preconceived knowledge of the factors that comprise an effective co-teaching partnership. According to Yin (2011), “the trick is not to permit the existence of one’s mental framework to bias” the integrity of the research study (p. 104). To combat my own personal bias as much as possible, I relied on the relevant literature to guide my interview and focus group questions.

Assumptions that I had during the proposal phase of the research study included an ontological philosophical assumption and a constructivist paradigm. Creswell (2007) stated that the use of participants’ direct quotations will aid in determining evidence from perspectives different from my own. For this reason, I utilized direct quotations from interviews, focus groups, and questionnaire submissions. This process also brought in the constructivist paradigm, where I was able to “rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” during the data collection and analysis phases of the research study (Creswell, 2007, p. 20).

Data Collection

Data was collected for this qualitative research study via three different methods:
interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires. In applying this triangulation pattern of data collection, I was inclined to note “corroborating or conflicting ideas or data” as is critical in qualitative research (Yin, 2011, p. 153). Triangulation consists of utilizing three ways of verifying or corroborating data in order to strengthen the validity of the study (Yin, 2011). Additionally, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main research study.

**Interviews**

The initial method of data collection for the collective case research study was individual interviews. According to Yin (2014), interviews lend the strengths of being targeted and insightful, along with being a crucial component of case study research. Interviews followed a semi-structured and focused format that allowed for guided conversations (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), focused interviews should have a short duration of less than one hour, contain open-ended questions that are followed closely by the researcher, and follow a conversational format. Each individual participant interview for the research study was digitally recorded for the purpose of transcribing the data for later analysis.

Since interviews should follow a conversational mode, the most important questions of the interview were open-ended rather than closed ended (Yin, 2011). According to Yin (2011), qualitative interviews allow the researcher to “understand a participant’s world, which is likely to include concentrated efforts at mastering the meaning of the participant’s words and phrases” (p. 135). For this reason, I took part in memoing during the interviews to record my efforts at understanding the participants’ meaning (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011).

Critical components of interviewing in a qualitative research study are the interview questions. While Yin (2011) recommended that the researcher set the boundaries for the conversation, the participant should be allowed to “color it” (p 137). Additionally, Yin (2011)
stated that the “relationship between the researcher and the participant is not strictly scripted” (p. 134). Rather than sticking to a definitive set of interview questions, the researcher should have a “mental framework of study questions” with the implication that “specific verbalized questions as posed to any given participant will differ according to the context and setting of the interview” (Yin, 2011, p. 134). For this reason, interview questions for this research study acted as a guide only, which were edited and reflected upon during and following interviews.

With the incorporation of a mental framework of interview questions to guide the interview, Yin (2011) also suggested strategies for improving actual qualitative interviews. These strategies included the researcher speaking in modest amounts, being nondirective, remaining neutral, maintaining rapport, and analyzing while interviewing. According to Yin, the researcher should speak in modest amounts, thereby allowing the participant to do most of the talking. This is important for allowing the participants to “vocalize their own priorities as part of their own way of describing the world as they perceive it”, and this keeps the researcher in a nondirective role (Yin, 2011, p.136). Also, Yin recommended the researcher pay close attention to his or her own tone of voice, body language, and facial expressions throughout the interview in order to maintain the neutrality of the researcher. “The least desirable conversation occurs when the participant tries to please or otherwise cater” to the researcher based on the perceived disposition of the researcher by the participant during the interview (Yin, 2011, p. 137). A rapport between the researcher and the participant must be built from the beginning of the interview, and it is the role of the researcher to maintain that rapport (Yin, 2011). According to Yin, the researcher had the “special responsibility to avoid conversations that might do harm to the other person” during the qualitative interview in order to maintain rapport (p. 138). A final suggestion by Yin is for the researcher to analyze throughout the interview. By employing the
qualitative interview strategies proposed by Yin, I sought to create a reliable form of data collection.

According to Yin (2011), interview questions should be open ended allowing for the participant to respond fully and the questions should be a guide only that acts as a mental framework for the researcher during the qualitative interview (Yin, 2011). Yin recommended beginning the interview with a brief exchange of pleasantries and background sharing. Following the introduction, grand tour questions should be utilized to establish a broad sense of the topic without biasing the conversation (Yin, 2011). For the current research study, grand tour questioning initiated the interviews of participants. After grand tour questioning, the key questions allowed for the opportunity of appropriate deviation as the need arose during individual interviews, but the researcher was tasked with maintaining the discussion to stay within the necessary topic by using the prompts for each key question (Yin, 2011). Additionally, the use of prompts for each of the key questions was utilized. According to Jacob and Furgerson (2012), the use of prompts keep the researcher on track while allowing for “unexpected data to emerge” (p. 4). The design of broad questions allows the interview to explore multiple directions while prompts help maintain the original focus of the interview (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). The following interview protocol was designed incorporating key questions with prompts. Also, a full interview protocol is available in appendix G of this manuscript.

**Key Question # 1:** Tell me about your teachers and their impact on students.

**Prompt:** How do your teachers affect the school climate in addition to the climate of the classroom?

**Prompt:** Tell me how your teachers impact student achievement.

**Prompt:** Describe how your teachers impact student engagement and motivation to learn.
**Key Question #2**: Describe some of the choices you, as the school leader, must make for your school.

*Prompt*: How does local, state, and national accountability affect your choices as the school leader?

*Prompt*: Who within the school influences your choices for the school?

*Prompt*: How do forces outside the school impact your choices for the school?

*Prompt*: When hiring new faculty and assigning teachers to classes and grade levels, what drives your choices?

**Key Question #3**: Walk me through the current implementation of co-teaching in your school.

*Prompt*: How do you define co-teaching?

*Prompt*: Based on your experiences, what are your impressions of co-teaching?

*Prompt*: Describe outcomes you have personally noted that derived from co-teaching classrooms.

*Prompt*: How do you determine which courses will be co-taught?

**Key Question #4**: Tell me about your experiences with pairing co-teachers in your current school and include whether you feel the pairings were effective choices or not.

*Prompt*: How do you determine which teachers will be paired as co-teachers?

*Prompt*: How do personal characteristics of individual teachers impact your choice in pairing co-teaching partnerships?

*Prompt*: Describe a co-teaching partnership you have chosen that displayed strongly compatible personalities, if any.

*Prompt*: How does certification and content knowledge of the teachers influence your choices, if at all? Is it beneficial to have both co-teachers certified in the content or
certified in special education? Why?

**Prompt:** How do prior co-teaching experiences of teachers influence your choices, if at all? Do you find that you prefer to assign co-teachers who have been co-teachers in the past?

**Prompt:** What do you consider to be more useful in choosing co-teaching partners: prior experience in co-teaching or professional certifications and content knowledge? Why?

**Prompt:** What do you feel is the single most important factor to be considered when you assign co-teachers?

In order to more effectively evaluate the open-ended interview questions, a pilot study was utilized. “A pilot study involves small-scale testing of the procedures” that were proposed for the main research study prior to the data collection process of the main study (Gall, Gall, & Borg 2007, p. 56). Additionally, the information gathered from a pilot study was utilized to revise the procedures in order to better articulate the study and the data collection methods (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2014); however, the pilot study offered no evidence that the original protocol should be altered. According to Yin (2011), a pilot study helps refine the study prior to full research begins. Gall et al. (2007) stated that glitches can be noted and corrected more easily through the implementation of a pilot study rather than when the main study is enacted.

For the research study, the developed interview questions and prompts were piloted to a former school administrator who paired co-teaching partners for multiple school years. This pilot participant had experience similar to the main study participants leading to a solid basis for the pilot study. Based on the data gathered from the pilot study, interview questions, as well as other data collection methods, were not revised.
Asynchronous Online Focus Group

The second method of data collection for the collective case study was the use of a focus group. Yin (2011) stated that groups are considered focused on a common experience or idea. Creswell (2007) recommended focus groups, as the interaction between participants, may provide rich data not disclosed during individual interviews. According to Underhill and Olmstead (2003), focus groups may be conducted via online text only asynchronous discussion groups in place of traditional in-person focus groups. Online text only discussion groups provide data that is rich in topic-related comments and unique ideas, similar to face to face focus groups (Underhill & Olmstead, 2003). Due to the similarities found in each method of focus group data collection, I opted to utilize an online text only, asynchronous focus group discussion board as a means of data collection. The software selected for implementing the online focus group discussion board is Boardhost. Boardhost (“Boardhost Forum Features,” 2015) offered a short uniform resource locator with a personalized subdomain for the researcher in addition to unlimited posts by participants. Technical support was readily available as the researcher created public or private forums (“Boardhost Forum Features,” 2015). According to Deggs, Grover and Kacirek (2010), “qualitative researchers should be amenable to the new forms of data that are emerging in the field” (p. 1035). I sought to utilize modern technology to collect data for this qualitative study.

Online text only asynchronous focus group discussion boards afford multiple advantages over traditional focus group interviews for the researcher and the participants. According to Diggs et al. (2010), asynchronous discussion boards allow for more efficient collection of data in addition to the ability of including participants from different geographic locations. Abrams, Wang, Song, and Galindo-Gonzalez (2015) stated that participants who are unwilling to
participate in face to face focus groups may be more likely to participate in online text only
discussion groups. Online discussion groups provide a more relaxed atmosphere for participants
to respond, as well as offering “visual anonymity that lowers inhibitions of participants”
(Abrams et al., 2015, p. 83). Other advantages for participants include provision for an equal
opportunity for all participants to speak freely without fear of a single dominant participant
(Abrams et al., 2015) and accommodations to the participants’ personal schedules (Deggs et al.,
2010). This qualitative research study involved participants who were school leaders. These
school leaders had limited schedule availability and lacked willingness to devote time for
personal interviews and traditional focus group meetings. Using asynchronous online discussion
groups allowed participants to respond at their leisure and not feel the need to wait for other
participants to respond (Abrams et al., 2015). Interruption of discussion by other participants in
online discussion boards is obsolete as participants can respond at any point. Participants were
further allowed to “track running scripts and catch up” if called away during a posted discussion
(Abrams et al., 2015, p. 82).

Participants were asked to describe their experiences with the phenomenon while
building off one another’s responses. Each of the initial threads for discussion is listed below.
According to Abrams et al. (2015), the moderator role of an online text only discussion group
calls for “less intervening and less directives” than traditional focus group moderators (p. 82).
Deggs et al. (2010) recommended preparing well developed instructions for participants
regarding the implementation of the online discussion group, as well as including this
information on the informed consent documentation supplied to participants. For this reason, I
sought to only intervene in the discussion when necessary to redirect the conversation to stay on
topic or elicit further description or discussion of a concept.
The online asynchronous text only discussion group utilized for this qualitative research case study provided data necessary to triangulate the results of the study so that it yielded more reliable results (Yin, 2011). Focus group discussion branched from each of the discussion board threads noted below. Appendix H of this manuscript contains the focus group discussion threads used as well.

1. Describe a time where you, as the leader of your school, had to make a choice that impacted your school population. What influenced your choice? Looking back, was it the correct choice? Who was most affected by your choice?

2. When making faculty choices for your school, what do you consider to be the most important factor for consideration: personal characteristics of the teacher, professional experiences of the teacher, or content knowledge and certifications of the teacher? Why? This can include hiring new teachers and assigning teachers to grade and subject levels.

3. If you were choosing teachers to become co-teachers, how would you choose? What factors would impact your choice? What things would you consider before making your choice?

4. Please tell me about challenges you have encountered when choosing new co-teaching partnerships. How did you overcome these challenges?

5. Suppose you are faced with choosing a new co-teaching partnership in your school. You have a general education teacher with eight years of experience in the classroom with five of those years being a co-teacher. This general education teacher is innovative, outspoken, and enjoys taking risks with instructional methods. Data driven instruction to attain high student achievement has been a focus of this teacher for years while this teacher maintains a relaxed classroom management position. You have two choices for a
co-teacher for this general education teacher. Choice A is a five-year veteran who has been teaching in a self-contained resource classroom all five years. This special education teacher has no past experience with student achievement, as he/she has served in only a self-contained classroom with students who were not obligated to participate in standardized testing, and believes in educating the whole child to become a successful member of society. As this teacher has been in special education for five years, the teacher is well versed in the needs of special education students, but this teacher tends to follow a teacher centered approach to instruction along with strong classroom management skills. Choice B is a special education teacher with a single year of experience, but this teacher is eager and enthusiastic about trying new things while still seeming timid with the students. This teacher believes in student centered instruction that follows the state standards, but this teacher demonstrates poor classroom management skills. Choice B is certified in both special education and the content area to be co-taught. How would you determine which special education teacher should enter into a co-teaching partnership with the regular education teacher? Which special education teacher would you choose? Why? What other information would you like to know about each of the three teachers prior to making a choice?

**Open-ended Questionnaires**

The final method of data collection used for the research study was open-ended questionnaires (see Appendix H). While Yin (2011) described the researcher as “the main research instrument for collecting data in a qualitative study” (p. 13), Yin admitted other instruments are necessary in conducting qualitative research. Open-ended questionnaires provide data complementary to other means of data collection (Harland & Holey, 2011). For this
reason, I opted to incorporate open-ended questionnaires into the qualitative data collection. According to Harland and Holey (2011), open-ended questionnaires can provide useful and complex data regarding the interpretation of outcomes of a qualitative study. While Harland and Holey support the use of triangulation in qualitative data collection, the addition of open-ended questions can also provide the opportunity for “a greater level of sophistication during interpretation and analysis” (p. 485). Yin recommended using open-ended questions as conversing probes to facilitate discussion of a phenomenon. Data collected from open-ended question responses can provide as much data as other methods of collection (Harland & Holey, 2011). For these reasons, open-ended questionnaires were utilized for the qualitative case study with the following questions.

1. What is your name, title, and school name?
2. How many years have you served in your current position at this school or other schools?
3. Describe the impact of your faculty on the success of students in your school. What is the role of the faculty in student success?
4. How do you think your choices in teacher assignment affect your faculty’s perceptions of you as the school leader?
5. How do your choices in teacher assignment express your desired outcome for your school environment? How is your school culture and environment affected by your choices in teacher assignment?
6. Provide an example of a successful co-teaching partnership you have chosen as a school leader. What makes you feel the partnership was successful? How did you feel when you were able to partner a successful co-teaching partnership?
7. Tell me about how you think co-teaching partnerships should be chosen. What factors
should be considered when choosing co-teachers? Given the personal characteristics of teachers, prior professional experiences of teachers, or content knowledge and certifications of teachers, why would one factor be more important in your choice of partnering co-teachers that the other two factors?

8. When considering a choice in partnering co-teachers, what personal characteristics of the teachers would you deem most important for influencing your choice?

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of data for this research study followed a model presented by Yin (2011), who described the process of qualitative data analysis in five basic steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. Data from all three data collection methods was first compiled and organized into a database (Yin, 2011). Following compilation, data was broken into chunks and assigned a label or code through disassembly of the data (Yin, 2011). Reassembling the data into categories then took place through the use of themes found during disassembly (Yin, 2011). Next, the themes that emerged from the reassembly of data into cohesive groups were interpreted and utilized to generate tables and graphs where appropriate (Yin, 2011). Finally, conclusions were drawn from the findings of the entire study (Yin, 2011).

For my study, data was analyzed using a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis software program that only served to assist, rather than take the place of, the researcher (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2011), collected data must first be compiled through organization into a database. The objective of effective compilation of collected data is to organize the data systematically prior to the formal analysis (Yin, 2011). NVivo, produced by QSR International, was utilized due to the multiple functions it provided (“NVivo 10 for Windows,” 2012). According to the QSR International website, NVivo allowed me to input data from Microsoft
Word documents containing transcriptions of the interviews and focus group (“NVivo 10 for Windows,” 2012). Additionally, NVivo offered the ability to store data in a single file to be accessed via multiple devices with the option of reviewing audio files while viewing the transcription of the audio (“NVivo 10 for Windows,” 2012). While the software did not replace the researcher, it did aid me in coding data while allowing me to insert memos to document my coding and analysis of the data (“NVivo 10 for Windows,” 2012). In addition to the storage of compiled data in NVivo, transcripts of interviews, focus groups, and questionnaires were maintained in Microsoft Word documents and organized into online folders through Dropbox. The data was accessible to the researcher through multiple sites and devices.

Following the compilation of data, the collected data was disassembled (Yin, 2011). The data was broken into chunks for analysis and assigned labels or codes (Yin, 2011). During the disassembly, memos were recorded in NVivo to keep track of initial ideas that further developed throughout the formal analysis (Yin, 2011). Level one codes were assigned during this phase of the data analysis using descriptive coding. According to Saldaña (2013), descriptive coding allows each piece of data to be categorized based on a single descriptor. While the initial descriptors may not suit all pieces of data, additional descriptors developed as I moved through the data (Saldaña, 2013). This initial coding created a categorized inventory for further recoding (Saldaña, 2013).

Yin (2011) recommended that disassembled data be reassembled into categories that develop from the level one codes established during disassembly. Saldaña (2013) stated that the second level of coding offers a more refined synthesis of initial codes. For this research study, pattern coding was followed as it sought to determine major themes from the initial coding of data. According to Yin, the reassembly phase incorporates freedom of choice that allows
researchers to use their own judgment. Yin also cautioned that the use of personal judgment should be as free from biases as possible. To neutralize these biases, Yin recommended that the researcher make constant comparisons throughout the reassembly to look for similarities in data, watch for negative cases where data that seemed to be similar were found to be dissimilar, and engage in rival thinking that allows the researcher to search for alternative explanations for initial ideas. During the reassembly, level one codes developed into higher levels of coding and a higher conceptual level of the collected data (Yin, 2011).

Yin also recommended creation of an array of data codes as each emerges. For the research study, an array that moved from concrete data to abstract theoretical implications was used during reassembly. According to Saldaña, coding can be cyclical where more initial codes develop that impact the themes, which emerge in the second stage of coding. The reassembly phase is critical to the analysis of the data.

Interpretation of the reassembled data followed next (Yin, 2011). According to Yin (2011), three modes of interpretation may be employed which are description, description plus a call for action, and explanation. Description offers the researcher an opportunity to use the collected data to describe a phenomenon (Yin, 2011). Description plus a call for action includes the description of the phenomenon while attempting to elicit subsequent action (Yin, 2011). Explanation is “devoted to unraveling the events that have been studied” (Yin, 2011, p. 214). For the current study, the most beneficial mode of interpretation was description as I wished to describe a phenomenon based on collected data. Tables were created to illustrate the interpreted data in a visual format (Yin, 2011). Yin (2011) stated that interpretation is the “craft of giving your own meaning to reassembled data” (p. 207), and the data analysis strategy allowed that.

