

WHAT WORKS? A COLLECTIVE CASE STUDY OF EFFECTIVE COLLABORATIVE
PRACTICES IN ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL INCLUSION CLASSROOMS IN
SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

by

Shellie Denise Brown

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The advent of inclusive educational practices in the United States in recent decades has prompted a need for increased and improved levels of collaboration among general and special education teachers. The purpose of this qualitative, holistic, collective case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in kindergarten through eighth grade public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. This study investigated two teams of general and special education teachers who were demonstrating effective collaborative practices. This study sought to answer the central research question: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? The theories guiding this study were Tuckman's stages of small group development and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory. Data was collected through interviews, cognitive representations, and artifacts. Data analysis occurred by organizing data into patterns and themes to conduct a within-case analysis of each case and cross-case analysis across the two cases of inclusion teams. This study revealed the following themes and sub-themes as best practices for inclusion teams at each stage of group development: (a) communication (talking, planning, reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, equal, support); (c) attitude (perspective, trust, respect, willing); and (d) perseverance (work, effort). The results provided insights to help other collaborative teams succeed in becoming cohesive, compatible partnerships who can work together for the success of their general and special education students.

Keywords: collaboration, inclusion teams, inclusion classrooms, group development, special education

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this study to my family. As the first person in my family to complete a doctoral degree, I thank them for their love and support throughout this process. Thank you to my husband, Scottie, my sons, Codie and Jessie, and my parents, Joe and Cristol, for standing by me and cheering me on. You are my most ardent supporters, and words cannot express my gratitude. You always believed in me, and for that, I am beyond grateful.

I am so very thankful for my heavenly father, God, for hearing and answering my prayers and providing me with the grace, patience, and determination to see this document to its completion. I am in awe of the love, mercy, and grace that God has supplied me during this journey.

I am forever grateful to all my students who have taught me so much and are the reason for this study. All students deserve our absolute best as individual teachers and as collaborative teams to create meaningful learning experiences within positive, inclusive environments where they can reach their fullest potential.

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List of Abbreviations

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)

Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS)

Readiness to Intervention (RTI)

Training and Technical Assistance center (TTAC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

With the advent of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2001 and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015, both of which reauthorized and provided modern revisions for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and with the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, schools have increased their accountability practices to include all students, including special education students, in evaluation and assessment protocols (ESSA, 2017; IDEA, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Schools have also increased the use of inclusive models of education to provide the least restrictive educational environment, which gives all students equal educational opportunities within the same classrooms.

For special needs students, more time spent in general education classrooms "correlates with higher test scores in math and reading, fewer absences, and fewer referrals for disruptive behavior" (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014, p. 25). Furthermore, inclusive education does not impact general education students' academic achievements negatively but provides positive benefits for general and special education students academically, socially, and emotionally (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018). Therefore, effective collaboration among general and special education teachers is vital to the success of all students.

Collaboration is defined as "two or more equally certified or licensed professionals implementing shared teaching, decision-making, goal setting, and accountability for a diverse student body" (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 76). Utilizing a collaborative teaming model within inclusive classrooms is ideal because it takes advantage of the best talents, skills, and knowledge from the general and special education teachers (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan,

2016). According to Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015), teachers who engage in better quality collaboration demonstrate higher student achievement gains than those who report poor quality in collaboration. However, if teachers lack expertise in implementing the various co-teaching models, it can cause them not to support co-teaching or collaborative models (Brendle, Lock, and Piazza, 2017; Chitiyo, 2017). This lack of expertise can also induce teacher anxiety for the implementation of co-teaching and collaborative practices (Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2015). Additionally, many teachers exhibit low self-efficacy for how to collaborate effectively and for how to overcome the challenges of developing a successful collaborative partnership (Al-Natour, Amr, Al-Zhoun, & Alkhamra, 2015; Banerjee, Stearns, Moller, & Mickelson, 2017; Zagona, Kurth, & MacFarland, 2017).

Chapter One provides the historical, social, and theoretical background of inclusive education and collaboration among general and special education teachers as well as the significance and purpose of this study. With the increase of inclusive education models being implemented in classrooms and with the difficulties surrounding successful collaborative practices, it was important to examine teams of general and special education teachers who were utilizing effective collaborative strategies inside and outside of the classroom and who overcame challenges to create successful inclusive partnerships. As outlined in this chapter, this process was accomplished in this study through the use of a collective case study.

Background

Special needs students have not always received equitable, high-quality educational opportunities in the United States. Only in the last four decades have special needs students been afforded the same, or nearly the same, opportunities as general education students. Progress for

these students has been slow to come and can still be improved by increasing the effectiveness of collaboration among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Historical

Beginning with Massachusetts in 1852 and ending with Mississippi in 1917, all states in the United States passed compulsory education laws requiring students to receive free, public education (Osgood, 2005). Despite this requirement, for decades after the passing of mandatory education, students with moderate to severe disabilities were segregated and denied "equal treatment in the classrooms with their peers" (Hossain, 2012, p. 2) or denied public education altogether. Because of this continued segregation and denial of equitable educational opportunities, the period between the 1900s and 1970s is referred to as the "isolation phase" (Hossain, 2012, p. 2). However, as a result of the advocacy of educators, parents, and activists for more equitable treatment and opportunities for special needs students, the "integration phase" (Hossain, 2012, p. 2) began through litigation and legislation.

Litigation judgments, including *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1982) (Disability Justice, 2019), provided for free and appropriate educational opportunities for all special needs students. Legislation was passed through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (Public Law 94-142) in 1975 to protect students with disabilities from discrimination in public schools (Hossain, 2012). It was later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and was reauthorized in 1997 and 2004 which ushered in the "inclusion phase" (Hossain, 2012, p. 2) of education along with the passing of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Public Law 107-110) in 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The IDEA and NCLB provided increased accountability for schools to ensure that students with

disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) and that they are educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which means that they have access to general education classrooms and are provided with proper supports to be successful (Hossain, 2012; Osgood, 2005).

Social

Over the past two decades, the inclusion of general and special education students in the same classrooms has become the norm in public education, which has created a need for increased collaborative efforts between the general and special education teachers serving all students. Research demonstrates that inclusion classrooms provide emotional, social, and academic benefits for general and special education students alike (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). Much research has been conducted on the perspectives and viewpoints of general and special education teachers relating to collaboration within inclusion classrooms and shows that the majority of general and special education teachers see the need for strong collaborative practices and understand the benefits of working as a collaborative team (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). However, research also shows that general and special education teachers often feel unprepared for successful collaborative practices by their undergraduate teacher education programs (Banerjee et al., 2017; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino, Weiss, & Regan, 2015; Zagona et al., 2017) and by a lack of continual professional development offered by schools or school districts (Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). Feeling unprepared causes teachers to struggle in overcoming the challenges of collaboration and in developing effective partnerships that will benefit general and special education students (Chitiyo, 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Morgan, 2016).

Theoretical

Research has shown positive benefits from effective inclusive and collaborative practices for general and special education students and teachers (Fruth & Woods, 2015; Hunt & Lewis, 2018; Morgan, 2016); however, the majority of research continues to show deficits in teachers' collaborative practices, which negatively affects inclusive classrooms (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). Therefore, underpinning this present research was the notion that teachers were not always effectively practicing what they knew could be beneficial to them and their students.

According to Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory, students learn through interactions with their peers, teachers, and environment, which led to the understanding that the learning environment has a significant impact on students' academic, social, and behavioral success (Jaramillo, 1996). Albert Bandura (1963) also posited in his social learning theories that students learn through the environment in the process of observational learning and by encoding the behavior of some of the models in their environment. General and special education teachers' collaboration can have an influence, positive or negative, on the inclusive learning environment, thereby causing positive or negative effects on student success within the classroom. Some teams of general and special education teachers have proven to be successful in their collaborative partnerships, which has positive impacts on the inclusive learning environment and general and special education students' achievement within the classroom (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Strogilos & King-Sears, 2018). It was important to determine how these teams of teachers went through the process of becoming an effective collaborative team or partnership. Developing a better understanding of what was working for effective collaborative teams of general and special education teachers in inclusion

classrooms could help other in-service teachers and could also aid teacher education programs in developing these skills in pre-service teachers.

Situation to Self

I worked as a general education elementary school teacher in inclusion classrooms in second, third, and fifth grades and as a Title I teacher providing remediation in reading and mathematics for struggling and special education students in kindergarten through fifth grade for eight years. Through these experiences, I witnessed some good examples of collaborative teams of general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms as well as some poor examples of collaborative partnerships. Furthermore, I currently serve as an assistant professor of education at a small college which affords me the opportunity to evaluate student teachers in the classroom as they prepare to become teachers and gives me a chance to observe still the types of collaboration that occur among general and special education teachers in some classrooms. In my experience, most general and special education teachers are proponents of inclusive learning environments for students because they have seen the benefits and they know that collaboration is necessary among general and special educators; however, there still seems to be a deficit of truly effective collaborative partnerships. In my experience, strengthening the level of collaboration among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms enhances the learning environment and leads to more positive student outcomes academically, socially, and emotionally for all students.

My axiological assumptions included that I am a proponent of inclusive educational practices for students as I believe in equity and equality of educational opportunities for all students and that I see the need for strong collaborative partnerships between general and special education teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized my prior knowledge and experiences as

expert knowledge that aided in the analysis of data (Yin, 2009). I applied a social constructivist approach to this research as I sought to understand further the world in which I live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To accomplish this in-depth understanding, my epistemological assumptions included that the longer I spent in the field with my participants, general and special education inclusion teachers, as well as the school and district-level administrators surrounding them, the better I could truly understand the phenomenon of what made these inclusion teams effective where others were not (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I sought to examine and develop an in-depth understanding of what successful collaborative teams were doing well and how they went through the process of becoming an effective team to help future in-service and pre-service teachers improve collaborative skills in inclusion classrooms.

Problem Statement

The increase in inclusive models of education to provide the least restrictive learning environment for special needs students has created an increased demand for collaborative practices including co-planning, co-teaching, and shared decision making among general and special education teachers (Carreno, Hernandez, & Luz, 2017; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). According to Morgan (2016) and Fruth and Woods (2015), a collaborative model of teaching benefits all students the most because they receive instruction and support from two highly qualified teachers. However, there are numerous challenges in collaboration among general and special education teachers including low self-efficacy for how to plan effectively, co-teach, and collaborate (Chitiyo, 2017) as well as negative attitudes toward collaboration (Chitiyo, 2017; Pit-ten, Ineke, Markova, Krischler, & Korlak-Schwerdt, 2018), time constraints (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017), enormous workloads (Al-Natour et al., 2015), personality conflicts (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017), confusion about teaching roles (Hurd & Weilbacher,

2017), and diminished senses of ownership (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). Additionally, research reveals that many teachers have a low self-efficacy for effective collaboration because of a lack of preparation and development of collaborative skills in their teacher education programs (Chitiyo, 2017; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Pit-ten et al., 2018; Shani & Orly, 2016).

The literature focused on the challenges for collaboration and inclusive practices as well as the perspectives and viewpoints of general and special education teachers toward inclusion classrooms and collaborative practices (Anders, 2015; Barr, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). However, the problem was that there was little research on the process by which general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classrooms develop into strong, cohesive partnerships enabling them to exhibit effective collaborative strategies within inclusion classrooms. It was determined that further research could provide an in-depth understanding of best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers and how teachers can effectively develop these skills and effective partnerships.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this collective case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. Effective collaboration was generally defined as "people working together toward a common goal" (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014, p. 79) as it pertained to general and special education teachers working toward the common goal of student growth and achievement. The theories guiding this study were Bruce Tuckman's (2001) theory of stages of group development and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory. Tuckman's (2001) theory of group development provided context for how individuals working in

groups process through four stages of development: (a) orientation, (b) group conflict, (c) group cohesion, and (d) functional role-relatedness. Tuckman (2001) referred to these four stages of development as: (a) forming, (b) storming, (c) norming, and (d) performing. Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory provided context for how individuals construct knowledge within social settings and how students learn through "interacting with their peers, teacher, manipulatives, and their contextual setting" (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 3). This theory showed that the success of the collaboration between general and special education teachers positively affects the learning environment within inclusive settings and the growth and achievement of general and special education students (Daniels & Hedegaard, 2011).

Significance of the Study

A review of the literature revealed that the majority of empirically significant research on inclusion classrooms pertained to the perspectives and viewpoints of general and special education teachers relating to inclusion, collaborative practices, and challenges for successful collaboration and inclusive education (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Anders, 2015; Barr, 2014; Chitiyo, 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Mackey, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Pit-ten et al. 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). However, a gap in the literature existed in examining the best practices of general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms who exhibit cohesive, collaborative practices as well as the process these teachers used in developing effective partnerships. Limited studies revealed what was working for effective elementary and middle school general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms (Atkins, 2008; Cleaveland, 2015), and no research existed pertaining to the procedural development of the successful collaborative team.

A collective design was utilized to strengthen the existing empirical knowledge of collaboration in inclusion classrooms at the elementary and middle school levels. This

investigation into best practices for cooperation between general and special education teachers allowed for an in-depth analysis of effective partnerships at the elementary and middle school levels, which could allow for the relatability of the study to other in-service and pre-service teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several researchers indicated that further research needed to be conducted into the most effective approaches for co-teaching and collaboration and how teacher education programs and schools could better support pre-service and in-service teachers in developing these skills (Chitiyo, 2017; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015).

This study added to the application of Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory by further examining the correlation between teachers' effective collaborative efforts and the development of successful collaborative partnerships in inclusion classrooms with the ramifications for creating positive, inclusive learning environments that help all learners to be successful. This study also applied Tuckman's theories on group development, which are typically utilized in team building in the business world (Tuckman, 2001), to the process of developing effective collaborative partnerships among general and special education teachers with the field of education.

The practical significance of this study was that it increased the understanding of several key elements of collaboration within inclusion classrooms including: (a) best practices of effective collaborative teams of general and special education teachers inside and outside of their shared inclusion classrooms and (b) the process by which these effective teams were able to develop into a successful partnership. This increased understanding could lead to replicable applications of results for other general and special teachers who are working to overcome the challenges of developing successful collaborative teams and could provide further insight into how teacher education programs can better develop collaborative skills in pre-service teachers.

Research Questions

In light of the aforementioned gap in the research literature, the focus of the study was to answer the following research questions:

Central Question

What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? The majority of research surrounding the collaborative team of special and general education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom centered around either the general or special education teachers' perceptions, experiences, or viewpoints about collaboration or inclusion (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Cate, Markkova, Krischler, & Krolak-Schwerdt, 2018; Dudley-Marlin & Burns, 2014; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016). The purpose of this research was to study what effective collaborative teams were doing inside and outside of the classroom that aided in their successful partnership, thereby producing positive results for students.

Guiding Questions

Sub-question 1. What are the best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? The rationale for this question was to determine what happens for effective collaborative teams once they were assigned by school administrators to teach in the same inclusion classroom. Stage one of group development is characterized by "anxiety, guardedness, dependency, and a mixture of curiosity and confusion" (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010, p. 45). This question helped reveal what these effective partners did during the orientation/forming stage of group development as posited by Tuckman (2001).

Sub-question 2. What are the best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? During the orientation/forming stage of group development, group members are often extremely friendly and overly polite to one another, but once those initial niceties are gone as the team begins to find its footing, conflicts can possibly arise (Tuckman, 2001).

According to Egolf and Chester (2013), four types of conflicts can arise in groups during the storming stage of group development: (a) personal conflict, (b) interpersonal conflict, (c) task conflicts, and (d) administrative conflicts. These challenges were apparent in the research on general and special education teachers' perspectives and experiences with collaboration in inclusion classrooms. Personal conflicts can arise when the general or special education teachers have negative feelings about being assigned to a particular team or exhibit negative feelings toward inclusion or collaboration (Pit-ten et al. 2018). Chitiyo (2017) found that some teachers do not support co-teaching within an inclusive learning environment. Interpersonal conflicts can also arise when there are personality conflicts between general and special education teachers. Some individuals like to dominate, which can cause power struggles within a group (Egolf & Chester, 2013). Some general education teachers see their classroom as "their turf" and have a difficult time giving over any control in a co-teaching partnership because they see it as an "invasion of their professional space" (Chitiyo, 2015, p. 62). Special and general education teachers can also have task conflicts such as: (a) difficulty agreeing on strategies for co-teaching or collaboration within the inclusion classroom or (b) administrative conflicts such as "disagreements over plans and procedures to guide the group to task completion" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 162) including scheduling co-planning times or determining roles and

assignments. This question helped determine what effective partnerships do to overcome the conflict/storming phase of their group development.

Sub-question 3. What are the best practices during the group cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? Once a team struggles through the difficulties that arise during the conflict/storming phase, they come to the cohesion/norming stage where they begin to develop a cohesive, compatible team (Egolf & Chester, 2013). The rationale for this research question was to examine how effective collaborative teams accomplished this task and became a team that worked together successfully.

Sub-question 4. What are the best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of group development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? During the role-relatedness/performing stage, teams can work together and communicate effectively to make decisions, solve problems, generate new ideas, implement strategies, and lead together (Egolf & Chester, 2013). Morgan (2016) asserted that when there are "cohesive delivery services inside and outside the classroom" (p. 49), the quality of instruction improves since the number of experts in the classroom increases, kids in the classroom are happier, and all learners feel included. The rationale for this question was to evaluate how effective collaborative inclusion teams continually work through these processes to provide positive student outcomes and a positive, inclusive learning environment for all students.

Definitions

1. *Best Practices* – The most effective pedagogies for teaching content to students; the most up-to-date, evidence-based strategies utilized in teaching (Schnackenberg & Burnell, 2017).
2. *Collaboration* - Individuals working together toward a common goal (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). In inclusion classrooms, a general and special education teacher work together toward the common goal of positive learning outcomes for general and special education students (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014).
3. *Conflict/Storming* – The second stage of Tuckman's stages of small group development in which various types of conflict can arise among team members including: (a) personal conflict, (b) interpersonal conflict, (c) task conflict, or (d) administrative conflict (Egolf & Chester, 2013). This stage can be characterized by "anxiety, guardedness, dependency, and a mixture of curiosity and confusion" (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010, p. 45).
4. *Co-Teaching* – Co-teaching occurs within inclusion classrooms between general and special education teachers (Brendle, Lock, & Piazza, 2017). Various models of co-teaching exist:
 - (a) one teach, one observe involves one of the co-teachers leading large group instruction while the other teacher gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group; (b) station teaching involves dividing students into three groups and rotating the groups from station to station taught by co-teachers at two stations and working independently at the third; (c) parallel teaching requires each of the co-teachers to instruct half of the students presenting the same lesson in order to provide instructional differentiation and increased student participation; (d) alternative teaching involves one

teacher providing instruction to the majority of students while the other teacher works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, or assessment; (e) teaming requires the co-teachers lead large group instruction by both lecturing, representing different viewpoints, and multiple methods of solving problems; (f) one teach, one assist, also identified as supportive teaching, involves one co-teacher leading instruction while the other teacher circulates among the students providing individual assistance. (Brendle et al., 2017, p. 540)

5. *Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EDHCA)* – Signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1975 (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). The first legislation to require public schools receiving federal funding to provide equal access to education to students with physical and intellectual disabilities (Public Law 94-142, 1975).
6. *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)* – Signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965 (Casalaspi, 2017). The first legislation to provide federal funding to help ensure quality and equality in the United States education system through grants for textbooks and library books, grants for low-income school districts, funding for special education centers, and scholarships for low-income college students (Casalaspi, 2017).
7. *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* – Signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015 to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (ESSA, 2017). The ESSA provides further protections and supports for disadvantaged and high-needs students; requires that all students be taught to high standards to prepare them for college and career; ensures the publication of statewide assessment data for families, educators, students, and communities; expands students' access to preschool; and maintains accountability for low-performing schools (ESSA, 2017).

8. *Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)* – The Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) mandated that public schools must provide a free and appropriate public education for all students, no matter the severity of their disability, within the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

9. *Functional Role-Relatedness/Performing* – The fourth stage of Tuckman's stages of small

group development in which the "successful group settles down and begins to do what it is supposed to do: complete its task" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 186). During this stage, the group can solve problems and generate new ideas as well as communicate effectively, make decisions, and implement strategies (Egolf & Chester, 2013).

10. *Group Cohesion/Norming* - The third stage of Tuckman's stages of small group

development in which conflicts among the group members are resolved and "cohesiveness, compatibility, and conformity develop, new standards and roles emerge, and member can communicate more freely" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 174). This stage is characterized by "beginning trust, cohesiveness, interdependence, and group interaction" (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010, p. 45).

11. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* – Originally named the Education for

All Handicapped Children Act, later named the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was signed into law by President Gerald Ford in 1975 (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). IDEA provided free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities between the ages of three and twenty-one (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015). Also, states and school districts were mandated to "identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities, without regard to the severity of their disability, to determine eligibility and need for special education and related services" (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015, p. 1651).

Stated were also required to provide an individualized education plan (IEP) to be applied within the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students who are found eligible and collaborate with the parents of special needs students (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015).

12. *Inclusion* - A means by which schools can meet the individualized, diverse needs of all learners within the regular classroom (Stadler-Heer, 2019). Also referred to as differentiation, individualization, scaffolding, and integration (Stadler-Heer, 2019).
13. *Inclusion Classroom* - A classroom fully integrated with special education and general education students to provide the least restrictive, most equitable learning environment for all students (Osgood, 2005).
14. *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)* – Part of the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Carson, 2015). Public schools are required to provide the best possible learning environment for students with special needs, and this is typically interpreted to mean integration into regular education classrooms for equity and quality of educational opportunities (Carson, 2015). Since the passing of IDEA, the courts have upheld a "least restrictive available" (Carson, 2015, p. 1398) approach where schools provide the best learning environment they can with the available resources rather than a "least restrictive needed" (Carson, 2015, p. 1398) approach which would cause schools to be mandated to provide more specialized, individualized, and possibly segregated educational opportunities for some students with special needs.
15. *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* – Signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 as an amended and reauthorized version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008). NCLB increased the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes, particularly for English as a second

language students, students with disabilities, minority students, and students with low-income families, by implementing mandatory end of the year standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 – 12, by requiring that states report these scores to show adequate yearly progress (AYP), and by requiring teachers to be highly qualified with proper certifications within their fields (Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008).

16. *Orientation/Norming* – The first stage of Tuckman's stages of small group development in which the group is beginning to get to know one another and figuring out how to work together (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010). In this stage, there is usually a "high level of affability, friendliness, and, in general, a very positive interpersonal climate" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 154).

Summary

As outlined in Chapter One, special needs students have moved toward more equitable educational opportunities alongside general education students through litigation and legislation (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008). Decreased segregation of special education students has created an increase in inclusion classrooms and a need for shared responsibility among teachers for all learners making it imperative that general and special education teachers practice effective collaboration. However, "Most research examining teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards inclusive education showed that teachers experience frustration, fear, anger, and lack of confidence regarding their ability to meet the needs of all their pupils" (Shani & Orly, 2016, p. 3). This case study sought to alleviate some of those fears, frustrations, and lack of self-efficacy for teaching diverse populations of students within inclusion classrooms. It accomplished these goals by providing an in-depth examination of the

best practices for effective collaboration between general and special education teachers as well as the process by which they were able to develop into an effective team.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter provides a review of literature pertaining to the best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers in elementary and middle school inclusion classrooms. The increased usage of inclusive models of education has caused a need for heightened levels of collaboration between general and special education teachers; however, the literature reveals many challenges to effective collaboration, including difficulty in how to successfully develop collaborative partnerships, which can negatively affect the inclusive learning environment. This chapter provides a review of literature pertaining to: (a) the theoretical framework supporting this study; (b) a historical overview of the evolution of the inclusion classroom; (c) the challenges facing teachers in inclusion classrooms relating to inclusive classrooms, inclusion teachers, and for collaboration; (d) benefits of collaboration; (e) deficits in collaborative efforts; and (f) the effects of collaborative practices on the learning environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study applied the use of two theories to add understanding to the current research on best practices among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms: Bruce Tuckman's (2001) theory on small group development and Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory.

Tuckman's Stages of Group Development

Some general and special education teachers can develop into a successful, cohesive team within the same inclusion classroom (Atkins, 2008; Cleaveland, 2015), whereas some general and special education teachers continually struggle to mesh together and become an effective

team (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). The teams who are successful did not become cohesive, compatible, and collaborative overnight rather they developed and worked through various issues and challenges (Atkins, 2008; Cleaveland, 2015; Weber, 1982). Tuckman's (2001) theory of group development provides context for how individuals working in groups process through four stages of development: (a) orientation, (b) group conflict, (c) group cohesion, and (d) functional role-relatedness. Tuckman (2001) coined these four stages of development as: (a) forming, (b) storming, (c) norming, and (d) performing. Part of understanding teachers' best practices for collaboration is investigating the strategies they utilized during each phase of their development into an effective team.

Orientation/Forming. Whether an administrator assigns collaborative team members consisting of general and special education teachers to the same inclusion classroom or the teachers are allowed choice in the selection of partners, there is a period at the beginning of the team's development where the members are getting to know one another (Kearney, Damron, & Sohoni, 2015; Tuckman, 2001). During this formative period, team members are relating to one another through an interpersonal relationship as well as through the task or goal assigned to the team (Kearney et al., 2015; Tuckman, 2001; Weber, 1982). In the course of this process, the team functions as a social entity as well as a task entity and the "task-oriented functions of groups and the social-emotional-integrative functions of groups occur as simultaneous aspects of group functioning" (Tuckman, 2001, p. 69). In other words, immediately upon being assigned to the same inclusion classroom, general and special education teachers have to begin to work together on a personal level while immediately beginning the task of meeting the needs of diverse learners within their inclusion classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Sinclair, Bray, Wei, Clancy, Wexler, Kearns, & Lemons, 2019).

This initial orientation or forming stage of group development can be characterized by feelings of anxiety and guardedness on the part of the group members as well as feelings of curiosity mixed with confusion about how to collaborate and work together effectively (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Weber, 1982). However, even though the individuals may be experiencing internal trepidation, the first stage can also be characterized externally by "high levels of affability, friendliness, and, in general, a very positive interpersonal climate" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 154).

During this initial stage, many dynamic pieces are moving as the individuals begin to work together. According to Alfred Schutz's interpersonal needs theory, individuals have interpersonal needs consisting of inclusion, control, and affection that can be satisfied only through the group experience (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Inclusion refers to an individual's desire to be included, accepted, and significant within a group (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009). Control indicates an individual's need to "be respected by others for our competence, skills, and leadership ability, and the need to respect the same control qualities in others" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 151). Affection refers to the need to like or love others and to have that like or love reciprocated, which leads to familiarity and high levels of trust between individuals (Egolf & Chester, 2013). As team members are beginning to form a partnership, each team member is seeking to meet these interpersonal needs within the group dynamic (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Mote, 2001; Schutz & Zembylas, 2009).

Conflict/Storming. During the development of a successful team, groups "often go through a conflict phase before getting down to business" (Egolf & Chester, 2013, p. 159). The conflict or storming stage of Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development is characterized by intragroup conflict, dissatisfaction, frustration, and sometimes anger or depression (Tuckman &

Jensen, 1977; Weber, 1982). These conflicts may come in the form of interpersonal conflicts, task conflicts, or administrative conflicts (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Weber, 1982). Interpersonal challenges for developing effective collaborative partnerships may include one or more of the teachers maintaining a negative attitude toward inclusion or collaborative practices (Chitiyo, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018), a diminished sense of ownership in teaching practices or classroom environment (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017), personality conflicts such as if one team member tries to dominate rather than collaborate (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Rangvid, 2017), and so on. Task conflicts can arise if teachers feel confusion over their teaching roles (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017) or disagreements ensue about which types of strategies, co-teaching models, or resources to utilize within the inclusion classroom (Besic, Paleczek, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Klicpera, 2017; Egolf & Chester, 2013). Additionally, administrative conflicts can arise due to disagreements over scheduling co-planning times, agendas for planning meetings, timelines for pacing content within the classroom, or decisions concerning lesson planning (Conley & You, 2016; Egolf & Chester, 2013; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018; Strogilos, Stefanidis, & Tragoulia, 2016).

Many special education teachers have left the profession due to the high levels of stress and anxiety associated with a lack of a team model and other factors (Ansley, Houchins, & Varjas, 2016; Conley & You, 2017; Garwood, Werts, Varghese, & Gosey, 2018). How a collaborative team works through conflicts greatly impacts their ability to become an effective partnership (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Weber, 1982).

Cohesion/Norming. Within the third stage of group development, the group members resolve conflicts and become cohesive and compatible (Tuckman, 2001; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982). This stage is characterized by the "beginning of trust, cohesiveness,

interdependence, and group interaction" (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977, p. 45). Successful, cohesive groups show high levels of positive interaction, display satisfaction from participating in the group, and are more productive and effective at achieving goals (Besic et al., 2016; Egolf & Chester, 2013; Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, & Patterson, 2017). At this stage of development, group members overlook one another's idiosyncrasies and provide acceptance and support to one another, which can help create a harmonious group, or a true partnership (Tuckman, 2001; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982).

Functional Role-Relatedness/Performing. In the final stage of Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development, the team functions as a cohesive, compatible social and task entity that can solve problems, generate new ideas, communicate effectively, make decisions, and implement strategies (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982). Within this stage of development, "members can now adopt and play roles that will enhance the task activities of the group, since they have learned to relate to one another as social entities in the preceding stage" (Tuckman, 2001, p. 70). Within the performing stage, the group utilizes each individual's strengths to accomplish tasks and supports individuals in their weaknesses (Tuckman, 2001; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982).

When investigating best practices of effective collaborative teams, I hypothesized that these teams worked through the stages of group development and were now at the performing stage where they developed a strong, cohesive partnership that enabled them to work together in a productive, professional manner aiding in successful learning outcomes for their students. However, for transferability, it was important to determine what these general and special education teachers did and what their experiences were like at each stage of group development for replicability of results for other inclusion teams of general and special education teachers.

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory provides context for how individuals construct knowledge within social settings and how students learn through "interacting with their peers, teacher, manipulatives, and their contextual setting" (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 3). Vygotsky posited about the social organization of structure within school settings in which the "unique form of cooperation between the child and the adult" (Moll, 1990, p. 2) is the main tenet of the educational process and how by this interactional process students can learn (Clara, 2017; Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Application of Vygotsky's (1978) theory substantiates that the ability of general and special education teachers to work together effectively with one another and with students greatly impacts the culture within an inclusion classroom causing either a positive or negative effect on the growth and achievement of general and special education students (Jaramillo, 1996; Siddig & Alkhoudary, 2018).

Many factors can influence teachers' abilities to create a positive learning environment that enhances the type of social learning needed for general and special education students, as described by Vygotsky (1978). However, teachers' preparedness for inclusive practices and attitudes toward inclusion and collaboration can have a significant impact, either negatively or positively (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Sagner-Tapia, 2017; Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2015). A study of general and special education teachers' best practices for collaboration and the development of an effective partnership involves what the teachers are doing outside of the classroom pertaining to co-planning and shared decision making as well as inside the classroom consisting of co-teaching and shared contributions to classroom activities that lead to their success for categorical collaboration and positive student learning outcomes.

Related Literature

In studying best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers, it was necessary to examine the history of inclusive practices in the United States and the world as well as the challenges for teachers, effects on teachers and students, types of collaboration and co-teaching, and perspectives of teachers relating to inclusive practices.

Historical Overview

The push for equity and equality has been at the forefront of special education for the last several decades. Through litigation and legislation, special education students now have more educational opportunities than ever before in the history of the United States and the world. International human rights agreements including The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action in 1994 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006 provided a framework for inclusive education as follows: "(a) all children learning together regardless of differences they may have; (b) equal access to inclusive education within home communities; (c) understanding and accommodating individual differences through appropriate curriculum, instruction, and resources; and (d) provision of supports as needed with the general education system" (Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016, p. 889).

Legislation. In the United States, landmark legislation through the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EDHCA) in 1975, which was later renamed and reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, as well as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 have paved the way for the inclusion of special education students in public education and then in regular classrooms (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EDHCA). Parents and advocates,

including the Kennedy family, became instrumental in the push for equal rights for special needs individuals who, at the time, were not allowed in public schools (Ennis & Katsiyannis, 2017; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the sister of Rosemary Kennedy, who had an intellectual disability, lobbied her brother President John F. Kennedy on behalf of individuals with disabilities (Carey, 2009; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Because of these efforts, funding was provided to study intellectual disabilities and teacher training through the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Carey, 2009; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Furthermore, because of the endeavors of such organizations as the National Association for Retarded Citizens and other parental groups, the Education for All Handicapped Children (EDHCA) (Public Law 94-142) was signed into law in 1975 by President Gerald Ford and is considered the Bill of Rights for children with disabilities and their families (Public Law 94-142, 1975; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). EDHCA was the first legislation to require public schools receiving federal funding to provide equal access to education for children with physical and intellectual disabilities (Public Law 94-142, 1975; U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

Ten years after the passing of EDHCA, special education advocates called for continued work in providing quality, equitable learning opportunities for students with special needs. Assistant Secretary of Education Madeleine Will (1986) called for less fragmented systems where general and special education teachers form partnerships for better service delivery and shared responsibility for all students among teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. Will (1986) and other advocates called for the de-stigmatization of students with special needs where educators do not focus on the students' handicaps, but rather their potential and where education does not focus on failures, but prevention. Will (1986) proposed "increased time for instruction, support systems for teachers, principal-controlled programs and resources at

the building level, and new instructional approaches" (Reynolds & Fletcher-Janzen, 2007, p. 2146). The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) which represented eight national organizations advocating for individuals with learning disabilities, supported Will's (1986) proposals for improving services and learning outcomes for students with special needs within general education classrooms (Dublinski, Dublinske & Newcomer, 1988).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1990, amendments were passed to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EDHCA), adding traumatic brain injury and autism to the disability categories (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Nevison, Blaxill, & Zahorodny, 2018). Then, in 1997, Congress reauthorized EDHCA, and it was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (IDEA, 2019; Njoku & Watson, 2017; Russo, 2019). This reauthorization, as well as one in 2004, made considerable changes to the EDHCA (Njoku & Watson, 2017; Russo, 2019; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). The IDEA (2019) has six main tenets: (a) all children between the ages of 3 and 21 must have access to free and appropriate public education (FAPE), (b) states and school districts must locate and evaluate all children with disabilities, (c) students who are deemed eligible must be provided with an individualized education plan (IEP) and a parent or guardian must be on the IEP team, (d) children with disabilities must be educated with children without disabilities "to the maximum extent possible" (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015, p. 1651) in the least restrictive environment (LRE), (e) due process safeguards must be in place for students with disabilities and their families, and (f) parents and students must be given an opportunity to participate in shared decision making with the school (Lipkin & Okamoto, 2015; Njoku & Watson, 2017; Russo, 2019).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, was the first legislation to provide

federal funding to help improve the quality and equality of educational opportunities for students in the United States, particularly for students living in poverty; however, it did not provide equitable educational opportunities for special needs children (Casalaspí, 2017; Ladd, 2017). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 was a renaming and reauthorization of the ESEA (Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008). NCLB increased the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes, particularly for English as a second language students, students with disabilities, minority students, and students with low-income families (Heise, 2017; Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008). This was accomplished by implementing mandatory end of the year standardized assessments in reading and mathematics in grades 3 – 12, requiring that states report these scores to show adequate yearly progress (AYP), and requiring teachers to be highly qualified with proper certifications within their fields (Heise, 2017; Overview of No Child Left Behind, 2008). These changes in accountability sparked the increase in inclusion classrooms in the United States, which increased the need for effective collaboration among general and special education teachers.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). No Child Left Behind legislation was replaced by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) by President Barack Obama in 2015 (Heise, 2017; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). ESSA provided more authority to states by removing some of the mandated federal regulations in NCLB; however, like NCLB, ESSA requires states to provide high-quality teachers and equity in learning opportunities for all students, including students with special needs (Black, 2017; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Under ESSA, schools can show performance with non-academic measures to provide more equity, equality, and opportunity for all students (Adler-Greene, 2019; Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). This change is

particularly beneficial to special needs and English as a second language (ESL) students because it can be unfair to assess all students the same way on the same standardized assessment (Adler-Greene, 2019; Fuller, Hollingworth, & Pendola, 2017; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Rather than only utilizing standards-based assessments, now states and localities can show students' growth and achievement through performance-based assessments such as portfolios or projects which provides more equitable educational opportunities for all students (Barlowe & Cook, 2016; Tindal, Nese, Farley, Saven, & Elliott, 2016).

Litigation. In addition to legislative action, monumental litigation decisions including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* in 1972, and *Mills v. Board of Education* in 1982 have also supported the push for special needs students to be included and given equitable, quality educational opportunities alongside general education students (Disability Justice, 2019).

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka. In 1896, the Supreme Court upheld racial segregation in schools in the case of *Plessey v. Ferguson*, where schools could segregate students based on race as long as facilities were equal in the "separate but equal" doctrine (Duignan, 2019b, p. 1). In 1954, a coordinated group of five lawsuits against school districts in Kansas, South Carolina, Delaware, Virginia, and the District of Columbia resulted in the Supreme Court's overturning of the decision in *Plessey v. Ferguson* citing that "separate but equal" is "inherently unequal" (Duignan, 2019a, p. 1). The desegregation of schools based on race opened up opportunities for more equitable learning opportunities for all students based on all demographics, including students with special needs who had previously not been allowed to attend public schools (Reber, 2005). The decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* had a profound impact on public education and started new litigations and renewed advocacy for

students with disabilities.

Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In 1972, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens brought a lawsuit against the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on behalf of 14 children with developmental disabilities who were denied access to public schools in Pennsylvania (Disability Justice, 2019). The court ruled on behalf of the children citing that the state could not deny public education to anyone under the age of twenty-one because "all mentally retarded persons are capable of benefiting from a program of education and training" (Disability Justice, 2019, p. 1) appropriate to their capacity.

Mills v. Board of Education. In 1972, the court case *Mills v. Board of Education*, which was brought on behalf of seven children who had been denied access to public schools in the District of Columbia, extended the court's ruling in *PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* beyond children with developmental disabilities (Disability Justice, 2019). The District of Columbia claimed insufficient financial means to be able to provide for the free, public schooling of these children; however, the court ruled that public education could not be denied because of "mental, behavioral, physical, or emotional handicaps or deficiencies" (Disability Justice, 2019, p. 2).

The convergence of legislation and litigation in the United States and the world has caused educators to find "efficient yet effective ways to provide high-quality instruction for students with disabilities" (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012, p. 498). IDEA provided explicit expectations that "students with disabilities would receive their education (to the maximum extent possible) with nondisabled peers, in the general education classroom, and with appropriate supplemental aids and services" (Solis et al., 2012, p. 498) which is known as the

least restrictive environment (LRE) mandate. Then, NCLB mandated school personnel to "provide evidence-based interventions to students who display inadequate performance in the school setting" (Solis et al., 2012, p. 498). These initiatives and stances have been victories for providing better quality educational opportunities for all students and have caused the creation of inclusive classrooms where special education and general education students are afforded the least restrictive, most equitable learning environments possible (Bemiller, 2019; Osgood, 2005; West, 2015). In inclusion classrooms, general and special education students are served by general and special education teachers working collaboratively for successful student outcomes (Bemiller, 2019; Carson, 2015; Cate, Markova, Krischer, Krolak-Schwerdt, 2018; Meir, 2018).

Challenges for Inclusion

Inclusion classrooms have proven beneficial for teachers and students; however, knowing how to collaborate effectively and working through the process of becoming a successful partnership can be arduous and overwhelming for general and special education teachers who are already working in challenging classrooms trying to meet the individualized needs of diverse learners (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Stadler-Heer, 2019; Zagona et al., 2017). Numerous challenges are inhibiting effective inclusive practices to inclusive education, inclusion classrooms, teachers, and collaborative partnerships.

Challenges for inclusive education. Inclusive education has become the norm in the United States during the past couple of decades; however, only 60% of all students with disabilities spend 80% of their day in regular classrooms (Gilmour, 2018; Reese, Richards-Tutor, Hansuvadha, & Xu, 2018). The other 40% of students with disabilities are taught in self-contained classrooms with only special education students full-time or spend part of their day in

resource rooms receiving individualized or small group instruction from a special education teacher and part of their day in an inclusion classroom (Haynes, 2015; Poonam & Poonam, 2015). This data shows that since legislation has mandated that students with disabilities receive education services in the least restrictive environment, progress toward this goal has been made, but has been slow due to "deeply entrenched systems of marginalization that sort and segregate students by a number of classifications including race, ability, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status" (Kozleski, Ting Yu, Satter, Francis, & Haines, 2015, p. 212).

In addition to breaking with traditions and long-held beliefs about separating special education students from general education students, full implementation of inclusive education in a school requires a great deal of capacity building in several areas, including staff, curriculum, facilities, logistics, and school culture. School culture refers to several components with classrooms, schools, and school districts. School culture includes the level in which a school prioritizes academic standards and promotes academic engagement and achievement among staff and students (Lee, 2018; Lee & Louis, 2019). School culture is also contingent upon high levels of mutual trust, respect, and positivity among teachers and administrators within a school (Lee, 2018; Lee & Louis, 2019).

To build a strong school culture, schools need to hire appropriate numbers of highly qualified general and special education teachers, support staff such as instructional aides, and supportive school and district level administrators and provide continuous professional development and training for effective inclusive practices (Kozleski et al., 2015; Mingo & Mingo, 2018). Schools and school districts also need to purchase curriculum to support the academic, emotional, and social needs of all students and provide resources to support leveled differentiation for students of all ability types and learning needs (Conderman & Hedin, 2014;

Erdem, 2017; Kaplan, 2019; Yngve, Lidstrom, Ekbladh, & Hemmingsson, 2018). In addition, schools must provide technology infrastructures to help support differentiation of students, individualized learning needs, and assistive technology services (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Erdem, 2017; Hassan & Mohamed, 2018; Yngve et al., 2018). Full implementation of inclusive education also requires schools to have appropriate classroom facilities that can provide for the physical needs of all students, including those with special needs (Kozleski et al., 2015). Building capacity within schools to meet all of these demands can be extremely challenging, particularly for rural schools or those in socioeconomically depressed areas where affordability and availability can be limited (Erdem, 2017; Ismaili & Ibrahim, 2016; Kozleski et al., 2015).

Challenges for inclusive classrooms. Numerous difficulties exist within inclusive classrooms for teachers and students. Some research shows that students with disabilities do not make academic advancements in inclusion classrooms because they do not advance as quickly within the grade-level curriculum as their same-aged nondisabled peers (Gilmour, 2018; Thompson, Walker, Shogren, & Wehmeyer, 2018). However, from 2000 to 2006 the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), part of the United States Department of Education, collected data on school-age students from elementary to middle school and then to high school in the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) (U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). The SEELS study revealed that students with disabilities "who spent 75% or more of their school day in inclusive settings scored higher in reading comprehension and math than those who spent 25% or less of their day in such settings" (Gilmour, 2018, p. 26; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). Therefore, one of the challenges in determining the effectiveness of inclusive practices is the measures or assessments utilized to gauge progress for students with disabilities.

Another challenge for inclusion classrooms is meeting the needs of diverse learners socially, emotionally, academically, and behaviorally. According to the United States Department of Education (2009), NCLB (2002) mandated that "(1) students with disabilities must be included in state assessments, and (2) assessment scores for all students must be calculated in the school district's annual yearly progress" (Rogers & Johnson, 2018, p. 2). Research shows that students with disabilities who spend more time in general education classrooms have "higher test scores in math and reading, fewer absences, and fewer referrals for disruptive behavior" (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014, p. 25). Furthermore, research shows positive benefits from inclusive practices for both general and special education students academically, socially, and emotionally (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018). However, it can be extremely challenging for teachers in inclusion classrooms to provide for the emotional engagement, or sense of belonging, as well as the behavioral engagement, consisting of effort, participation, and motivation, which help students in academic progress (Bruggink, Goei, & Koot, 2016; de Leeuw, de Boer, Bijstra, & Minnaert, 2018; Rangvid, 2017). Compounding these challenges can be a lack of funding for special education curriculum and resources to assist teachers in providing for the holistic needs of their students within inclusion classrooms (Banks, Frawley, & McCoy, 2015; Rangvid, 2017).

Challenges for inclusion teachers. Some teachers do not feel prepared to teach diverse populations of students in inclusion classrooms (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Zagana et al., 2017) or have negative attitudes toward inclusion or collaboration (Able, Sreckovic, Schultz, Garwood, & Sherman, 2015; Chitiyo, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018). "Teachers who have positive attitudes toward the idea of inclusion are more likely to incorporate children with disabilities in classroom activities and

are more likely to create a classroom environment conducive to learning for all students” (Bemiller, 2019, p. 76). However, many teachers feel unprepared for inclusive and collaborative practices from their teacher education programs (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Zagana et al., 2017) and by a lack of continual professional development offered by schools or school districts (Banerjee et al., 2017; Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). The majority of teachers feel that inclusive practices and strong collaboration among general and special education teachers are beneficial for students; however, their lack of preparation can cause them to have low levels of self-efficacy for how to provide effective instruction to wide ranges of diverse learners within inclusive settings and how to collaborate successfully with one another leading to negative feelings (Able et al., 2015; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Zagana et al., 2017). Rogers and Johnson (2018) revealed that the majority of the preparation for general education pre-service teachers in teacher education programs is focused on providing instruction to general education students while the focus for special education pre-service teachers is on “planning instruction and making instructional adaptations for students with disabilities in non-inclusionary classrooms” (p. 2). Therefore, pre-service teachers are not receiving adequate preparation for providing for the holistic and diverse needs of general and special education students in inclusive classrooms, or for how to collaborate effectively and work as a team (Rogers & Johnson, 2018; Sharma & Nuttal, 2015; Shin, Hyunjoo, & McKenna, 2016). These deficiencies in training lead to a lack of self-efficacy, which can greatly impact teachers’ abilities to be successful on a long-term basis within inclusion classrooms and can lead to teacher burn out (Pellegrino et al., 2015; Rangvid, 2017; Sharma & Nuttal, 2015).

Some teachers have negative attitudes toward inclusive or collaborative practices because of decreased levels of self-efficacy; however, some have negative attitudes toward special education or inclusion philosophies of education. As revealed by Kirby (2017), “some teachers saw it as a privilege for students with disabilities to be included with their peers in the general education classroom” (p. 176). This perspective can lead general education teachers to feel less responsible for providing differentiation or individualized instruction for these students because of a belief that “some students with disabilities can only be educated in a resource room” (Kirby, 2017, p. 176; Zagona et al., 2017). Furthermore, some teachers see inclusion as a “compromise between academic and social gains” (Kirby, 2017, p. 176) which can lead to a negative view of inclusion practices (Cate et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2017). Portelli and Koneeny (2018) warned of having these types of deficit mentalities relating to special education students or inclusion classrooms as they can hinder genuine inclusive practices. When teachers have negative attitudes toward inclusion, special education, or collaboration because of deficit attitudes, lack of self-efficacy, or other reasons, it can be difficult for their students to be successful and for an effective collaborative partnership to develop.

Challenges for collaboration in inclusion classrooms. When developing collaborative teams, many challenges can hinder or even halt teachers’ progress, including various interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts. Whether teachers can resolve these interpersonal and intrapersonal conflicts may help determine whether their partnership becomes cohesive and strong or divided and weak.

Interpersonal conflicts. Within a partnership consisting of a general and special education teacher assigned to the same inclusion classroom, various interpersonal conflicts can arise. Interpersonal conflicts can include personality conflicts between teachers (Hurd &

Weilbacher, 2017), confusion about teaching roles (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017), unwillingness to communicate and work together (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Strogilos et al., 2016), and differences of opinion in decision making for students or the inclusion classroom (Chitiyo, 2017; Sinclair et al., 2019). Within any partnership, whether the individuals choose to work together or whether a superior selects the team members, the individuals must navigate differences in personalities to work together in an effective manner (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Tuckman, 2001). Within a collaborative partnership, the individuals may make decisions at different speeds where one person wishes to take his or her time considering all options and performing research to ensure that the best decision is made and the other prefers to make spur of the moment decisions and try lots of options which can cause differences of opinion in making decisions and implementing strategies within the classroom (Chitiyo, 2017; Sinclair et al., 2019). Also, one individual may prefer things to be done ahead of schedule while the other individual may procrastinate which can lead to negative feelings between the teachers and an unwillingness to work together productively (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Strogilos et al., 2016).

There may also exist some generational differences between teachers which could affect the decision-making process where one individual may feel that because of his or her experience and expertise in the classroom, he or she should take the lead role and make the majority of the decisions or the less experienced teacher may feel that he or she does not have enough to contribute, which can create an imbalance in the partnership as well as confusion about teaching roles (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Jones, Murray, & Tapp, 2018). Additionally, some teachers who have been teaching for many years may sometimes be accustomed to more traditional teaching methods and may not have as much flexibility in trying more modern techniques. Inflexibility on the part of either the general or special education teacher can create disparities in

the partnership leading to a lack of effective communication or decreased levels of goodwill and comradery within the partnership (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Strogilos et al., 2016; Tuckman, 2001). These types of differences in personality and preferences may make it difficult for the general and special education teachers to develop into a cohesive team that can work well together (Tuckman, 2001). Difficulties with forming a cohesive partnership can cause a great deal of stress on the individuals and have been found to lead to burnout in inclusion teachers, particularly among special education teachers (Soini, Pietarinen, Pyhalto, Haverinen, Jindal-Snape, & Kontu, 2019).

Intrapersonal conflicts. Intrapersonal conflicts can include negative attitudes of teachers toward special education, collaboration, or inclusion classrooms (Chitiyo, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018) and low self-efficacy due to a lack of preparation or knowledge for inclusive practices (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Rogers & Johnson, 2018, Zagona et al., 2017). Within a collaborative inclusion partnership, one teacher may have a positive attitude toward collaborating and inclusive education; whereas, the other team member may have a negative attitude which can make it difficult for the team to work together in a positive, cohesive manner (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Zagona et al., 2017). Furthermore, due to stress and the difficult demands of the job, one or more of the teachers may have a negative attitude toward teaching in general and may only be putting forth the minimal requisite effort and work required as burnout rates are high for teachers (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Soini et al., 2019). This can make it extremely difficult for the teachers to form an effective collaborative team who produces positive student learning outcomes (Bettini et al., 2016; Conley & You, 2017; Soini et al., 2019). Approximately 44% of new teachers leave the profession within the first five years of teaching (Will, 2018). Some

reasons teachers cite for leaving the profession include working conditions, work demands, lack of administrative support, lack of collegial support, inadequate resources, and low compensation (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). High attrition rates negatively affect student outcomes, particularly for special needs students and English as a second language (ESL) students (Cross & Thomas, 2017). All students need experienced teachers because they have “better classroom management, differentiation strategies, and are better able to increase student self-esteem” (Cross & Thomas, 2017, p. 1).

Further, teachers cite lack of preparation and training as a reason leaving the teaching profession, but also as a challenge to effective collaboration and inclusive practices (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Rogers & Johnson, 2018; Zagona et al., 2017). When one or more of the teachers in a collaborative inclusion partnership has not received adequate training from their teacher education programs or from professional development provided by their schools or school districts for how to collaborate effectively, co-teach, differentiate instruction for a variety of learners within the same classroom, plan for instruction and assessment within inclusion classrooms, or manage behaviors in inclusion classrooms, it can be extremely challenging for the partnership to be effective (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Rogers & Johnson, 2018, Zagona et al., 2017).