The final phase of data analysis recommended by Yin (2011) was drawing conclusions
from the interpreted data. According to Yin (2011), a conclusion for a research study is “some kind of overarching statement or series of statements that raises the findings of a study to a higher conceptual level” (p. 220). Additionally, the conclusion must be “connected both to the preceding interpretive phase and to a study’s main data or empirical findings” (Yin, 2011, p. 220). Yin described five types of conclusions for qualitative research studies. The first was concluding by call for new research where the conclusion takes the form of a question to be addressed by future research (Yin, 2011). Challenging generalizations and social stereotypes was another type of conclusion which could be drawn if the study demonstrated findings that deviated from the current literature (Yin, 2011). New concepts, theories, or discoveries about human behavior may emerge as the concluding evidence of a research study (Yin, 2011). The fourth type of conclusion would be a conclusion that makes a substantial proposition in an attempt to illuminate an integral concept or make a prediction (Yin, 2011). Generalization of the findings to a broader set of situations is the final type of conclusion proposed by Yin; this type of conclusion connects the study to theoretical constructs and offers an argument on how to apply the findings to new situations. For this research study, the method of conclusion utilized did not develop until the other phases of data analysis were accomplished. Conclusions were not drawn until the data was been compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted due to the nature of qualitative research (Yin, 2011).

For the data analysis of the current research, the model of analyzing the data proposed by Yin (2011) was followed. Data was compiled in a logical organization which led to “stronger analysis and more rigorous qualitative research” (Yin, 2011, p. 182). Following compilation, data was disassembled into level one codes that perpetuated the higher level codes generated from the level one codes. Data was then reassembled and arrayed so that themes began to
emerge (Yin, 2011). Interpretations were made with careful attention to inconsistent terminology to ensure higher conceptual levels and themes leading to the final phase of data analysis, which is concluding (Yin, 2011). During each phase, qualitative research software was utilized for storage and initial coding of the data to maintain a record of the researcher’s thoughts and ideas during each phase of data analysis.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness can be increased through precautions taken throughout the research development and study. According to Yin (2011), maintaining transparency of the research procedures, employing research procedures methodically, and adhering to evidence can each contribute to the trustworthiness of a research study. Research procedures should be publicly accessible and carefully documented so the study remains transparent allowing for others to review (Yin, 2011). Approaching the qualitative research study methodically brings integrity to the study by following an orderly set of research procedures (Yin, 2011). Yin also recommended maintaining an adherence to the evidence presented by the collected data through making certain all data analyzed is derived from the evidence presented through the collection of data. By keeping research procedures transparent, methodical, and grounded in the collected evidence, trustworthiness of a qualitative research study may be improved.

**Credibility**

Credibility of the study was strengthened by the incorporation of a triangulation method of data collection and member checks of the transcribed personal interviews. According to Swezey (2014), credibility in qualitative research is similar to internal validity. During the design phase of the research, a theoretical basis of choice theory by Glasser (1988) was utilized to add credibility to the study (Yin, 2014). Pattern matching was utilized during data analysis as
recommended by Yin (2014) in addition to seeking to confirm that findings address each of the stated research questions (Yin, 2011).

**Dependability**

According to Swezey (2014), dependability is “akin to reliability” (p. 181) in qualitative research. To increase dependability of the results of the study, interviews with participants were digitally recorded and transcribed. An audit trail was evident along with a strict adherence to case study protocol to increase dependability (Yin, 2014). Development of a case study database during compilation, disassembly, and reassembly of the collected data further impacted dependability of the study findings.

**Transferability**

Transferability is an alternate method of describing external validity in qualitative research (Swezey, 2014). According to Swezey (2014), “the reader determines transferability of findings, as opposed to the researcher generalizing findings to a population” (p. 181). To increase the transferability of the study, I offered rich descriptions in order for readers to determine if the findings apply to other contexts.

**Confirmability**

Objectivity is synonymous with confirmability in qualitative research (Swezey, 2014). To increase the confirmability of this research study, an audit trail with documentation of data collection and analysis methods was maintained (Swezey, 2014). Interviews were digitally recorded (Creswell, 2007) with the allowance of participant member checks of interview transcripts to further increase confirmability of study findings (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2011).

**Ethical Considerations**

With the use of human participants in the research study, it was imperative to provide
ethical considerations. Yin (2011) recommended maintaining a strong sense of ethical responsibility through proper treatment of the participants and careful handling of the collected data. Due to the research procedures being at the discretion of the researcher, prominence of ethical principles should guide the research study (Yin, 2011). Maintaining research integrity promotes that the researcher’s words “can be trusted as representing truthful positions and statements” (Yin, 2011, p. 40). The American Educational Research Association promotes research integrity as being responsible to the field of research, the intellectual ownership of the written words, and the review of the research (Yin, 2011).

For this research study, measures were adopted to maintain ethical considerations of participants and data. No data was collected until all appropriate approvals were received from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board. A letter of approval can be found in Appendix A of this manuscript. Additionally, all participants received full explanations of the study including research procedures and handling of all confidential data, along with a written consent form prior to participation (Yin, 2014). Participants were advised that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time. Confidentiality of participants was achieved through assignment of pseudonyms for interviews (Yin, 2014). Open-ended questionnaires were completed via an online survey tool that does not record the identity of the participant. Participants created their own unique login and password for the asynchronous focus group discussion board to maintain anonymity. Each of these measures denoted ethical considerations for the research study, the study participants, and the data collected from the participants.

**Summary**

In concluding this methodology chapter, a brief review of the chapter components is in order. The research design for the study has been clearly identified as a collective case study,
and justification has been given for the selection of this research design. The setting was described for each method of data collection in addition to offering support for selection of the setting. Discussion of participants and ethical considerations for the participants were addressed. Triangulation using three different data collection methods was identified, explained, and supported. Analysis of the collected data was described to follow a method of compilation, disassembly, reassembly, interpretation, and conclusions (Yin, 2011). A full description of the research methods was delineated in order to increase the trustworthiness of the qualitative collective case research study.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present the findings and results from analysis of data collected during this study. In Chapter Four, the participants are described in detail, and the results are presented. First, a description of the theme identification process is presented. Following the description, results are presented as each of the identified themes relate to the subquestions of the study. Finally, results are presented as they relate to the central research question.

The purpose of this case study has been to discover the factors impacting choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. The central research question seeks to discover what factors impact these choices while the subquestions each address a more specified integrated element of the factors. The three research subquestions address personal characteristics of teachers, professional experiences of teachers, and certifications and content knowledge of teachers that impact choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. All of these integrated elements blend to answer the central research question and provide results to that end.

The justification for designing this research study with the stated central research question and subquestions stems from a lack of literature defining exploration into the choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Empirical evidence is present in the literature for the implementation of co-teaching along with the effects of co-teaching on the classroom (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014). Additionally, literature denotes the choices of school leaders in hiring teachers (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). The problem resides in the fact that
empirical evidence at the intersection of these concepts is unobtainable in current literature. A lack of research into the crossroads of school leaders' choices and co-teaching partnerships was the problem that necessitated this study.

Data was collected concurrently through three varying methods. Each participant was asked to complete an online open-ended questionnaire initially. Following the completion of the questionnaire, participants were asked to participate in a semi-structured interview or an online asynchronous focus group. Two participants elected to participate in both the interview and focus group. From these data sources, collected data was initially coded to determine broad themes. Once these themes emerged, all data were revisited multiple times in order to refine the emerged themes into the final themes as presented in the results of this chapter.

**Participants**

The participants in this research study included school leaders from seven different North Georgia school districts. Participants were either school principals or district-level special education directors. Years of experience for each participant varied from a single year in the current position to over 10 years in the current position. Table 2 presents the demographic information of the participants in terms of job title, gender, and years of experience in their current position. Each of the participants is described in greater detail in the following narratives.

**Sandra**

Sandra is a principal with 33 years of experience in education, and she has spent 15 years in her current role as a high school principal in rural North Georgia. Sandra believes firmly that teachers impact student performance, but she also believes that co-teachers offer greater emotional stability to students than single-teacher classrooms. Her impression of co-teaching
Table 2

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Years of Experience in Current Position</th>
<th>District of Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kim</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susie</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darla</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jim</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae</td>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

was positive, but she was quick to add that it had to be done correctly. Sandra shared that a majority of the classes in her high school are co-taught, and she proclaimed her definition of co-teaching as “two teachers working together to make sure that they are able to meet all the needs in the classroom.” While Sandra has a rich history in education, she made multiple references to
Brenda

Brenda has spent her entire 14-year educational career in a single middle school in District H. She was a teacher in the school for three years, assistant principal for three years, and is currently in her eighth year as principal of the middle school. She believes that co-teaching is “dual teaching,” and she has seen numerous positive outcomes of co-taught classes. She lends some of the credit for these positive outcomes to the implementation of a co-teaching contract reviewed and signed annually between each co-teaching partnership at her school. She stated that she found the co-teaching contract to force a conversation that may not happen otherwise where the two teachers involved discuss roles and responsibilities. Brenda’s middle school has co-teaching in all four content areas across all three grade levels, and Brenda stated that she thinks teacher assignment has a direct link to a positive school climate.

Walter

In District G, Walter has spent eight years as principal in an elementary school where he also served two years as assistant principal. Walter stated that teachers are the foremost determinant of a student's academic success in his school. Additionally, he stated that his primary role as principal was “to lead and support instruction” to make certain teachers have the tools they need to effectively instruct students. Co-teaching takes place in almost every classroom in Walter's school for at least one segment during the day, and Walter said that he finds co-taught classrooms to be very beneficial as long as there is a high level of trust between the collaborating teachers. Walter is currently working on his educational doctorate in addition to his full-time responsibilities as elementary school principal.
Diane

Diane is a district-level special education director for District U. She has held this position for the last decade, and she proudly declared that all school choices she makes are with the district’s students’ needs in mind. Full implementation of co-teaching is present in all schools of District U, and Diane is responsible for the assignment of co-teaching partnerships in each of these schools. Diane said she has witnessed favorable results from co-taught classrooms, and cites her district’s high graduation rate as justification. Her personal definition of co-teaching includes a special education teacher and a regular education teacher in the same class for an entire segment. Diane plainly stated that she believes in co-teaching as a means for effective instruction of all students, but she further stated that her faculty should trust her choices as being driven by the needs of the students.

Jane

Jane has spent 33 years in education, but her last seven years have been as a district-level special education director for a rural school district in North Georgia. Additionally, Jane also teaches college courses at a university in North Georgia. Jane was very vocal about her challenges in her current position and how she had to work to win over many district-level administrators before she felt valued in her position. She quickly explained that her challenges helped shape the state of the district's school system today as her role as director of special education requires her to “oversee the effectiveness” of her district’s special education teachers and “seek out ways to support them.” Jane stated that she was so involved in the assignment of district teachers because she felt there was a direct correlation between student engagement and the school’s faculty and staff. Jane stated that she had no intention of retiring in the foreseeable future.
**Kim**

Kim is in her second year as special education director for District R but, Kim also served as a co-teacher and special education department chair for a middle school outside of North Georgia prior to taking her current position with District R in North Georgia. Kim proudly stated that co-teaching is currently implemented in all grade levels from prekindergarten through 12th grade in District R. Kim shared her inhibitions as she started out as the special education director for District R. She said District R was startlingly different from her previous district of employment; she felt that she had to work at building relationships in District R before she truly felt welcomed. She divulged that once the district faculty and personnel believed she was making choices with the needs of students in mind, she felt more at ease in her position. Kim’s definition of co-teaching offered that “both teachers take responsibility for every student's learning in that classroom”.

**Mary**

As a principal of five years in District H, Mary demonstrated a clear affinity for co-taught classrooms. She actually stated that she wished she could “provide a co-teaching setting in all of the classrooms,” but Mary quickly qualified this statement by sharing that the current level of co-teaching implementation was driven only by the scheduling which is based on student needs. Mary said that she made all of her choices for the school with the students’ needs being the driving factor instead of the preferences of teachers within her middle school. Mary stated that she considered her faculty to be leaders for her middle school students’ success and co-taught classes to reap the greatest benefit for students.

**Mark**

Mark is in his first year as the special education district-level director for District G.
Prior to coming to District G, Mark spent six years as the special education director for another district in North Georgia, but he quickly noted the stark differences in his roles even though his title did not change. District G is an urban school system in North Georgia, while Mark’s prior school district was rural. When asked as to his current role as a leader in his district, Mark said that he was lucky enough to only manage special education and 504 plans for the district. He said that his list of duties in the rural school district was lengthier, but the student population was much smaller and less diverse. Additionally, Mark was a co-teacher himself for over a decade, so he rapidly pointed out the positive outcomes he had witnessed as a co-teacher. Mark focused his discussion on the opportunities for students of all abilities to interact in the general education classroom in a way that left no student feeling isolated. Furthermore, Mark confessed that the changes from his previous position to his current position were immense, and he was working to familiarize himself more with District G.

Susie

For the past decade, Susie has been the director of special education for District H. She stated that she believes that co-teaching is a means of providing “specialized support and instruction within the general education setting.” Susie also shared that she believes co-teaching benefits all students in the inclusive classroom, whether the student receives special education services or not. Her primary role as director of special education is to effectively budget funds received for special education so that the needs of special education students are met. Susie stated that District H has co-teaching classrooms in all of the district’s schools. Susie further revealed that her experiences with co-teaching have been favorable, and she gave credit to the classroom teachers who “make or break a school.”
Darla

While Darla began her educational career as a classroom teacher, she moved into administrative roles. She served as an assistant principal and a principal in a middle school setting before spending the last six years as a principal of an elementary school in District H. Darla presented a more ambiguous description of the implementation of co-teaching at her elementary school. When asked about the level of implementation of co-teaching in her building, Darla stated that they do “as much as possible to meet the needs of the students.” Additionally, Darla reported that she bases all of her choices as school principal on research, feedback, and best practices, but she added that her faculty positively affects student achievement, as evidenced by state assessment data.

Jim

Jim is a rookie elementary school principal in District S. Prior to becoming a principal, Jim was a classroom teacher and an assistant school principal. With his change in position, he admitted that maintenance of a positive school environment was at the forefront of his duties. Jim divulged that he seeks substantial discussion from the teachers in his school prior to making a choice because he believes that his teachers “expect him to make sound choices.” As for the implementation of co-teaching at Jim's elementary school, Jim stated that there are multiple classrooms that are co-taught.

Beth

Beth holds substantial history in education. She currently works as the director of student services for District G, but she spent 20 years as a school psychologist prior to coming to the role of director of student services one decade ago. Beth describes her current role as being a support system for her district. She said that she expresses certain expectations and work requirements to
her teachers, and then she follows up by providing additional support whenever necessary. Furthermore, Beth divulged that she struggles with choices because she wants to consider all factors and explore multiple avenues before stating that she has settled on a choice. Also, Beth declared that the “success of children depends on teachers.”

Mae

Mae has been the director of special education for the last 13 years at District S. While Mae was not detailed about the current implementation of co-teaching in her district, she was more vocal about the choices with which she is faced in her position as director of special education. She stated that she feels that it is necessary to make choices with the strengths and weaknesses of all constituents in mind. Furthermore, she related that she feels that these choices carry such weight due to the fact that her “faculty is very influential in student success.”

Results

Descriptions of each of the participants was provided. Now results of this study are presented by answering the research study questions. Prior to addressing the results in relation to the research questions, theme identification is discussed with a description of the data analysis and coding process. A description of results from each data collection method is shared. Codes from collected data are discussed in relation to how each fits within the emerged themes and applies to answering each of the research questions.

Theme Identification

Themes from the collected data emerged from the qualitative analysis of codes identified within the data. Appendix J of this manuscript is a table listing each of the individual codes with the frequency of occurrence in each of the three methods of data collection. Appendix K of this manuscript contains a second table that denotes how each code fits within the emerged themes of
knowledge, personal characteristics, experience, and choices. A chart illustrating the classification of codes into the themes can be found in Appendix K of this manuscript. Each of the themes are discussed in detail below by answering each of the research study questions.

In order to begin analysis of the collected data, axial coding was utilized. According to Yin (2011), axial coding allows the researcher to systematically develop categories and list subcategories for each category. For this study, four categories, or parent nodes, were developed. Each of the parent nodes sought to address the research study questions, which were derived from the current literature base. Therefore, the parent nodes were school leaders’ choices, teachers’ knowledge, teachers’ experience, and teachers’ personal characteristics. As collected data was coded, it was determined that the four parent nodes were insufficient to fully encompass the description of codes. For that reason, additional parent nodes were incorporated as needed to more effectively code the collected data in search of emerging themes. Parent nodes were utilized as a grouping mechanism for coded pieces of data. After the first pass through the collected data, 20 parent nodes, or codes, were created. These parent nodes, or codes, can be found in the frequency chart in Appendix J of this manuscript.

After all pieces of the collected data were coded into the 20 parent nodes, a second pass through all of the collected data was completed. This ensured that no vital data was ignored from coding during the initial pass through the collected data. In addition to making a second pass through all collected data, all coded data was revisited to ensure it had been placed in the proper parent node. Each parent node was analyzed individually with respect to the data pieces each contained. This was significant because codes contained multiple words and phrases signifying a single concept. By revisiting each coded piece of data, the codes were assured to be in the correct parent node. When the second pass through the data was completed, the process of
analyzing how the codes fit together ensued.

To investigate how the codes connected, the parent nodes were reviewed and analyzed to determine the overall themes that embodied the assembled nodes. From this analysis, the four emerging themes discovered were choices, knowledge, experience, and personal characteristics. All 20 parent nodes corresponded with one of the four themes, thus strengthening the authentic emergence of the themes. The themes surfaced from the diligent and methodical analysis of the coded data within the original parent nodes. Each of the 20 parent nodes was assigned to one of the four themes. Appendix K of this manuscript documents how the parent nodes containing the coded data aligned with the themes. Again, each individual piece of coded data was revisited to guarantee its suitable placement within the theme. Some of the parent nodes were renamed in order to combine, split, or correctly define the coded data within. At this point, a fourth pass through the collected data was done to be certain that all pertinent data was effectively coded.

The process of the multiple steps of data analysis resulted in a clear vision of the emerged themes from the collected study data. From the initial pass through the collected data, actions were taken to ensure the proper coding of all data. Repeated passes were made through the collected data as well as the coded data to be certain all were precisely coded. Additionally, original parent nodes gave way to a more comprehensive set of nodes as the analysis continued from pass to pass. The parent nodes were examined to determine the overarching themes from the collected data, and subcategories were verified within each theme. Following the data analysis plan proposed by Yin (2011), the data were compiled, disassembled, reassembled, and interpreted.