Outside conflicts. Challenges for developing effective collaborative partnerships can also come from outside the individuals in the group and the group itself. These challenges can include enormous workloads of teachers (Al-Natour et al., 2015), time constraints (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017), lack of administrative support (Bettini, Crockett, Brownell, & Merrill, 2016), and difficulties with classroom management (Chaffee, Briesch, Johnson, &

Volpe, 2017). The majority of teachers receive 30 to 60 minutes of planning time per day to plan for multiple subjects or periods, plan for differentiation of instruction, prepare resources, and disaggregate data on assessments as well as have meetings with their grade level or content area colleagues, administrators, and parents (Merritt, 2017). The rest of their day is spent face-to-face with students, which causes them to have to work additional time in the mornings, evenings, and weekends in order to meet all of their job requirements (Merritt, 2017).

In addition to considerable responsibilities and limited planning time, lack of administrative support can hamper effective collaboration and inclusive practices (Banerjee et al., 2017; Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). Like some teachers, some administrators can have negative attitudes toward inclusive educational practices as well as a lack of self-efficacy or expertise for effective collaborative methods, inclusive practices, or pedagogy for special needs students (Cate et al., 2018; Kirby, 2017; Zagona et al., 2017). Research shows a positive correlation between supportive and proactive school and district level administrators for effective inclusive education and positive school culture (Al-Mahdy & Emam, 2017; Ryan, 2006). According to Ryan (2006), school administrators can enact nine components to facilitate effective inclusive practices: “(a) thinking about leadership, (b) including members of the community, (c) advocating for including, (d) educating participants, (e) developing a critical consciousness, (f) promoting dialogue, (g) emphasizing student learning, (h) adopting inclusive policymaking processes, and (i) incorporating whole-school approaches for ensuring meaningful inclusion” (Shani & Ram, 2015, p. 304). According to Bowen, Robinson, Ivey, and Ethel (2017), the development of school culture should be a principal’s top priority, with hiring staff who fit in with the culture as the next top focus. Research indicates that teachers’ top request of principals in building a school culture that promotes collaboration and inclusive educational

practices is to provide a common planning time for general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom (Besic et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2016; Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Fluijt, Bakker, & Struyf, 2016).

According to Pellegrino, Weiss, and Regan (2015), “although collaboration between educators is becoming more common in schools, the skills to become an effective collaborator are not at all intuitive” (p. 187). Collaboration within inclusion classrooms is “more than just working together and takes effort, diligence, and training” (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017, p. 52). According to Morningstar, Shogren, Lee, and Born (2015), inclusive education benefits “students with and without disabilities, but only when teachers use high-quality and differentiated instruction, and assessment and progress monitoring, in addition to curricular and instructional accommodations” (p. 193). Effective inclusive practices can only occur when the aforementioned challenges and obstacles are overcome on the part of general and special education teachers as well as administrators.

Effects of Collaboration on Learning Environments

According to Bettini et al. (2016), general and special education teachers increase in their effectiveness more rapidly in schools with strong collaborative practices, including shared planning times, group accountability, and administrative support. Strong collaborative practices can have a positive effect on school culture, which increases teacher attrition and retention (Bettini et al., 2016; Conley & You, 2017). According to Solheim, Roland, and Ertesvag (2018), “collaboration between individual teachers and collective groups might not only improve teacher professional growth but can also develop the school as an organization” (p. 459). Additionally, school culture has been linked to student achievement, and schools with “cultures of academic press, collective efficacy, collaboration, and collective responsibility are more effective at

promoting student achievement” (Bettini et al., 2016, p. 180). Demirdag (2017) suggested that for effective inclusive practices to occur within a school, teachers and administrators must have a shared commitment to a “set of core school values” (p. 176), which enhances their ability to work collaboratively. School culture affects classroom climate and vice versa. When a school has a positive culture and climate, it can trickle down into the classrooms, and when a classroom has a positive, inclusive learning environment, it can affect other classrooms and the school.

Benefits for collaboration. Having two highly qualified experts in a classroom can produce benefits for the teachers and students. Benefits include broadened access to activities and resources from multiple teachers, increased teacher empowerment as their ideas are incorporated into the plans and instruction, and a wider view of students’ needs included in the planning process (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017).

Benefits for teachers. Working as part of a collaborative team can produce benefits for teachers. Having two educators to share in the workload including lesson planning, curriculum mapping, disaggregation of data, improvement plans, preparing assessments, grading student work, providing instruction to students, and making class decisions can take the pressure off of individual teachers (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Morgan, 2016). According to Lynch, Hunt, and Lewis (2018), sharing of teaching responsibilities is particularly important in inclusion classrooms where learners can exhibit an extremely diverse range of academic needs and teachers must differentiate their “teaching content, pace, level, access, response, sequence, structure, allocated time, teaching style, and grouping” (p. 448). When general and special education teachers work collaboratively and share their teaching skills and expertise within the teaching partnership and the classroom, each teacher can learn from one another and more can get accomplished for students’ learning outcomes (Hamdan, Anuar, & Khan, 2016).

Furthermore, working as part of a collaborative team can remove feelings of teacher isolation. Teachers can feel as if they are alone on an island or as though they are an egg alone in their single partition within the carton of individual classrooms in a school. Teachers can experience feelings of isolation for multiple reasons including: (a) teachers are often alone in their classrooms all day with only students to converse with; (b) teachers who are new to a school or to teaching can feel alone in their daily work; (c) teachers who have varying teaching philosophies or perspectives from their fellow teachers can feel isolated; or (d) teachers who have experienced disagreements with fellow teachers or administrators can feel a sense of not belonging within their grade level, department, or school community (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikahmadi, 2016; Vance, 2017). Improving teacher collaborative skills and giving teachers more opportunities for working with their colleagues, such as general and special education teachers working in the same inclusion classroom, can help teachers bridge the gaps between their islands and remove these feelings of professional isolation (Mattessich & Johnson, 2018; Vance, 2017).

Benefits for students. Effective collaboration provides for “cohesive delivery services inside and outside the classroom” (Morgan, 2016, p. 49) as well as improvement in the quality of instruction since the number of experts inside the classroom increases. Research indicates that effective co-teaching leads to more “meaningful access to learning” (Strogilos, Tragoulia, Avramidis, Voulagka, & Papanikolaou, 2017, p. 1217) which eliminates exclusion for both general and special education students. Research shows positive learning outcomes for an extensive range of diverse students in inclusive learning environments, including students with learning disabilities, autism, and those with more significant learning needs (Morningstar et al., 2015). Studies also show that students are happier in inclusion classrooms because all learners

feel included, and they can receive instruction and assistance from two teachers rather than just one (Fruth & Woods, 2015; Morgan, 2016; Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019).

Effective inclusion can be beneficial on a variety of modalities for all students because inclusion classrooms help meet the holistic needs of general and special education students by providing not only for the academic development of the students but also their psycho-emotional development (Lynch et al., 2018; Schwab, Sharma, & Loreman, 2018). As posited by Abraham Maslow (1968), humans have innate needs, including security, love, belongingness, and acceptance and these needs must be met for humans to learn, grow, and develop. Providing for these needs within a classroom increases students' connectedness to the class and school which can help to increase their emotional engagement, or their degree of involvement, commitment to school, and motivation, thereby increasing their learning (Heise, 2017; Rangvid, 2018). Having two teachers working collaboratively together to create a positive, inclusive learning environment where students' holistic needs are met, including providing acceptance and belonging, is a tremendous benefit to student outcomes and success (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Schwab et al., 2018).

Deficits in collaboration. Research also reveals deficits in collaborative practices within schools and classrooms. Research shows that when general and special education teachers collaborate, it is often at a very low level with limited scope and frequency (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Mackey, 2014). In many inclusion classrooms, the general and special education teachers do not meet for common planning or collaboration prior to instruction in the classroom (Banks et al., 2015; Brendle et al., 2017; Pratt et al., 2017).

Additionally, in most inclusion teams, the general education teacher is viewed as the leader and makes the majority of the instructional decisions for the classroom since he or she is

considered to be the content expert and has experience with the grade-level curriculum (Gavish, 2017; Sinclair et al. 2019). Conversely, the special education teacher is expected to “modify assignments and tests and provide students with accommodations” (Brendle et al., 2017, p. 544) rather than working as a cohesive team with joint responsibility and accountability for all student outcomes. In this type of dynamic within an inclusion classroom, students often tend to trust and rely more on the general education teacher rather than viewing the special education teacher as an equal within the inclusive partnership which can possibly lead to less effective co-teaching or collaboration within the classroom (Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019).

Another area of concern indicated by research is a growing shortage of highly qualified special education teachers. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2002), “approximately 12.3% of the 13.6 million special education teachers lack certification in special education” (Brownell, Bishop, Sindelar, 2018, p. 4). The average caseload of special education teachers is 17 putting approximately “800,000 students with disabilities served by uncertified teachers” (Brownell et al., 2018, p. 4). In 2018, 48 states in the United States reported a shortage of special education teachers (Fowler, 2019). Because of difficulties in recruiting students for teacher education in colleges, teacher burn out, work conditions, and other factors, the majority of states and school districts have teacher shortages in multiple areas, especially in special education (Cross & Thomas, 2017; Fowler, 2019; Soini et al., 2019). Rural school districts have an especially challenging time in recruiting and retaining adequate numbers of highly qualified special education teachers because of factors including geographic location, culture, and lack of resources (Brownell et al., 2018; Jovanovic, Karic, Mihajlovic, Dzamonja-Ignjatovic, & Hinic, 2019). This lack of highly qualified special education teachers makes it difficult to provide proper services to all of the special education students within a school as well as causes a deficit

in the ability of general and special education teachers to form effective collaborative partnerships within inclusion classrooms (Brownell et al., 2018; Fowler, 2019).

Research also indicates that there are deficits in school culture in some schools to support effective inclusive educational practices (Chitiyo, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018; Vlachou & Fryssa, 2016). For a school to utilize effective collaborative, inclusive practices, everyone has to work together and feel a shared responsibility and obligation to support all students including teachers, administrators, support staff, parents, and community members (Bjonsrud & Nilsen, 2018; Francis, Blue-Bannin, Turnbull, Hill, Haines, & Gross, 2016). Creating a positive culture within a school that supports all students' optimal development academically, socially, emotionally, and physically takes time, training, and effort (Bjonsrud & Nilsen, 2018). The goal in education should not only be to help students survive or reach minimal goals, but to "truly flourish" (Cummins, 2015, p. 52) and reach their fullest potential. Schools must create a positive school culture around inclusive educational practices, but a willingness and predisposition to want to have effective collaboration and inclusivity is not enough (Mingo & Mingo, 2018). There also has to be an unwavering and continuous investment in the training of teachers, administrators, and support staff in general and special education to support strong teacher efficacy as well as positive communication and trust-building among schools, parents, and communities to build "sustainable relationships" (Shani & Ram, 2015, p. 301) which help truly effective collaboration and inclusive education occur (Mingo & Mingo, 2018). Investing in the training of educators begins in teacher education programs in colleges and continues within schools.

Types of collaboration/co-teaching in the classroom. Many types of collaboration and co-teaching models exist for use inside the inclusion classroom. However, some teachers do not have knowledge of these models or training for how to implement them (Chitiyo, 2017;

Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Chitiyo (2017) revealed that only 44% of the teachers learned about co-teaching from their university training, leaving over half of the teachers reporting that they did not receive training in their teacher education programs on co-teaching. Brendle, Lock, and Piazza (2017) provided the following co-teaching models:

(a) One teach, one observe involves one of the co-teachers leading large group instruction while the other teacher gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group; (b) station teaching involves dividing students into three groups and rotating the groups from station to station taught by co-teachers at two stations and working independently at the third; (c) parallel teaching requires each of the co-teachers to instruct half of the students presenting the same lesson to provide instructional differentiation and increased student participation; (d) alternative teaching involves one teacher providing instruction to the majority of students while the other teacher works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, or assessment; (e) teaming requires the co-teachers lead large group instruction by both teachers lecturing, representing different viewpoints, and multiple methods of solving problems; (f) one teach, one assist, also identified as supportive teaching, involves one co-teacher leading instruction while the other teacher circulates among the students providing individual assistance. (p. 540)

The most common type of co-teaching/collaborative model utilized within inclusion classrooms is the one teach-one assist model where, typically, the general education teacher provides instruction to the whole group while the special education teacher assists individual special education students by moving throughout the classroom during the lesson (Brendle et al., 2017; Chitiyo, 2017; Morgan, 2016). The one teach-one assist model can create the illusion that the general educator is the real teacher and the special educator is an aide or has more of a

supporting role rather than sharing the main role (Brendle et al., 2017; Chitiyo, 2017; Morgan, 2016).

Perspectives on effective collaboration. Limited research has been conducted on effective practices of general and special education teachers for successful collaboration (Atkins, 2008; Cleaveland, 2015), and no research has been conducted on general and special education teachers' best practices for progressing through the stages of group development as posited by Tuckman (2001) to form a cohesive partnership. According to Shin, Hyunjoo, and McKenna (2016), the "relationship between special education and general education teachers is described as a 'professional marriage,' and mutual communication and co-planning could facilitate the success of co-teaching" (p. 102). Several studies show that teachers report a need for common planning time to co-plan for instruction, share in curriculum decisions, and discuss issues that arise within the classroom (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Morgan, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Some research also reveals that it is vital for general and special education teachers to reflect on lessons jointly, teaching strategies, assessments, and classroom activities after instruction for effective collaboration (Bjonsrud & Nilsen, 2018; Fluijt et al., 2016). Teachers acting as reflective practitioners aids in continuous growth and development in their pedagogical, professional, and collaborative skills (Tiainen, Korkeamaki, & Dreher, 2017; Qing-li, Torres, Shi-Ji, 2019).

Summary

As outlined in Chapter Two, through years of legislation and litigation, great strides have been made for special needs students as they have been provided with acceptance into public education and now into regular classrooms. These changes have provided more equitable, quality learning environments for all students. Inclusion classrooms offer the opportunity for

high-quality instruction and support for general and special education students from general and special education teachers within the same classroom (Fruth & Woods, 2015; Morgan, 2016). Research showed positive benefits from inclusive, collaborative practices for general and special education students as well as for teachers (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Morgan, 2016). Research also showed that the majority of teachers, with some exceptions, had positive attitudes toward the philosophy of inclusion, but low self-efficacy for the actual implementation of collaborative practices (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Zagona et al., 2017). There were numerous challenges cited for general and special education teachers working to develop into a cohesive, compatible partnership, including interpersonal and intrapersonal challenges within the group dynamic and from outside of the group (Chitiyo, 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018). Therefore, it was important for teachers to learn and grow continually not only as educators but also as collaborators. Extensive improvements have been made for special needs students; however, to continue to make a positive impact on student outcomes and achievement, it was important to study how inclusion teams can overcome the challenges and become effective at collaborating within inclusion classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. This study was important because the increase in inclusion classrooms has led to an increased need for effective collaborative practices among general and special education teachers to help meet the needs of all students (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). Although inclusion classrooms have been the norm in education for the last couple of decades, many teachers still struggled with how to utilize collaborative practices inside and outside of the classroom effectively. This study identified and investigated two teams of general and special education teachers, one at the elementary level and one at the middle school level, who were demonstrating effective collaborative practices. As elucidated by Creswell and Poth (2018), this could only be accomplished by going to the teachers' schools, talking directly to them, and allowing them to tell their stories. This study employed a holistic, collective case study design. The holistic approach was appropriate as the study investigated one unit, the team of the general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms, within the same school district (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, utilizing collective cases provided more compelling, robust evidence (Yin, 2009). Chapter Three outlines the design, setting, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures as well as information relating to the trustworthiness of this study.

Design

The purpose of research is to develop an understanding of specific issues or topics (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research allows the researcher to immerse himself or

herself in the natural setting of the participants to derive a “complex, detailed understanding of the issue” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45), which allows people’s voices and experiences to be heard. Specifically, case study research is an inquiry utilized to “understand a real-life phenomenon in depth within its real-life context” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). According to Stake (1995), a single case study allows the researcher to study the “particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Utilizing collective cases can provide more compelling, robust evidence and can cause possible direct replication, which can strengthen the analytic conclusions of the study (Yin, 2009). For purposes of this research, a collective case study was appropriate as it allowed for within-case and cross-case analysis of results within and across an elementary collaborative inclusion team and a middle school collaborative inclusion team (Yin, 2009). Multiple viewpoints increased the relatability of the results and the replicability of the practices utilized by the effective collaborative teams of general and special education teachers (Yin, 2009). A holistic approach to this case study was appropriate as the research investigated one unit, the team of the general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms, within the same school district (Yin, 2009). Multiple forms of data collection were utilized, including interviews, artifacts, and cognitive representations. Replicating the procedures for each case, or each inclusion team, provided credibility to the study (Yin, 2009).

Research Questions

CQ: What are general and special education teachers’ best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia?

SQ1: What are the best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

SQ2: What are the best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

SQ3: What are the best practices during the group cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

SQ4: What are the best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Setting

The setting for this study was Happy School District, which is a small, rural school district located in the southwestern portion of Virginia. Happy School District had seven elementary schools with a student population of 2,515 in grades PreK – 5 and three middle schools with a student population of 1,324 in grades 6 – 8 for the 2019/2020 school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The entire student population in grades PreK through 12 was 5,587 for the 2019/2020 school year (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). In the school district, 92.7% of students were white, 2.5% were black, 0.9% were Hispanic, 0.6% were Asian, and 3.2% were two or more races (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Additionally, 52.2% percent of the student population in Happy School District were reported as economically disadvantaged (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The overall

attendance rate for the Happy School District was 93%, and the graduation rate was 88.9% (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). Students with disabilities represented 16.4% of the student population, and, at the elementary and middle school levels, the majority of students with special needs were served through inclusive education (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

Two cases were selected from one elementary school and one middle school within Happy School District for this collective case study. The elementary school, Cheerful Elementary School, had a student population of 405 students in grades PreK-5 for the 2019/2020 school year, with 55.1% classified as economically disadvantaged, 11.6% students with disabilities, and 99% of the students were Caucasian (Virginia Department of Education, 2020). The middle school, Joyful Middle School, had a student population of 505 students in grades 6-8 for the 2019/2020 school year, with 56% classified as economically disadvantaged, 14.9% students with disabilities, and 96.6% were Caucasian (Virginia Department of Education, 2020).

This school district was selected for this investigation because, although it is a small, rural school district with geographic and socioeconomic barriers, the school district exhibits some examples of high quality schools in that it was ranked 11th out of 133 school districts in the state of Virginia for student achievement in 2017/2018 and 10th in 2018/2019 (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). This research aimed to give a voice to teams of general and special education teachers who were exhibiting strong collaborative practices within their inclusion classrooms in this school district.

Participants

This study utilized criterion-based purposeful sampling to determine participants. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), a purposeful sample would “intentionally sample a

group of people that could best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (p. 148). Utilizing criterion sampling enabled the selection of rich cases that met the specific, predetermined criterion of importance (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The criteria utilized in this study included: (a) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classrooms in grades kindergarten through fifth for the elementary case, and in grades sixth through eighth for the middle school case; (b) participants’ students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (c) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms. The sample size for this collective case study was 12 participants in total. The sample included two cases consisting of two inclusion teams of one general and one special education teacher assigned to the same inclusion classroom who served as case subjects. One case, or inclusion team, was selected from the elementary school level (grades K – 5) and one case, or inclusion team, was selected from middle school (grades 6 – 8). Participants interviewed in the study also included the individuals surrounding the general and special education teachers within their inclusion classroom, school, and district. These participants included two school principals, two school assistant principals, one regional special education coordinator, one director of elementary schools, one director of middle schools, and one director of special education.

Procedures

The researcher received approval from the superintendent of schools for the selected school district (see Appendix A) and successfully defended the proposal for this study. Next, the researcher received approval for the study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through

Liberty University (see Appendix B). Then, the researcher determined possible participants by emailing principals at each elementary and middle school within the school district requesting nominations for possible participants among teachers who met the criteria (see Appendix C). Principals utilized their access to the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data for reading and mathematics to identify general education teachers who met the criterion for consistent student growth from fall to spring for a minimum of three years. Principals also used their evaluations of teachers to help provide recommendations of teams of teachers who, in their view, exhibited successful collaborative practices. Once the researcher received recommendations from principals, recruitment emails were sent to the possible case subject participants (see Appendix D) as well as the assistant principals and district-level administrators (see Appendices E, F, G).

After the teacher participants were determined, the researcher sought to obtain consent from the case subject participants (see Appendix H) to engage in the study, from the principals where the cases were selected, and from the regional and district level supervisors for the areas of the selected schools (see Appendix I). The participants received anonymity throughout the study and had the option of leaving the study at any time (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). After approval was obtained, the researcher collected data from interviews, artifacts, and cognitive representations. The researcher recorded and transcribed the interviews, transcribed the field notes from observations, transcribed the artifacts into usable textual contexts, and transcribed the notes written with the cognitive representations. All of this data was analyzed to determine patterns and themes of best practices for effective collaboration and the development of a successful collaborative partnership.

The Researcher's Role

I served as the human instrument in this study with various roles, including teacher, advocate, evaluator, and interpreter, as provided by Stake (1995). I “maintained vigorous interpretation” (Stake 1995, p. 9) during data gathering. Additionally, I was responsible for preserving a professional working relationship with site administrators and participants as well as ensuring security and integrity during the collection of data, analysis, and reporting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I was an elementary school teacher for eight years within the school district where this study took place. I worked as a general education teacher in inclusion classrooms in second, third, and fifth grades and as a Title I teacher providing reading and math remediation to struggling and special education students in grades K – 5. However, I have not worked in the school district for over three years.

Currently, I work as an assistant professor of education and Director of Teacher Education at a small Christian college that is located on the outskirts of the school district, which was the setting for this study. I supervise student teachers placed in schools within the school district and other school districts; however, I did not utilize participants in classrooms where I had student teachers who were under my supervision. Through my experiences, I have witnessed positive examples of collaborative teams within inclusion classrooms and poor examples of collaborative teams. I hoped that through this study, a better understanding of the development of a successful partnership and inclusive teachers’ best practices for effective collaboration might be reached to aid in-service and pre-service teachers in better developing collaborative skills and practices.

Data Collection

Data was collected through interviews, artifacts, and cognitive representations. These forms of data collection provided a rich, descriptive context for providing an in-depth understanding of what was working for these effective collaborative teams (Yin, 2009). Utilizing collective cases and multiple forms of data collection allowed for triangulation of the data to “minimize misrepresentation and misunderstanding” (Stake, 1995, p. 109) of the results.

Interviews

Interviews allow the researcher to give a voice to participants and can provide deep knowledge that is “constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 4). Further, according to Stake (1995), “Two principal uses of case study are to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others” (p. 64). Interviews with participants and the individuals surrounding the participants allowed me to discover and portray multiple views of the cases (Stake, 1995).

In qualitative research, it is most beneficial to go to the participants’ setting as it will allow them to remain comfortable which will help them in revealing more about their experiences; therefore, I interviewed each participant at his or her school or a place of his or her choosing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I interviewed each general and special education teacher individually to garner the individuals’ responses and gain insight into their views and experiences on the development of the successful collaborative partnership and their best practices for collaboration within inclusion classrooms (see Appendix J). Then, I interviewed each team together with follow-up questions determined after the initial individual interviews to aid in further understanding of the team dynamic and what was working for each team (see Appendix K).

I also interviewed the principals at each school, the assistant principals at each school, the regional special education coordinator for the area of the selected schools, the district special education director, the elementary school supervisor, and the middle school supervisor (see Appendix L). These interviews with the individuals surrounding the participants contributed further to the understanding of what was working for these successful collaborative inclusion teams of teachers. Interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended to allow for flexibility and the ability to delve more deeply into the participants' responses (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All interviews were recorded with two recording devices and later transcribed by the researcher. Interviews lasted approximately 35 to 45 minutes each. Individual follow-up interviews or questions took place via email.

According to Yin (2009), the “interviews will be guided conversations rather than structured queries” (p. 106) to allow for a fluid rather than rigid interviews. Therefore, throughout the semi-structured interviews, the researcher engaged in follow-up questions, as necessary, for clarification or to dive more deeply into the participants' responses since knowledge is “produced socially in the interaction of interviewer and interviewee” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 82). Throughout the interviews, the researcher listened without judgment to allow the participants' voices to be heard and experiences to unfold in great depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Interview questions for individual general and special education teachers.

1. Please introduce yourself to me. What is your name, age, and why you became a teacher?
2. Please give me information about your experience as a teacher. How many years have you been teaching, how many years in inclusion classrooms, what grade levels/subjects

have you taught?

3. What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?
4. What type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?
5. When you first started teaching in an inclusion classroom within a collaborative partnership, did you feel prepared by your experiences in your college teacher education program?
6. What types of professional development opportunities has your school provided for inclusion teachers?
7. In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?
8. What was the process for determining your collaborative team for your inclusion classroom?
9. Once the team was selected, what was it like for you and your teaching partner when you first started working together in the inclusion classroom?
10. When you first started working together, were there any conflicts or disagreements on any issues with your teaching partner?
11. How did you resolve conflicts or disagreements between one another?
12. Other than challenges in developing the partnership between you and your teaching partner, have there been other challenges within the inclusion classroom or in the school?
13. How did you and your teaching partner overcome these challenges?
14. As you and your teaching partner have worked through various issues and

challenges, how has that affected the development of your partnership?

15. What types of things do you and your teaching partner do to continue to grow and work together?
16. What strengths do you feel you bring to the teaching partnership?
17. What weaknesses do you feel you bring to the partnership?
18. How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected student outcomes?
19. How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected the learning environment?
20. Imagine I am a beginning teacher, what advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?
21. What advice would you give to other teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?
22. What do you think you and your partner have done or do differently than other collaborative partnerships that you have witnessed that makes you successful at collaborating and working together?

Breakdown of general and special education teacher interview questions. Questions one and two provided demographic information about the general and special education teachers. These questions provided ages, years of experience, and an understanding of the individuals' reasonings for entering the education profession. Starting the interviews with these questions provided knowledge information about the individuals and helped to make them feel comfortable with the interviewer as it was important to establish a positive rapport so that they would speak comfortably and deeply about their experiences (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015).

Questions three and four provided an understanding of the viewpoints of the participants relating to the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms. Research showed that one hindrance to effective collaborative practices could be the negative attitudes of the general or special education teachers toward inclusive practices (Chitiyo, 2017; Kirby, 2017; Pit-ten et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2017). These questions aided in determining the attitudes of general and special education teachers who had proven to be effective at collaborating in inclusion classrooms toward inclusive practices and teaching diverse populations of students.

Questions five and six provided information relating to the general and special education teachers' self-efficacy and feelings of preparedness for inclusive educational practices, collaborative skills, and providing instruction to diverse populations of students. Research showed that many general and special education teachers do not feel prepared for effective collaboration and inclusive practices (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Roger & Johnson, 2018; Zagona et al., 2017). One influential aspect of what may make these collaborative teams effective could be effective preparation from their teacher education programs or high levels of professional development and training provided by their schools or school district.

Question seven provided an overall view of what the participants see as best practices for collaboration in inclusion classrooms. This initial view of each participant's perspectives provided some broad understanding before delving more deeply into the teacher's practices. High levels of self-efficacy due to meaningful training and professional development opportunities may have provided the general and special education teachers with evidence-based strategies for their inclusion classrooms which have led to positive student outcomes.

Question eight provided insight as to how collaborative teams were selected at varying

schools and levels. If teachers were allowed choice in the selection or if administrators made the selections may influence teachers' initial attitudes toward the collaborative team and may help ease the transition through the orientation and conflict stages of group development (Tuckman, 2001).

Question nine provided insight into the teachers' initial perceptions of the orientation/forming stage of group development, as posited by Tuckman (2001). To gain a better understanding of the development, dynamics, and best practices of successful collaborative teams, it was imperative to develop an understanding of their development from a newly formed team to a well-performing team.

Questions ten through thirteen were designed to elicit information about the teachers' possible conflicts, challenges, and issues, as can be seen in group development in Tuckman's (2001) conflict/storming stage. Research showed that collaborative teams could face many challenges in developing an effective collaborative partnership that is successful within an inclusion classroom and that many teams never overcome these challenges (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). These questions helped determine what these successful collaborative partnerships did to overcome their personal, classroom, and school challenges.

Questions fourteen and fifteen helped establish what the participants did during the cohesion/norming stage of Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development. Once the collaborative teams worked out their roles and overcome challenges, they normalized into cohesive teams that could work together (Egolf & Chester, 2013). These questions helped identify how these effective collaborative partnerships were able to accomplish this task, where others had not been successful. These questions helped determine if the teachers had a common planning time, shared in decision making, and reflected on issues that occurred within the

classroom (Bjonsrud & Nilsen, 2018; Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Fluijt et al., 2016; Morgan, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2015).

Questions sixteen through eighteen helped identify what the collaborative team did and continued to do within Tuckman's (2001) functional role-relatedness/performing stage of group development. Research showed that effective collaboration positively affects student outcomes emotionally, socially, and academically (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014; Fruth & Woods, 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). It was important to identify the particular benefits effective collaborative practices had on these successful collaborative partners' general and special education students.

Questions nineteen through twenty-two aided in identifying how the successful collaborative practices of these effective inclusion teams affected the learning environment of the general and special education students in relation to Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory (Jaramillo, 1996). These questions also provided a further in-depth understanding of the participants' best practices for effective collaboration, which may be transferable to other collaborative inclusion teams.

Table 3.1

Interviews with General and Special Education Teachers and Related Research Questions

Research Questions	Related Participant Interview Questions
What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia?	<p>What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?</p> <p>What type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?</p> <p>When you first started teaching in an inclusion classroom within a collaborative</p>

	<p>partnership, did you feel prepared by your experiences in your college teacher education program?</p> <p>What types of professional development opportunities has your school provided for inclusion teachers?</p> <p>In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?</p>
What are best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>What was the process for determining your collaborative team for your inclusion classroom?</p> <p>Once the team was selected, what was it like for you and your teaching partner when you first started working together in the inclusion classroom?</p>
What are best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>When you first started working together, were there any conflicts or disagreement or any issues with your teaching partner?</p> <p>How did you resolve conflicts or disagreements between one another?</p> <p>Other than challenges in developing the partnership between you and your teaching partner, have there been other challenges within the inclusion classroom or in the school?</p> <p>How did you and your teaching partner overcome these challenges?</p>
What are best practices during the cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>As you and your teaching partner have worked through various issues and challenges, how has that affected the development of your partnership?</p> <p>What types of things do you and your teaching partner do to continue to grow and work together?</p>

<p>What are best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?</p>	<p>What strengths do you feel you bring to the teaching partnership? What weaknesses do you feel you bring to the partnership?</p> <p>How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected student outcomes?</p>
<p>What collaborative strategies do general and special education teachers utilize to create a successful learning environment for general and special education students?</p>	<p>How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected the learning environment?</p> <p>Imagine I am a beginning teacher, what advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?</p> <p>What advice would you give to other teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?</p> <p>What do you think you and your partner have done or do differently than other collaborative partnerships that you have witnessed that makes you successful at collaborating and working together?</p>

Interview questions for administrators and special education directors.

1. Please introduce yourself to me. What is your name, age, and why you entered the education profession?
2. Please give me information about your experience as a teacher and as an administrator. How many years did you teach, what grade levels/subjects did you teach, how long have you been an administrator, and in what capacity?
3. What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?
4. What type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special

education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?

5. In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?

6. How are inclusion teams selected within your school(s)?

7. When you think of successful collaborative partnerships, what best practices do these teachers utilize?

8. When you think of weaker collaborative partnerships, what do these teachers do that causes them to be less effective?

9. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their collaborative partnership grow and develop?

10. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what types of challenges or issues have you seen them overcome, and how have they overcome them?

11. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, would you categorize them as a cohesive team, meaning that they are able to work together collaboratively in an effective, professional manner? If so, what practices do you think make them cohesive and successful in their partnership?

12. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what strengths and weaknesses do you think each teacher brings to the partnership, and how does that affect their success in working together?

13. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their successful partnership affect the learning environment and general and special education students?

14. What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district

been able to provide that has helped general and special education teachers working together in inclusion classrooms?

15. What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district been able to provide to help inclusive practices for improved student outcomes?

16. Imagine that I am a beginning teacher. What advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?

17. What advice would you give to teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?

18. Overall, what practices do you think have worked for effective collaborative partnerships in inclusion classrooms?

Breakdown of interview questions for administrators and special education directors.

The interview questions for the administrators, supervisors, and special education director were similar in format to the interview questions for the general and special education teachers to garner further understanding of the phenomenon of effective collaborative practices from the participating teachers and those surrounding them.

Questions one and two provided demographic information about the school and district level administrators regarding their age and their reasoning for entering the education profession as well as their years of experience as a teacher and administrator and in which subjects and grade levels. These questions also helped the interviewees to feel comfortable and at ease to allow for more open responses on later questions as they helped to establish a rapport with the interviewer (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Questions three and four were designed to elucidate information regarding the school and

district level administrators' viewpoints on inclusion classrooms and special education processes. Research indicated that administrators could have positive or negative attitudes toward inclusive education and may or may not be supportive of general and special education teachers' collaborative processes by providing common planning times, professional development opportunities, or other support (Besic et al., 2017; Bettini et al., 2016; Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017; Cate et al., 2018; Fluijt et al., 2016; Kirby, 2017; Zagona et al., 2017). Research also revealed that administrators could have an enormous impact on school culture, which could enhance or harm effective collaboration among general and special education teachers and student learning outcomes (Al-Mahdy & Emam, 2017; Ryan, 2006). It was important to understand the impact these administrators and special education directors had on the culture and inclusive educational processes within the schools of the participants as well as the level of support they provided to the teachers and classrooms.

Question five provided a baseline of understanding of the administrators' knowledge and understanding of best practices for inclusion classrooms. This also garnered an understanding of the level of self-efficacy the administrators and special education directors exhibited for evidence-based practices within inclusion classrooms.

Question six provided information on how the general and special education teachers were assigned to specific inclusion classrooms with the school. In some schools, the administrators selected the teams, whereas, in some schools, the teachers have some input in the selection. For transferability, this response could show a pattern in how effective collaborative teams are selected.

Questions seven through thirteen were designed to garner specific information from the administrators, supervisors, and special education director on effective or ineffective

collaborative practices they observed from inclusion teams and how they affected the learning environment and student achievement within the inclusion classroom. These individuals needed years of experience as teachers prior to becoming administrators and observed a wide variety of practices during their tenures as teachers and as administrators, supervisors, or directors. These individuals also observed the participants in their inclusion classrooms, during IEP meetings, during professional development opportunities, and during the completion of other job-related duties. This line of questioning led to specific information on what these effective inclusion teams have done differently than other less effective teams.

Questions fourteen and fifteen were designed to provide further information on the types of support and training the schools or school district have provided to teachers. School and district level administrators make a lot of impactful decisions relating to the selection and distribution of curriculum, resources, funds, and personnel (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Kaplan, 2019; Erdem, 2017; Yngve et al., 2018) as well as the types of professional development and training that is provided to teachers (Kozleski et al., 2015; Mingo & Mingo, 2018). It was essential to determine the types of curriculum, resources, funds, professional development, and training that have been made available to the participants and the effect on their success as an effective collaborative partnership and on their practices within their inclusion classrooms.

Questions sixteen through eighteen were intended to provide further information from the point-of-view of the administrators, supervisors, and special education director on best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom and how these teachers can work through the stages of group development as posited by Tuckman (2001). The experience and expertise of these interviewees helped provide valuable insights into what works and what does not for inclusion teams. Due to the challenges for

collaboration among general and special education teachers (Chitiyo, 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Sinclair et al., 2019; Strogilos et al., 2016), it was imperative to gather information from credible, reliable experts about best practices in inclusion classrooms to decrease the high levels of teacher burn out and attrition (Soini et al., 2019) as well as to provide support and assistance for inclusion teams struggle to form a strong, cohesive partnership (Egolf & Chester, 2013).

Table 3.2

Interviews of School and District Administrators and Related Research Questions

Research Questions	Related Participant Interview Questions
What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia?	<p>What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?</p> <p>What type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?</p> <p>In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?</p> <p>Imagine that I am a beginning teacher. What advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?</p> <p>Overall, what practices do you think have worked for effective collaborative partnerships in inclusive classrooms?</p>
What are best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	How are inclusion teams selected within your school(s)?
What are best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and	When you think of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their collaborative partnership grow and develop?

special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what types of challenges or issues have you seen them overcome, and how have they overcome them?</p> <p>What advice would you give to teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?</p>
What are best practices during the cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>In thinking of the teachers for this case study, would you categorize them as a cohesive team, meaning that they are able to work together collaboratively in an effective, professional manner? If so, what practices do you think make them cohesive and successful in their partnership?</p> <p>In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what strengths and weaknesses do you think each teacher brings to the partnership, and how does that affect their success in working together?</p>
What are best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?	<p>When you think of successful collaborative partnerships, what best practices do these teachers utilize?</p> <p>When you think of weaker collaborative partnerships, what do these teachers do that causes them to be less effective?</p> <p>What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district been able to provide that has helped general and special education teachers working together in inclusion classrooms?</p>
What collaborative strategies do general and special education teachers utilize to create a successful learning environment for general and special education students?	<p>In thinking of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their successful partnership affect the learning environment and general and special education students?</p> <p>What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district</p>

	been able to provide to help inclusive practices for improved student outcomes?
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Artifacts

Artifacts were collected to provide further support for the successful collaborative practices utilized by the participants (see Figures 4.9 - 4.12). The researcher collected artifacts from the participants including, but not limited to: (a) co-planned lesson plans with differentiation models, (b) plans for co-teaching or other collaborative instructional models, and (c) professional development presentations completed by the teachers relating to collaboration, co-teaching strategies, and inclusive practices

Cognitive Representations

The general and special education teachers participating in the study were asked to create two cognitive representations (see Figures 4.1 – 4.8). The first was be a drawn pictorial representation of what the process of developing into a cohesive, collaborative team looks like to them, and the second was a drawn pictorial representation of what best practices in collaboration look like to them. Each pictorial representation also included one or two written sentences describing the picture. This data provided a further in-depth understanding of the teachers' stages of developing into a successful partnership and their views on the best practices for collaboration in inclusion classrooms.

Data Analysis

According to Stake (1995), “there is no particular moment when data analysis begins” (p. 71); therefore, to ensure high-quality data analysis, I analyzed data continuously from the beginning of data collection and throughout the entire collection and analysis cycle (Yin, 2009). As described by Yin (2009), this steady analysis ensured that I attended to all the evidence and

exhaustively covered my research questions. My previous experiences as a general education teacher in inclusion classrooms provided some prior, expert knowledge that I applied during the analysis phase of the study (Yin, 2009). As postulated by Yin (2009), pattern matching logic was utilized as it is “one of the most desirable techniques” (p. 136) for case study analysis. Pattern matching allowed me to match patterns within the themes of the data to strengthen the internal validity of the study (Yin, 2009).

I began data analysis procedures with open coding by organizing data into “causal conditions (what factors caused the core phenomenon), strategies (actions taken in response to the core phenomenon), contextual and intervening conditions (broad and specific situational factors that influence the strategies), and consequences (outcomes from using the strategies)” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 85). This process was done by organizing data from interview transcriptions, reflective descriptions of cognitive representations, and artifacts into usable textual forms that could be entered into searchable spreadsheets which allowed me to better organize the data for performing analyses and interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009). Next, I performed a within-case analysis through detailed descriptions of each case and the themes within each case (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009). Since this study involved collective cases, cross-case analysis was conducted next by cross-examination of the two cases to determine themes and patterns of themes across the cases, which helped to determine assertions and interpretations of the meaning across the cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2009).

The process of the within and cross-case analyses required me to clearly define and continuously compare the codes or combinations of codes identified as emergent themes within the descriptions of cognitive representations, interview transcripts, and artifacts (Yin, 2009).

This was accomplished with the creation of Word tables that showed the emergent themes and patterns of themes and how they related to the research questions for each individual case study and the comparison of the two cases (Yin, 2009). This process also assisted me in developing argumentative interpretations across the cases, as recommended by Yin (2009).

Lastly, I developed naturalistic generalizations from analyzing the data or “generalizations that people can learn from the case for themselves, apply learnings to a population of cases, or transfer them to another similar context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 206). This was accomplished by deep analysis to build connections between the themes and patterns within and across the data to the initial research questions (Yin, 2009). The triangulation of multiple sources of data with interviews, cognitive representations, and artifacts increased the construct validity of the investigation, and the use of collective cases with two cases representing elementary and middle school grades provided thicker, more robust data (Yin, 2009).

Trustworthiness

Frameworks have been in existence for years for rigorous credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability, which help to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). This researcher addressed each of these issues within this study to ensure high-quality research.

Credibility

Credibility, or internal validity, seeks to ensure that the “study measures or tests what is actually intended” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). Credibility was accomplished in this collective case study by utilizing well-established research methods, clarifying researcher bias, peer review, and member checking (Yin, 2009). I used direct interpretation and aggregation of codes to determine themes and sub-themes as recommended by Yin (2009). I provided reflexivity by positioning

myself in the research through the relaying of my experiences in inclusion classrooms and how they informed my motivation for the study and interpretation of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I utilized peer review through continuous approval by my dissertation committee through the defense of the proposal and continuous checks. Additionally, I performed member checking by allowing the participants to read through the transcribed interviews and write-ups of the results to ensure “accuracy and palatability” (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability was established by providing a detailed account of the methods and procedures utilized throughout the investigation (Shenton, 2004). Throughout the data collection, I had prolonged engagement with the general and special education teacher participants as well as special education coordinators and school administrators through multiple interviews (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I also used consistent, well-established coding methods, and a codebook during the analysis process (Yin, 2009). Furthermore, dependability was strengthened through the triangulation of data through multiple viewpoints (principals, supervisors, special education director, general education teachers, and special education teachers) and multiple data collection methods (interviews, artifacts, and cognitive representations) (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

According to Shenton (2004), confirmability relates to ensuring that the “work’s findings are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher” (p. 72). Confirmability was established in this study through the use of external audits through dissertation committee members. Also, I provided detailed information regarding my biases, values, and experiences as well as reflexivity with detailed field notes in the form of researcher journal entries throughout the study including just prior to

and directly after each interview (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (see Appendix M). The study also included verbatim transcriptions of interviews, samples of data collected directly from artifacts, and the case subjects' cognitive representations.

Transferability

Transferability, or external validity, relates to the “extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations” (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Some applications from the results of this study may exist for other general and special education in-service teachers in inclusion classrooms and pre-service teachers preparing to become general or special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. Through this study, I sought to create a “rich, thick description” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263) which will allow readers to “transfer information to other settings” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263). Utilizing cases from the elementary school level and the middle school level may increase the transferability of the results to larger populations of pre-service and in-service teachers.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations must be made during each phase of the research process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Several protocols were put in place to ensure the ethics of this study. I displayed concern for the welfare of participants by exhibiting respect for them throughout the research process, beginning by receiving approval for the study through my dissertation committee and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University before data collection. Then, I received informed consent from the superintendent of schools, school principals, regional and district level special education directors, general education teachers, and special education teachers involved in the study. Participants in the study were made aware that participation was completely voluntary, and participants could choose not to participate at any time. I protected

the anonymity of the schools and participants by utilizing pseudonyms throughout the study. I also protected all collected data and materials relating to the study by keeping them in a locked filing cabinet within a locked office. During interviews, observations, and discussions of the study with the participants, I listened to the participants to garner their perceptions and experiences rather than my own. During data analysis and reporting of results, I was careful to report on all perspectives equally and was conscientious about not siding with any participants on issues (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

As outlined in Chapter Three, the current qualitative collective case study examined the best practices for collaboration in elementary and middle school inclusion classrooms, among general and special education teachers. The setting was a small, rural school district situated in the southwestern portion of Virginia. Four participants were selected utilizing criterion-based purposeful sampling to ensure two high-quality cases of teachers, or two inclusion teams consisting of one general and one special education teacher each, who had proven effective at collaborating in inclusion classrooms. Data was collected for this collective case study in multiple ways including: (a) interviews of participants and the administrators surrounding the participants, (b) collection of artifacts provided by the participants showing evidence of effective collaborative practices, and (c) cognitive representations created by the participants depicting the development of a successful collaborative partnership and best practices for collaboration. Data analysis occurred throughout the study and involved within-case and cross-case analyses of all data (Yin, 2009). Trustworthiness was established throughout the study to lend to its credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Additionally, ethical considerations were made throughout the study to ensure the protection of the participants, schools, and data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The escalation of inclusive practices in education has produced the need for general and special education teachers to increase their collaborative efforts. The purpose of this collective case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. Through interviews and the collection of artifacts and cognitive representations, this study examined the best practices of two inclusion teams, one at the elementary school level and one at the middle school level, each consisting of one general and one special education teacher. The investigation of instructional and collaborative practices of each pair of co-teachers was regarded as an individual case study, and then the teams were cross analyzed to determine common patterns and themes.

The central research question guiding this collective case study was: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? Additional sub-questions for this study were: (a) What are the best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? (b) What are the best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion team? (c) What are the best practices during the group cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? (d) What are the best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general

and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? This chapter provides information relating to (a) the demographics of the participants; (b) data obtained from the interviews, cognitive representations, and artifacts; (c) patterns and themes generated from the data; and (d) a summary of findings from the data.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of members of two inclusion teams, one from Cheerful Elementary School and one from Joyful Middle School, each consisting of one general and one special education teacher. Participants also included the school and district level administrators surrounding these teachers, including two principals, two assistant principals, one regional special education coordinator, one director of elementary schools, one director of middle schools, and one director of special education. A total of 12 participants comprised the study. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the schools and participants. These participants represented ages ranging from 28 to 61, and years of experience in the field of education ranged from five years to 34 years. The study consisted of two males and ten females, and all participants were Caucasian. The insights and perspectives of the teachers, school administrators, and district-level administrators added depth and richness to the investigation. The two teams of co-teachers had worked collaboratively together for at least five years, and all but one of the teachers had worked as part of previous inclusion partnerships. All of the administrators in the study had worked in inclusion classrooms during their tenures as classroom teachers.

The backgrounds and experiences of the teachers contributed to the development of their current partnerships and influenced their perspectives on best practices for collaboration in inclusion classrooms. Additionally, the backgrounds and experiences of the administrators

influenced their work in selecting and supporting inclusive practices and inclusion teams within their schools and school district. This section provides information relating to each co-teaching pair and each administrator.

Table 4.1

Description of Study Participants

Name	Age	Years of Experience in Education	School	Role
Ms. Clark	28	5	Cheerful Elementary School	General Education Teacher
Ms. Walker	52	15	Cheerful Elementary School	Special Education Teacher
Ms. Anderson	46	20	Cheerful Elementary School	Principal
Mr. Wilson	57	22	Cheerful Elementary School	Hybrid Music Teacher/Assistant Principal
Ms. Jones	46	15	Joyful Middle School	General Education Teacher
Ms. Moore	52	9	Joyful Middle School	Special Education Teacher
Ms. Harris	41	21	Joyful Middle School	Principal
Ms. Davis	46	20	Joyful Middle School	Assistant Principal
Ms. Thomas	58	28	Happy School District	Regional Special Education Coordinator
Ms. Miller	61	34	Happy School District	Director of Elementary Schools
Mr. Clyde	48	25	Happy School District	Director of Middle Schools
Ms. Taylor	65	29	Happy School District	Director of Special Education

Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker

Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker teach at Cheerful Elementary School and work as an inclusion team in fourth-grade mathematics. They have worked as a team for the past five years. Their principal selected the team based on her belief that these teachers would work well together. It is not common practice in this school for teachers to have input into the selection of inclusion teams.

Ms. Clark is a 28-year-old general education teacher who has been teaching for five years. She has taught in fourth-grade inclusion classrooms containing a mixture of general and special education students for all five years of her teaching career. During her first year of teaching fourth grade, she taught reading, math, and history through Virginia studies; however, for the last four years, she has strictly taught math due to the grade level departmentalizing.

Ms. Walker is a 52-year-old special education teaching who has been teaching for 15 years. Ms. Walker has worked in numerous inclusion classrooms during all 15 years of her teaching experience with various general education teachers. She has taught kindergarten through fifth grade in reading and math; however, for the past four or five years, she has focused on third through fifth-grade math instruction.

In individual and team interviews, Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker exhibited positive perspectives on inclusion classrooms. They enjoy the inclusivity and positive benefits that inclusion classrooms can bring to general and special education students and have experienced positive student outcomes in their inclusion classrooms while working together. Ms. Clark's only experience working as part of a co-teaching team has been with Ms. Walker, and it has been a positive experience. However, Ms. Walker has been part of several inclusion teams and has not always had positive experiences as she has with Ms. Clark. The variances in experiences added to the depth of insights the teachers offered pertaining to this study. Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker have developed a good relationship and rapport to the point of maintaining a friendship outside of work. When first assigned to the same inclusion classroom, Ms. Clark was starting her first year of teaching, making her very receptive to help from Ms. Walker. This created a mentorship where Ms. Walker was able to help Ms. Clark as she began teaching the curriculum

and modifying instruction for all learners, but it has evolved into more of an equal partnership over time.

Ms. Anderson

Ms. Anderson is the principal at Cheerful Elementary School. She is 46 years old and has been in the education profession for 20 years. She worked as a math teacher for eight years. Her first year of teaching was at a high school teaching Pre-Algebra to eighth-grade students and Algebra I Part 1 to ninth-grade students. Then, she taught for seven years at an elementary school in Happy School District, teaching math and writing to fifth-grade students. She served as assistant principal at Joyful Middle School for six years, two years as principal at another middle school, and now four years as principal at Cheerful Elementary School. As principal, Ms. Anderson selects the general and special education teachers to be paired in inclusion classrooms based on who she believes will work well together due to the teachers' personalities and their experience in particular content areas.

As a teacher, Ms. Anderson had experience teaching in inclusion classrooms and has had experience working with a variety of inclusion teams as an administrator at the elementary and middle school levels. Ms. Anderson has a positive perspective on inclusion classrooms. She feels that inclusion classrooms help provide equality of educational experiences for all students and help special education students not to feel ostracized. At the elementary level, Ms. Anderson is not able to provide common planning time for inclusion teams during the school day. Still, she allows teachers to utilize flex time, which is extra time they are required to perform under their contracts, to meet together for planning purposes. Ms. Anderson recommended Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker as an effective inclusion team and spoke highly of their collaborative efforts, co-teaching practices, and student outcomes.

Mr. Wilson

Mr. Wilson serves in a hybrid role as a music teacher and assistant principal at Cheerful Elementary School. Mr. Wilson is 57 years old and has worked in the education profession for 22 years. He worked as a general music teacher at Cheerful Elementary School for nine years, then as a high school choir teacher in Happy School District for 10 years, and now as the music teacher and part-time assistant principal at Cheerful Elementary School for three years. Mr. Wilson has a positive attitude regarding inclusion classrooms. He expressed that they are beneficial to students because everyone is treated equally. Mr. Wilson was very complimentary of Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker as an inclusion team. He felt that they had created a positive learning environment that is conducive to learning for all students.

Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore

Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore teach at Joyful Middle School and work as an inclusion team teaching math for sixth and seventh-grade students. At the time of their selection, Mr. Clyde was the principal, and he selected their team. They have been working together in the same inclusion classrooms for the past five years.