**Interview Results**

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine of the research study
participants in each of their individual professional offices. Each interview took no more than 45 minutes and followed a guided conversational format, as recommended by Yin (2014). The purpose of the interviews was to explore the level of experience each participant had assigning co-teachers, any personal bias (in favor or against) about co-teaching, experiences in pairing co-teachers, and choices made by the participants. The interviews were semi-structured with a flexible script followed by the researcher, charting a path of concepts through which participants were encouraged to openly discuss their experiences. Appendix G of this manuscript contains the interview protocol. A mental framework of questions with suggested prompts was utilized for each interview. During the individual semi-structured interviews, the researcher was careful to exhibit impartial facial expressions and body language in order to maintain neutrality, as suggested by Yin (2011). In addition to trying to disguise any researcher bias during the interviews, I sought to build a rapport with each participant from the moment we met. According to Yin, a solid rapport with participants encouraged open conversation during the interview. Because of these measures taken by the researcher, the interviews were successful for collecting rich data for analysis.

While collected data was rich, only nine participants were interviewed. This number of interviews was sufficient for multiple reasons. First, Yin (2011) proposed that the number of participants for any research study should be related to the complexity of the study topic. This study topic is straightforward, seeking only factors that affect choices. There is no treatment group. There is no delicate and personal information involved. Due to the simplicity of the study topic, a minimal number of interview participants were necessary. Secondly, Yin also stated that composition of the participants should be considered when determining the number of participants for a research study. For this study, seven different school districts from North
Georgia were represented by at least one school leader. Participants’ years of experience were vastly different, ranging from a single year to over three decades of experience. The composition of participants enveloped a number of factors that influenced the appropriate number of participants being interviewed.

Finally, data saturation was reached during the collection of data through individual interviews. According to Fusch and Ness (2015), data saturation is reached when “no new data, no new themes, no new coding, and ability to replicate the study” is present (p. 1409). The data collected from interviews were professionally transcribed by an online service with turnaround of less than 48 hours. Since the data were transcribed so quickly, coding was completed as promptly as each interview transcription was received. For this reason, the analysis of data was a progressive process that was completed throughout the collection of data. Data was initially coded in the order interviews were conducted. By the sixth interview, a definitive pattern had developed where no original codes were necessary. All coded data fit agreeably within the codes developed in previous coding sessions. Throughout the seventh, eighth, and ninth interviews, it became evident that no new codes or themes would emerge as all collected data from these interviews were just corroborations of previously identified codes and themes. Data saturation was indicated by the absence of any unique data from the final two of nine interviews.

A brief introduction of the research study along with a reminder of the signed participant consent form initiated each one-on-one interview. This offered a review of the purpose of the interview in addition to the participant’s right to opt-out of the interview at any time. A digital recorder was used throughout the duration of the interview and was acknowledged by the researcher so that participants were aware of the interview being digitally recorded for transcription. The recorder remained on during the interview, and each participant was offered
the opportunity to review the recording following the interview. No participants sought to review the recording. Participants were also offered the opportunity to review the transcript of the interview when completed, but no participants opted to review the transcripts.

As stated previously, semi-structured interview protocols were followed. Each interview included four broad key questions with multiple researcher prompts to ensure the guided conversation maintained the necessary direction for data collection. The key questions sought to identify the participant’s level of experience with co-teaching, the participant’s views on the impact of co-teaching, the participant’s experience in pairing co-teachers, and the participant’s influences on professional choices. The interview was introduced with a description and purpose for the study while thanking the participant for granting the interview. Secondly, the researcher asked a few questions to simply develop rapport with the participant while gaining background information about the participant, such as professional background. Four key questions followed, but the order for the questions was not strictly adhered to by the researcher. The researcher began with the same initial key question for each interview; however, the guided conversation of the interview would often lend itself to asking the subsequent questions out of the order presented on the interview protocol. This was due to the participant’s responses to the initial key question and was done in order to maintain a conversational flow to the interview. Each of the key questions is discussed below with results for each question.

**Key Question 1: Walk me through the current implementation of co-teaching in your school.** This first key question initiated each of the one-on-one interviews. The purpose of this question was to gather data on the participant’s level of experience with co-teaching in general. The prompts for this question also sought to determine the participant’s general understanding and perception of co-teaching. All interviewees stated that co-teaching was
abundant in their school or system. Some participants communicated that co-teaching was present in all grade levels and multiple content area, but other participants said a co-teaching model was only utilized in language arts and math. Jane recounted that co-taught classrooms “needed to start at preschool if we were expecting the outcome to come at high school.” Upon hearing the consistent responses of full implementation of co-teaching in the schools, the researcher probed the participants on personal definitions of co-teaching. All interviewees included that co-teaching included two adults, but further explanation of their personal definitions resulted in differences. One participant responded nothing additional other than two adults in a single classroom. Other participants defined co-teaching as a general education teacher and special education teacher working in the same classroom, two certified teachers working together to meet the needs of all students in the classroom, providing specialized support for special education students in the general education setting, and two teachers who work in a manner that students are unable to differentiate between the content teacher and special education teacher. Sandra declared, “traditionally you have basically content and experts. Then you have implementation experts. They are supposed to communicate and work together.”

In addition to seeking a better understanding of the participants’ personal definitions of co-teaching, the first key question probed the participants’ personal impressions of co-teaching. All nine interviewees stated that positive outcomes and benefits had been witnessed related to co-teaching in their schools. One participant, Walter, was more definitive in his response by stating that co-teaching is an “effective model when properly implemented.” Mary stated that she found such positive outcomes with her co-teaching experiences that she desired to have co-teaching in every classroom of her school. Along with having positive general views of co-teaching, the participants noted beneficial outcomes for multiple constituents. Five of the nine
interviewed participants described benefits for students in the forms of increased feelings of belonging for previously segregated special education students, increased sensitivity of special needs students by general education students, increased opportunity for finding an advocate for student needs within the classroom, and increased chances for individualized instruction. Participants noted that positive outcomes for teachers had been witnessed as well. Walter voiced that “co-teaching can be very beneficial to students when there's a high level of, first of all, trust and belief.” Teachers have a greater opportunity to build relationships with students and a reduced pressure due to having a “partner in crime,” as stated by Kim.

Key Question 2: Tell me about your co-teachers and their impact on students. The second key question was posed at different times during each interview. When a participant finished with the first key question, the interviewer was often led to pursue the direction that the first key question led. For that reason, there was no static position of when the second key question was asked. Probes for this key question included asking the participants to discuss their feelings on the impact of co-teachers on the classroom climate and student outcomes. The purpose of this key question and probes was to gain further knowledge of the level of experience and implementation of co-teaching within the participants’ schools.

Themes that emerged from the data collected during this key question included teacher impact, classroom climate, and student performance. Participants described only a few ways that teachers impact students; however, all nine interviewees voiced that teachers have a direct impact on students. Five of the participants responded that teachers were able to build strong relationships with students in a co-teaching classroom, and one of those participants, Sandra, mentioned that through the relationships, students were able to feel like each had a personal advocate in the classroom. Diane recounted that co-teaching allows that “more students with
disabilities at all levels are engaging and actively participating in the development.” Other modes of co-teacher impact on the students included a greater chance for students to gain multiple points of view on a concept, an increased opportunity for appropriate accommodations to be provided to special education students, and a higher likelihood for the students to experience freedom during their learning in the classroom.

A second topic that emerged from the collection of data on the second key question was the climate of the classroom. Six differing responses were given by the nine interviewed participants. Sandra, Kim, and Jane all noted that implementation of a co-teaching model provided special education students an advocate within the general education classroom. Other participants responded that the classroom climate was more effective due to a lower student to teacher ratio, and co-teaching offered a more supportive classroom. Only one participant, Mary, stated that co-teaching impacted the students by allowing a greater opportunity for social interaction. Brenda stated only that if the co-teachers were happy, the classroom would be happy. According to Diane, students in the co-teaching classroom were in a climate where they could be “double-dipped” due to having both a content teacher and a special education teacher. While all interviewees described a manner in which the co-teachers impacted the classroom climate, there were multiple descriptions provided by participants.

The third topic that developed from the second key question focused on how co-teaching has directly impacted the student. While the responses were more similar than the impact of co-teachers on the classroom climate, there were still five differing effects of co-taught classrooms noted by interviewed participants. Three participants stated that they had experienced an increase in student achievement; two participants stated they had experienced increased student engagement and motivation, and two participants stated they had experienced an increase in
overall student performance. Diane shared that she had experienced an increase in self-confidence of special education students served in a co-taught classroom. Walter articulated that co-taught classrooms offered “a great opportunity to impact students cause you get to build a relationship with those kids and then also provide those needed accommodations.” A decrease in behavioral referrals from co-taught classrooms was something that Mark had experienced as a school leader. Interviewees noted varying positive impacts of co-teaching on students.

Key Question 3: Tell me about your experiences with pairing co-teachers in your current school and include whether you feel the pairings were effective choices or not. The third key question was asked to all nine interviewed participants at varied times during the interview. The purpose of the question was to attain data regarding what factors impacted the choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Prompts for the third key question included the topics of effective co-teaching partnerships, personal characteristics, content knowledge of teachers, and prior experiences of teachers. Additionally, participants were prompted to indicate which factor most greatly impacted their choice in assigning co-teaching partnerships.

The initial prompt for the third key question was intended to actuate participants’ thoughts regarding their experiences with co-teaching partnerships. One topic that came out was the participants’ description of effective co-teaching partnerships they had personally experienced included several different concepts. Three of the responses dealt with a professionally positive working relationship, and three of the responses included the teachers both having a strong comfort level with the process of co-teaching and leading the classroom. Brenda voiced her opinion that the most effective co-teaching model “works the best is when they feel comfortable to get up there and teach an eighth grade math class as well.” Kim stated
that effective co-teachers taught the class in a manner in which students were unable to
distinguish which teacher was the content teacher and which was the special education teacher.
Mark and Jane both declared that effective co-teachers worked to have defined roles while
sharing the workload. Through exploring the participants’ definition of an effective co-teaching
partnership, data was collected to delineate what may impact choices when assigning co-
teachers.

Personal characteristics was another prevalent topic that developed when interviewees
shared their experiences with choosing co-teaching partnerships. While multiple participants
referenced co-teachers who were willing to try new things, willing to accept all students, and
willing to be flexible in their teaching styles, other responses referenced personal characteristics
as well. Jane declared, “I can help teach and develop a willing teacher,” and Mary disclosed
“people that are open to new ideas” make the most effective co-teachers. Compatibility,
supportive natures, and strong classroom management skills were also mentioned by participants
as personal characteristics that would impact choices in partnering co-teachers. Jane revealed
that co-teachers had to demonstrate a passion for teaching, and Walter mentioned a common
philosophy of education as essential in assigning co-teachers. Other personal characteristics of
effective co-teachers disclosed by participants included the ability to work well with others,
strong communication skills, and sufficient professional knowledge. Through probing, all
interviewees were quick to respond with personal characteristics that impacted their choices.

In addition to personal characteristics affecting choices in assigning co-teachers, all
participants were eager to share their opinion on the impact of content knowledge and
professional certifications on their choices. While some of the participants preferred a co-teacher
with strong content knowledge regardless of professional certifications, other participants
preferred a co-teacher with little content knowledge. In either case, each interviewee articulated that the level of a teacher’s content knowledge is an impactful factor on choices in assigning co-teachers. Participants who stated a preference for co-teachers with little content knowledge related that administration could support the co-teacher in developing the content knowledge to increase effectiveness in the classroom. Kim took it a step further to share that she did not consider content knowledge as much as she considered a teacher’s area of expertise. Jane and Susie said that content knowledge is of lesser importance than strategy knowledge for addressing special education students’ needs. Jane revealed that in her experience, “the special education teachers were trained, and what they did very well was they understood learning styles and they understood readiness,” so the non-general education teacher is the strategist of the partnership. Highly qualified teacher certification was mentioned by three participants, demonstrating that professional certifications also impact choices in assignment. Participants not mentioning highly qualified teacher certification did comment on certification, but those participants did not equate certification to being an effective co-teacher. Each of those five interviewees proclaimed that certification was just a piece of paper, but knowledge of student learning styles and content were of greater importance.

Another topic that was addressed by several of the interviewed participants was prior experience of a teacher. Walter, Brenda, and Mary all stated that whether a teacher had prior co-teaching experience impacted their choices in assigning co-teachers. In fact, Mary revealed that she believed it was “absolutely important to have co-teaching experience” before she assigned a teacher to a co-teaching position. Brenda said she would consider a teacher with co-teaching experience for a co-teaching position more than a special education teacher who had only taught in a resource classroom setting. While the amount of prior co-teaching experience was important
to Kim, she stated that personality was far more important than a teacher’s amount of experience. Diane said that she could train a teacher to become a co-teacher, so other factors were of greater importance. Three interviewed participants disclosed that prior co-teaching experience would impact their choices in assigning co-teachers, but two interviewed participants stated that it would not. Jane divulged that she does “look at professional experiences but I look with the glasses of full inclusion and supporting all children.” The remaining three participants did not respond as to whether prior experience was a factor in their choices.

The most telling prompt from the third key question was when the interviewees were asked what single factor was most impactful of their choices in assigning co-teachers. Surprisingly, no interviewed participants stated that prior teaching experience, co-teaching or not, was the most influential factor in assigning co-teaching partnerships. Since several interviewees had stated prior experience did have an impact on their choices, it was anticipated that these participants would have revealed prior experience as having the most impact on their choices. The most disclosed factor of importance in choosing co-teaching assignments was personality. Six of the nine participants responded that personality was the most impactful factor on their choices. Willingness, interpersonal skills, passion for education, and desire for sharing the classroom were all mentioned by participants as personal characteristics impacting their choices. Three of the nine interviewed participants revealed content knowledge to be the factor most impacting their choices. These participants mentioned highly qualified teacher certifications, content knowledge, and knowledge of the learner. Based on this prompt alone, personal characteristics have the greatest impact on choices by the school leaders who were interviewed for this study.
Key Question 4: Describe some of the choices you, as the school leader, must make for your school. The fourth key question involved the concept of professional choices the participants made within their schools. Probes for this key question asked about describing the choices required of each participant and describing the influential factors for the choices. Also, participants were questioned in regards to their hiring practices along with factors that impact their hiring choices. The purpose of this question was to determine choices facing the participants, how the participants faced these choices, and further refine factors that impact their choices.

Interviewees came from two professional positions in the public education sector. All participants were either a school principal or a district-level special education director. The choices delineated by each participant were aligned with their current position. For example, principals responded with choices regarding mediation of conflict within the school, instructional choices for faculty, public relations with parents and the community, and provision of a positive school climate. Special education district-level directors declared their choices were related to supporting classroom teachers. Both groups, principals and directors, expressed that choices they make in their position included budgeting along with human resource choices.

Given that the participants all verbalized choices with which they were faced in their positions, the next probe sought to determine what influenced their choices. Sandra expressed that she was often limited in her choices as she was faced with teacher and student complaints as her main influence. Education laws defining teacher certifications were identified by Jane and Mark as highly impacting their choices. Kim stated that she was driven by data collected on the students in order to make her choices, but Diane answered that her choices were driven by budgetary restraints. Susie and Walter articulated that their choices were strictly made with the
best interest of their students’ needs in mind. Parents are highly influential on Mary’s choices for her school. Brenda stated that teacher expertise influenced her choices, but earlier in the interview Brenda declared that her choices were all based on financial situations within her school. It is possible that Brenda was sharing factors that impact her choices of assigning co-teachers instead of her overall choices for her school.

Since all interviewed participants noted human resource duties as part of their professional choices, a final probe for the fourth key question involved asking about factors that impact their choices on hiring teachers. Again, a teacher’s necessity to be highly qualified was mentioned, but several other factors were revealed as well. Participants responded that they seek and hire teachers who are passionate about education, love children, have a desire to work, and are open to new ideas. Student need and best fit were also mentioned as factors that impact hiring choices by participants. Predominantly, interviewed participants responded that personal characteristics of teachers have the most impact on their hiring choices.

**Focus Group Results**

Nine participants were invited to an asynchronous online focus group to further explore the factors impacting choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. Of those nine participants, only three participated. The lack of participation was dismaying, but the three people who did participate (Darla, Jane, and Kim) provided initial thoughtful responses that were aligned with data collected from other methods. While Jane and Kim are district special education directors, Darla is a principal of an elementary school. The focus group had five threads for each participant to respond (see Appendix I). Thread topics included descriptions of professional choices, delineation of the most important factor when making faculty choices, descriptions of the factors that impact choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships, and description of
challenges faced in choosing co-teaching partnerships. A final thread presented a scenario where the participant was asked to select one of two described teachers for a co-teaching position. Each of the responses and replies for these threads produced useful data that supported data collected from interviews and open-ended questionnaires.

The first two threads sought responses from participants about their professional choices and factors that impacted choices in faculty hiring and assignment. Kim did not respond to the initial thread; however, Jane and Darla both described choices they have made that impacted their school. Jane, a special education director at the district level, divulged her choices when she first became director. When she was still within her first month as director, she was asked by her superintendent to perform an “overhaul of the special education department” in order to better serve the district’s special needs students. Jane described how her choices in this endeavor impacted students, faculty, parents, and even their district’s partners in education. She initiated the changes and chose to enact a parent mentor program in order to deliver the context of the changes to all parents of special education students being served in District D.

In contrast to Jane’s recollection of a past choice, Darla described a choice she is currently seeking to make. Darla said that her school’s homework policy is in need of an update. She said that she knew she would have to make choices regarding the policy, so she began by reviewing current literature in regards to homework in elementary school. Additionally, she had her school’s teacher leadership team review the literature to make recommendations. Not only did she allow input from her leadership team, but Darla is also in the process of gathering information from parents and students about updating the homework policy. While Darla’s description of a current choice in her care does not involve co-teacher assignment, it does describe the process that Darla takes in making choices that affect her school population. In the
focus group discussion, she stated that once she has surveyed all constituents, she will base her policy choice on the gathered data. Jane replied to Darla’s post by applauding her effort to consult multiple sources prior to making her policy choice.