Ms. Jones is a 46-year-old general education mathematics teacher. She has taught for 15 years. She has taught sixth, seventh, and eighth grades. For the past several years, she has solely taught math. Ms. Jones has taught in inclusion classrooms during all 15 years of her teaching experience. Ms. Jones expressed mixed feelings about inclusion classrooms. She feels that inclusion classrooms can have positive benefits for students and teachers, but that there are some drawbacks and challenges for both. She has witnessed special education students feeling singled out in front of general education students because of their accommodations, such as receiving a calculator when other students did not or receiving a different type of calculator than the general

education students. She has been part of various inclusion teams, some of which she felt were effective and positive experiences and some of which were ineffective and negative experiences.

Ms. Moore is a 52-year-old special education teacher. She worked at Joyful Middle School for 23 years as the secretary and then completed her teaching degree and has been teaching there for nine years. She has worked in inclusion classrooms for all nine years of her teaching experience and has been paired with several general education teachers. She has taught sixth and seventh-grade students in math, English, science, and history. Ms. Moore obtained her teaching endorsement in mathematics, in addition to special education; therefore, she now mostly focuses on math instruction. Ms. Moore also expressed mixed feelings about inclusion classrooms. She feels that they are incredibly beneficial to most students, but that some students need specialized guidance within a self-contained classroom. Due to her dual-endorsement, Ms. Moore teaches some periods in inclusion classrooms with Ms. Jones, but also has a couple of periods of self-contained math with students.

In the inclusion classrooms where Ms. Moore is paired with Ms. Jones, approximately 80% of the students are general education and 20% are special education. In the self-contained classrooms where Ms. Moore is paired with a special education paraprofessional, approximately 90% of the students are special education and 10% are general education students who have low scores on math SOL tests. The inclusion classrooms contain approximately 30 students, while the self-contained classrooms contain approximately 15 to 20 students.

Ms. Moore has been part of several positive collaborative teams that worked well together. Still, she also had experiences in inclusion classrooms that were negative, particularly when she first started teaching, and the school first started having more inclusion classrooms. In these classrooms, Ms. Moore did not feel like an equal partner, but more like an aide in the

classroom. Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore have developed a strong relationship to the point of friendship outside of work during their time as an inclusion team. Both feel very favorable about being part of this inclusion team and the benefits it has brought to them, as teachers, and to their students.

Ms. Harris

Ms. Harris is the principal at Joyful Middle School. She is 41 years old and has been in the education profession for 21 years. She served as an elementary school teacher in Happy School District for 12 years, teaching math for fourth and fifth grade. Ms. Harris then taught math for the sixth and seventh grade at Joyful Middle School for three years. She served as the assistant principal at Joyful Middle School for three years and now as the principal for one year. When working as a teacher, Ms. Harris taught in inclusion classrooms for most of her teaching career. She expressed that inclusive practices and collaboration among general and special education teachers have progressed a lot during her time in the education profession. Ms. Harris was very positive about inclusion classrooms and helping to create an inclusive climate in the school has been a focus of hers as an administrator. Ms. Harris feels that inclusion classrooms provide excellent opportunities for not only cognitive but also social and emotional growth for general and special education students. Ms. Harris selects the teachers for the inclusion teams; however, she did not select this team as she was not an administrator yet at that time. When Ms. Harris selects inclusion teams, she takes the input of teachers and is willing to listen to their viewpoints.

Ms. Davis

Ms. Davis is the assistant principal at Joyful Middle School. She is 46 years old and has been in the education profession for 21 years. She taught mathematics at a high school in Happy

School District for 19 years, served as the assistant principal at an elementary school for one year, and has been at Joyful Middle School as the assistant principal for one year. As a teacher, Ms. Davis taught Algebra I, Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, and Geometry. Most of her time was spent with ninth-graders teaching Algebra I and Algebra I Part 1 and Part 2. She taught in an inclusion classroom for approximately 15 years. Ms. Davis expressed that she had some positive, but mostly negative experiences teaching in inclusion classrooms. She felt that the experience was positive when she had a special education teacher in her classroom who was familiar with or was willing to learn the math content. She had experiences with several special education teachers who were not confident in teaching the math curriculum. Ms. Davis did not have common planning time with her inclusion partners, and they were not able to find time to plan together. These challenges made Ms. Davis feel that she had to do all of the planning, teaching, and differentiating for all of the students. She did not think that she had an equal partner in her experiences in inclusion teams. Ms. Davis has only been at Joyful Middle School for one year, but she was complimentary of the partnership between Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore. She has observed in their classroom and showed appreciation for the co-teaching strategies and collaboration that they exhibit.

Ms. Miller

Ms. Miller is the Director of Elementary Schools for the Happy School District. She is 61 years old and has been in the education profession for 34 years. She taught at an elementary school in a different school district for five years. She then moved to Happy School District where she worked as an elementary school teacher for approximately seven years, an elementary school principal for seven years, and a middle school principal for seven years before starting in her role as Director of Elementary Schools for the past eight years. In this role, Ms. Miller

supervises all of the elementary schools but also is in charge of Title I, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), as well as Neglected, Delinquent, Homeless, and Foster Care for the school district. Ms. Miller had a very positive perspective on inclusion classrooms. Still, she expressed that multiple options, including inclusion, self-contained, and pull-out strategies, should be available to help meet the individualized needs of all students. Ms. Miller was complimentary of the elementary inclusion team for this case study and the progress of inclusive practices within the elementary and middle schools in Happy School District.

Mr. Clyde

Mr. Clyde is the Director of Middle Schools for the Happy School District. Mr. Clyde is 48 years old and has been in the education profession for 26 years. He served as a special education teacher for eleven years at Joyful Middle School for math, English, science, and history for sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. Then, he served as the assistant principal at Joyful Middle School for one year and principal for 13 years. He has served as Director of Middle Schools for one year. During his tenure at Joyful Middle school, he was instrumental in the development of inclusive practices at the school. Mr. Clyde expressed a positive attitude toward inclusion classrooms because of the benefits for general and special education students. During his time as a special education teacher, inclusion classrooms were non-existent, and all of his instruction took place in self-contained classrooms.

Mr. Clyde was the principal at Joyful Middle School during the development of inclusive classrooms and collaboration among general and special education teachers. He selected Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore as an inclusion team based on their personalities and the fact that Ms. Moore was endorsed to teach mathematics in addition to special education. He was very complimentary of the success of this inclusion team. He expressed how far Joyful Middle

School has come in its efforts to have cohesive inclusion partnerships and successful inclusive learning environments for students.

Ms. Thomas

Ms. Thomas is a regional special education coordinator for Happy School District, serving the region for Cheerful Elementary School, Joyful Middle School, and several other schools. She is 58 years old and has been in the education profession for 28 years. She has observed and worked with both inclusion teams that are part of this collective case study. She served as a special education teacher at a high school and elementary school in a different school district for ten years. Then, she worked as a special education teacher at an elementary school in Happy School District for ten years and as a regional special education coordinator for the past eight years. As a special education teacher, she taught ninth through twelfth grade at the high school level and kindergarten through fifth grade at the elementary school level in math, English, science, and history. During her time as a teacher, she worked in inclusion classrooms for several years in fourth and fifth grade. In her role as a regional special education coordinator, Ms. Thomas is responsible for all grades pre-kindergarten through post-graduation. In this role, she takes referrals for students who are suspected of having disabilities and follows those students through the Readiness to Intervention (RTI), child study, and eligibility for special education services processes.

Ms. Thomas commended the effectiveness of both the elementary (Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker) and the middle school (Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore) inclusion teams for this collective case study. She has viewed their progression and development as cohesive inclusion teams. Ms. Thomas was very positive about inclusion classrooms. She sees them as extremely beneficial for general and special education students.

Ms. Taylor

Ms. Taylor is the Director of Special Education for the Happy School District. She is 55 years old and has been in the education profession for 29 years. She served as a special education teacher at Cheerful Elementary School for 17 years, as assistant principal at middle school in Happy School District for three and a half years, and as a principal at the middle school for half a year. She has served as the Director of Special Education for the district for eight years. Ms. Taylor has experienced the progression in education toward inclusive practices and inclusion classrooms. When she was a special education teacher, she worked in a self-contained classroom where she pulled students out of their regular classrooms to teach them in math, English, science, and history. Ms. Taylor was very complimentary of both of the inclusion teams for this collective case study.

Results

This section will detail the theme development, responses to research questions, and an overview of the findings of this study.

Theme Development

The purpose of this collective case study was to determine general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms in elementary and middle school grade levels (K-8). Data was collected through interviews, cognitive representations, and artifacts. Data were recorded, transcribed, organized, and analyzed. Recurring patterns and themes were identified within and across each inclusion team. Data analysis was conducted utilizing the strategy of pattern matching logic as it is "one of the most desirable techniques" (Yin, 2009, p. 136) for case study analysis. Patterns and themes were identified and matched within and across each case using direct interpretation and aggregation as

described by Stake (1995). Pattern matching allowed me to identify four main themes, with sub-themes for each, across both inclusion teams for best practices for collaboration in inclusion classrooms: (a) communication (talking, planning, and reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, equal, and support); (c) attitude (perspective, trust, respect, and willing); and (d) perseverance (work and effort).

Interviews. I conducted 14 interviews for this collective case study. Each teacher and administrator was interviewed individually at their school or location of their choosing to provide participants with a comfortable place to answer the interview questions openly (see Appendices J, L). The two inclusion teams were also interviewed together to gather further information and an in-depth understanding of their partnership and collaborative practices (see Appendix K). All elementary and middle school principals in Happy School District were emailed recruitments letters which included requests for their recommendations for effective inclusion teams based on the following criteria: (a) general education teachers whose students had shown growth from fall to spring on Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) testing for the previous three years, (b) teachers who had positive evaluations from principals, and (c) teachers, who in their view, exhibited successful collaborative practices (see Appendix C). I received recommendations from the principal at Cheerful Elementary School for Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker and from the principal at Joyful Middle School for Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore. I emailed recruitment letters to these four teachers requesting their participation in the study, and they agreed to participate (see Appendix D). Interviews were scheduled and conducted at convenient times for the participants.

I also emailed recruitment letters to the assistant principals at each school and the special education coordinator for the region where these schools are located as well as the directors of

elementary schools, middle schools, and special education for Happy School District (see Appendices E, F, G). I received agreements for participation and consent from the elementary school principal, elementary school assistant principal, middle school principal, middle school assistant principal, regional special education coordinator, director of elementary schools, director of middle schools, and director of special education (see Appendix I). Interviews with these administrators were scheduled and conducted at convenient times for them.

Cognitive Representations. After each individual interview with the general and special education teachers, I requested that each teacher complete two cognitive representations to provide further in-depth information (see Figures 4.1 – 4.8). The first cognitive representation asked, “What does the process of developing into a cohesive, collaborative team look like to you?” The second cognitive representation asked, “What do best practices for effective collaboration look like to you?” The teachers were asked to draw the first thing that came to their minds and write one to two sentences describing the pictures.

Artifacts. At each individual interview with general and special education teachers, I gave the teachers copies of the research questions guiding this study. I asked them to supply artifacts that would help provide information relating to the research questions. The teachers brought their artifacts to the team interviews and gave them to me. Artifacts collected from each inclusion team consist of co-created lesson plans, lesson structures establishing co-teaching roles, and (in the case of the middle school team) presentations and materials the team used when providing professional development relating to co-teaching and collaborating within inclusion classrooms for other teachers (see Figures 4.9 – 4.12).

Overview of Findings

I transcribed each interview and then read each multiple times as well as read and examined each cognitive representation description and each artifact numerous times. I hand-coded by highlighting each document and labeling codes as well as created searchable spreadsheets to aggregate and directly interpret patterns and themes within each case and then across each case (Stake, 1995). As provided by Creswell and Poth (2018), I used open coding to organize the data into its major categories and then used selective coding to develop reasoning for the correlations related to the phenomenon for this study of what makes these inclusion teams effective where others are not. Through this process, I identified generalized best practices for effective collaboration among general and special education teachers in K-8 inclusion classrooms. During the within-case analysis for each case, themes were revealed for the elementary school inclusion team and for the middle school inclusion team. During the cross-case analysis many of the same patterns and themes were identified across both teams as identified in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Comparison of Best Practices for Effective Collaboration among General and Special Education Teachers

Elementary School Team	Both Teams	Middle School Team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Share • Support • Flexibility • Co-teaching • Succeed together • Fail together 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effective communication • Work together • Willingness • Positive attitudes • Teamwork • Build a positive relationship • Have same goals • Students come first • Openness • Respect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True team • Ours, not yours or mine • Both teachers equally valuable • Team becomes natural

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professionalism • Administrative support 	
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Furthermore, I aggregated the codes from the interview transcripts and cognitive representations descriptions to determine the number of instances of each, as seen in Table 4.3 (Stake, 1995).

Table 4.3

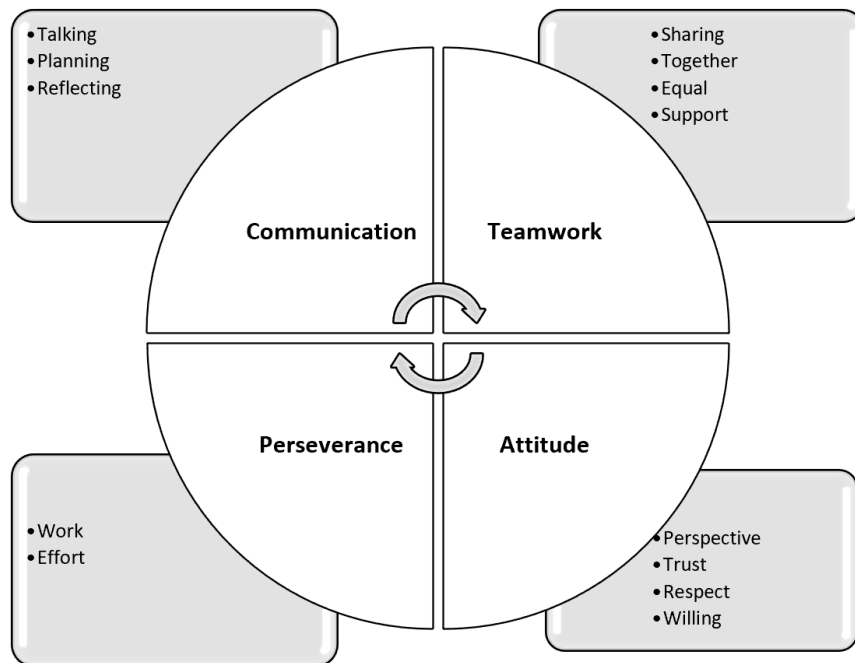
Codes Used in Analysis of Interview Transcripts and Cognitive Representations

Code	Instances	Description
Communication	36	Teachers talking to one another and to administrators.
Talk	52	Teachers and administrators discussing and communicating with one another.
Plan/Planning	141	Teachers planning for instruction, student activities, and classroom.
Reflecting	8	Teachers reflecting on instruction, student activities, and class occurrences after class session.
Attitude/Feel	241	How teachers and administrators feel about teaching and collaborating within inclusion classrooms.
Perspectives	31	How teachers and administrators feel about inclusion classrooms and inclusive practices of education.
Sharing	21	General and special education teachers dividing up responsibilities and roles within the inclusion classroom.
Team/Teamwork	219	General and special education teachers working together.
Equal/Equality	29	General and special education teachers sharing roles and responsibilities. Also, general and special education students having similar learning experiences.
Effort	9	General and special education teachers working together and putting in time and work toward collaborating together.
Work	445	General and special education teachers collaborating and providing for student needs within inclusion classrooms.

Together	245	Teams communicating and collaborating with one another.
Support	36	Best practices for inclusion classrooms entail support for students from both teachers, for teachers from one another, and for teachers and students from administrators.
Trust	23	Relying on one another and feeling comfortable within an inclusion partnership.
Respect	22	General and special education teachers treating one another in a professional, courteous manner.
Open	46	General and special education teachers open/open-minded to new ideas and ways of doing things within the classroom as well as open to accepting help from another teacher.
Willing	46	Team members putting in the necessary time, effort, and work toward developing a cohesive partnership and co-teaching within an inclusion classroom.

During the process of cross-case analysis between the elementary and middle school inclusion teams, these codes as well as pattern matching and direct interpretation (Stake, 1995), led to the identification of themes and sub-themes related to best practices among general and special education teachers in inclusion teams. The overarching themes were identified as: (a) communication, (b) teamwork, (c) attitude, and (d) perseverance with sub-themes for each as detailed in Figure 4.13. This section describes the themes and sub-themes.

Figure 4.13. Themes and Sub-Themes for Stages of Group Development



Communication. All participants identified communication as a crucial element to the success of inclusion teams. Both middle school teachers and the elementary school special education teacher had previous negative experiences with working in inclusion classrooms with various partners. They all revealed that a significant difference between working in those teams compared with their current partnerships was variations in the level and type of communication.

Talking. How the teachers talked to one another was identified as an essential part of communication among effective inclusion teams. Both teams of teachers revealed that they talked frequently, openly, and honestly with one another. Ms. Jones said, “Being able to talk through if we had any differences or just to be open-minded to other people’s opinions, and maybe this opinion might work better in a different situation. So, it’s just being able to look at all of those different opinions and apply the best one.” The teachers in these teams talked to one another multiple times throughout the school day. They also often talked or texted in the evenings and on the weekends. In speaking of the elementary inclusion team, Ms. Anderson

said, “They talk together. Even outside of school, I know from what they’ve told me that they may be at home on the weekend, and one of them gets the idea, and they text the other, ‘Hey, we could do this.’ They actually just became very close friends in doing this collaborative teaching.”

Planning. All participants identified planning as one of the most important methods of communication for effective inclusion teams. Ms. Thomas said, “The biggest thing is in sharing the lesson plans and just asking for a common planning or being able to take the time to meet with them before or after school.” All participants identified common planning as crucial to their success as an inclusion team. The middle school inclusion team had a common planning period throughout most of their years of working together, but the elementary team did not. When the inclusion teams did not have a common planning time, they had to create time before school, after school, or in quick times of passing throughout their school day.

As part of the planning process, it was revealed by participants that teachers must plan for their roles in the lessons and divide up the responsibilities. This was particularly essential to the groups when they first started working together. Ms. Moore and Ms. Jones found it helpful to utilize a co-teaching lesson plan template that would help them accomplish this task (see Figure 4.10). Ms. Moore said, “We started using the template for the lesson plans, and we started planning out the things that I would do and the things that she would do, and after we did it a little bit, it just got second nature that we could almost read each other’s minds.” Also, the teachers planned for various instructional strategies, differentiation of instruction, accommodations for students, engaging student activities, and the types of assessment to be used. Creating these types of detailed lesson plans helped the teachers when they first started working together and continued to help them throughout the stages of group development.

Reflecting. An interesting sub-theme from this study was that effective inclusion teachers not only plan together but also reflect together. After lessons, the general and special education teachers spent part of their planning time reflecting on lessons to determine what worked well and what did not work well so that they could continuously make improvements together. Ms. Moore said:

We'll put notes, like we do an interactive notebook and if the page we put in there, we might look and say we didn't really like that one, let's look for a different one next year. So, we'll put a sticky note on it and that way when we're planning this lesson, that one didn't work or, you know, we're going to have to change that one because this happened last year. Or, any activity that we do, we try to. Just little things about doing the activities that we do because all of the kids, it might work one year, but the next year it might not work.

The general and special education teachers expressed that they discussed and reflected not only on instructional strategies and activities for students, but also on student behavior, ways to better differentiate or provide accommodations for students, and anything they can do to help their students be successful.

Teamwork. A second theme identified in this study was teamwork. All of the participants expressed that a difference between effective and ineffective inclusion teams is the level of teamwork that is present. To be effective, both teachers must exhibit high levels of willingness to work together as a team in all areas of the classroom. Ms. Miller stated, "I think it's just amazing to watch them. There's a back and forth between the two teachers. One teacher will pick up where the other one kind of dropped off. They fill in the gaps for each other."

Sharing. As part of teamwork, it was identified that the inclusion teachers must be willing to share ideas, methods, territory, resources, students, and every part of the classroom.

Mr. Wilson stated:

Where the partnership isn't as strong, maybe one teacher or the other, they want to exercise or say, 'This is my domain. You take care of this, and you take care of that.'

And, there's not a lot of giving and taking. I think for it to be truly collaborative, there has to be a lot of give and take equally.

Effective teams were willing to be open-minded, share, and work together as a team. Ms. Thomas said, "Not being selfish about sharing, you know, your space and your classroom and your students. To just put the students first and want all of the students to be successful."

Together. Another integral part of teamwork is working together. The effective inclusion teams found ways to work together on every aspect of their classroom. Ms. Anderson said, "If I have a child who struggles, but they don't qualify for an IEP, I put them in there too. And, those teachers work together to find that need." Ms. Anderson also expressed, "The ones that I have found who are unsuccessful are the ones that just refuse to work together. If they work together, they find success." Being together, communicating together, planning together, and working together helped these effective teams find success. Mr. Wilson said, "You can tell their interaction is effective and that they are there to support each other as well as to support the students."

Equal. Equality in inclusion classrooms is related to the general and special education teachers feeling like an equal part of the team and class as well as both teachers treating general and special education students equally, which is necessary for effective teamwork. All of the participants in this study expressed that a tremendous benefit of inclusion classrooms is that all

students are provided with the same educational experiences. Additionally, within effective inclusion teams, the general and special education teachers both teach, assist, and support both general and special education students. No differences were made between the teachers or the students within the effective teams. Mr. Wilson said, “In an inclusion classroom, everyone is the same. Everyone is treated equally.”

Both special education teachers expressed that in previous negative experiences with working with general education teachers within inclusion classrooms, they were not made to feel like they were equals in the classroom. In those classrooms, the general education teachers treated the special education teachers as more of an aide or classroom helper. Ms. Moore said:

I’ve had really great experiences in inclusion in most of the times I’ve been a teacher, but there was some at the beginning that wasn’t so great. You know, the teachers were so territorial and they didn’t want you to do anything, and I just felt like an aide. I even had one teacher tell me one time that I couldn’t tell the kids they could go to the bathroom. I mean, that’s limiting my authority.

Ms. Taylor also emphasized, “We have some teachers who are very territorial and they more or less treat the special ed side as an aide, you know, giving them little tasks that they don’t want to do.” Without equality among teachers and students, inclusion teams and classrooms could not find success.

Support. This study also revealed support to be an essential aspect of teamwork within inclusive classrooms. Support was threefold within this study: (a) both general and special education teachers supporting general and special education students, (b) general and special education teachers supporting one another, and (c) administrators supporting students and teachers.

As mentioned before, within effective inclusion teams, both teachers equally support all students. Ms. Clark stated, “If somebody has a question that’s not special ed, she will go to them and help them, and I help the special ed in return. It’s more of a co-teaching thing than it is, ‘You have this student, and I have this student.’ We don’t do that.” All the participants described ineffective inclusion classrooms they had been in where the special education teacher would only assist with the special education students. Ms. Moore said:

I’ve got a strong initiative and a want to. I told somebody when I first started teaching that I didn’t go into teaching just to sit there and be an aide. Some people are happy with that, I guess, when they go into an inclusion classroom. They just sit there and occasionally answer a question or whatever.

Within these inclusion teams, all of the teachers indicated that they equally help and support all students. Furthermore, all of the participants noted that general and special education teachers supported one another. They worked on every aspect of their inclusion classrooms together. Over the years of these team’s development, the teachers reported that they have become reliant on one another.

Additionally, this study showed that an integral aspect of support came from the school and district-level administrators, but especially the principals and assistant principals. Mr. Clyde expressed, “It ends and begins with the principal. If you don’t make it important, then they’re not going to see it as important. So, you have to work it, and you have to be in there to support those folks and be available to help them out when they need the assistance.” Administrators provide support to students and teachers by helping to emphasize inclusive practices and creating a positive, inclusive school climate. Also, administrators provide support in the inclusion team selection process by pairing general and special education teachers together who they believe

will work well together. Administrators also provide a great deal of support for inclusion teams through scheduling. This study indicated the importance of principals scheduling co-planning times for general and special education teachers, ensuring that special education teachers can stay in the inclusion class for the entire period, and leaving teachers together for extended periods to allow for their development as a partnership. Participants also revealed that administrators, especially principals, sometimes have to provide encouragement, training, or mentoring to inclusion teams who are struggling to work together. Ms. Anderson stated:

I have had other inclusion classes where I have really had to sit down and talk with the general ed teacher about, you know, 'This is what we have to do. I know this is different than what you're used to.' Coaching them into making the special ed teacher part of the curriculum and just maybe meeting with them monthly to see that progression is happening.

Within these inclusion teams, administrative support from the school and district levels has aided in the teams' development.

Attitude. A third theme revealed in this study was the influence of attitude on inclusion teams. For these inclusion teams to become cohesive, the general and special education teachers needed a positive attitude toward working together and working within inclusion classrooms from the beginning of the partnership and throughout all stages of group development. It was vital for both teachers to be receptive to working together, listening to one another, sharing, and compromising. Ms. Moore said, "Some people are more receptive to the ideal, and I guess it has to do with personalities a lot too. Some people are just not." Mr. Wilson said, "Some personalities work better than others. When you have a good match, you know, of those teachers

and they learn how to work together, how to interact together, that's what I think has been most successful."

Perspective. A sub-theme of the general and special education teachers' attitudes is their perspective relating to teaching, working with another teacher, teaching inclusion classrooms, and sharing their class and resources. As identified in this study, when teachers had negative perspectives toward these areas, it became nearly impossible for the teams to become cohesive. However, when teachers had positive perspectives, they were able to develop into successful collaborative teams. Ms. Taylor expressed that it is essential for teachers to "understand that every student belongs to both teachers." She also expressed, "Little Suzie Q may have an IEP or 504 with accommodations, but that doesn't mean she belongs to that special ed world. They should always be considered gen ed first and foremost."