The second thread asked participants if personal characteristics, professional experiences, or content knowledge had the greatest impact on their choices regarding faculty. Darla did not state which she found to have the greatest impact. Instead, Darla responded that she looked for the best fit for her school; however, she followed up her statement by declaring that she thought personality was more important than experience. Furthermore, she stated that experience was more important than content knowledge. In a roundabout way, Darla responded that personal characteristics were most important. Jane agreed that personal characteristics were the most important, but Jane also stated that within personal characteristics, she looked for attitude. Additionally, Jane stated that experience only impacted her choices in regards to whether or not the teacher had come from a district that implemented an inclusive classroom environment. Both responders pronounced that personal characteristics had the greatest impact on their faculty choices.

Co-teaching choices were the focus of the third discussion thread for focus group participants. The thread gave an open-ended question asking the participants to share what factors each considered before choosing co-teaching partnerships. Jane once again stated that attitude was the first factor she considers. She followed it up by sharing that acceptance of all children was highly important as well. Once she had revealed her factors of consideration, she further stated that she looked for teachers to volunteer to be part of a co-teaching partnership. Darla leaned more toward personal characteristics being the most influential in choosing co-teachers. She stated that she sought the “best fit general education teacher to serve special
education students,” and she considered special education teachers’ caseload and content knowledge. Additionally, Darla declared that she honored teacher preference when possible. From this thread, both respondents noted personal characteristics as having an impact on choosing co-teachers. This clearly aligns with the previous thread where both participants stated that personal characteristics were the most important factor in making faculty choices.

Since the participants were responding to discussion threads about choosing co-teaching partnerships, the fourth thread asked the participants to describe challenges encountered in choosing co-teaching partnerships. Jane and Darla both responded, but their responses were strikingly different. Jane described her initial month as a special education director for District D when she began partnering co-teachers. She stated that she faced challenges because she “interfered with the natural process of individuals partnering on a voluntary basis,” but she said she learned from that challenge and sought volunteers for co-teaching positions whenever possible thereafter. Darla took a different route with her description. She said the most challenging obstacle she had faced was common planning time due to the elementary schedule offering little flexibility. Furthermore, Darla stated that a “lack of common vision” among co-teachers was an obstacle. Darla described challenges to co-teaching partnerships, but Jane described a challenge she faced when choosing co-teachers.

All three participants responded to the final thread that presented a situation where each was asked to select a co-teaching partnership. The information regarding the qualifications and personalities of the candidates can be found in the protocol for the online asynchronous discussion group in Appendix I of this manuscript. Two of the participants selected the second candidate, but the third participant did not ever state that she would choose either. Jane disclosed that she would look for a candidate’s attitude and willingness in addition to the candidate’s self-
directed nature, but she never specified which of the described candidates she would choose. Kim and Darla were more decisive in choosing the second candidate, but each of these participants provided differing reasons for their choice. Darla acknowledged that she preferred the second candidate because this candidate was described as having a student-centered model focus for her classroom. Kim asserted that she would choose the second candidate because of the candidate’s willingness and flexible personality. Although all three participants responded differently, each provided a reason for choosing a candidate that was based on the personal characteristics of the candidate.

**Open-ended Questionnaire Results**

A third method of data collection was an online survey containing open-ended questions to which participants were asked to respond. The online survey was offered through SurveyMonkey, and participants were provided a static link to the survey so each could access the survey at their convenience. Thirteen participants completed the online survey questionnaire, and over 22 pages of transcript were gathered from the responses. The questionnaire was comprised of eight questions. The first two questions sought background information on each participant; the final six questions asked the participants to describe their faculty’s role, the choices faced in their current position, and their perceptions of co-teaching partnerships.

Question three of the questionnaire probed the participants about how their faculty impacts student success. All 13 participants stated in some capacity that faculty highly affects student success in their schools. Walter stated that “success of students is directly correlated to the abilities of the teacher,” and Mary voiced that “faculty leads student success.” A supporting statement of why faculty deeply impacts student success came from Sandra. Since faculty is the closest point of contact with students, it is likely that most faculty develop
relationships with students. In an attempt to lend credence to her claim that faculty impacts student success, Sandra said, “Relationship is the most important and most influential in regard to success.” Brenda, Mary, and Darla all referenced school achievement scores as support for the impact of their faculty on student achievement. Since all three of these participants were principals serving in District H, the commonality in their responses seems sensible. Susie and Beth cited the direct impact of their special education teachers on students with disabilities, but again this may stem from their similar job titles. Jim’s response took the time to praise his faculty for the positive impact it has on their students. Jim stated, “Good teachers are the key to the game, and we are blessed to have a solid staff.” In all, the 13 participants each declared that faculty has a direct impact on student success.

Following the question seeking the impact of faculty on student success, the next question asked the participants to describe how their choices affected the faculty’s perception of the school leader. All 13 participants responded to the question, but two of the participants did not directly answer the question. Walter explained how he involves his faculty in implementation of his choices, and Mary proclaimed that her school is “limited by the number of staff,” which affects her ability to make effective choices in assigning faculty positions. The remaining participants addressed the question and acknowledged what they felt were their faculty’s perceptions. Participants revealed beliefs that faculty positively perceived their choices due to the input of the faculty in the choices, the understanding that their choices were made with the students’ needs in mind, and the fact that multiple factors were examined prior to making the choices. Jane noted that her faculty had to be committed to the common purpose of their special education department to fully appreciate the choices she made in her position. Also, she added that she hoped her faculty perceived her as a support figure in addition to being their leader.
Diane took a different stance in that she knew her faculty did not always like her choices, but her faculty trusted her to make choices in the best interest of the students. Kim and Mae both noted that involving their faculty’s noted strengths and weaknesses when making choices allowed their teachers to feel successful and, in turn, positively perceive the school leaders. Jim and Mark described a situation where faculty faulted the administration when choices were not made in the faculty’s personal preference; however, Jim stated that he spends extensive time considering each teacher’s position before making a choice. The synthesized results from this question were mixed, with most participants noting that choices were made after careful deliberation and consultation from affected constituents.

The next open question on the questionnaire asked participants to describe how their choices of teacher assignment express their desired outcomes and affect the culture of their schools. Based on the responses, participants expressed concern that their choices may affect the climate of the school, but little was added to describe how these choices would do so. Jim, a new principal, disclosed that he fears creating a negative environment where the students, parents, and staff would be adversely affected. Mae also responded as being concerned with careful placement of negative teachers because “their negativity can affect the school staff and environment negatively,” but Kim approached the question as to how she could create a positive learning environment. She believes that she can positively affect the school climate by developing relationships with her teachers and sharing the vision of her department with each of them. Brenda articulated it further by stating that she thinks a “crucial part of the equation that we sometimes overlook” is assignment of teachers. Along those same lines, Beth and Susie both expressed the need to have teachers assigned to a grade and subject level for which they have a passion. Darla and Mary had a different response to the question in that each of them shared
how they make their choices. Darla imparted that she makes her choices as a member of a partnership or team. Choices are not normally hers to make alone. Mary pronounced that she makes her choices based on student needs without considering the preferences of the teachers being assigned. Mark and Sandra expressed the need for teachers to feel effective in order to create a positive school climate. According to Sandra, teacher assignments that are “compatible and supportive” can create a productive learning environment. While all participants responded to this question, little was gained in how their choices would affect the culture of their schools.

Probing participants to recall a particular co-teaching partnership was the focus of the next question. Participants described successful co-teaching partnerships where teachers demonstrated energy, confidence, and commitment. Over half of the participants mentioned co-teachers who were willing to take on new challenges and collaborate with one another on personal strengths and weaknesses. A couple of the participants mentioned that successful co-teachers pair themselves or volunteer for the role. A development of trust and a chance to plan together were also mentioned by the participants. Each of the characteristics mentioned of successful co-teaching partnerships was mirrored in the data collected during the focus group and individual interviews.

Participants were asked to share their opinion on how co-teaching partnerships should be chosen. Personal characteristics were overwhelmingly the most often mentioned factor for consideration. Some participants, such as Kim, noted that attention must be made to details regarding each teacher’s strengths and weaknesses in order to pair two teachers successfully. Willingness to utilize novel instructional methods and classroom composition were also mentioned by multiple participants. Diane disclosed that teacher willingness was important, in addition to the teacher having an interest in the content and age to be taught. Walter and Sandra
expressed the need to consider the prior experiences of the teachers before choosing co-teachers. The level of each teacher’s content knowledge was revealed as important in responses by Jim and Darla. Five of the 13 participants acknowledged that teachers should be allowed to volunteer for co-teaching positions. According to Mae, teachers should demonstrate a desire to become co-teachers because “certification and knowledge are of little help if the participants are unwilling participants.”

Susie, Kim, and Mark all voiced that two teachers with opposing personalities are often an appropriate match. Mark declared that opposing personalities are beneficial to co-teaching partnerships because “each will have a perspective and talent to bring to the class” that can benefit students. Participants each revealed their views on how co-teaching partnerships should be chosen, and their responses reaffirm the results from the focus group and the individual interviews. Personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge of teachers play a role in choosing co-teaching partnerships.

The final question from the online questionnaire asked participants to describe what personal characteristics were the most influential when choosing co-teaching partnerships. The most noted characteristic was the willingness to try new things. The participants would consider teachers who were unafraid to step out of their comfort zone to become co-teachers. A second quality influencing the participants’ choices was the desire to share the classroom because teachers who are willing to share their daily working space will more likely make successful co-teachers. Being an open-minded individual was another trait listed by participants. Additional personal characteristics noted as indicative of possible co-teachers were enthusiasm, strong communication tendencies, passion for all children, confidence, creativity, and flexibility.
Research Question Answers

This section of the fourth chapter serves to answer the research questions posed by this research study. The research questions were developed from the review of the current literature regarding the impact of teachers, the choices of school leaders, and the implementation of co-teaching practices. The central question sought to discover the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. The subquestions each explore a derivative of the central question with greater specificity to individual factors. For this reason, the answers to the three subquestions merge to answer the central question.

In answering the central question and subquestions, themes that emerged relating to each question are provided. Themes were identified through the careful analysis of coded data. Data was collected from 22 sources by three differing methods of data collection. Sources of the collected data include nine personal semi-structured interviews, 12 completed online open-ended questionnaire responses, and one online asynchronous focus group. Collected data was initially coded and recoded multiple times to discover the emerging themes. Four distinct themes emerged. Three of the themes tie directly to a research subquestion, while the fourth theme addresses the theoretical basis of the research study, choice theory. This section of the fourth chapter has segments for each subquestion and the central question. Discussion of theoretical implications are included in the fifth chapter.

Subquestion 1: What personal characteristics of teachers impact choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships? Participants in this research study were school leaders in North Georgia. Data collected via interviews, a focus group, and questionnaires were coded and analyzed to reveal that the personality, willingness, communication, flexibility, passion, and interpersonal skills of teachers all impact administrator
choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships in North Georgia. Each of these traits fit within the theme of personal characteristics that emerged from the analysis of data.

Personality was coded a total 103 times across all 22 sources. All participants referenced that personality definitively impacts their choices in co-teacher assignment. Some participants provided additional explanations as to what personality traits they seek in a co-teacher. Participants stated that they considered the level of a candidate’s professionalism, openness, self-confidence, work ethic, and leadership potential when assigning co-teachers. Other personality traits mentioned were the capacity the candidate possessed for maintaining a cooperative and supportive relationship. Appreciation of the particular age or grade level of the students, along with the candidate’s personal philosophy of education, was also disclosed as personality traits that participants considered. Additionally, several participants noted a compatibility of personalities between the co-teachers as being an impacting factor. Participants stated they sought co-teachers who shared a common attitude and commitment to all students while demonstrating friendliness and collegiality. Nearly half of the references from data sources stated that personalities of co-teachers just had to click, so personality was a factor impacting their choices of co-teachers.

A second concept within the theme of personal characteristics was the willingness of a teacher to take on co-teaching responsibilities. Willingness on the part of the candidate was noted in 18 different sources of data collection. For this reason, willingness is a factor that impacts the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Participants noted willingness in many different instances and regards. Being a willing, or volunteer, co-teacher was highly favorable to many of the participants. For example, Sandra recounted that “willingness to explore uncharted areas and possibilities” was critical for co-
teachers. Kim commented that teachers who “welcome the opportunity to try something that might push them out of their comfort zone” were more desired for co-teaching positions. They sought a willingness for teachers to try new things, to stretch their own skills, and to share responsibility and accountability with another teacher in the same classroom.

In addition to personality traits and willingness, participants stated that the communication skills of candidates were a factor in choosing co-teaching partnerships. Communication skills are personal to each individual, and participants sought candidates for co-teaching who possessed strong communication skills. Kim stated that communication was essential for the teachers in a co-teaching partnership to bring their own expertise to the classroom for the benefit of the students. Diane divulged that she believed communication skills were essential for a successful co-teaching partnership because co-teachers work so closely together that an ability to talk openly with their partner was necessary. Collegiality in conversations was noted by Walter, while Susie included that co-teachers must be able to express their strengths and weaknesses to one another in order to promote an effective co-teaching relationship. Brenda revealed that she has her co-teachers complete a co-teaching contract at the beginning of each school year in order to open the door of communication between new co-teaching partners. Communication was noted to be part of a successful co-teaching partnership and impactful on the choices by North Georgia school leaders.

The flexibility of a teacher was another noted category within personal characteristics that impacted choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Ten of the 13 participants mentioned the necessity of a co-teacher to be flexible in multiple aspects. Mae stated that she considers a candidate’s flexibility because that candidate may have to “give up a bit of autonomy as the classroom teacher” if placed in a co-teaching partnership. Tolerance was
brought up as a type of flexibility that impacts a school leader’s choices. Since co-teachers share the workspace and all of the responsibilities that come with it, Kim said that a flexible personality that allowed for both partners to share leadership roles in the classroom highly affected her choices. Jane admitted that co-teachers often need to adjust instruction; therefore, a candidate must demonstrate flexibility in order to continue growing professionally. Walter addressed a differing view of flexibility by discussing flexibility in planning. Google Drive is utilized by Walter’s school for all lesson plans. Here is where he asks his co-teachers to collaborate when they are not afforded common planning time. Walter stated that co-teachers need to be flexible in their planning strategies to be prepared for each class. The flexibility of a teacher is a personal characteristic that impacts the administrator’s choice of their assignment.

In addition to personality, willingness, communication skills, and flexibility, a passion or interest for education was listed as a personal characteristic that impacted the co-teaching assignment choices of North Georgia school leaders. A candidate’s passion to teach was revealed by participants 34 times throughout the collected data as being an important factor in whether the school leader would place the candidate in a co-teaching position. While some participants spoke of a passion to teach or dedication to education, other participants addressed the interest of a teacher in co-teaching. Jane brought up the volunteering of teachers to take on co-teaching roles, and Kim mentioned that she looked at whether the candidate had a desire to be part of a team. Interest in particular content areas was addressed by Brenda and Mary. Each of these middle school principal participants stated that their assignment choices were impacted by the teachers’ interest in a certain content area. Mark, Sandra, and Susie all noted that they considered a candidate’s passion and love for children when making their choices. An overwhelming 10 of the 13 participants added that the passion and interest of the teacher
impacted their choice in assigning that teacher to a co-teaching partnership.

The final category within personal characteristics was interpersonal skills. Participants revealed that a candidate’s interpersonal skills impacted the choice as to whether that person became a co-teacher. Assertiveness and listening skills were mentioned by multiple participants as factors that influenced their co-teaching assignments. Participants sought co-teachers who were comfortable taking a leadership role in the classroom, but Kim pointed out that balance should remain between the teachers so that no one dominated the other partner. Multiple participants recounted that the problem solving and negotiation skills of the teacher impacted their choices. Diane revealed that an effective co-teaching team she had paired worked together to solve their own problems. She stated that when the team faced a dilemma in their classroom, both teachers “discussed it and came to a working solution,” and she found that to be highly impactful in her future choices of co-teaching partnerships. Diane considered negotiation and problem solving skills, but she was not the only participant voicing this opinion. Walter, Mark, and Sandra also mentioned the need for co-teachers to work together to face challenges within their classrooms. Brenda went so far as to add that “interpersonal skills are really more important than work skills” of a candidate for a co-teaching position.

**Subquestion 2: What professional experiences of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?** Two distinctive topics arose within the theme of professional experiences. Participants spoke of two definitive aspects of professional experiences: prior teaching experience and prior co-teaching experience. Of the nine participants who mentioned professional teaching experience, a vast majority felt that prior experience was beneficial for teachers who are assigned as co-teachers. For this reason, prior teaching
experiences and prior co-teaching experiences can impact choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

Prior teaching experience was mentioned by participants as influencing their choices when choosing co-teaching partnerships. Darla stated that when she made choices of co-teacher assignments, she looked for “general education teachers who have demonstrated strength in developing struggling learners,” and she said that the consideration of this factor has proven worthy due to her results in successful co-teaching teams who share a common vision. Participants also mentioned simply identifying the candidate’s overall effectiveness in previous teaching assignments as a guide for their choices in whether the candidate should be placed as a co-teacher. Susie said that a candidate with a fruitful track record in teaching the content for which she is seeking a co-teacher would be more desirable than a candidate with no such record. Other mentions of prior teaching experience included whether a candidate had demonstrated student focused beliefs in past teaching assignments and whether a special education teacher had any prior teaching experience with the content being considered.

In addition to prior teaching experience, participants in this research study noted the fact that a candidate’s prior co-teaching experience could impact their choices. The results of the study revealed multiple codes that aided in the emergence of a theme related to choice theory. This results of this theme are addressed in the fifth chapter under theoretical discussion. Susie was the only participant to note that prior co-teaching experience had little to no impact on her choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. Other participants who discussed prior co-teaching experiences of candidates all shared in the belief that the extent and effectiveness of the candidate as a co-teacher was influential in their choices. Mary even noted that she considered a candidate with demonstrated co-teaching experience with multiple partners to be more appealing.
than a candidate with no co-teaching experience. Resource classroom teaching experience was not as favorable as inclusive co-teaching experience to Beth when she chose new co-teaching partnerships. Jane communicated that she does prefer candidates with co-teaching experience, but she would consider teachers who “come from inclusive friendly districts or program providers” since these candidates have been exposed to co-teaching at some level. The majority of participants stated that prior co-teaching experience impacted their choices in co-teaching assignments.

**Subquestion 3:** What certifications and content knowledge of teachers impact North Georgia school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments? North Georgia school leaders who participated in this study provided substantial evidence that certifications and content knowledge impact their choices in assigning co-teachers. When exploring the statements of participants regarding content knowledge of teachers, three topics emerged. Certifications of teachers, content knowledge of non-general education teachers, and the importance of content knowledge for successful co-teaching partnerships weave together to answer the third subquestion of this research study.