From the beginning of their partnership, Ms. Walker said, "She really made me feel welcome and made me feel as part of her team. She included me in everything." Ms. Walker stated that this partner included her not only in the teaching and differentiating for various students' needs, but also in the classroom management, decision making in the classroom, field trips, letters to parents, and every aspect of the class. Ms. Walker stated, "She was wonderful to work with. She was so open to anything—just those little things to feel like you're a part. You have ownership in the class. It's not just about a score, you know. It's like you really have ownership." Positive perspectives led to strong ownership of the inclusion classrooms among the participants, which provided both teachers with higher levels of motivation, satisfaction, and engagement in their positions.

Trust. Trust was identified as another sub-theme of attitude. In order to work together cohesively and effectively, the general and special education teachers had to develop high levels of trust in one another. Mr. Harris expressed:

For inclusion to truly work, the two teachers have to trust each other. They have to trust their loyalty. They have to trust that they're not going to go out and, you know, talk about every little mistake that they make because we all make mistakes. But, they also have to trust their ability to teach the kids. So, it takes a while to build that trust.

It was essential for these inclusion teams to learn to trust one another and develop respect and loyalty toward one another to become successful. The general and special education teachers must work with one another every day during the school year. If there are feelings of distrust, it would be tough to exhibit strong teamwork.

Respect. Both inclusion teams discussed how they respect one another as teachers, professionals, and people. Respect was a compelling aspect of teacher attitude within this study. Ms. Miller expressed, "They have to have mutual respect for each other." Both inclusion teams expressed how their respect for one another has grown the longer they have worked together. Ms. Jones said, "We've just grown closer to each other and gained more respect for each other." In previous experiences within inclusion teams that were not as effective as the current teams, the teachers did not feel respected, which caused difficulties within the partnership.

Willing. A final sub-theme under attitude was willingness. Within an inclusive partnership, both the general and special education teachers must be willing to work together to be effective. Ms. Moore stated, "Unless you have a willing person that's going to be receptive to your help, it's hard to help somebody or be that equal partner to them." Not only did these teachers exhibit willingness within their partnerships, but also within their classrooms with the

students. Ms. Davis stated, “It has to be a team process, and they have to both be willing to work an equal amount. It can’t just be one doing all of the work and the other one just showing up.” As indicated in this study, willingness contributed tremendously to the success of the inclusive partnership and classroom.

Perseverance. The final theme that was indicated in this study was perseverance. Throughout this study, all participants discussed that it could take years for general and special education teachers to mesh together and become cohesive partners within their inclusion classrooms. It took perseverance on the part of the general and special education teachers in this study to develop through the stages of group development and become effective together. The participants indicated that it did not happen overnight and took time, work, and effort. Ms. Miller iterated, “They need to build cohesiveness, and that doesn’t happen right away, that takes time. So, I think longevity works well with the teams.”

Work. Throughout this study, the participants discussed the enormity of the workloads of general and special education teachers. Work was indicated as an essential sub-theme under perseverance because teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners involves exorbitant amounts of work to accomplish all of the required tasks, especially to do them well. All of the participants indicated that having an active inclusion partner helps with the workload as the teachers were able to work together and split up some of the responsibilities. An essential part of the work within inclusion teams was revealed that both teachers worked toward the same goals and always put the students first in the work. Mr. Wilson said, “They are working together, working collaboratively. They seek to help each student to achieve the best outcome.”

Effort. Teachers have to put forth tremendous amounts of effort every day to accomplish all of their tasks and responsibilities. In addition to this effort in their normal classroom and

school duties, inclusion teachers must put forth an effort to develop and maintain a cohesive partnership to be effective co-teachers. Meeting the diverse needs of students within an inclusion classroom requires enormous effort on the part of both teachers. Ms. Taylor expressed that it is necessary, “For both teachers to read, understand, and implement the IEP and the accommodations. Don’t just go through and skim it, but truly go through and read the present level of performance, and what the accommodations are. Really take that and take note.” When both teachers put forth the necessary effort, the inclusion teams saw successful student outcomes and positive results within their partnership

Research Question Responses

Interview questions for general and special education teacher participants mirrored those of interview questions for the administrators surrounding the teachers to garner in-depth, robust information relating to each research question and theoretical proposition. The cognitive representations and artifacts obtained from general and special education teachers added further depth into understanding their best practices for effective collaboration in their inclusion classrooms and allowed the researcher to triangulate data to increase the validity and reliability of the study (Yin, 2009). In addition, the triangulation of these sources of data allowed for converging lines of inquiry as posited by Yin (2009). This section details the research question responses and within-case synthesis for each inclusion team.

Elementary school inclusion team: Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker. This section details the research question responses from the elementary inclusion team.

Central research question: What are general and special education teachers’ best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? Since she is a newer teacher with five years of experience, the only inclusion team

Ms. Clark has been part of is the partnership with Ms. Walker. Therefore, Ms. Clark has a very positive perspective on inclusion classrooms. Ms. Clark expressed that she loves inclusion classrooms and that she would not have it any other way. She feels that general and special education students help one another to be successful within the inclusion classroom. Ms. Walker has more experience as an educator and has been part of multiple inclusion teams. She was part of one successful inclusion team before the partnership with Ms. Clark, but has been part of multiple teams that she did not feel were as effective or successful. Because of some of her negative experiences with inclusion classrooms, Ms. Walker expressed mixed feelings about working in inclusion classrooms. She stated that inclusion classrooms are challenging to manage at times because “the general ed teachers do not always want your buy-in or want you to be part of the team. Some teachers, not all teachers, want you to just be there for management...to manage behaviors and to redirect students. Some teachers don’t really want you co-teaching in their classroom.” When the inclusion team can collaborate and work together well, Ms. Walker feels that inclusion classrooms can be positive and helpful for general and special education students. Both Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker thought that the best learning environment for special education students is inclusion, but with the option for pull-out when necessary, depending on the individual needs of the students.

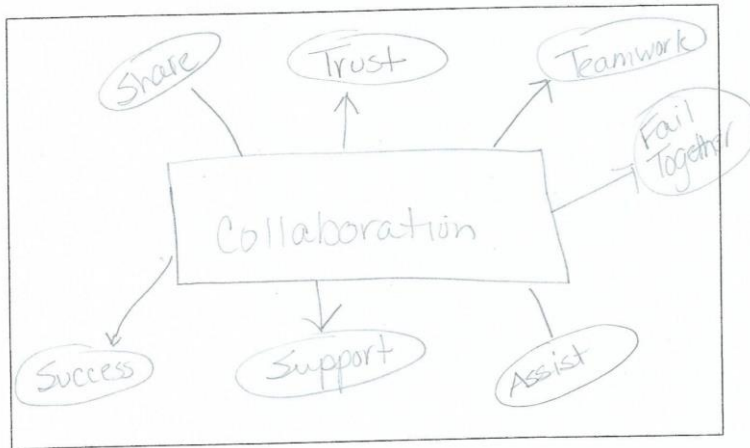
Neither Ms. Clark nor Ms. Walker felt entirely prepared by their teacher education programs for how to collaborate or teach within inclusion classrooms. They expressed that it has been a learning experience where they have had to learn as they went through their teaching careers. Since Ms. Walker already had ten years of teaching experience prior to working with Ms. Clark, she was able to serve as a mentor to Ms. Clark. This initial partnership formation made Ms. Clark very receptive and open to help from Ms. Walker, which was a positive

experience for Ms. Walker in light of some previous general education teachers not being responsive to co-teaching with her. Both Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker expressed that they have not received professional development from their school or school district. They revealed that they would like to participate in professional development on collaborating and teaching in inclusion classrooms. This was an odd revelation because the school principal, regional special education coordinator, and director of special education all stated that professional development had been provided over the years; however, the elementary team was unaware of these opportunities.

Best practices identified by Ms. Clark included listening to the special ed teacher, communicating openly, working on everything together, and keeping all the learners' needs in mind. Ms. Clark stated that it is essential for the general education teacher to, "Be open and accepting. Let her in my classroom and be an equal partner." Best practices identified by Ms. Walker included communicating openly, trusting one another, sharing, being flexible, being open-minded, working together, supporting one another, and assisting one another, and being respectful and professional. Both teachers expressed that the team has to be willing not only to succeed together but also to fail together. Ms. Walker stated, "I feel like that if we're going down, we're going down together."

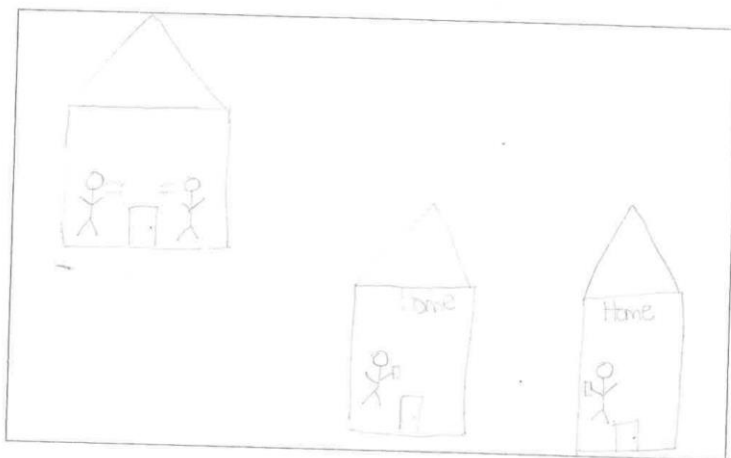
The co-teachers further expressed their insights when asked to draw a picture and write a short description in response to the question, "What do best practices for effective collaboration look like to you?" (See Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

Figure 4.1. Ms. Walker Cognitive Representation 1



The words in the representation are what it takes to be a successful team.

Figure 4.2. Ms. Clark Cognitive Representation 1



Communication. The general education teacher and special education teacher maintaining a positive relationship with effective communication inside and outside of school.

Sub-question 1: What are best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? The school principal selected the inclusion teams at the elementary school level based on who she thought would work well together. Both Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker communicated that when they first started working together, it was awkward and strange, but that they have always gotten along well. Ms. Clark expressed:

It was strange for me because I felt like I was going to go in and be by myself, but then there's this other person that comes in. So, at first, it was different, I won't say it was difficult because she's always been wonderful to work with, but it was different because it was hard to decipher between the roles. Like what was her role, what was my role, how did we take responsibility and split it.

Ms. Clark felt that Ms. Walker helped her a lot with her first year of teaching and learning how to become a capable inclusion team. Ms. Walker stated:

For the most part, it was good. You know, you have the ones that are willing that want you in their classroom, and they're willing to let you do things and let you teach. So, that's the great part is the ones that are willing to do. That makes it worthwhile, but then you struggle with the ones that don't because you don't feel valued. You're not seen as a professional, I guess. You're treated more as an aide in that aspect.

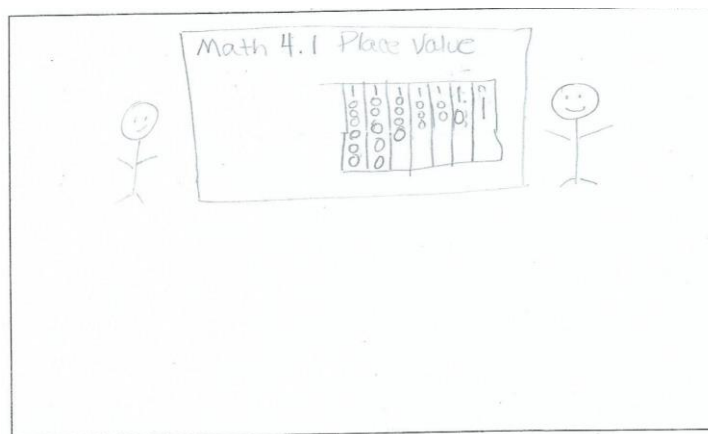
From the beginning, Ms. Walker felt welcomed into Ms. Clark's classroom. An essential piece of that involved how Ms. Clark introduced Ms. Walker to the students. In the past, some general education teachers had not introduced Ms. Walker at all or introduced her as someone who was there to help. However, in this partnership, at the beginning of the school year, Ms. Clark introduced Ms. Walker as her co-teacher. She made it clear to the students that both teachers had equal authority in the classroom and that the students could feel comfortable going to either teacher for assistance. After this, both Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker cited that the co-teachers had to develop a relationship, communicate frequently and openly, be honest with one another, and work to establish their roles within the partnership. At the elementary level, the school principal was not able to provide common planning time for the inclusion teachers; therefore, the teachers had to plan before or after school, which was challenging.

Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker discussed the importance of getting to know one another and building a relationship when they first started working together. This team developed a friendship outside of school, which helped them build a strong, positive relationship inside of school. Their friendship has enabled them to be able to talk openly and honestly with one another and has progressed their professional relationship.

This was exemplified in the co-teachers' cognitive representations which asked teachers to draw a picture and share a description of, "What does the process of developing into a cohesive, collaborative team look like to you?" (See Figures 4.3 and 4.4.)

Figure 4.3

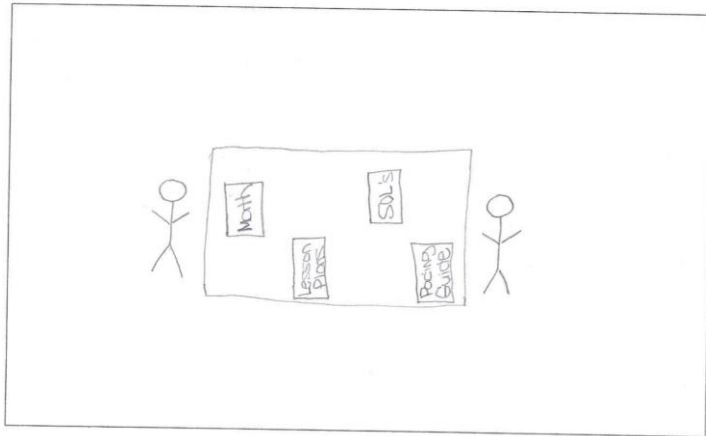
Ms. Walker Cognitive Representation 2



General and special education teachers coteaching in an inclusion classroom.

Figure 4.4

Ms. Clark Cognitive Representation 2



The general education teacher and special education teacher collaborating together and forming lesson plans during a common planning period.

Both Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker emphasized the importance of planning together as part of the initial development and getting accustomed to working together.

Sub-question 2: What are best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker communicated that they had not had any disagreements since they started working together. Because Ms. Clark was receptive to working with Ms. Walker and made her feel welcome in the inclusion classroom from the beginning, the team was able to progress quickly into a cohesive partnership. The major issues or challenges they faced in working together came from outside influences such as scheduling since they do not have a common planning period. Also, the special education teacher is not always able to stay for the entire inclusion classroom period. To overcome these scheduling challenges, the teachers have to meet before or after school or discuss things quickly in passing. Ms. Walker stated that communication is a vital part of being an effective team; however, she said:

A lot of times at the elementary level there's not a lot of time for communication unless you're willing to give up your time in the afternoon to stay after school. There's no common planning, there's not set time for you to work with those teachers, you know. You're doing it, so to speak, on the fly or in passing or via email.

Ms. Walker has experienced many issues and challenges with previous inclusion partners, particularly general education teachers who were territorial, were not willing to let her teach, and did not communicate openly with her. According to Ms. Walker, those partnerships were strained and were extremely difficult. She has experienced general education teachers who treated her like an aide and an outsider. Often, she has felt like she had to step back and be flexible in doing whatever the general education teacher would allow her to do. From these problematic partnerships, she expressed:

There's been a couple of, you know, difficulties along the way, you know, but you just...to resolve them you have to be open to their suggestions I feel like. And, you can give your input, but at the end of the day they see it as their classroom, they see it as their students. And so, for us special ed teachers, I feel like we just have to step back and just say in the big picture it's about the kids.

Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker cited open communication, honesty, willingness to work together, respect, and having the mutual goal of putting the students first as major reasons for their ability to work through issues or challenges. Co-planning and frequent communication were also integral pieces to the team's effective development during this stage of group development. Figure 4.9 shows an example of co-planning by Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker where they created this additional documentation in addition to their typical lesson plan to provide

further assistance to the teachers, including planning for specific accommodations for special education students.

Figure 4.9. Sample of Co-Planning from Elementary School Inclusion Team

4th grade made inclusion class

1. Describe the lesson that will be observed.

What have/will you have done instructionally with students in the days prior to the observation?

Taught SOL 4.14 (5 days): collect, display, and interpret data using bar and line graphs.

2. Describe the population of the class.

27 total students: 23 General Ed., 4 SPED

3. What will be observed?

- Whole group class activity: VA Math SOL MIP (Statistics: Sandwich Data)
- Students will determine the best way to display data
- The class will collect data and students will construct a bar graph. (This will be done as a whole group on the board and also on their own paper.) Students will lead a question/answer session about the graph.
- Exit ticket will be given.

4. What instructional methods will be used?

- Guided Instruction
- Formative Assessment

SPED Accommodations:

- Clarify instructions/directions
- Scaffold Bar Graph (printed bar graph for students)
- Proximity seating
- Peer Buddy
- Check Frequently for student understanding.

5. What would you like to be highlighted in this lesson?

- Student lead question/answer sessions
- Student understanding of material
- Students using appropriate vocabulary

6. What do you believe to be any areas of concern?

Ability to construct a graph from scratch.
Ability to formulate grade level appropriate questions.

Sub-question 3: What are best practices during the functional cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? Once roles were established, and fundamental issues

and challenges were worked out, Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker continued to work on building their relationship and developing their roles in the classroom. They found it useful to take turns in teaching and have tried a couple of different co-teaching strategies, including alternative teaching and team teaching; however, the primary strategy they utilize is one-teach/one assist. They take turns in which teacher is the lead teacher depending on what part of the lesson they are teaching; however, they both contribute to the instruction and aid all students. They cited that they would like to participate in professional development about the different co-teaching strategies and collaboration in inclusion classrooms as a means of continuing to develop and strengthen their practices. As part of the norming stage, they continued to communicate openly, honestly, and frequently with one another, and they continued to maintain a positive, respectful, and professional relationship with one another. Due to establishing an effective, cohesive team, Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker have seen positive student outcomes for general and special education students.

According to Ms. Anderson, the elementary school principal, and Mr. Wilson, the elementary school assistant principal, this inclusion team has learned how to use one another's strengths and weaknesses in a positive way to work together cohesively. Ms. Anderson stated, "The regular ed teacher's strength is bringing in the knowledge of the curriculum. The special ed teacher coming in, her strength is being able to modify and being able to help the children who need the modifications to the curriculum." Mr. Wilson iterated that Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker are "good educators and they have the students' best interests at heart, and they want the students to be successful, and they want themselves, you know, their collaboration to be successful."

Sub-question 4: What are best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? Now that Ms. Clark and Ms. Walker have spent five years as an inclusion team, they have developed lesson plans and activities that work for their students although they modify them each year according to their current students' needs. Additionally, they have established their roles in the classroom and partnership, they feel comfortable with one another, and they have developed instructional co-teaching practices that work for them. They continue to plan together and reflect on their teaching, lessons, and student activities after instruction for continuous improvement. They have created a learning environment where there is no separation between general and special education students or teachers. All students feel comfortable working with both teachers, and both teachers assist all students. Ms. Walker revealed:

We have fun. You know, we do different learning activities based on the standards and we're able to laugh. The kids are able to laugh and to joke and to have a good time, you know, when it's acceptable. You feel at east that...you can feel tension in the classroom. So, when you're in those good collaboration partnerships, you feel like you can kind of break the tension and it's going to be okay versus in the classroom where you don't have a good collaboration or you're not seen as equals.

The teachers have learned to work well with one another's strengths. Ms. Clark is very organized, knowledgeable of the curriculum, and receptive to assistance. At the same time, Ms. Walker is very experienced with differentiating for various students' needs, is flexible, and is a hard worker. They have developed a healthy mutual respect and professional attitude toward one another. Ms. Clark stated:

It's a working partnership. I had to let the control not take me over. I think that's a problem with some. You know, they think they are the teacher and you do this. I just like to think of my special ed teacher as more than an aide. She's not an aide; she's a teacher equally just like I am. And, she knows those students and knows what's best for them and so I think it's important to take her opinions and to take her knowledge and use it wisely.

The Director of Special Education, Ms. Taylor, stated that the team must understand that "every student belongs to both teachers." She also said that these teachers "share the game goal of student success" and they are "headed in the same direction" rather than tugging against one another. She also expressed that the teachers have developed "admiration for one another" which has aided tremendously in their ability to work as a team.

Middle school inclusion team: Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore. This section details the research question responses from the middle school inclusion team.

Central research question: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? Ms. Jones, general education, and Ms. Moore, special education, were both experienced teachers when they were paired by their principal to work together in the same inclusion classrooms. Both teachers had previous experience with various other teachers collaborating within inclusion classrooms, and both had positive and negative experiences previously. Ms. Jones expressed mixed feelings about inclusion classrooms. She felt that "it's fair to allow the kids to intermingle, but I think there's some aspects of it that make the special ed student feel singled out" such as when the special education students have a calculator accommodation and the general education students cannot use a calculator, or the special

education students have to use different calculators than the general education students. Ms. Moore expressed similar opinions relating to inclusion classrooms. She revealed that it is beneficial to most students, but that there are some students whose deficits are so significant that they do not know what questions to ask or how to verbalize what type of assistance they need. In these cases, Ms. Moore feels that a smaller, self-contained classroom setting can be beneficial for students. The middle school utilizes inclusion classrooms, self-contained classrooms, and has resource rooms set up where general and special education teachers can pull individual or small groups of special and general education students to for additional assistance, when necessary. This mixed approach has worked well for the middle school and has led to improved student outcomes for both general and special education students.

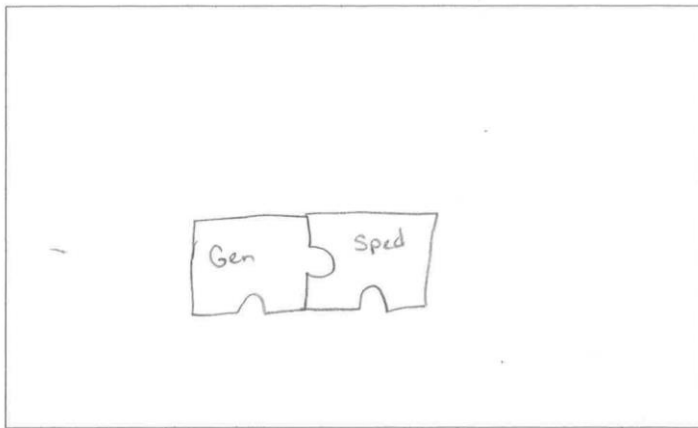
Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore did not feel prepared for collaborating and teaching in inclusion classrooms by their teacher education programs as these pedagogies were not mainstream in education during the period when they completed their college degrees. However, they have participated in an enormous amount of professional development to learn these strategies, which has helped them to develop into an effective collaborative partnership. Ms. Moore and Ms. Jones participated in a five-year grant program through the Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC) as part of programs and resources provided by Virginia Tech Institute. As part of this professional development, the teachers took classes and attended conferences and training in the summers. Additionally, representatives from TTAC visited their classrooms throughout the school year to observe and provide further assistance. Through this process, the inclusion team became very familiar with various models of co-teaching, created co-teaching lesson plans, recorded lessons using multiple models of co-teaching, and completed several book studies. This opportunity allowed them to become certified as trainers who then

provided professional development to their school and other schools within Happy School District and other school districts.

Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore identified best practices for effective collaboration as establishing a good relationship with one another and planning together. Also, they revealed that both teachers need to have an equal part of everything, including the planning and instruction, working together, becoming a true team, having the same goals, putting the students first, being willing, and having a positive attitude.

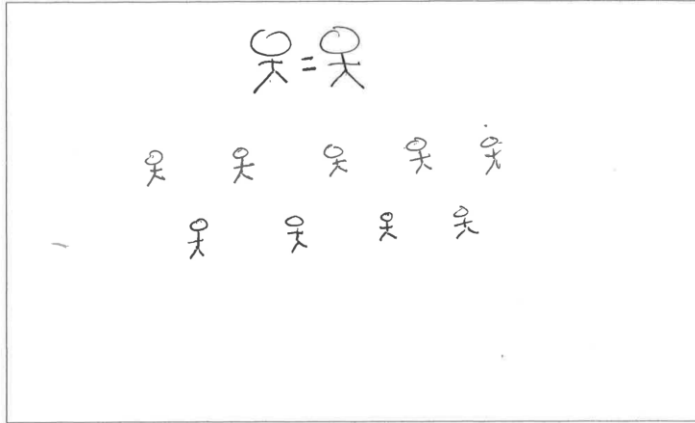
Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore further expressed their insights within their cognitive representations. In this cognitive representation, the teachers were asked, “What do best practices for effective collaboration look like to you?” (See Figures 4.5 and 4.6.)

Figure 4.5. Ms. Jones Cognitive Representation 1



Effective collaboration is like puzzle pieces; together they form a beautiful picture. Teams must be willing to “fit” together in all areas to be an effective team.

Figure 4.6. Ms. Moore Cognitive Representation 1



The teachers are equal and each one is just as valuable and important as the other one.

Sub-question 1: What are best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? The middle school principal selected the teachers for the inclusion teams. At the time when Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore were paired together, Mr. Clyde was the school principal. He indicated that he selected teams based on who he thought would work well together and also based on the special education teachers' proclivity toward certain subject areas. Since Ms. Moore had a dual endorsement in special education and mathematics, she was paired with Ms. Jones for math classes. Mr. Clyde and Ms. Harris both indicated that when administrators are pairing general and education teachers together for inclusion classrooms, there is some trial and error that takes place. They expressed that when a team develops into a cohesive unit, it is best to leave the team together. Ms. Harris also indicated that she does listen to teachers' considerations when selecting team members.

When Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore started working together, they both indicated they had some initial awkwardness and hesitancy. Ms. Jones stated:

It was a little difficult because I felt like as the classroom teacher that I was the leader, you know, but at the same time, I didn't feel like I was any more of a person than her, but

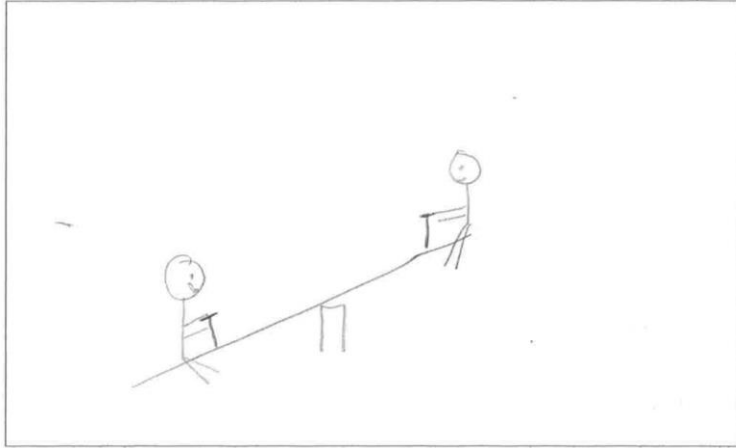
it was like my name was on the top of the list. But, I didn't want to tell her what to do because I was like, I'm not her boss. And, I didn't want her to feel like I was being bossy or anything. But, at the same time, if I didn't say something it was like she didn't know what to do.

According to the teachers, some of their initial hesitancy and nervousness was due to having negative experience working as part of previous inclusion teams that did not become effective. Due to this, they did not know what to expect. Ms. Moore stated that at first, "it's hard because you don't know...so it's a learning process." Ms. Moore said, "It takes a little bit of time to warm up to each other," as the teachers worked to establish their roles within the classroom. After the inclusion team started meeting together, talking to one another, and planning together, they began to become more comfortable with one another and with co-teaching in their inclusion classroom. Ms. Moore stated:

I just feel like we want it to work, and sometimes people don't want it to work. So, it's kind of like a marriage. That's what they always said; it's like you're married to this person. And, the first year's always rocky, and you get to know each other all your little quirks and stuff.

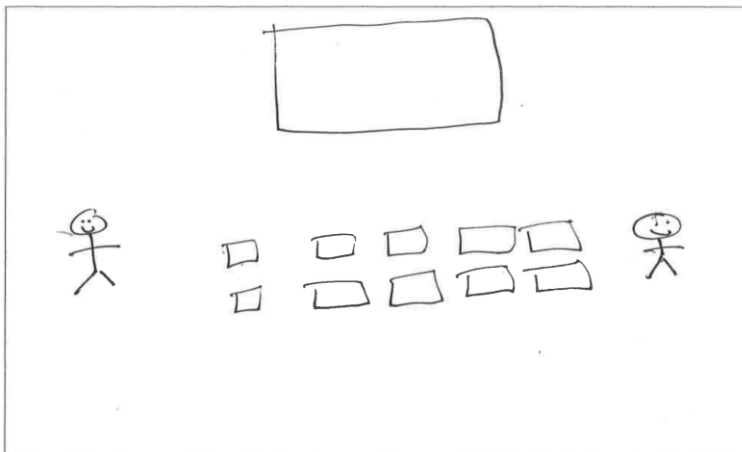
Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore further described their thoughts in their second cognitive representations which asked, "What does the process of developing into a cohesive, collaborative team look like to you?" (See Figures 4.7 and 4.8.)

Figure 4.7. Ms. Jones Cognitive Representation 2



A collaborative team is just that a team and it must work together for success. The team must trust and work together for same goal; success of our students.

Figure 4.8. Ms. Moore Cognitive Representation 2



The teachers working well together and becomes a natural working relationship with students working with both teachers no matter whether a general education teacher or special education teacher.

Sub-question 2: What are best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? At the beginning of their teaching partnership, Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore had to work through the initial hesitancy and awkwardness of establishing

their roles within the partnership and inclusion classroom. They accomplished this by creating open communication where they spoke freely and honestly with one another and by planning together. Ms. Moore stated that during those initial phases of team development:

We planned. We had that common planning, and we used that lesson plan, and we actually wrote down, ‘You do this part, I’ll do this part, you do this part, and then I’ll do this.’ We knew our roles, and then the more we did that, we kind of fell in place about what she...what was expected of me and what I expected of her and it all kind of meshed together.

During planning, Ms. Moore and Ms. Jones utilized co-teaching lesson plan templates provided through their training with TTAC, which assisted them in planning together effectively. Ms. Jones expressed that she had experienced special education teachers in the past who would not come to her class on time, did not participate in planning together, and were not familiar with the subject. All of these issues made it difficult for those partnerships to become effective. Ms. Jones expressed, “It’s really hard to a person who thinks it’s my way or the highway to be a co-teacher. You have to be open-minded and willing to share the responsibilities.” Ms. Moore experienced previous partnerships where she felt like more of an aide or helper in the classroom due to the attitude of the general education teacher. Ms. Moore emphasized, “You have to be a team player, not a dictator. You’ve got to be accepting for somebody to come in there and not just be your aide when you’re in there but be your equal partner.” Ms. Harris stated that due to their past experiences with inclusion partnerships, there were initial trust issues that Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore had to work through. When problems or challenges arise within a collaborative partnership, Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore cited open communication as a necessity. Ms. Moore stated:

They just need to talk with them because, I mean, it might start out as something little, but then it gets to be a thorn in your flesh, and it gets bigger. I mean, it might start out as just a little thing, and talking about it might fix it. If you let it fester, it's going to get out of hand to where, you know, you're not even going to be speaking to each other. You want to be in a good relationship. If it starts out bad doesn't necessarily mean it can't turn into a good thing, but I think you've got to talk to each other and you've got to set...you know, like we did, with those lesson plans. That's what you have to do at the beginning.

Additional challenges that initially faced not only this inclusion team but the school included matching the right pairs of teachers and scheduling. Through trial and error, the administrators paired various general and special education teachers together until they found teams that could develop into competent, cohesive partnerships based on personalities, attitudes, and comfortability with specific content areas. Mr. Clyde expressed:

It was a thing we worked pretty hard and obviously went through a bunch of training with TTAC and a bunch of opportunities. I think it was always a special thing with me because I had the special ed background where it was a point of attention that needed to be given. I kind of took pride in overseeing those relationships.

Also, through experimenting with different scheduling changes, the administrators and teachers discovered that it was best to have the special education teacher in the entire period, rather than just a portion. They also learned to ensure that general and special education teachers working in inclusion teams had a common planning period. Ms. Harris stated:

I can't stress enough how important the co-planning time is when you're wanting a true inclusion class to work and be successful whether it's during the school day and if you

can't schedule it into your school day, because some schools just don't have that capability in their schedule, then they need to work together after school or before school or during the summer because that is probably the key to making things work the most.

Within this collaborative partnership, both teachers exhibited a willingness to work together and worked toward developing a positive working relationship that later also developed into a friendship. Through effort and perseverance, they were able to work through issues and challenges in their partnership.

Essential parts of the team's development into a collaborative partnership included co-planning and working together on every aspect of their classes. Figure 4.10 provides an example of co-planning by Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore where they used a co-teaching lesson plan template to plan for their lesson. In their lesson plans, Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore plan for the teaching roles, co-teaching models utilized, and accommodations for students during each of their plans.

Figure 4.10. Sample of Co-Planning from Middle School Inclusion Team

Give or Take a Few - A Co-Teaching Lesson Plan

Co-Teaching Approaches

A "(Y)" in front of the following list items indicates the approach is outlined in the lesson. A "(N)" in front of the following list items indicates the approach is not outlined in the lesson.

- (N) Parallel Teaching
- (Y) Station Teaching
- (N) Alternative Teaching
- (Y) Team Teaching
- (Y) One Teach/One Observe
- (N) One Teach/One Assist

Subject

Math 6.

Strand/Reporting Category

Patterns, Functions and Algebra

Topic/Lesson

Graphing and Solving Inequalities

Standards

6.14 The student will solve one-step linear inequalities in one variable, involving addition or subtraction, and graph the solution on a number line.

Lesson Outcome

The student will solve addition and subtraction inequality problems and graph them on a number line

Materials



- Whiteboard
- Elmo
- Computer
- Individual candy bags (lifesavers, peppermint discs, twizzlers)
- Inequalities Practice worksheet

- Solving Inequalities Matching Activity
- Candy Graphs: Solving and Graphing Inequalities PowerPoint
- One Step Inequalities Practice

Vocabulary

- greater than
- less than
- greater than equal to
- less than equal to
- open circle
- closed circle
- solution set
- expression
- Variable
- Equation
- inequality

Co-Teacher Actions

Lesson Component	Co-Teaching Approach(es)	General Educator (GE)	Special Educator (SE)
Anticipatory Set	Team Teaching One teach/One observe	<p>Introduce the inequality $x < 5$, and have students write what they think it means on whiteboards,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss as a class, include important vocabulary: variable, inequality, inequality symbols. • Present inequality examples including all inequality symbols. • Discuss the differences between / expressions, equations, and inequalities. Students need to graph the following 	<p>Share simple strategy with hand gesture for remembering when to use open and closed circle.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> Open Circle Closed Circle </div>

Lesson Component	Co-Teaching Approach(es)	General Educator (GE)	Special Educator (SE)
		<p>inequalities: $X \geq -6$ $X \leq 4$ $X > 3$ $X < -4$</p>	<p>See larger photos below.</p> <p>Circulate checking for understanding (formative assessment) with each student using checklist/clipboard.</p>
Lesson Activities/ Procedures	Team Teaching	<p>Discuss how the inequality symbol determines whether the circle is closed or open and which direction it is colored. Model on SMARTboard.</p> <p>Co-Construction of FRAME: Inequality</p>	<p>Present the inequality $x + 5 > 8$, and ask students to work with a partner to solve it. Ask students to describe how they solved for the variable and to compare the process to solving equations. During this discussion, also be sure to compare the solutions to equations versus the solutions for inequalities. Show how to check the solution for an inequality.</p> <p>Complete on SMARTboard with students answering questions and completing their own FRAMES. Distribute partially completed FRAMES as needed.</p>
Guided/Independent Practice	Station	<p>Student will be separated into three groups for stations. Each student must complete the worksheet associated with the station. This will be turned in at the end of day 2 for a grade. They can use FRAME as reference in each station (Copy attached)</p> <p>Station 1 – lead by Gen Ed teacher -students will complete problems on the <i>Inequalities Practice</i> worksheet</p>	<p>Station 2 – lead by Spec Ed. Teacher – teacher will model the first two problems of the power point candy activity. Then students will complete the activity, modeling the graphing of the inequalities using their candy.</p>

Lesson Component	Co-Teaching Approach(es)	General Educator (GE)	Special Educator (SE)
		Station 3 – student will complete <i>Solving Inequalities Matching Activity</i> using the Whiteboards. This station will be student lead.	
Closure	Team Teaching	Develop the “So What” statement from their FRAMES	Ask what open and closed sign means, when to flip sign and what is inverse operation of addition and subtraction.
Formative Assessment Strategies	Team Teaching	Student work from each station will be evaluated & used to form groups tomorrow	Students will complete Inequalities Quiz on day 2 in small group setting, read aloud as needed
Homework	Team Teaching	Students will create their own one step inequality and explain how they solved it.	Given 15 min to complete, if additional time is needed, students must complete for homework.

Specialty Designed Instruction

- Certain students will receive direct instruction as needed during the lesson.
- Students are put into groups during the station activity according to their weaknesses and strengths.

Accommodations

- Calculator with additional functions.
- Alternative setting if stations become overwhelming
- Reduce the number of problems on Quiz

Modifications

- Students can use their FRAME to help recall essential vocabulary. Partially completed FRAMES will be distributed to certain students.
- Students who have difficulty with recalling multi-step procedures will be given a checklist to self-monitor the steps necessary to solve the inequalities.

Sub-question 3: What are best practices during the functional cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? As Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore progressed in the development of their partnership, they continued to plan together, communicate frequently and openly with one another, and work on maintaining a positive relationship. Ms. Moore said, “It’s just like an old hand now, but at first, you have to work at it.” To continue to develop their relationship, the teachers continued to plan together, participate in professional development together, and according to Ms. Jones, “we just constantly do things like this together” speaking of participating in this case study. The teachers worked to develop their relationship and ability to teach together but never stopped putting effort into their growth and development. Mr. Clyde, Director of Middle Schools, stated that Ms. Moore and Ms. Jones were “both actively involved in the planning, the discipline, overseeing classroom management, the instruction, and the ability to go back and remediate things as well.” Therefore, they collaborated and worked together in all areas. Not only do the teachers plan co-teaching lessons together, but they reflect on their

teaching and student activities after instruction. This reflection piece has been essential in their continuous development together. Also, the teachers have found ways to utilize their strengths to contribute effectively to the partnership. According to Ms. Harris, Ms. Jones is organized, good at the direct instruction aspects of teaching math to students, and efficient with classroom management. Whereas, Ms. Moore is more creative at finding ways to integrate games and technology into the lessons. This cooperative partnership has led to positive student outcomes. In recent years, the team has seen growth in SOL scores among general and special education students. Ms. Moore attributed that to all of the students being able to get more help. She stated:

I feel like they get more help. Having two people in there, you have four eyes instead of just two eyes. Like, one person's teaching and the other person is just kind of monitoring, and you can put out fires that might occur if that other set of eyes wasn't in there. I feel like that helped, and any time you can put out the fires to where instruction is not hindered, I think you're benefitting the kids.

Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore expressed that as time has progressed, they have developed a stronger relationship, closer friendship, and have gained more respect for one another. If any issues arise within the partnership or classroom, they talk through the problems openly and honestly. Ms. Jones iterated:

It's a give and take relationship just like any relationship. You know, understanding that the other person went to school just like you did and spent the same amount of time working on their degree as you did and, you know, they're your equal. They're there for the same purpose that you're there for and that's to get the kids to learn.

Sub-question 4: What are best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and

special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom? Ms. Moore and Ms.

Jones expressed that since they have been co-teaching and working together collaboratively in planning and instruction for a long time now, they can finish one another's sentences and feel completely comfortable with one another inside and outside the classroom. Ms. Jones stated, "I feel like she's my right hand." Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore cited continued communication, planning together, reflecting together, supporting one another, and relying on each other as practices that have helped them remain cohesive in their partnership. Through the development of this partnership and working together within the same inclusion classrooms, Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore have experienced a shift in their perspectives. Ms. Jones stated, "It's not mine or yours, it's ours." Viewing the classroom and all of the responsibilities as belonging to both teachers together has helped them maintain a strong focus toward their shared goals of creating a positive learning environment and successful student outcomes. Ms. Jones described effective collaboration as "two teachers fitting together to form a beautiful picture."

Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore have utilized multiple co-teaching models in their classroom including: (a) one teach-one observe, (b) station teaching, (c) parallel teaching, (d) alternative teaching, and (e) teaming. The team's willingness to work together has contributed to their ability to develop into a cohesive team, and their desire to try various models of co-teaching and variety with student activities has helped make them stronger co-teachers. Ms. Harris stated:

I have no doubt any student I put in that classroom is getting probably the best instruction they could receive anywhere in the county because the two of them balance each other out. So, if Ms. Jones can't explain something to a student in a way that they understand, then Ms. Moore will figure out that way. If Ms. Moore is trying to explain something to a student and they don't understand, Ms. Jones will find a way. I think they're getting

exposed to every teaching style, learning style, you know, multiple modalities of learning.

Both teachers expressed that the work in being an effective inclusion team became more natural for them, but never stopped. They still put effort into working together, communicating, planning, teaching, and maintaining their relationship. They indicated communication and planning together as key in their ability to co-teach. Ms. Moore stated, “Two teachers are better than one. I think two heads are better than one.” Ms. Jones iterated:

I think a big thing is planning together because I’ve had collaborative teachers who weren’t available for the co-planning and it just makes...there’s a disconnect, you know, because they were there to help with the planning. They weren’t there to offer other ways of presenting the material to the kid or even to give an accommodation to the material. And so, being there and being an active part of the planning is...it’s a necessity. It’s nice, but it’s a necessity for an effective classroom.

Now that they have developed into an effective inclusion team and because of the opportunities and training they were afforded through TTAC, Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore have provided professional development training on inclusive practices for their school and other schools within their school district. Figure 4.11 provides sample slides of a presentation they have used in their professional development trainings. Figure 4.12 provides a self-assessment document that Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore received during their training with TTAC from the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) that they use with participants in their professional development trainings. Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore also provided participants with their lesson plan template as seen in Figure 4.10 as well as showed videos of them performing various models of co-teaching within their inclusion classroom.

Figure 4.11. Sample Slides of Professional Development Presentation by Middle School Inclusion Team

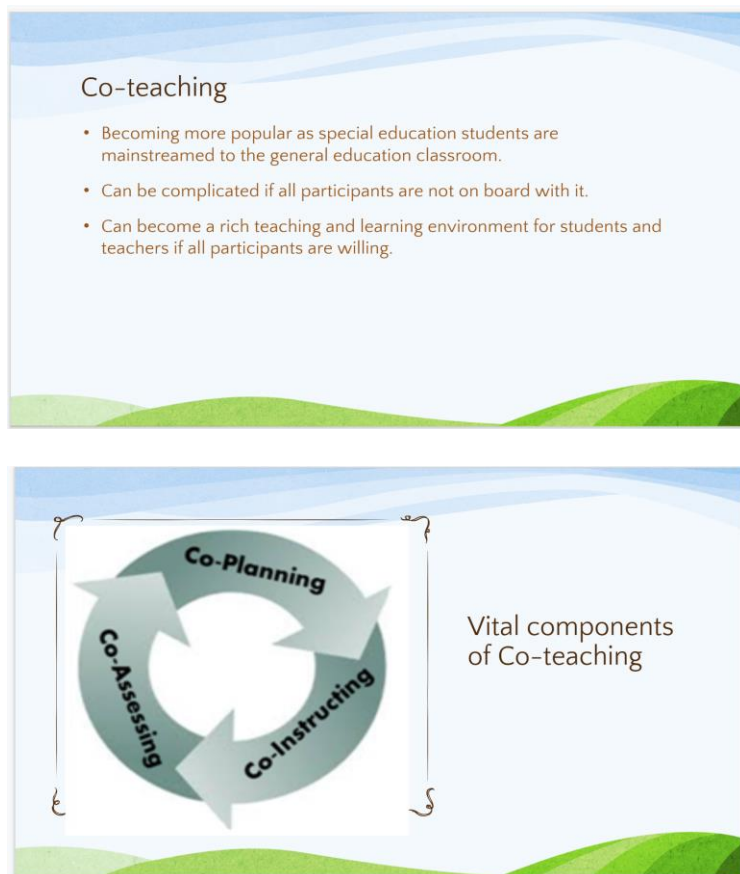


Figure 4.11. Co-Teaching Self-Assessment from VDOE

Excellence in Co-Teaching Initiative
Virginia Department of Education

**Self-Assessment of Quality Indicators of Co-Teaching
For Administrators & Co-Teachers**










School: _____ Administrator: _____

Teacher: _____ Date: _____








Review the following list of Quality Indicators of Co-Teaching. Indicate your perception of implementation of these indicators in your school/classroom at this time by checking the symbols according to the following key:

☒ Fully Implemented ☐ Evolving ☐ Assistance Needed




1. Administrative Support

- ☐ ☐  1. A mission and vision have been established and communicated regarding co-teaching.
- ☐ ☐  2. A thoughtful process is in place for assigning co-teachers.
- ☐ ☐  3. Administrators have defined and shared their expectations with co-teachers, including roles and responsibilities.
- ☐ ☐  4. Professional development in co-teaching has been provided to co-teachers jointly; resources also have been provided (books, videos, etc.).
- ☐ ☐  5. Common planning time is provided in the master schedule and honored by administrators (teachers not pulled from planning for other duties).
- ☐ ☐  6. The master schedule is completed, with teacher assignments, in a timely manner to ensure time for co-teachers to begin collaboration and co-planning (typically before the end of the previous school year).
- ☐ ☐  7. Students with disabilities are scheduled by IEP into heterogeneous co-taught classes.
- ☐ ☐  8. Resources (personnel, materials, time) are committed to implementing and sustaining the co-teaching model.
- ☐ ☐  9. A system is in place for co-teachers to access administrative support when needed.

2. Interaction of Co-Teachers

- ☐ ☐  1. Co-teachers utilize planning time provided in the schedule to work collaboratively.
- ☐ ☐  2. Co-teachers collaboratively engage in long-range (course/semester) and short-term co-planning (unit/lesson).
- ☐ ☐  3. Co-teachers demonstrate collaborative practices: parity of roles, shared responsibility for academic and nonacademic demands, shared responsibility for establishing and maintaining classroom management, and shared accountability for student outcomes.
- ☐ ☐  4. Co-taught classrooms have an obvious feeling of collaboration and community.
- ☐ ☐  5. Co-teachers demonstrate evidence-based practices for instruction and behavior management, and use of a variety of co-teaching models.
- ☐ ☐  6. Accommodations/modifications are implemented in the co-taught classroom.
- ☐ ☐  7. There is ongoing measurement of student performance and use of formative and summative data to inform instruction.

3. Evaluation of Co-Teaching Effectiveness

- ☐ ☐  1. Administrators observe co-taught classes and planning sessions and provide feedback.
- ☐ ☐  2. Evaluators (administrators, supervisors, etc.) have received specialized training for evaluating co-teaching partners.
- ☐ ☐  3. Administrators and teachers analyze co-teaching's effect on attendance, discipline and referral statistics, achievement, SOL performance, and other measures of success.

If common planning time is not currently provided in the master schedule, how do teachers plan co-taught lessons?

Additional Comments:

Summary

Chapter 4 provided the results of the data analysis. The chapter includes information relating to the demographics and backgrounds of the participants. Participants in this collective case study included 12 individuals, including one elementary school inclusion team and one middle school inclusion team, consisting of one general and one special education teacher each, as well as the school and district-level administrators surrounding the inclusion teams. Detailed information was provided about each participant as well as each case or inclusion team. Data collection comprised of individual interviews with each participant and team interviews with each of the two inclusion teams, as well as cognitive representations and artifacts from the inclusion teams, were detailed. Direct interpretation of instances and aggregation was used to determine 17 codes. After codes were outlined and classified, four themes with sub-themes for each across the two cases were identified relating to the purpose of this study through the process of pattern matching: (a) communication (talking, planning, and reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, equal, and support); (c) attitude (perspective, trusting, respect, and willing); and (d) perseverance (work and effort). Responses to the research questions were provided and supported by participant quotes detailing the themes within and across the cases.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this collective case study was to develop an in-depth understanding of general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. Chapter Five consists of a summary of the findings, a discussion of the implications, and the delimitations and limitations of the study. Additionally, this chapter contains a discussion of how the results of this study fit into existing research and suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

This collective case study investigating best practices of general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms and the development of successful collaborative partnerships between general and special education teachers revealed four main themes with sub-themes relating to the purpose of this study: (a) communication (talking, planning, and reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, and equal); (c) attitude (perspective, trust, respect, and willing); and (d) perseverance (work and effort). These themes and sub-themes were identified through: (a) interviews with participants, (b) the collection of artifacts from the two inclusion teams, and (c) the completion of cognitive representations by the general and special education teachers. The content of these themes and sub-themes comprehensively answered each research question for the study. This section provides a cross-case synthesis of the research question responses.

CQ: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia?

The central research question was answered through the themes of communication, attitude, teamwork, and perseverance, with sub-themes for each.

Communication. Both teams of effective inclusion teachers indicated that communication must take place often and openly. Both teams reported that they speak to one another multiple times throughout the school day. This communication occurred during the inclusion class period, during their common planning time, before or after school, and in the evenings and on weekends. In addition to planning together for instruction, student activities, assessments, classroom management, and every part of their inclusion classrooms, both teams of teachers also reflected on their teaching, co-teaching strategies, student activities, student behavior, and other elements of their inclusion classroom.

Attitude. Throughout the study, both inclusion teams stressed the importance of both teachers, general and special education, as well as administrators having positive attitudes and perspectives toward teaching general and special education students, working together, co-teaching, and creating inclusive learning environments. If the general or special education teacher has a negative attitude toward working together or any aspect of the inclusion classroom, it can tremendously hinder the effectiveness of the inclusion team.

Teamwork. As identified by both teams of inclusion teachers, effective collaborative partnerships must share the teaching responsibilities and roles equally. All of the teachers and administrators expressed that for inclusion partners to work together, both teachers must view the classroom as theirs equally, work with both general and special education students with no separation, share ideas and resources, and work to develop a good relationship based on mutual goals for student success. The school climate can also have a great deal of influence over the attitudes and teamwork of the inclusion teams.

This study also revealed that an integral part of teamwork was that the administrators must be part of the team. The school and district-level administrators provided support for

students and teachers for effective inclusive practices within these schools. General and special education teachers worked together to form partnerships but relied on the administrators for support and assistance through the selection of teams, scheduling, and other support.

Perseverance. Both inclusion teams also revealed that throughout the process for becoming cohesive partners and as they have continued to work and become more effective together, it has taken effort, work, and perseverance on the part of both teachers. All participants expressed that effectively working together takes daily effort, willingness, and work.

SQ1: What are best practices during the orientation/forming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Sub-question one was answered mainly through the themes of communication and attitude. When these inclusion teams first started working together and navigating through the initial phases of becoming partners, they indicated that what worked for them was: (a) talking frequently; (b) getting to know one another's personalities, strengths, and weaknesses; (c) beginning to plan together; and (d) beginning to figure out each teacher's roles and responsibilities.