Multiple study participants mentioned hiring and assigning only highly qualified teachers. According to Mary, all of their teachers must be highly qualified to teach the grade and subject to which they are assigned, and it is “non-negotiable” to Mary. Additionally, Brenda agreed by stating that “certainly state law trumps everything else,” so all of their teachers must be highly qualified for their classrooms. Walter proclaimed that he can only interview or consider assigning teachers for positions in which they are highly qualified. When probed, he explained that being highly qualified means that the teacher possesses the proper certification for the grade and subject to be taught. Mary articulated that she bases her choices of teacher
assignment predominantly on the certifications of her teachers, because she has limited funding and must meet the demands of state requirements for employing highly qualified teachers. Mae and Diane shared disagreeing viewpoints of the impact of teacher certifications in their choices of assigning co-teaching partnerships. Diane described her view being that certifications are “not necessary, but my job is to support that teacher so she doesn’t function as a glorified parapro” in the co-taught classroom. Brenda revealed that teacher certifications are factors in her choices, but “certifications are just pieces of paper we have to use in teaching” that do not demonstrate the true expertise of a teacher. Although there were mixed results of the impact of teacher certifications on North Georgia school leaders’ choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships, the participants who stated that certifications were a factor noted that certifications were the most important factor in their choices.

In addition to certifications of teacher candidates for co-teaching positions, participants in the research study voiced the importance of a candidate’s content knowledge. While most of the participants indicated they were concerned with amount of content knowledge of co-teaching candidates, referring to the content knowledge of the non-general education teacher was common by participants. When participants were asked about the influence of content knowledge on their choices for co-teachers, participants immediately responded about the content knowledge of the non-general education teacher. Jim stated that it is essential for the non-general education teacher to possess knowledge of the content in order to be effective, and Walter shared that both teachers should be comfortable with the content so they can effectively support all students in the classroom. According to Mark, in an ideal situation, all special education teachers would be certified in a general education content. Brenda said that she thinks special services teachers should be a content expert in addition to a strategy expert. To be considered a successful co-
teaching team, both co-teachers should have strong content knowledge, as stated by Susie. Several participants noted that the non-general education teacher may not need the content knowledge initially, but it would be beneficial to develop that knowledge over time while in the classroom. Diane, Kim, and Sandra all voiced that co-teachers must be willing to learn the content of their own accord. Kim recommended that the teacher needing the content knowledge could explore the content during planning times or seek other methods for learning the content prior to teaching the content to students. Diane revealed that when both teachers have strong knowledge of the content, each teacher is more likely to compliment the classroom learning. For Diane, Kim, and Sandra, content knowledge of the candidate would not impact their choices. They would rather know that the candidate possesses the motivation to learn the content in order to provide effective instruction. According to Diane, a teacher can learn content, but “personal characteristics help you reteach it to others.” The results were mixed as to the impact of a teacher’s content knowledge on the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

**Central Question Answer:** What are the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships? After collecting data from 13 school leaders in North Georgia via three different data collection methods, it is clear that multiple factors impact their choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships. These factors can be categorized into themes of personal characteristics, prior experiences, and possession of content knowledge and certifications. Each of these themes emerged from the analysis of collected data from 22 sources, including nine personal interviews, one focus group, and 12 completed questionnaires. The results of this research study indicate the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when choosing co-teaching partnerships.
**Personal characteristics.** Within the theme of personal characteristics, participants of this research study identified a number of factors relating to personality that impacts their choices in assigning co-teachers. Among those characteristics were professionalism and collegiality. Participants declared that candidates who demonstrated the propensity to work well with others and maintain professional relationships were more likely to be considered for co-teaching positions. Additionally, a co-teaching candidate’s self-confidence and attitude impacted the choices of North Georgia school leaders. Participants stated that a candidate who demonstrated a positive attitude toward the education and inclusion of all children was more likely to be chosen for a co-teaching position. A final aspect of personality that was mentioned by study participants was the level of openness of the co-teaching candidate. Participants revealed that openness to implementing different instructional strategies, openness to sharing a classroom with another teacher, and openness to educating all levels of students were desirable personal characteristics of a co-teaching candidate.

Along those same lines, a vast majority of participants described a candidate’s willingness as being a factor impacting co-teaching assignment choices. Willingness seems closely tied with openness, mentioned in the personality node, but willingness takes openness a step further. Participants described a candidate’s openness in terms of accepting new things. Willingness was described by participants as wanting to be actively involved in those new things. Many participants stated that they chose co-teaching partners based on the candidates volunteering to co-teach. This demonstrated their willingness to try new things and step out of their current comfort zone, according to participants.

In addition to personality and willingness, participants stated that a candidate’s communication skills and flexibility impacted choices about whether that candidate was assigned
to a co-teaching position. Participants noted that co-teachers have to possess strong communication skills in order to properly plan with their counterparts. Co-teachers must collaborate on instruction, assessment, and needs of the students within the co-teaching classroom. Furthermore, participants recounted that co-teachers must be effective in communicating their own strengths and weaknesses to one another in order to successfully co-teach. Participants noted that strong communication skills are necessary for co-teachers, and therefore, communication skills were factors that impact the co-teaching choices of North Georgia school leaders.

Tied into communication abilities, the flexibility of a candidate impacts the choices of assignment by North Georgia school leaders. Walter tied these two characteristics together by sharing that a candidate’s ability to be flexible impacts his choices because the co-teachers in his school may not be afforded common planning time with all of their co-teacher, since his co-teachers do not remain with a single classroom teacher all day. Planning for co-teaching teams in Walter’s school requires them to be flexible in their times to plan. District G utilizes Google Docs as a means for co-teachers to communicate. Walter asks that his co-teachers plan using Google Docs to communicate or schedule a time to plan together in person. He voiced that co-teachers must be flexible in their communication skills as well as flexible in their personality as they may work with multiple co-teachers daily.

Walter was not the only participant to mention that a teacher’s flexibility impacted his choices. A number of other participants mentioned flexibility saying that co-teachers need to be flexible in altering instructional methods to meet the needs of the diverse classroom. Additionally, Sandra commented that flexible personalities impacted her choices because co-teachers may have to demonstrate greater tolerance due to working with multiple co-teachers and
multiple personalities. She said she had assigned two co-teachers who worked well together because they were tolerant of one another and demonstrated flexibility in their teaching. Sandra regarded them as a strong and effective co-teaching team and said that their relationship caused her to consider flexibility in other co-teachers before assigning. Yet another personal characteristic impacting choices of co-teaching assignment is flexibility.

Interpersonal skills and passion were also mentioned as personal characteristics that influenced co-teacher assignments by North Georgia school leaders. Participants shared interpersonal skills such as assertiveness, leadership potential in the classroom, problem solving skills, and negotiation skills as impacting their choices. Many participants related that successful co-teaching teams, in their experiences, demonstrated strong interpersonal skills along with an ability to work together effectively. Whether a candidate demonstrated these interpersonal skills was considered by school leaders when choosing co-teachers.

Additionally, school leaders stated that the passion demonstrated by candidates affected their choices as well. School leaders stated that candidates with a passion for children, for education, and for co-teaching were more likely to be suited to a co-teaching position; therefore, participants revealed that the passion of the candidate impacted their choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships.

**Prior experiences.** Along with personal characteristics of co-teaching candidates, participants voiced that prior experiences of the candidate impacted their choices. Only a few participants articulated that prior experience had no impact on their choice of assigning a co-teaching partnership. Most participants divulged that prior teaching experience during which the candidate demonstrated a successful track record in the classroom influenced their choice as to whether that teacher would be suited for co-teaching. Also, participants stated that a teacher
with prior experience in the classroom was able to demonstrate instructional practices with a student focus that would benefit a co-teaching team. Some participants revealed that a teacher with prior demonstrated effective co-teaching experience would be a wise choice because this candidate would have knowledge of the various models of co-teaching and how to implement them. Prior experience of candidates did impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships, but almost all participants agreed that the personal characteristics of the candidate were more influential in their choices.

**Content knowledge and certifications.** A final factor that impacts the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships is the content knowledge of the candidates. Participants voiced that a candidate’s knowledge of the curriculum and content to be taught influenced their choices. The issue with the participants’ responses lies in the fact that when participants were asked about the impact of content knowledge on their choices, participants referred to the special education teacher. No participants included comments on the content knowledge of the general education teacher. In reference to the non-general education teacher, participants communicated that the content knowledge of this teacher would help create a balanced classroom where both teachers were comfortable teaching the class. Some participants even noted that when the non-general education teachers did not possess effective knowledge of the content, these co-teachers were unable to realistically support the students in the classroom. Brenda even went so far to reveal that she felt her special education teachers who work in a co-teaching environment should be content experts in addition to being a special education strategist. Some of the participants noted that the level of content knowledge of the participants did not influence their choices. This was supported by the participants stating that content knowledge can be learned and refined over time by the non-general education teacher.
In addition to the content knowledge of the candidates, participants stated that certifications of the candidates immensely impacted their choices. Several participants noted they were unable to assign teachers who were not highly qualified in the area they would teach. These participants proclaimed that they were bound by state law in some of their choices due to only being able to assign teachers who are highly qualified to teach. For that reason, content knowledge and certifications of teachers definitely impacted the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

Summary

This chapter presented information regarding the participants of this research study. Demographical information of the participants was listed in a table, and each participant was described in order to provide a comprehensive look at the people who shared their experiences for this research study. In addition to information about participants, this chapter presented results of this research study. Results were presented by theme identification that explains the process followed for determining the emerging themes from the collected data. A description of themes was organized by each of the three data collection methods demonstrating triangulation of the research study results (Yin, 1994). Also, results of the research study were presented by answering each of the three research subquestions and the central question of the study.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Overview

This fifth and final chapter begins by presenting a summary of the research study findings. Following the summary of findings is a discussion of the study findings in relation to the empirical and theoretical concepts included in the literature review. Additionally, this chapter will present theoretical, empirical, and practical implications based on the research study findings. Limitations of the research study and recommendations for future research are also included.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of the case study research was to discover the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Collected data were able to answer each of the three research subquestions and the central research question. Data was collected from 13 participants who both were considered leaders in their schools or systems and made choices regarding the assignment of co-teaching partnerships. Following data collection via individual interviews, focus group participation, and open-ended questionnaires, data was compiled using NVivo software (2012), and then analyzed to determine emergent themes. Themes that emerged related directly to one of the research questions. A summary of each research question follows with a description of the findings that help answer the research question.

The first research subquestion sought to discover what personal characteristics of teachers impacted the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. From the analysis of the data, categories emerged that tied directly to personal characteristics of the co-teaching candidates. Personality, willingness, communication,
flexibility, passion, and interpersonal skills were all mentioned by study participants as impacting their choices in assigning co-teachers. Additionally, a vast majority of the participants described personal characteristics of the co-teaching candidate to be the most influential in their choices regarding the assignment of the teacher. Based on the research study, North Georgia school leaders’ choices are impacted by the personality, willingness, communication, flexibility, passion, and interpersonal skills of a co-teaching candidate when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

The second research subquestion probed the participants’ experiences to discover what prior experiences of the co-teaching candidate were influential in their choices. Analysis of the data found that two types of prior experience were considered influential. First, participants noted prior teaching experience as a factor impacting their choices. According to participant responses, candidates with prior experience that demonstrated a successful history of teaching struggling learners were considered more often than those teachers with no successful prior teaching experience. In addition to prior teaching experience, participants denoted prior co-teaching experience of a candidate to impact their choices as well. A candidate having prior co-teaching experience would be more familiar with the implementation of co-teaching instructional methods and could present a record of their effectiveness. Both prior teaching experience and prior co-teaching experience were noted by participants to impact their choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

The final research subquestion pursued the content knowledge of teachers that impact North Georgia school leaders’ choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships. For this question, participant responses were coded into either teacher certifications or content knowledge of the teacher. Multiple participants stated that teacher certifications were exceedingly
influential in their choices because school leaders are saddled with maintaining compliance with educational laws that require students to be instructed by highly qualified teachers. This means that teachers must be certified in the area for which they will teach. In addition to certifications, a majority of participants discussed the importance of the non-general education teacher in the co-teaching partnership having knowledge of the curriculum and content. Two participants disagreed, stating that content knowledge could be gained over time while working in the co-taught classroom. For these participants, content knowledge of the non-general education teacher was found to not impact their choices. However, for the majority of research participants, the content knowledge of the non-general education teacher did impact their choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships.

The central research question sought to synthesize the findings of the three research subquestions. Factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships include personal characteristics, prior experiences, and content knowledge of the teachers. Personal characteristics impacting North Georgia school leaders’ choices included the personality, willingness, communication, flexibility, passion, and interpersonal skills of the co-teaching candidate. North Georgia school leaders’ choices were also influenced by the candidate’s prior teaching and prior co-teaching experiences. Certifications of the teacher and the content knowledge of the non-general education co-teacher were also discovered to be factors impacting the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

Discussion

This section of the fifth chapter discusses the findings of the research study in relation to the review of literature in the second chapter. Empirical evidence demonstrated in the literature
review regarding the impact of teachers, choices of school leaders, and co-teaching is linked to the findings of the current study. Discussion of these links ensues and is followed by a section dedicated to discussing the association between the research study findings and the theoretical framework of Glasser, which was discussed in the literature review as well. Additionally, empirical, theoretical, and practical implications are communicated along with limitations of the research study and recommendations for future research.

**Empirical Foundation**

A lack of literature is available on the assignment of co-teaching partnerships. Ample research is accessible on the impact of teachers in the classroom (Bourke & Brown, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Mirza & Iqbal, 2014; Sokal & Sharma, 2014), choices of school leaders in hiring and assignment of teachers (Ball & Green, 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014), and the positive perceptions of co-teaching instruction (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Thomas, 2014; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011), but literature does not reflect the crossroads of these concepts in the form of choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. The current research study corroborates the base of current literature while contributing the novel concept of assignment of co-teaching partnerships.

**Teacher impact.** The current literature base, as reviewed in the second chapter, addresses four areas of how the teacher impacts the education system. Results from the current study corroborate the empirical evidence demonstrated in the literature review, but the current study takes the knowledge base a step further to include the impact of co-teachers. The climate of the classroom and the achievement of students were referenced in the literature review. Additionally, behavior and content knowledge of teachers were also addressed. All four of these
areas are supported by the findings of the current research study.

First, teachers definitely impact the climate of the learning environment. According to Bourke and Brown (2014), teachers are the primary influence on classroom climate. From the current research study, participants overwhelmingly agreed that teachers impact the classroom more than any other constituents. In fact, one participant revealed that teachers are the primary point of contact for students and provide the framework for the climate of the classroom. Another participant stated that teachers with a negative attitude can create a negative learning environment where students will not flourish. This helps to address the gap in a study by Cranston (2012) that neglected to mention the effect of poorly perceived teachers on the climate in the classroom. Results from the current research study support the literature base on this concept; however, the current study extends the knowledge by exploring the impact of co-teachers on classroom climate. Co-teachers have a direct impact on the classroom climate in multiple ways. Results show that North Georgia school leaders believe that co-teachers offer a more effective classroom due to a lower ratio of teachers to students. This allows the teachers to offer a more supportive environment where many of the students identify with one or the other teacher as an advocate for their learning. Through this climate, a stronger cohesion develops between the class members and teachers, creating a learning environment that promotes social interactions between special education and general education students. Therefore, the current research study supports that co-teachers impact the classroom climate by creating a more supportive and effective classroom environment where all students can learn.

In addition to impacting the classroom climate, teachers impact student success. Bernstein-Yamashiro and Noam (2013) noted in their study that teachers who developed meaningful relationships with their students increased student achievement and reduced student
discipline referrals. In the current research study, Mark corroborated this sentiment by sharing that he had personally witnessed a decrease in behavioral issues of special education students based on the co-teachers in their classroom. Results of the study demonstrated that students in co-taught classes felt more connected to their teachers due to a greater opportunity for relationships to develop, since the ratio of students to teacher is lower. Furthermore, participants noted that while relationships flourished in co-taught classrooms, student motivation and engagement increased. This finding supports a study by Knoell and Crow (2013) that demonstrated positive relationships between students and teachers boosted student learning and motivation.

This study also supports a study by Allen et al. (2013) that found students with strong connections to their teacher learned at a deeper level when supported by their teacher. Again, this corroborates the current base of literature while extending the results to include the impact of co-teachers. In the current research study, participants mentioned that students in co-taught classes not only experienced solid relationships with their teachers, but these students often found an advocate for their learning when there were two teachers in the classroom. Humphries, Strickland, and Keenan (2014) stated that when teachers are academically and socially responsive to students, engagement and achievement of the students increases. This sentiment was sustained through the current research study. The study participants articulated that students often feel connected to their co-teachers, as there are greater chances for students to interact with a teacher meaningfully and individually. Through this connection, student achievement and engagement were both noted to improve in co-taught classrooms, from the experiences of North Georgia school leaders. The results of the current research study supplement the literature stating that teachers impact student motivation, engagement, and achievement, and extend the
literature to encompass how North Georgia co-teachers impact student success.

Behaviors of teachers also influence the classroom. According to Eryilmaz (2014), teachers who are more agreeable and open to new experiences positively impact student success. Again, the current research study supports this study while further refining the finding to add that co-teachers, not just teachers, who are more agreeable and open to new experiences positively impact student success. Over and over, participants in the current research study described the necessity of a co-teacher to be willing and open to new ideas and experiences. Their choices of co-teachers relied heavily on the willingness of the candidate, and their experiences with previous successful co-teaching relationships denoted that the co-teachers involved were willing to experiment and adjust instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classrooms. This further broadens the results of the study by Eryilmaz to include co-teachers.

Other teacher behaviors that were noted in the current research study included the immediacy of co-teachers to quickly assist struggling learners due to having two teachers in the classroom. Participants shared personal experiences of co-teachers being more likely to identify a struggling student since there were two sets of eyes in the classroom. One participant related that it was like the students were getting “double-dipped” by having two teachers who were attentive to their academic needs. According to Mazer (2013), greater teacher immediacy behaviors lead to a more positive classroom environment and increased student success. The results from the current research study cite the immediacy of co-teachers from the experiences of the study participants. For this reason, the results of the current research study support and extend the current literature base on how teacher behaviors impact the learning environment by including North Georgia co-taught classrooms.

A final concept from the review of literature was that when teachers possess stronger
knowledge of the content, it results in higher student achievement (Mahadeo, Manthey, & Brewe, 2013). Results from the current research study were mixed in this realm. North Georgia school leaders were probed to explain whether the amount of a teacher’s content knowledge would impact their choice of assigning that teacher to a co-teaching position. While there was no majority opinion on the impact of content knowledge possessed by a co-teacher originally, all responses to this probe referenced only the content knowledge of the non-general education teacher. Results of the study point to the need for the non-general education co-teacher to either initially possess knowledge of the content or learn the content over time. In either case, North Georgia school leaders desire non-general education teachers to possess knowledge of the content as co-teachers. One reason provided in the study for this desire is creation of a more balanced classroom where both co-teachers can actively lead the instruction or work with struggling learners on content. Additionally, participants revealed that a balanced classroom where both co-teachers have sufficient content knowledge increases the opportunities for higher student achievement. While the results of the current study do not overwhelmingly support the results of Mahadeo et al. (2013), results do point to North Georgia school leaders seeking co-teachers with content knowledge, either initially or gained, to better serve their students, with a goal of higher student achievement in mind. For this reason, the current study results extend the research of Mahadeo et al. to encompass the need of both co-teachers to possess content knowledge to meet the needs of all learners and increase student achievement.

**Choices of school leaders.** From the review of literature, two dominant notions were reviewed in accordance with choices of school leaders. First, the role of school leaders was explored in regards to what influences their choices and what perceptions they hold to be their role in the school. In addition, factors that impact their choices in hiring or assigning teachers
within their schools was investigated. Both of these concepts are addressed by the results of the current research study. Each corroborates the current base of literature while extending the literature to include roles of school leaders in North Georgia and factors that impact their choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. For this reason, the current study provides a novel contribution to current literature.

School leaders define their roles in multiple aspects. North Georgia school leaders overwhelmingly agree that budgeting of school funds is a primary responsibility of their position. From determining which external professional learning opportunities to offer their teachers to which resources to purchase for their students, North Georgia school leaders are expected to budget as deemed necessary in their school. Other duties of North Georgia school leaders include conflict mediation between all constituents, public relations with parents and the community, and human resource duties of hiring faculty members. North Georgia school leaders are expected to comply with all education laws and must only hire highly qualified teachers who possess current Georgia certification for the area and grade band they will teach. Additionally, the needs of the students drive the hiring of all faculty, but North Georgia school leaders seek input from multiple parties prior to making choices affecting their school. In conjunction with their choices, North Georgia school leaders noted pressure from constituents to provide concrete evidence of their school’s success through high student achievement. To this end, many North Georgia school leaders regularly defend their school based on historical student achievement data. The results of the current study support the statements of Khan and Iqbal (2013) that school leaders are held accountable for the success of their schools.

Additionally, North Georgia school leaders also face choices that maintain adherence to education laws and make data driven choices, as noted by Murray (2014). Rutledge, Harris, and
Ingle (2010) asserted that school leaders feel pressure to increase student achievement, and the current study demonstrates that North Georgia school leaders make choices with this concept in mind. Responsibility for the entire school population, as articulated by Senechal (2013), is mirrored by the results of the current study demonstrating that North Georgia school leaders view their role as multifaceted to include the school population, the parents, and the community. Clearly, the current literature base is corroborated by the findings of this research study.

As noted by North Georgia school leaders, another facet of their role is to manage their faculty. Current literature denotes that school leaders hire new faculty members to strengthen the current faculty while considering the candidate’s personal characteristics to determine if the candidate seems to be an appropriate fit for the school (Ball & Green, 2014; Cranston, 2012; Hynes et al., 2011; Rutledge et al., 2010). North Georgia school leaders uphold these considerations when hiring new faculty for co-teaching positions. In addition to a candidate’s perceived match to a school’s culture, North Georgia school leaders’ choices are impacted by the candidate’s passion for education, love for children, and desire to work in a co-teaching position. In accordance with a study by Bigham et al. (2014), North Georgia school leaders consider a candidate’s personal characteristics of professionalism and whether the candidate demonstrates an open mind to try new things. Furthermore, candidates who show a willingness to stretch their skills and undertake new experiences are more likely to be hired by North Georgia school leaders for co-teaching positions. Current literature communicates that school leaders consider prior experiences, collaborative willingness, content knowledge, and classroom management skills when hiring new faculty (Bigham et al., 2014; Bourke & Brown, 2014; Dillon, McCaughtry, & Hummel, 2010; Khan & Iqbal, 2014). North Georgia school leaders reflect upon these same personal characteristics when hiring co-teachers. In fact, personal characteristics of a candidate
are the most influential factor to North Georgia school leaders when hiring co-teachers. In contrast to this, Dillon et al. (2010) declared that prior successful experience of a candidate is the most influential factor in hiring faculty. North Georgia school leaders diverge from this claim when making choices regarding hiring co-teachers.

An additional human resources role of North Georgia school leaders is the assignment of teachers to grade levels and courses. The main concern of these school leaders is the willingness of the candidate to tackle a co-teaching role. Mae declared that she found unwilling co-teachers to be ineffective co-teachers, which can negatively impact the entire school. Another concern of North Georgia school leaders is assigning teachers to a subject and grade level for which they have passion and content knowledge. This substantiates the claims of Carlyon and Fisher (2012) who stated that school leaders make choices that meet the needs of the teacher in addition to the needs of the students. North Georgia school leaders look for volunteers to become co-teachers because they have experienced greater success with co-teaching volunteers than drafting unwilling co-teaching participants. This demonstrates that the choices of North Georgia school leaders are strategic when assigning co-teaching partnerships, which mirrors the sentiments of Carlyon and Fisher who recounted that school leaders are strategic when assigning teachers to grade levels and subjects. Carlyon and Fisher also found that courses are assigned to teachers with strong content and pedagogical knowledge. This finding is not substantiated by the current research study. North Georgia school leaders were marginally influenced by content knowledge when choosing co-teaching partnerships. Those who preferred strong content knowledge in their candidates stated that it was advantageous because both co-teachers would be comfortable with content instruction. Those who stated that content knowledge had no bearing on their choices stated that content knowledge could be obtained on their own time in order for them to feel
comfortable with the content instruction. Considering the results of the current research study, all of the points made by Carlyon and Fisher cannot be supported. This holds true for the results of a study by Kalogrides, Loeb, and Beteille (2013) that found parents, teacher preferences, and teacher retention are all factors in the choices of school leaders when assigning teachers to courses and grade levels. North Georgia school leaders agreed that parents and teacher preferences influenced their choices in assigning co-teachers, but teacher retention was not a factor. In fact, North Georgia school leaders noted that their choices are influenced by parents, faculty, community, and education law requirements. While many of the features of current literature dealing with hiring and assigning teachers was supported by North Georgia school leaders choosing co-teachers, some of the features diverged.

Co-teaching. Co-teaching is not a new concept, but it has increasingly gained attention over the last decade. With the pressure for all students to demonstrate content mastery, school leaders are seeking the most effective and qualified faculty for their schools. This includes faculty for co-teaching their inclusive classrooms. A stumbling block occurs due to an absence of a common definition for co-teaching. A synthesized definition from the current literature base defines two teachers in a general education classroom who teach students with and students without disabilities (Chanmugam & Gerlach, 2013; Dusty & Schneider, 2012; Petrick, 2014; Rimpola, 2014; Walters & Misra, 2013). North Georgia school leaders tend to agree with this generalized definition; however, these leaders added a few additional details to the definition. North Georgia school leaders defined co-teaching as two certified teachers working together within the same classroom to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Additionally, one North Georgia school leader noted that an important detail of co-teaching that tends to be overlooked is that the teachers work in conjunction, so that students are unable to decipher which
is the content teacher and which is the specialized teacher. A definition of co-teaching by North Georgia school leaders matches closely with a synthesized definition from current literature.

Both the current literature and the current research study results support the benefits of co-teaching implementation. According to Fenty and McDuffie-Landrum (2011), co-taught classrooms increase the social skills of students, support of the students, and support of the teacher, in addition to providing greater opportunities for teachers to interact with students individually. North Georgia school leaders substantiate this literature by noting the same benefits of co-teaching. Additional benefits of co-teaching described by North Georgia school leaders were a reduction in perceived pressure for accountability that teachers felt and an opportunity to advocate for students. With two teachers working diligently together on the common mission of educating their students, North Georgia school leaders expressed that the teachers feel less pressure to perform since they are not alone in their mission. Also, North Georgia school leaders describe co-taught classes as providing two teachers who may advocate for a student’s educational needs. The current research study corroborates with current literature while providing additional benefits of co-teaching experienced by North Georgia school leaders.

While benefits of co-teaching are documented, Chanmugam and Gerlach (2013) and Solis et al. (2012) noted a common challenge to co-teaching. Co-teaching teams who do not determine the roles of each co-teacher create obstacles for themselves. North Georgia school leaders divulged that this challenge of co-teaching roles can be combatted through implementation of a co-teaching contract developed at the beginning of the school year. A conversation is forced between co-teachers to discuss what each teacher provides the class and delineates each teacher’s classroom responsibilities based on their strengths. This alleviates confusion between the teachers that may occur, according to Moorehead and Grillo (2013).
Defined roles for each co-teacher creates a more effective class while initiating a conversation between co-teachers as experienced by North Georgia school leaders. The current research corroborates the studies from Chanmugam and Gerlach, Solis et al. (2012), and Moorehead and Grillo in that an absence of clearly defined roles for co-teachers can lead to a challenging co-teaching experience.

A final concept from the current literature on co-teaching came from a study by Pugach and Winn (2011), which found that special education teachers who co-teach work in a supporting role rather than a leading role in the classroom. North Georgia school leaders failed to see the benefit of having a co-teaching relationship where one teacher feels inferior to the other teacher. Instead, North Georgia school leaders encouraged a full implementation of co-teaching instructional methods where neither teacher serves only as a support. In fact, North Georgia school leaders expressed that co-taught classrooms should appear balanced so that both teachers function as lead teachers; no co-teacher should be viewed as a paraprofessional. There is strong discrepancy between the current study results and those of Pugach and Winn. One truly interesting aspect discovered in the current research study is how North Georgia school leaders refer to the non-general education teacher in a co-teaching partnership. The non-general education teacher is called the co-teacher while the general education teacher is referred to as the teacher, which almost negates the fact that North Georgia school leaders seek for both co-teachers to be equal partners in the classroom.

**Theoretical Foundation**

North Georgia school leaders make choices in searching for their quality world as described by Glasser (1994). According to Glasser, all humans make choices to satisfy their basic genetic needs. A balance of satisfaction of all of their basic genetic needs is what Glasser
termed as a human’s quality world. North Georgia school leaders seek to balance fulfilling their needs of belonging, freedom, fun, and power in their quality world. While balance is sometimes not achieved, these school leaders continue to create their quality world in their schools.

Satisfying the need for love and belonging by North Georgia school leaders is demonstrated through their choices for their respective schools and school systems. North Georgia school leaders seek input from multiple constituents prior to finalizing any choices that affect the school and its population. This satisfies their need for belonging as they become part of a choice team rather than simply making choices alone. Also, North Georgia school leaders seek a positive school climate; therefore, choices by these leaders reflect a desire to create a cohesive learning environment where members interact with one another freely while sharing a common vision. Influences on the choices of North Georgia school leaders include students, parents, faculty, and community. For this reason, the school leaders are seeking to satisfy the need for belonging by involving multiple constituents in their choices. Comments from the current research study reflecting school leaders attempting to satisfy their need for belonging revolved around how the school leaders felt they were perceived by the multiple stakeholders in their school system. In their quality world, North Georgia school leaders seek to satisfy their need for love and belonging by making sure the school and community perceive their choices as sound.

A second genetic need to be satisfied is the need for freedom. The need for freedom is the need for an opportunity to express one’s own ideas, choices, and creativity (Glasser, 1994). North Georgia school leaders seek to satisfy their need for freedom through expressing their vision for the school or the co-teaching program. A prime example of the satisfaction of this need comes from Jane, a research study participant. Jane shared her story of entering a new
school system and being asked to make monumental choices and changes in regards to the implementation of special education programs. Jane was allowed freedom to create a special education program that included co-taught classrooms at all grade levels in order to include special education students in general education classrooms. Her choices helped the administrators and teachers of the district schools visualize her plan for revamping a special education department for an entire school district. North Georgia school leaders satisfy their need for freedom in their quality world through sharing their ideas for altering a school or district climate.

According to Glasser (1994), satisfaction of the need for fun can aid in balancing out the quality world when other needs are not met. North Georgia school leaders satisfied their need for fun through making choices that created a pleasant working environment for teachers and students alike. One participant even noted that happy teachers are more fun than negative teachers. Another participant revealed that it was exciting to see the choices she made impacting others positively. North Georgia school leaders satisfy their need for fun by enjoying the positive experiences that result from their choices.

The final genetic need that North Georgia school leaders seek to satisfy is the need for power. According to Glasser (1994), the need for power is satisfied when a person has feelings of accomplishment, success, recognition, or respect. In the quality world for North Georgia school leaders, the need for power is satisfied through gaining the respect of the faculty, being recognized for student achievement, or feeling accomplished when the co-teaching partnerships chosen succeed. These school leaders make choices that impact the entire school population, and many of the choices involve the input of the school faculty. By allowing the faculty to share ideas prior to a choice being made by the school leader, the school leader is satisfying his or her
need for power by gaining the respect of the faculty while also satisfying the faculty’s needs for power by recognizing their input.

Another way North Georgia school leaders satisfy their need for power is through recognition for student accomplishments or achievement. During the data collection for the current research study, multiple participants recounted student achievement information. I feel this was done to further their satisfaction of power by exhibiting feelings of accomplishment and recognition on the part of the school leaders. A final instance of North Georgia school leaders satisfying their need for power is through their assignment of co-teaching partnerships. These leaders perked up when asked to describe successful co-teaching assignments they had made. All were pleased to share the success of former pairings, and this satisfied their need for power.

North Georgia school leaders adhere to the satisfaction of their basic genetic needs as described by Glasser’s (1994) choice theory. The need for belonging, freedom, fun, and power underlie their professional choices for their schools and school systems. This research study clearly demonstrated how North Georgia school leaders seek their quality world and satisfaction of needs through their choices. This study provided a novel contribution to the literature on choice theory by discovering how North Georgia school leaders make choices in search of their quality world.

**Practical Implications**

The current base of literature is deficient in providing empirical evidence on the assignment of co-teaching partnerships. Given the results of the current qualitative multiple case study, assignment of co-teaching partnerships is a worthy topic of study. The implications of the current study results are theoretical, empirical, and practical so that multiple constituents can apply the results of the study findings to their professional positions and research. While many
of the findings from the current study are straightforward, definite implications exist far outside of the concrete findings.

**Theoretical**

Choice theory as proposed by William Glasser (1994) has been applied in both business management and educational environments. The results of this study support the application of choice theory as a business management tool for leaders in an educational setting. Glasser has explored how business managers implement choice theory principles in order to increase productivity and effectiveness of the business. Business managers must create a working environment that allows workers to satisfy their genetic needs of belonging, freedom, fun, and power while satisfying the manager’s needs. Also, Glasser has proposed how choice theory principles can be utilized by classroom teachers in order to create a more effective classroom environment by allowing students opportunities to meet their basic genetic needs of belonging, freedom, fun, and power.

The current study results imply that school leaders should utilize choice theory principles in their professional positions. School leaders function as the business managers of their schools. The current study results note that North Georgia school leaders view their role in the school as managerial positions requiring that they make choices involving human resources and public relations. In addition to those facets of the position of school leader, accountability for student achievement and responsibility for providing adequate working conditions are viewed as facets of the professional position of school leader. Theoretical implications of the current research study demonstrate that choice theory should be applied by school leaders due to their role as the manager of the school, the school system, or the school system department. School leaders should seek to satisfy the basic needs of belonging, freedom, fun, and power for their faculty
which will, in turn, satisfy their own needs in their quality world. The results of the study show that choice theory principles are being followed by North Georgia school leaders, but it is believed to be inadvertent. School leaders should consciously and actively seek to implement choice theory principles in their choice to facilitate satisfaction of their needs and the needs of their faculty.

In order to accomplish this recommendation, school leaders need to be educated on choice theory and the principles associated with it. A book study of Glasser’s work, a professional development course regarding choice theory and management, or self-guided learning about choice theory are all methods that school leaders could employ to gain knowledge of choice theory and how it applies to their management position. Additionally, school leaders should read research by Glasser on implementing choice theory in business management and in educational settings. Through gaining knowledge of how to implement choice theory as managers of their school, school leaders can strive for a more effective school climate. As Glasser (1994) shared about business management through choice theory, workers who are satisfying their needs will be more productive. This should hold true for faculty working for a school leader who applies choice theory and satisfies the faculty’s needs. The current research study results denote that North Georgia school leaders are interested in maintaining a positive school climate while attempting to increase student achievement. For this reason, the theoretical implication derived from the research study results is that choice theory should be applied by school leaders to create a more effective working and learning environment.

A second theoretical implication continues to involve school leaders utilizing the concepts of choice theory. As described in the current research study results, school leaders are responsible for assigning co-teaching partnerships. It is in the best interest of the school leaders,
the students, and the school to create effective co-teaching partnerships. Again, the current study and current literature base denote the impact of the teacher or co-teaching partnership on the classroom climate. A positive teacher or a positive co-teaching partnership develops a positive classroom climate where student engagement, motivation, and engagement are increased. The results of the current study imply that school leaders should actively engage in the application of choice theory principles when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Care should be taken by the school leader in meeting the needs of non-general education co-teachers, as the literature points out that these individuals often feel slighted and serve a supporting role in the classroom instead of fulfilling the role of co-teacher.

To achieve the implementation of choice theory in assigning co-teachers, I recommend that school leaders become educated on choice theory prior to implementation. School leaders should create a checklist or chart to aid them in making decisions that follow the choice theory model. For this, school leaders should list each of their possible co-teaching partnerships in a chart that also denotes the satisfaction of the four basic needs described in choice theory. The fifth choice theory need of survival is unnecessary for this chart. For each proposed partnership, the school leader should note on the chart if each of the basic needs is met for both co-teachers. The school leader should explore whether the proposed partnership satisfies the need for belonging, freedom, fun, and power for each of the co-teachers in the proposed partnership. Following the acknowledgment of needs satisfaction for each partnership on the chart, the school leader should then view the chart holistically to determine which proposed partnership would offer the greatest satisfaction of both co-teachers’ needs. A selection of a proposed partnership that is expected to satisfy the needs of belonging, freedom, fun, and power for both co-teachers would be the most effective choice. For this reason, the school leader is recommended to
actively implement choice theory principles in choosing co-teaching partnerships in order to satisfy the co-teachers’ needs and have a high likelihood of creating a positive classroom climate that is beneficial to students.

A third theoretical implication is for a different group of stakeholders than the school leaders. Co-teachers can also implement choice theory principles in developing an effective and satisfying co-teaching partnership. While the current research describes multiple factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders, the most prevalent factor in this study that impacted co-teaching assignment were the personal characteristics of possible co-teachers. Over and over, participants in the study denoted the need for a teacher to be willing to accept new challenges and to share responsibilities in the classroom. This finding implies that co-teachers should employ choice theory principles in their relationships together. According to Glasser (1994), satisfaction of needs will aid individuals in living their quality world scenario. For co-teachers, the importance of attaining their quality world is magnified as they are not only developing relationships with students, but are also developing and maintaining a relationship with one another. Co-teachers should seek to satisfy one another’s basic needs.

To accomplish this implementation of choice theory for co-teachers, it is recommended that co-teachers receive training on choice theory principles. This could be done through professional development, a book study, or education from their school leader. Once the co-teachers have both learned the principles of choice theory, they should seek to implement the principles in their relationship.

The most effective means of implementing these principles is to create or review a co-teaching contract that delineates the roles and responsibilities of each co-teacher. It is recommended that the review analyze the roles and responsibilities of each co-teacher to
determine whether their basic needs of freedom, belonging, fun, and power are being met. If they are not, the co-teaching contract should be revised so that both teachers are able to satisfy their needs and thus improve their relationship within the classroom. It is recommended that co-teachers first review the contract independently, making notations of which roles and responsibilities satisfy each of their personal needs. Then the co-teachers should openly discuss their findings. Adjustments can be made to the roles and responsibilities together in order to maximize the satisfaction of each of their needs. One teacher should not be having all basic needs met while the other has none met. There must be a balance that allows both co-teachers to satisfy their basic needs in order to achieve their quality world and promote a more positive classroom climate.

The current research study demonstrated three distinct theoretical implications. First, school leaders should learn and apply choice theory principles in decisions regarding their school to create and maintain a positive overall school climate. Secondly, school leaders should implement methods for ensuring that choice theory principles are applied to their decisions when assigning co-teaching partnerships. Finally, co-teachers themselves should implement choice theory principles in the development of their partnerships through review and analysis of their co-teaching roles and responsibilities.

**Empirical**

The current qualitative multiple case study provides empirical implications in addition to theoretical implications. As noted in earlier chapters, there is a lack of current literature on the assignment of co-teachers. While there is sufficient evidence regarding the factors that school leaders use to make choices regarding hiring and assignment of general education teachers, a definitive gap exists in the research regarding hiring and assigning co-teachers. The results of
the current study serve to begin to fill this gap at the crossroads of teacher impact, choices of school leaders, and co-teaching.

Results of the current research study demonstrate that co-teachers impact the learning environment and the success of students, and current literature demonstrates that teachers impact the learning environment in the same manner. It is necessary to differentiate because co-teachers are different from single general education classroom teachers. Co-teaching requires advanced interpersonal and academic skills, which may require substantial effort on the part of the co-teacher. Co-teachers not only perform all of the duties of a general education classroom teacher, but co-teachers must also understand and implement Individualized Education Plans for special education students, continuously monitor student progress in accordance with Individualized Education Plans, navigate a partnership with a co-teacher that may or may not be pleasant, and still perform all the duties associated with being a general education classroom teacher. Co-teachers are a different sector of educational faculty, and this sector deserves to be studied in terms of how they impact student success. Implications from the current research study in relation to the impact of the teacher address just this issue. While current literature would lead one to believe that documenting the impact of general education classroom teachers is sufficient, the results of the study suggest otherwise. The study implies that co-teachers are separate from regular classroom teachers in that the assignment of co-teachers requires the school leader to consider the personal characteristics, prior experiences, and content knowledge of two separate teachers. The school leader attempts to match the separate teachers in a partnership that will encourage them to trust and rely on one another’s strengths and weaknesses in order to provide the most beneficial educational measures possible to meet the needs of each individual student within their classroom. The current study implies that this task requires ample thought and
consideration, and this concept fails to be demonstrated through current literature.

To overcome the gap in the current literature base, researchers must explore the realm of assignment of co-teachers. The current research study opened the door to a novel area of study where researchers can seek answers to why some co-teaching relationships work and others do not. The dynamics of a co-teaching partnership could be explored in addition to how school leaders perceive their own choices in the assignment of co-teachers. Results of the current case study demonstrate, through connections with current literature and the collected data from North Georgia school leaders, that co-teaching partnerships affect the success of students and the satisfaction of teachers. These choices have been explored in regards to the factors that impact North Georgia school leaders’ choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships, but that is the just the tip of the iceberg. There is so much more to study regarding the overall concept of assigning co-teaching partnerships; the gap in literature is substantial. Researchers must step up to fill this gap with empirical evidence.

Practical

Practical implications of the current research study extend to four different groups of individuals. School leaders, teachers, teacher candidates, and higher education faculty may all take something from the practical implications of the current research study. Based on the determination of factors that impact North Georgia school leaders’ choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships, each group shares in the list of practical implications.

School leaders. First, school leaders should review the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders. Based on this information, school leaders can learn how to make more effective matches by determining their own factors that impact their choices when assigning co-teaching partnerships. To do this, school leaders should create a ranking list of
personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge they feel are beneficial in choosing co-teachers. This list would be used to evaluate co-teaching candidates based on the school leader’s most influential factors. Additionally, school leaders should seek to solicit volunteers. North Georgia school leaders definitively stated that teachers who volunteered for co-teaching positions were far more effective than those who were drafted to co-teach. All school leaders should take note of this finding and the implication that teachers should be allowed to volunteer for co-teaching positions. School leaders may do this by creating an online survey, personally discussing the option of co-teaching with individual teachers, or creating a volunteer box where candidates can share information as to why they feel they would be an effective co-teacher. The survey may include an opportunity for teachers to volunteer for co-teaching positions and an opportunity for teachers to define their personal characteristics that may be helpful in pairing the co-teachers. The practical implication here is that school leaders should consciously check the candidates’ personality and skills against their desired checklist, while remaining open to allowing teachers to volunteer for co-teaching positions.

**Teachers and co-teachers.** Practical implications for school leaders were not the only implications derived from the current research study results. Implications from the study affect current teachers and current co-teachers. If teachers want to become co-teachers, the teachers should seek their own possible partner from the pool of faculty at their school. Then the teachers should discuss if co-teaching is a viable option for them along with developing a justification list for their school leader. The teachers should not simply state that they want to work together. The teachers need to demonstrate their commitment to becoming a co-teaching partnership by laying the groundwork for building a strong working relationship and presenting these findings to their school leader for review. The study results demonstrated that the most successful co-t
teaching partnerships in North Georgia were formed when two teachers volunteered to work together to educate all children in their classroom. Additionally, a teacher who desires to become a co-teacher should examine his or her own personal characteristics to determine if the factors mentioned by North Georgia school leaders are applicable to the co-teaching candidate. Also, an aspiring co-teacher should seek ways to demonstrate these personal characteristics in their current role while finding ways to demonstrate their willingness to try new things. The teacher may research a new instructional method or technology application for their current classroom. When the teacher volunteers for a co-teaching position, these practices and personal characteristics should be pointed out to school leaders, as these were deemed impactful by North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships.

If co-teachers are dissatisfied with their current partnership, the school leader must be notified. Again, altering co-teaching assignments cannot simply be a passing thought. The co-teacher should present sound evidence to the school leader about why the current co-teaching situation is not effective. Another option may be to ask for mediation from a school leader while the co-teachers communicate their concerns with the partnership. Many of these challenges can be overcome by the co-teachers communicating their strengths and weaknesses with one another, and then the co-teachers could incorporate these findings in their planning and lessons.

As mentioned in the current research study results, North Georgia school leaders utilized a co-teaching contract that forces initial conversations at the beginning of the school between new co-teachers. Implications of using this contract are that co-teaching partnerships become stronger and face fewer challenges. Roles and responsibilities, along with strengths and weaknesses, are revealed during the discussion of the contract. Disgruntled co-teachers could employ this contract in a failing partnership in an attempt to save it. Also, teachers who are new
to co-teaching could utilize this type of co-teaching contract to lessen some of the challenges that may be faced in their new role. In addition to the co-teaching contract, new co-teachers could implement a co-teaching planning guide that requires input from both co-teachers for each lesson. The planning guide should be developed by both co-teachers to address the needs of individual students in their classrooms. The implications from the results of the research study are that current, new, and aspiring co-teachers should implement methods to combat co-teaching challenges before they occur.

**Teacher candidates.** Teacher candidates may also be influenced by the practical implications of the current research study. Based on the results, North Georgia school leaders’ choices when assigning co-teachers are impacted by personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge. For a teacher candidate to be more appealing for a position as a co-teacher, the candidate can prepare by addressing the factors related by North Georgia school leaders. For this preparation, teacher candidates may work to educate themselves on the concept of co-teaching. The models presented by Friend, Reising, and Cook (1993) should be reviewed, or the candidates can seek out professional learning opportunities to gain knowledge of co-teaching practices.

Additionally, teacher candidates should demonstrate the personal characteristics discussed by North Georgia school leaders when interviewing for co-teaching positions. Teacher candidates should mention their willingness to try new things, their attitude toward including all children, their desire for collaboration, and their interpersonal skills. In addition to addressing these personal characteristics in an interview, the teacher candidates should seek ways to gain experience in co-teaching classrooms. First, the candidates can request field placements in co-teaching classrooms through their university’s clinical services office. If there are none
available, the candidates may solicit the opportunity to observe co-teaching classrooms in a local school district classroom. Many colleges of education are currently implementing co-teaching experiences as part of their student teaching endeavors. In either case, the candidates are gaining clinical experience in a co-teaching environment that can impact a school leader’s choice when assigning that candidate to a co-teaching partnership. Not only should the teacher candidates showcase their personal characteristics and seek professional co-teaching experiences, but the candidates should also attempt to gain content knowledge in the subject that will be co-taught. While North Georgia school leaders were mixed on their responses to the extent that content knowledge impacts their choices, all responses communicated that content knowledge was necessary initially or should be obtained independently. The current research study results imply that a teacher candidate who demonstrates the personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge, as mentioned by North Georgia school leaders, is more apt to be assigned a co-teaching position.

**Higher education faculty.** A final group that is able to utilize the practical implications of the current research study results is higher education faculty. Higher educational institutions seek to fully prepare teacher candidates for teaching positions. Based on the study results, higher education can also seek to fully prepare teacher candidates for co-teaching positions. The implications for preparing these candidates is to develop the personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge that North Georgia school leaders identify as impacting their choices of assigning co-teachers. Higher education institutions could supplement teacher education programs with rigorous content knowledge and applications, in addition to practical implementation of the content. This may require colleges to revisit their courses and requirements to better ensure teacher candidates are proficient in content knowledge. Also, the
colleges may work to provide greater opportunities for teacher candidates to have professional experiences in co-teaching classrooms. This may be done through field experience placements or added as a facet of the student teaching experience. In either case, the goal is to provide clinical experiences in co-taught classrooms for their college students.

Another way that higher education institutions may prepare their teacher candidates for co-teaching positions is to develop a certificate endorsement for co-teaching. The requirements of the endorsement would include additional coursework and additional field experiences that are geared towards co-teaching. Teacher candidates who were truly interested in co-teaching could complete the endorsement requirements that would allow them to build their knowledge and clinical experiences in co-teaching.

A final measure that colleges may explore is methods for educating school leaders about co-teaching. This may be offered as a seminar, a conference, or coursework. The goal would be to describe the practice of co-teaching, the implementation of co-teaching, and methods for evaluating co-teaching. The study results implied that school leaders must be knowledgeable about co-teaching just as teacher candidates must be prepared for co-teaching.

**Limitations**

Limitations of the current research study include limitations based on the participants and limitations based on the researcher’s possible bias. While these limitations are noted, they do not invalidate the results. First, there is a lack of generalizability due to the design of the multiple case study. The study was bound by the geographic location of North Georgia. This may result in a lack of generalizability that is common to all case studies (Yin, 2011). Additionally, only school leaders who had experienced the phenomenon were asked to participate in the study. Permission was only granted by a portion of the school districts in North Georgia, which was a
decision by each school district’s superintendent of schools. While I sought permission from many school districts, only a few approved for me to contact their school leaders as possible participants. This was out of my control as the superintendents made the decision of whether I could contact their school leaders. Also, data was collected from participants sharing their personal experiences. According to Yin (2011), a researcher cannot expect “totally accurate renditions of real-life behavior and how things actually transpired” by participants (p. 132). Once again, the study was limited by the experiences shared by the participants.

Further limitations of the study included bias on the part of the researcher. I am a former co-teacher who had experienced positive and negative relationships with various co-teaching partners. In addition to my prior co-teaching experience, I am currently considered the resident expert on co-teaching at my university where I work as an assistant professor, along with being the chair of the committee for our annual co-teaching conference. I am fairly knowledgeable about co-teaching practices, implementation, and challenges, but I took measures to keep this bias from interfering with the individual participant interviews by remaining neutral during all interview processes.

Throughout the process of data collection, I learned that my experiences could have offered bias to the study. From my physical presence to my vocal tones, I sought to combat my bias in order to generate a reliable study. First, I learned that I had to remain neutral during interviews as not to bias the responses of participants. Secondly, I learned that I had to withhold approval or denial of my opinions during interviews as participants responded to probing questions. While both were difficult, I was able to neutralize my bias by presenting a pleasant, but impartial interview where participants were free to express themselves openly. I maintained a professional demeanor and resisted the urge to offer approval or denial of participant
responses. I learned that withholding my own bias was extremely challenging, but it was also highly effective in eliciting open, honest responses from participants during individual interviews.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

The current research study opened a new area for educational research. Co-teaching partnerships should be investigated in greater depth in regards to the assignment of co-teachers. A review of literature identified a substantial gap that research of the assignment of co-teaching partnerships could fill. Based on this information and the results of the current research study, recommendations for future research studies include increasing the sample size to a larger number. Also, the geographic location of the research study could be altered to determine if results are consistent across different regions of Georgia or different regions of the United States.

Future research is also necessary to more clearly define which personal characteristics impact school leaders’ choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. Research should also explore how school leaders determine whether their assignments of co-teachers are effective. Further studies should investigate the choices of school leaders based on different decision-making models to determine if school leaders adhere to any one decision-making model more frequently than others.

Quantitative future studies are also recommended. First, it is recommended that the relationship between the factors impacting co-teaching assignments and student achievement should be studied. Are co-teachers who volunteered for co-teaching more likely to demonstrate greater student achievement gains? This line of study could be further defined by questioning if personal characteristics, professional experiences, or content knowledge of co-teachers had the most profound impact on student achievement.
Summary

The current research study sought to discover factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. The purpose of the study derived from a review of literature that helped the researcher identify a gap in the current literature base at the crossroads of teacher impact, choices of school leaders, and co-teaching. At the intersection of this literature lay school leader choices in assigning co-teachers. Research questions were formed with this notion in mind and also derived from current literature. Personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge were identified in the review of the literature as impacting choices for hiring teachers. These concepts were integrated into the research questions, and Glasser’s (1994) choice theory was selected as a theoretical basis for the study.

The qualitative multiple case study was bounded by the geographic location of the participants who were all from North Georgia. Participants were solicited from North Georgia school districts that granted permission to contact possible participants. Data was collected via personal interviews, a focus group, and open-ended questionnaires, lending triangulation to the study results. Once data was collected, it was compiled using NVivo qualitative software (2012). Following compilation, data was disassembled through first level coding followed by multiple levels of coding. Reassembly of data identified emerging themes of personal characteristics, prior experience, and content knowledge that correlated with the case study research questions. Themes were interpreted to determine results of the study.

Findings of the study were presented in regards to themes emerging from each of the three methods of data collection. Since each theme correlated with the research study questions, results were also presented by answering each of the three subquestions and the central research
question. Descriptions of each study participant were provided in order to give the reader a cast of characters for the study. Pseudonyms of participants and school districts were included to maintain participant anonymity during the study. Results of the research study were discussed as each applied to choice theory, teacher impact, school leader choices, and co-teaching as identified in the review of literature.

Theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study were discussed, and recommendations for future research were delineated. The most dominant implications of the study were practical in nature. Teachers, teacher candidates, school leaders, and higher education faculty are all able to benefit from the implications of this research study’s results. Teachers and teacher candidates should seek to possess as many of the factors impacting co-teaching assignment choices of school leaders to increase their chances of becoming a co-teacher if so desired. School leaders should consciously identify personal characteristics, professional experiences, and content knowledge considered beneficial of co-teachers prior to making choices of co-teacher assignment. Higher education professionals may use the implications to better prepare teacher candidates for co-teaching positions.
REFERENCES


doi:10.1080/10474410903535380


doi:10.1080/1045988X.1993.9944611


doi:10.1080/03634523.2014.881516


doi:10.1177/0038040712456555


doi:10.1177/1080569913507596


doi:10.1016/j.tate.2012.08.006

doi:10.1063/1.4789706

doi:10.1080/03634523.2012.731513


August 19, 2015

Donna Rae Cherney
IRB Approval 2274.081915; A Case Study to Discover the Factors Impacting North Georgia School Leaders’ Choices in the Assignment of Co-Teaching Partnerships

Dear Donna,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. 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.

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

Sincerely,

[Signature]

O. M'Chael Baker, MA, CBP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971
APPENDIX B: PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT INITIAL CONTACT EMAIL

The following was included with the participant consent form as the initial solicitation of participants:

My name is Donna Cherveny, and I am asking your help by participating in my doctoral research study. I am proud to be culminating my education with Liberty University, and I would like for you to take part in my research study.

Through my research study, I am seeking to discover factors that impact choices of school leaders in assigning co-teaching partnerships. Your help would be greatly appreciated as your experiences as choice-makers in your school are valuable in shaping the current literature.

Please take time to consider participating in my doctoral research study and review the attached consent form for further details regarding my study. After reviewing the document, I hope you will consent to participate in my doctoral research study and share your experiences of choosing co-teaching partnerships in your respective school.

Please feel free to contact me with any questions regarding the research study either prior to your consent or during the study. My contact information is below.

Thank you

Donna Cherveny
Doctoral Student
Liberty University
dcherveny@liberty.edu
APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM A

CONSENT FORM A

A CASE STUDY TO DISCOVER THE FACTORS IMPACTING NORTH GEORGIA SCHOOL LEADERS’ CHOICES IN ASSIGNMENT OF CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS

Donna Cherveny, Principal Investigator
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of factors that impact the choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a North Georgia school leader who may have assigned co-teaching partnerships. 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 Donna Cherveny, a doctoral candidate in Liberty University’s School of Education.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to discover the factors that impact choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. With the study, I hope to discover what personal characteristics, professional characteristics, and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices when a co-teaching partnership is chosen. The following research questions will guide the study:

- What are the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships in their respective schools?
- What personal characteristics of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?
- What professional experiences of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?
- What certifications and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in an online questionnaire and a personal interview. If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- EXPERIENCE: Verify that you have experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching partnerships by signing this consent form.
- INTERVIEW: Participate in a one-on-one interview scheduled at your convenience at your school campus. The interview will take less than one hour, and I will follow an interview guide with open-ended questions. Additionally, you will be asked to allow digital recording of the interview in order to provide an accurate transcription. The only individuals who will be allowed to listen to the recording are the researcher and a professional transcriber. You will also be given the opportunity to review the audio recording to clarify any errors that may be present or withdraw the use of the audio recording altogether. If you approve the audio recording, a transcription of the interview will be created using a pseudonym in place of your name to maintain confidentiality. Once the transcription is complete, the audio recording will be deleted.
QUESTIONNAIRE: Complete an open-ended questionnaire online concerning your experiences with the assignment of co-teaching partnerships. The questionnaire should take no more than half an hour, and it may be completed at your leisure over the course of a one-week period. There will be no restrictions for time allowed to complete the questionnaire. Confidentiality of your personally identifiable information will be maintained through the use of a pseudonym when the data is being analyzed by the researcher.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
This study has minimal risks as your participation encompasses activities that are no more than you would encounter in everyday life, but providing personal experiences may cause anxiety. If at any time during the study you feel uncomfortable in continuing with your participation, you may choose to withdraw from the study.

Benefits of this study outweigh the minimal risk to you as the participant. As a participant, you will be adding to the existing body of research on co-teaching in schools. Your contribution will provide new insight for others on the factors that impact your choices in pairing co-teachers. This information may benefit other school leaders, teachers, and teacher candidates. Your personal experiences will be shared in a confidential manner that allows you to speak freely and share openly. You will receive a copy of the study for your own perusal. Although you will not receive a direct benefit from your participation in the study, your participation is greatly appreciated and will serve to impact the current literature on selection of co-teaching partnerships.

Compensation:
There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

All records of this study will be kept private at all times. No personally identifiable information of participants will be published. Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant in the study. A list of participants and corresponding pseudonyms will be maintained separately from all other data collected. Research records will be stored on the researcher’s personal, password-protected computer. Audio recordings of interviews will be deleted upon the participant’s verbal consent to use the recording and transcription of the interview has been secured. All written data for this study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until final approval of the dissertation committee. Following a three-year retention period, all collected data will be deleted and destroyed. Paper records will be shredded. Electronic records will be deleted.

Data from the findings of the study may be used for future publications, but participant names and personally identifiable information will be replaced with pseudonyms to maintain the participants’ confidentiality. No personally identifiable information will be utilized in future publications or presentations.
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. If you decide to participate, you are free
to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the primary researcher, Donna
Cherveny, at dcherveny@liberty.edu or 706-927-5617. If you choose to withdraw from the
study, any data collected from you by the researcher will be removed and deleted.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Donna Cherveny. You may ask any questions you have
now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Donna Cherveny at 706-927-
5617 or dcherveny@liberty.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. James Swezey
with Liberty University at jaswezey@liberty.edu or 434-592-4903.
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 Boulevard, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 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 the appropriate boxes and
electronically signing below, I consent to the data collection methods and attest to my experience
with the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships.

☐ I consent to having the interview digitally recorded for audio purposes only.
☐ I have assigned co-teaching partnerships.

Participant Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
(Please type your name in the space above to acknowledge your acceptance of being a
participant.)

Researcher Signature: ___________________________ Date: __________
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM B

CONSENT FORM B

A CASE STUDY TO DISCOVER THE FACTORS IMPACTING NORTH GEORGIA SCHOOL LEADERS’ CHOICES IN ASSIGNMENT OF CO-TEACHING PARTNERSHIPS
Donna Cherveny, Principal Investigator
Liberty University
Department of Education
You are invited to be in a research study of factors that impact the choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a North Georgia school leader who may have assigned co-teaching partnerships. 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 Donna Cherveny, a doctoral student in Liberty University’s School of Education.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to discover the factors that impact choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. With the study, I hope to discover what personal characteristics, professional characteristics, and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices when a co-teaching partnership is chosen. The following research questions will guide the study:

- What are the factors that impact the choices of North Georgia school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships in their respective schools?
- What personal characteristics of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?
- What professional experiences of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?
- What certifications and content knowledge of teachers impact school leaders’ choices of co-teaching assignments?

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in an online questionnaire and a personal interview. If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- EXPERIENCE: Verify that you have experienced the phenomenon of choosing co-teaching partnerships by signing this consent form.

- QUESTIONNAIRE: Complete an open-ended questionnaire online concerning your experiences with the assignment of co-teaching partnerships. The questionnaire should take no more than half an hour, and it may be completed at your leisure over the course of a one-week period. There will be no restrictions for time allowed to complete the questionnaire. Confidentiality of your personally identifiable information will be maintained through the use of a pseudonym when the data is being analyzed by the researcher.

- ONLINE FOCUS GROUP: Participate in an asynchronous discussion board which will be available for two weeks to access as many times as you desire. The intent is to provide a forum for open discussion of the topic between yourself and other participants. You will be provided a link for accessing the discussion board, but you will be asked to
create your own login and password that are not identifiable to yourself or your school, and then you will supply the login to the researcher via email or telephone. For participation in the asynchronous online focus group, you will be asked to respond to each of five initial threads and post thoughtful responses to at least two other participants for each thread. Completion of the asynchronous online focus group should take less than one hour of your time.

**Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:**

This study has minimal risks as your participation encompasses activities that are no more than you would encounter in everyday life, but providing personal experiences may cause anxiety. If at any time during the study you feel uncomfortable in continuing with your participation, you may choose to withdraw from the study. Benefits of this study outweigh the minimal risk to you as the participant. As a participant, you will be adding to the existing body of research on co-teaching in schools. Your contribution will provide new insight for others on the factors that impact your choices in pairing co-teachers. This information may benefit other school leaders, teachers, and teacher candidates. Your personal experiences will be shared in a confidential manner that allows you to speak freely and share openly. You will receive a copy of the study for your own perusal. Although you will not receive a direct benefit from your participation in the study, your participation is greatly appreciated and will serve to impact the current literature on selection of co-teaching partnerships.

**Compensation:**

There will be no compensation for your participation in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All records of this study will be kept private at all times. No personally identifiable information of participants will be published. Pseudonyms will be assigned for each participant in the study. A list of participants and corresponding pseudonyms will be maintained separately from all other data collected. Research records will be stored on the researcher’s personal, password-protected computer. All written data for this study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until final approval of the dissertation committee. Following a three-year retention period, all collected data will be deleted and destroyed. Paper records will be shredded. Electronic records will be deleted.

Data from the findings of the study may be used for future publications, but participant names and personally identifiable information will be replaced with pseudonyms to maintain the participants’ confidentiality. No personally identifiable information will be utilized in future publications or presentations.

**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. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
How to Withdraw from the Study
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the primary researcher, Donna Cherveny, at dcherveny@liberty.edu or 706-927-5617. If you withdraw from the study, any data collected from you by the researcher will be deleted.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Donna Cherveny. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact Donna Cherveny at 706-927-5617 or dcherveny@liberty.edu. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. James Swezey with Liberty University at jaswezey@liberty.edu or 434-592-4903.
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 Boulevard, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 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 the appropriate box and electronically signing below, I consent to the data collection methods and attest to my experience with the phenomenon of assigning co-teaching partnerships.

☐ I have assigned co-teaching partnerships.

Participant Signature: __________________________ Date: __________
(Please type your name in the space above to acknowledge your acceptance of being a participant.)

Researcher Signature: __________________________ Date: __________
Dear Participant,

Thank you for your consent to participate in my doctoral research study. Your experiences will benefit the current base of literature that is lacking in choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. As the qualitative nature of this study, data will be collected through the multiple methods outlined in the consent form that you signed and returned. Information for each of the methods is listed below with further information. Please review and contact me with any questions. Once again, thank you for your help in shaping the current literature and participating in my doctoral study.

**Interview**

I would like for you to select your date, time, and location for the interview at your school. The interview should take less than one hour where you share your experiences with choosing co-teaching partnerships. Please select from any date and time from the date range below and email me your selected time and date. I will respond via email to confirm.

Available dates: ________________________________
Available times: ________________________________
Location of your choice: _________________________

**Open-ended Questionnaire**

To access the questionnaire, please click the following link which will automatically direct you to the questionnaire. Confidentiality of all data obtained through this questionnaire will be maintained. When your responses are received, you will be assigned a pseudonym to keep all personally identifiable information confidential. There is no time limit on completion of your responses once you begin the questionnaire, so please feel free to take as much time as necessary to complete the questionnaire and feel comfortable that your responses will be kept confidential. The questionnaire will be available only from _________ until _________ to allow you to complete the questionnaire at your convenience. The link for the questionnaire is: www.___________________.

Again, thank you for your participation in my doctoral research study. Your experiences are important to the current literature base. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. I look forward to hearing from you regarding a date, time, and location for the interview. Meeting you and documenting your experiences will be a joy.

Thank you

Donna Cherveny
Doctoral Student
Liberty University
dcherveny@liberty.edu
APPENDIX F: PARTICIPANT DUTIES EMAIL B

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your consent to participate in my doctoral research study. Your experiences will benefit the current base of literature that is lacking in choices of school leaders when assigning co-teaching partnerships. As the qualitative nature of this study, data will be collected through the multiple methods outlined in the consent form that you signed and returned. Information for each of the methods is listed below with further information. Please review and contact me with any questions. Once again, thank you for your help in shaping the current literature and participating in my doctoral study.

**Asynchronous Online Discussion Board**

To access the discussion board for participation, please visit www.__________. You will be asked to create your own login information and password. Please DO NOT create a login or password that is identifiable to yourself or your school. Please email me at dcherveny@liberty.edu with your login information. Confidentiality of your personally identifiable information will be maintained through the use of a pseudonym. You are encouraged to log into the discussion board as many times as you like during the date interval it is open. You are further encouraged to respond to all threads and other participant postings. This will help enable a rich discussion of the shared experiences of choosing co-teaching partnerships. Please plan to respond to each of the five discussion threads and post thoughtful replies to at least two other participants for each thread. The discussion board will be available on the following dates only: ____________.

**Open-ended Questionnaire**

To access the questionnaire, please click the following link which will automatically direct you to the questionnaire. Confidentiality of all data obtained through this questionnaire will be maintained. When your responses are received, you will be assigned a pseudonym to keep all personally identifiable information confidential. There is no time limit on completion of your responses once you begin the questionnaire, so please feel free to take as much time as necessary to complete the questionnaire and feel comfortable that your responses will be kept confidential. The questionnaire will be available only from _________ until _________ to allow you to complete the questionnaire at your convenience. The link for the questionnaire is: www.___________________.

Again, thank you for your participation in my doctoral research study. Your experiences are important to the current literature base. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns. Documenting your experiences will be a joy.

Thank you

Donna Cherveny
Doctoral Student
Liberty University
dcherveny@liberty.edu
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introduction
You have been selected to participate in my doctoral research study because you have a great deal to share about choosing co-teaching partnerships. My research study focuses on the factors that impact your choices in assigning co-teaching partnerships. My study does not seek to evaluate your choices or experiences, but it rather seeks to learn more about how school leaders, such as yourself, choose co-teaching partnerships.

I ask that you allow this interview to be digitally recorded so that it may be transcribed for data analysis. Prior to today, you signed a consent form that discussed the confidentiality of your responses, the voluntary nature of being a participant in this study, and the option that you may choose to stop at any time you feel uncomfortable. Do you have any questions regarding this consent form or the study itself? If not, I have planned for this interview to last no more than an hour. I understand you are a busy individual, and I thank you for sharing your time and experiences with me.

Interviewee Background Information
How long have you been a leader at this school?
_____________________________________________________________________________
What experience did you have as a school leader prior to coming to this position?
_____________________________________________________________________________
Briefly describe your role as a leader in this school.
______________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Key Question #1: Walk me through the current implementation of co-teaching in your school.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Prompt: How do you define co-teaching?
______________________________________________________________________________

Prompt: Based on your experiences, what are your impressions of co-teaching?
______________________________________________________________________________

Prompt: Describe outcomes you have personally noted that derived from co-teaching classrooms.
______________________________________________________________________________

Prompt: How do you determine which courses will be co-taught?
______________________________________________________________________________

Key Question # 2: Tell me about your co-teachers and their impact on students.
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Prompt: How do your co-teachers affect the school climate and the climate of the classroom?
**Prompt:** Tell me how your co-teachers impact student achievement.

---

**Prompt:** Describe how your co-teachers impact student engagement and motivation to learn.

---

**Key Question #3:** Tell me about your experiences with pairing co-teachers in your current school and include whether you feel the pairings were effective choices or not.

---

**Prompt:** How do you determine which teachers will be paired as co-teachers?

---

**Prompt:** How do personal characteristics of individual teachers impact your choice in pairing co-teaching partnerships? Do you seek what you think are compatible personalities?

---

**Prompt:** Describe a co-teaching partnership you have chosen that displayed strongly compatible personalities, if any.

---

**Prompt:** How does certification and content knowledge of the teachers influence your choices, if at all? Is it beneficial to have both co-teachers certified in the content or certified in special education? Why?

---

**Prompt:** How do prior co-teaching experiences of teachers influence your choices, if at all? Do you find that you prefer to assign co-teachers who have been co-teachers in the past?

---

**Prompt:** What do you consider to be more useful in choosing co-teaching partners: prior experience in co-teaching or professional certifications and content knowledge? Why?

---

**Prompt:** What do you feel is the single most important factor to be considered when you assign co-teachers?
Key Question #4: Describe some of the choices you, as the school leader, must make for your school.

Prompt: How does local, state, and national accountability affect your choices as the school leader?

Prompt: Who within the school influences your choices for the school?

Prompt: How do forces outside the school impact your choices for the school?

Prompt: When hiring new faculty and assigning teachers to classes and grade levels, what drives your choices?

Closing:
Thank you for sharing your experiences with me. Your participation is greatly appreciated, and you can be certain that your privacy and confidentiality will be maintained. If you would like, you may review the audio recording of the interview now. If not, you are granting permission for the audio recording to be transcribed in its entirety and used for my study. Thank you again for your participation in my doctoral research study.
APPENDIX H: OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE QUESTIONS

1. What is your name, title, and school name?

2. How many years have you served in your current position at this school or other schools?

3. Describe the impact of your faculty on the success of students in your school. What is the role of the faculty in student success?

4. How do you think your choices in teacher assignment affect your faculty’s perceptions of you as the school leader?

5. How do your choices in teacher assignment express your desired outcome for your school environment? How is your school culture and environment affected by your choices in teacher assignment?

6. Provide an example of a successful co-teaching partnership you have chosen as a school leader. What makes you feel the partnership was successful? How did you feel when you were able to partner a successful co-teaching partnership?

7. Tell me about how you think co-teaching partnerships should be chosen. What factors should be considered when choosing co-teachers? Given the personal characteristics of teachers, prior professional experiences of teachers, or content knowledge and certifications of teachers, why would one factor be more important in your choice of partnering co-teachers that the other two factors?

8. When considering a choice in partnering co-teachers, what personal characteristics of the teachers would you deem most important for influencing your choice?
APPENDIX I: ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE FOCUS GROUP THREADS

Thread #1
Describe a time where you, as the leader of your school, had to make a choice that impacted your school population. How did you reach your choice? What influenced your choice? Looking back, was it the correct choice? Who was most affected by your choice?

Thread #2
When making faculty choices for your school, what do you consider to be the most important factor for consideration: personal characteristics of the teacher, professional experiences of the teacher, or content knowledge and certifications of the teacher? Why? This can include hiring new teachers and assigning teachers to grade and subject levels.

Thread #3
If you were choosing teachers to become co-teachers, how would you choose? What factors would impact your choice? What things would you consider before making your choice?

Thread #4
Please tell me about challenges you have encountered when choosing new co-teaching partnerships. How did you overcome these challenges?

Thread #5
Suppose you are faced with choosing a new co-teaching partnership in your school. You have a general education teacher with eight years of experience in the classroom with five of those years being a co-teacher. This general education teacher is innovative, outspoken, and enjoys taking risks with instructional methods. Data driven instruction to attain high student achievement has been a focus of this teacher for year while this teacher maintains a relaxed classroom management position. You have two choices for a co-teacher for this general education teacher.
Choice A is a five-year veteran who has been teaching in a self-contained resource classroom all five years. This special education teacher has no past experience with student achievement and believes in educating the whole child to become a successful member of society. As this teacher has been in special education for five years, the teacher is fully versed in the needs of special education students, but this teacher tends to follow a teacher centered approach to instruction along with strong classroom management skills. Choice B is a special education teacher with a single year of experience, but this teacher is eager and enthusiastic about trying new things while still seeming timid with the students. This teacher believes in student centered instruction that follows the state standards, but this teacher demonstrates poor classroom management skills. Choice B is certified in both special education and the content area to be co-taught.

How would you determine which special education teacher should enter into a co-teaching partnership with the regular education teacher? Which special education teacher would you choose? Why? What other information would you like to know about each of the three teachers prior to making a choice?
### APPENDIX J: FREQUENCY TABLE OF CODES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Frequency Total</th>
<th>Frequency from Interviews</th>
<th>Frequency from Focus Group</th>
<th>Frequency from Questionnaires</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective Co-Teaching</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs Satisfaction</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Impact</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influences on Choices</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of School Leader</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion/Interest</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impressions of Co-Teaching</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Teaching Experience</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Co-Teaching Experience</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly Qualified</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Content</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choices</td>
<td>Needs satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student impact</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Influences on choices</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role of leader</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hiring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impressions of co-teaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content Knowledge</td>
<td>Prior teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prior co-teaching experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Characteristics</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willingness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Passion/interest</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>