During this initial phase, attitude was a vital component of the teachers' success. The general and special education teachers had to be willing to work with one another; share their classroom, students, ideas, and resources; and talk through issues, roles, and responsibilities. They had to show openness and honesty in their communications. Additionally, it was important for both teachers to enter the partnership with the perspective that each was equally valuable and had positive contributions to make to the team.

SQ2: What are the best practices during the conflict/storming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Sub-question two was answered through all four themes: communication, attitude, teamwork, and perseverance. Many internal and external issues and challenges can hinder general and special education teachers' progress toward becoming an effective collaborative team. In this study, external challenges for both teams involved scheduling to ensure that they have time to plan together and in making sure that the special education teacher could be in the inclusion classroom the entire period. Internal challenges involved overcoming initial hesitations and distrust between the general and special education teachers due to previous negative experiences. All of the teachers also experienced initial awkwardness and a little anxiety over determining their roles within the classroom. Both teams indicated that to move beyond this stage of development, they had to learn to talk with one another frequently, openly, and honestly. Best practices during this stage of development also involved positive teacher attitudes and teamwork on the part of all the teachers in these two inclusion teams.

SQ3: What are the best practices during the cohesion/norming stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Sub-question three was answered through the themes of communication, teamwork, and perseverance. Both inclusion teams cited continued communication, planning, and sharing of responsibilities as vital elements to their team normalizing and being able to work together effectively. Also, continued relationship building and positive attitudes between the general and special education teachers were crucial to them becoming effective, cohesive partnerships.

SQ4: What are the best practices during the functional role-relatedness/performing stage of development for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Sub-question four was answered again through all four themes of communication, attitude, teamwork, and perseverance. Once inclusion teams have worked through the stages of group development and become cohesive partnerships that can perform together successfully, the work is still not finished. The inclusion teams indicated that even after years of working together, the work on their partnership never stops. The same themes of communication, attitude, teamwork, and perseverance appeared at this stage of group development as essential pieces to continued growth. These inclusion teams have become effective at working together due to the time spent working through the stages of group development and the effort they have put into building strong relationships.

Discussion

This section explains how the current study fits in with the empirical and theoretical literature relating to best practices among general and special education teachers for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms, the development of inclusion teams, and the effects of effective collaboration on the learning environment.

Empirical Literature Discussion

This study on the best practices of general and special education teachers for effective collaboration aligns with much of the empirical literature relating to this topic.

School culture. According to literature, school culture is an integral element in creating and providing inclusive educational opportunities for all students and is contingent upon having high levels of mutual trust, respect, and positivity among teachers and administrators (Lee, 2018;

Lee & Louis, 2019). This study confirmed these findings. All teachers and administrators in this study confirmed the necessity of trust, respect, and positivity among teachers and administrators to not only creating a positive, inclusive school climate but also positive, inclusive classroom learning environments for general and special education students. This study also confirmed that all of these elements must be present to create collaborative, cohesive teamwork among general and special education teachers.

Literature also showed capacity building to be integral in the success of creating a positive, inclusive school culture. This includes having appropriate numbers of highly qualified general and special education teachers and support staff, purchasing appropriate curriculum and resources, and having appropriate physical and technology accommodations in classrooms (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Erdem, 2017; Hassan & Mohamed, 2018; Kaplan, 2019; Yngve et al., 2018). Literature also indicated that this could be challenging for rural schools or schools in socioeconomically depressed areas (Erdem, 2017). This study confirmed these findings. The school district for this case study is located in a rural, socioeconomically disadvantaged area in Southwest Virginia. The elementary school only has two special education teachers and one special education instructional aide for the entire school and struggles to have enough room for pull-out situations or resources that could assist teachers and students. The special education teachers utilize small office space for pulling out special education students; however, space is extremely tight. The middle school is a larger school with a higher student body, so it has six special education teachers and four special education instructional aides, which makes scheduling easier. The middle school has also created multiple classrooms to be used as pull-out and resource rooms with flexible seating and technology resources for general and special

education teachers and students to utilize. The elementary school has worked to increase its flexible seating and technology resources within the classrooms.

Research indicated that having supportive school and district-level administrators as well as continuous professional development aids in the success of inclusion classrooms (Kozleski et al., 2015; Mingo & Mingo, 2018). Due to a grant opportunity and the supportive nature of the administrators at the middle school, the middle school inclusion team participated in five years of professional development through TTAC. The elementary school principal was also supportive of inclusive practices, but the elementary inclusion team indicated that they had not received professional development. The differences in the level of professional development and training between the middle and elementary school inclusion teams were evident in their responses to questions and in the types of artifacts they were able to provide. Both teams were exhibiting effective inclusive and collaborative practices, as identified by their principals, but the middle school team was further progressed than the elementary school team.

Challenges for inclusion teams. The literature revealed numerous challenges in inclusion classrooms for students, teachers, and administrators. This study confirmed the majority of these challenges.

Challenges for students. Some literature indicated that special education students do not make academic gains within inclusion classrooms (Gilmoure, 2018; Thompson et al., 2018); however, some showed that special education students can make academic gains within inclusion classrooms (Gilmour, 2007; U.S. Office of Special Education Programs, 2007). This study proved that special and general education students could make academic gains within inclusion classrooms. The elementary and middle school inclusion classrooms showed academic growth within their subject areas for general and special education students on Measures of Academic

(MAP) testing, Interactive Achievement benchmark testing, and Standards of Learning (SOL) testing. The teachers and administrators testified that the majority of students in these classrooms had good scores and showed positive growth throughout the academic school years. When speaking of the growth that special education students showed, Ms. Harris stated:

By the time we do this from sixth to eighth grade, we can get a lot of students that maybe were scoring in the low 300 in sixth grade to passing their SOLs by eighth grade. So, we start out with a 70 to 80% pass rate in sixth grade, but we get them up to the 90's by the time they get to eighth grade.

An additional challenge discovered in the study for special education students in inclusion classrooms was students' hesitancy or refusal to utilize their accommodations for fear of receiving condemnation or appearing to be different in front of their same-age general education peers. This reaction from students was not a challenge identified at the elementary school level; however, it was at the middle school level, when students could be more concerned with their peers' opinions of them, according to the middle school general and special education teachers. Ms. Jones indicated that sometimes the special education students would not use their calculators if general education students did not get to use one, or if their calculators looked different than their peers. Ms. Jones said, "They feel embarrassed maybe by using an accommodation that they get, and so they tend to not want to use that accommodation that they need." The middle school inclusion team also revealed that a challenge to special education students can be not wanting to ask questions in class due to fear of embarrassment or because they are not sure what to ask or how to ask the question. Ms. Moore stated:

In an inclusion classroom where you have so many kids together that have, whether they're special education or general education kids, that are having issues and deficits in

math; some of those kids you lose them because they're so deficit or their deficits are so great that they don't know what to ask. They don't know how to ask a question, or they're afraid to ask a question.

These challenges for special education students have led Ms. Jones and Ms. Moore to provide flexibility to general and special education students and to show the students that it is acceptable to use their accommodations because everyone needs assistance in something. They worked to boost all students' confidence and self-efficacy within their subject area of math. They also utilized the resource rooms where general and special education teachers can pull general or special education students for individual or small group assistance when necessary. Furthermore, the administrators at the middle school have created a self-contained classroom, with general and special education students who were struggling. In this class, Ms. Moore moved at a slower pace. She provided necessary assistance and accommodations to those students who experienced deficits that made it difficult for them to be in the typical inclusion classroom.

Literature indicated that inclusion classrooms could provide social, emotional, and behavioral benefits in addition to the academic benefits previously cited for general and special education students (Dudley-Marling & Burns, 2014). However, it can be difficult within such diverse student populations for all of their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral needs to be met (Bruggink et al., 2016; de Leeuw et al., 2018; Rangvid, 2017). This study confirmed both assumptions. Both inclusion teams indicated that they had witnessed positive growth not only academically, but also socially, emotionally, and behaviorally for general and special education students within their inclusion classrooms. Ms. Clark said, "Just to feel that they're not different, that they can fit in." Ms. Moore also emphasized, "It gives them confidence."

Both teams of inclusion teachers also indicated that it was challenging to meet all the needs of students; however, they cited having an effective collaborative partnership as helpful in overcoming the challenge. All of the study participants stressed that it is better to have two teachers in the classroom because they help one another, and they help the students. Ms. Moore said, “Two heads are better than one.” Ms. Jones stated, “Just to have that extra, a different way, a different perspective on how to say it a different way is helpful.” The general and special education teachers revealed that now that they have worked through the process of becoming cohesive, collaborative teams, they relied on and supported one another, which was beneficial to the students.

Challenges for teachers. The literature showed several potential problems for general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. These challenges included interpersonal as well as intrapersonal difficulties within the inclusion classroom as well as challenges outside the classroom.

Low self-efficacy. One challenge was that some teachers do not feel prepared by their teacher education programs to teach in inclusion classrooms (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Zagana et al., 2017) or by a lack of continuous professional development provided by their school or school district (Banerjee et al., 2017; Xialoi & Olli-Pekka, 2015) leading to low self-efficacy. The participants in this study confirmed both suppositions. None of the teachers or administrators in this study felt prepared for teaching and collaborating in inclusion classrooms by their teacher education programs. This was due to a couple of factors. Several of the teachers and administrators in this study completed their teaching degrees before the push for inclusive educational practices. Also, all of the teachers and administrators indicated that they did not take any classes specifically

related to how to co-teach, collaborate, or work effectively within inclusion classrooms. The teachers and administrators, particularly those who specialized in special education, indicated that they had training on ways to diversify instruction and differentiate for special education students but no training specific to teaching within inclusion classrooms.

The middle school teachers felt they had received proper levels of professional development and continuous training for teaching in inclusion classrooms from TTAC. Still, neither of the teams felt that their schools or school district had provided enough continuous professional development. The elementary team notably indicated that they would like to complete some additional training and professional development together to increase their self-efficacy for teaching and collaborating within inclusion classrooms. The differences in the level of the training and professional development the teams have experienced became apparent in the types of artifacts the teams were able to provide because the middle school teams' lesson plans were designed for co-teachers. In contrast, the elementary teams' lesson plans were typical of one-teacher lesson plans. Also, the middle school team provided multiple artifacts that they have used when they have conducted professional development on inclusive practices within their school and other schools. As part of the TTAC program, they have become teachers who can help provide training and assistance to other teams of inclusion teachers. Additionally, during the team interviews, the middle school team was much more familiar with and had tried all of the various models of co-teaching. In contrast, the elementary team was only aware of and had only tried a couple of models.

Negative attitudes. The literature also revealed that negative attitudes or perspectives toward inclusion classrooms, special education students, or unwillingness to collaborate with another teacher could make becoming an effective, cohesive partnership extremely challenging

(Chitiyo, 2017; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Mackey, 2014; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Pit-ten et al., 2018; Rogers & Johnson, 2018; Zagana et al., 2017). Throughout this study, all participants confirmed this assertion. One of the main themes indicated in this study was the importance of attitude for developing into an effective inclusion team. This study affirmed that when teachers or administrators have negative attitudes toward inclusive practices, the process of developing into a collaborative team becomes difficult to nearly impossible. Multiple teachers and administrators discussed experiences with teams of general and special education teachers who could not work together effectively because of multiple factors. These included the general education teacher being territorial, teachers not wanting to work together due to personality conflicts, general education teachers treating special education teachers as aides or helpers rather than teachers, and teachers not participating in co-planning. All of the participants indicated that teachers and administrators need to have positive attitudes and perspectives toward inclusive practices and working as part of a team to be successful.

Confusion about teaching roles. The literature showed that when general and special education teachers are paired together and assigned to the same inclusion classroom, a difficulty could be confusion about teaching roles (Hurd & Welbacher, 2017). This study confirmed this assertion. Both teams of inclusion teachers indicated that in the initial stages of working together, they experienced hesitancy and awkwardness because neither teacher was sure what to do or what their role was in the classroom. The teachers were accustomed to mostly teaching by themselves in their class or had negative experiences with previous co-teachers. In the case of the special education teachers, they had been previously paired with general education teachers who would not allow them to teach, treated them like aides, and acted as if they were there only to assist the special education students. In the case of the middle school general education

teacher, she had been previously paired with special education teachers who would not help with the instruction due to unfamiliarity with the content area, did not meet for co-planning, came to the classroom late, and left the class early. The elementary general education teacher did not have experience with this because her only inclusion partner was the special education teacher in this study. Due to these prior experiences, it took some time for both inclusion teams to communicate and work together to determine their teaching roles and to become comfortable in them.

Lack of communication. The literature indicated that lack of communication could also be a hindrance for general and special education teachers for effective collaboration (Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). This study confirmed this supposition as communication was one of the major themes that appeared as an essential element at all stages of development for both inclusion teams. Both teams indicated that for them to become effective in their collaboration, they had to communicate openly, honestly, and frequently from the beginning of their partnership and ongoing. Ms. Clark said, “We’re very open and honest with each other, and we just talk all the time. Even outside of school, you know, and we just keep that line of communication open constantly.” The middle school general and special education teachers and the elementary special education teacher had all previously experienced partnerships where there was a deficit in communication, which they attributed to the ineffectiveness and eventual dissolution of those teams.

Workloads of teachers. Another challenge identified in the literature was the enormous workloads and time constraints of general and special education teachers (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017). All of the participants in this study confirmed this conjecture. The teachers and the administrators in this study discussed the enormity of the work that goes into

teaching and meeting the needs of students as well as the time constraints on teachers with only 30 to 60 minutes of planning per day. The special education teachers and Director of Special Education also implicated the additional duties that special education teachers have for their students with the development of Instructional Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 plans, meeting for testing and eligibility of services, and development of behavioral plans. Ms. Taylor stated, “The paperwork is a job within itself. Because, you know, the special ed teachers are responsible for grading work and planning and doing everything as a gen ed person, but yet all of the meetings and the preparation it takes a lot of time for that.”

Lack of administrative support. The literature also determined that a challenge for teachers working in inclusion classrooms can be a lack of administrative support (Banerjee et al., 2017; Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). The literature showed that if administrators have a negative attitude toward inclusive practices or a lack of self-efficacy or expertise for effective inclusive instructional strategies, collaborative practices, or pedagogy for special needs students, it can hamper effective practices among general and special education teachers (Cate et al., 2018; Kirby, 2017; Zagona et al., 2017). This study supported these findings. The current school and district-level administrators fully supported inclusive practices within their schools and school district. However, the district-level administrators expressed that this was not fully the case at all of the schools in this school district. They cited the supportive nature of the principals at the schools for this case study as having a very positive impact on the success of these and other inclusion teams at these schools. Joyful Middle School has particularly worked extremely hard in recent years to put a focus on inclusive educational practices.

This study confirmed that the success of inclusion teams begins with the school and district-level administrators. If teachers do not have administrators’ assistance and support, it

can be very difficult to develop into effective collaborative teams. The principals at these schools have spent years of trial and error to determine the right matches of general and special education teachers. They have also worked on providing the best possible scheduling to allow for times of common planning and to have the special education teachers stay in the classrooms for the entire period. Further, they have made efforts to provide curriculum and resources necessary to the success of the inclusion classrooms, and have been supportive of the teachers' and students' needs. Therefore, this study expanded on the literature by showing examples of the success that can occur for inclusion teams with proper administrative support, especially in the case of the middle school inclusion team.

Benefits of Inclusion Classrooms. The literature revealed the benefits of inclusion classrooms for teachers and students. According to the literature, individual pressure can be taken off teachers when working as part of a collaborative partnership in lesson planning, curriculum mapping, disaggregation of data, improvement plans, preparing assessment, grading student work, providing instruction to students, and making decisions for the classroom (Carreno & Hernandez-Ortiz, 2017). Students receive benefits by having two teachers to provide assistance, different ways of viewing and learning material, and high quality of educational experiences (Morgan, 2016; Strogilos et al., 2017). Additionally, all students benefited within inclusion classrooms because no students were excluded, which provided increased equality in teaching and learning (Fruth & Woods, 2015; Morgan, 2016; Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019). This study confirmed all of the benefits mentioned above for teachers and students. The general and special education teachers expressed that working with another teacher supported them in planning, teaching, creating student activities, differentiating for students' needs, and all areas of their classroom responsibilities. Ms. Jones said, "It's better to have two teachers. Two heads are

better than one.” Ms. Clark also emphasized, “I love it. I wouldn’t have it any other way, honestly. I always ask to be the inclusion classroom teacher because I like to see how they learn from each other, the higher students and the special education students. I just think they can blend so well.”

Expansion of the Empirical Literature. The empirical literature mostly related to the perspectives and viewpoints of general and special education teachers on inclusion, collaborative practices, and challenges for successful collaboration and inclusive education (Al-Natour et al., 2015; Anders, 2015; Barr, 2014; Chitiyo, 2017; Hurd & Weilbacher, 2017; Mackey, 2014; Morgan, 2016; Pit-ten et al., 2018; Ronfeldt et al., 2015). There was a gap in the literature pertaining to effective inclusion teams’ best practices as well as the process for developing into an effective team. Therefore, this study expanded the empirical literature by providing a reference for what effective inclusion teams do differently than ineffective teams, particularly relating to best practices inside and outside of the classroom and for their development as a cohesive partnership.

Theoretical Literature Discussion

This study utilized two theoretical frameworks consisting of Tuckman’s (2001) stages of group development and Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural learning theory. This study aligns with much of the theoretical literature.

Tuckman’s stages of group development. Literature indicated that inclusion teams do not become effective overnight; instead, they must develop and work through various issues and challenges (Atkins, 2008; Cleaveland, 2015; Weber, 1982). This study confirmed this supposition. All of the participants expressed that developing into an effective inclusion team required time and work on the part of the general and special education teachers, as well as the

administrators who supported them. Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development provided a framework of four phases that groups or teams of individuals must work through: (a) orientation/forming, (b) conflict/storming, (c) cohesion/norming, and (d) functional role-relatedness/performing to become a cohesive, effective team. As part of this study, I hypothesized that the two inclusion teams worked through these stages of development to become cohesive, compatible, and successful. The results of this study confirmed this hypothesis.

Orientation/Forming. The literature showed that there is a time at the beginning of the team's development where the individuals are getting to know one another, learning how to relate to one another, and figuring out how to work together (Kearney et al., 2015; Tuckman, 2001; Weber 1982). Research also revealed that during this stage, individuals could feel curious, confused, and anxious (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Weber 1982). This study supported both of these notions. The general and special education teachers expressed that they felt hesitant, anxious, and awkward when they first started working with their current inclusion partner. They also indicated that it took time for them to get to know one another, figure out one another's expectations, establish their roles within the team and classroom, and begin to be able to work together.

Conflict/Storming. The literature revealed that there might be a period where teams or team members may go through some internal or external conflicts and challenges that must be resolved to be able to work together effectively (Egolf & Chester 2013). Literature also showed that this phase of group development could be characterized by intragroup conflict and feelings of dissatisfaction, frustration, anger, or depression from the team members (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Weber, 1982). This study confirmed these suppositions, however, not precisely

concerning these inclusion teams. All of the participants, except the elementary school general education teacher, had been part of ineffective inclusion partnerships during their careers. They expressed that within their current partnerships, they never really experienced conflicts, arguments, or negative feelings within the team. However, in some of their previous experiences, the participants did experience personality conflicts, disputes, negative feelings due to how they were treated within the groups, disrespectful attitudes, and negative perspectives from co-teaching partners. In those ineffective partnerships, this was the stage of development that the participants never really moved beyond. However, in their current partnerships, the only interpersonal or intrapersonal issues they had consisted of overcoming their initial hesitations, awkwardness, and establishing their roles within the classroom. Moreover, the only outside conflicts they experienced in their current placements related to scheduling in making sure they had time to plan together and ensuring that the special education teachers could be in the classrooms for the full period.

Cohesion/Norming. The literature revealed that during this stage of development, the team members begin to trust one another, can resolve conflicts, and become cohesive and compatible in their work (Tuckman, 2001; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982). The literature showed that this stage could be characterized by high levels of positive interaction, feelings of satisfaction from participating in the group, and productivity within the group at achieving goals (Besic, et al., 2016; Egolf & Chester, 2013; Pratt et al., 2017). This study confirmed these suppositions. All of the participants expressed that at this stage of development within effective co-teaching partnerships, the teachers trusted and respected one another and could work together effectively for the common goal of positive student outcomes. All of the teachers in this study enjoyed being part of their inclusion teams. They felt pleased in their

relationships, their abilities to work together, and the positive results they saw in their classrooms with all students.

Functional role-relatedness/Performing. The literature showed that in this final stage of group development, teams could function as a cohesive, compatible social and task entity that can solve problems, generate new ideas, communicate effectively, make decisions and implement strategies (Egolf & Chester, 2013; Tuckman & Jensen, 2010; Weber, 1982). This study confirmed this theory. Both inclusion teams indicated that they felt entirely comfortable working and communicating with their co-teaching partner and that they assisted and supported one another tremendously well. They noted that they do everything together in preparing for their classrooms and within their classes. They revealed that if they succeeded, they did it together, but if they failed, they did it together also. If a lesson went exceptionally well, and the students understood a concept, the co-teachers celebrated in that success together. However, if students struggled to understand a concept or a lesson or activity did not go well, the co-teachers worked together to find a solution and ways to help the students succeed. Ms. Harris stated, “I have no doubt any student I put in that classroom is getting probably the best instruction they could receive anywhere in the county because the two of them balance each other out.”

Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory. According to Vygotsky’s sociocultural learning theory, students learn through “interacting with their peers, teacher, manipulatives, and their contextual setting” (Jaramillo, 1996, p. 3). Further, the literature showed that one of the primary presumptions for how students learn effectively is through the cooperation and relationship with their teachers (Clara, 2017; Daneshfar & Moharami, 2018; Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). This study confirmed these suppositions. Within these inclusion classrooms, the learning environment, the interactions between students, the cooperation between students

and teachers, and the relationships between teachers and students were paramount to the success of the students. As part of this study, I hypothesized that effective inclusion teachers create positive learning environments that help lead to successful student outcomes. This study confirmed this hypothesis. All of the participants expressed that ineffective inclusion partnerships negatively affect the learning environment within the classroom and that effective inclusion partnerships positively affect the learning environment. When discussing the learning environment of the elementary inclusion team, Ms. Anderson expressed:

Well, they like math, and that's a subject most kids say they don't like. So, you know, their students will say that they like math. I've seen success in these children passing SOLs that maybe they hadn't passed the previous year, but they saw success. And, that's important for children who struggle to see success on these tests even though they're not the end all be all of the world, but it builds their self-confidence to think, 'Hey, I can do this again.'

When discussing the learning environment of the middle school team, Ms. Davis stated, When you go in there they are on task, and they're rarely sitting down. They're circulating the room. The classroom environment is one in which the students feel safe to ask questions and participate, which is a hard place to get to as an inclusion class. But, those students have a safe learning environment. They feel like they can open themselves up and ask questions. I think that's key.

All of the participants expressed that when an inclusion team was not effective and did not work well together, it created tension within the classroom, and the learning environment could feel uncomfortable for students. When discussing ineffective inclusion teams' classrooms that she had been in, Ms. Harris said:

It wasn't as warm. The kids did not ask the inclusion teacher questions. The ineffective classroom that I went into, a lot of times the special education teacher was standing in the back or staying with one student the entire time. When the kid would ask that teacher a question, or they would try to answer, sometimes the gen ed teacher would answer again even if it was the same answer rather than trusting their first explanation. You could tell that the kids felt like one person was more in control than the other. So, it wasn't as enjoyable to watch, and the interaction just wasn't there. It was almost a waste of a professional person is what it felt like.

However, this study showed that within the classrooms of effective inclusion teams who were able to work well together, the teachers and students felt happy, enjoyed being in the classroom, succeeded in learning, and felt comfortable. Mr. Wilson stated, "It's a positive atmosphere, and it's evident learning is taking place, and the students are relaxed with both teachers. So, it's just a good environment for learning."

Expansion of Theoretical Literature

This study expanded the existing theoretical literature for Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development and Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory.

Tuckman's stages of group development. Typically, Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development are applied within the world of business for teams working together in corporations and other businesses. This study expanded its application by applying the theory to general and special education teachers who are paired together within inclusion classrooms. This theory helped provide a framework for the stages of development of these inclusion teams and worked well to help explain the process they used to form a cohesive partnership. By using this

theory in a new way, it opens up possibilities for future research to further the use of this theory to education and other types of teams.

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory. Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory has been applied to the field of education previously; however, this study expanded its application by utilizing it as a framework for the correlation between the effectiveness of inclusion teams and the learning environment. This theory worked well to show the effects that the co-teaching relationship can have on the classroom learning environment and thereby the success of the students.

Implications

The implications of this research study supported and expanded upon the empirical and theoretical literature. Previous research regarding general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms was insufficient to determine best practices between teachers for developing into effective, cohesive, collaborative teams. This study attempted to fill the gap by providing information regarding best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia and for the development of effective inclusion teams. This section describes the empirical, theoretical, and practical implications for this study as well as recommendations for stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

This study applied two theories, Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development and Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory as a framework for the research questions.

Tuckman's stages of group development. Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development are typically applied to the field of business; however, this study applied the stages to the field of education. Tuckman's (2001) theory provided stages of group development,

which aided in establishing markers for the stages of development for the general and special education teachers within their inclusion teams. The elementary and middle school inclusions teams in this study had both been paired together for five years. As provided in this study, these cases of co-teachers developed through the four stages of group development over this period of five years. An important aspect indicated by both inclusion teams was that their team growth and development never stopped. They expressed that they would continue to strive to work together in innovative and effective manners. This suggests that the stages of group development are not entirely linear, but fluid. For example, a team could make it to functional role-relatedness/performing stage and be working effectively together, but then a major issue or challenge could occur, which could push the team back to the conflict/storming phase of development. How teams develop through the stages and then continue to work on their partnerships makes an enormous impact on the long-term success of the teams.

It is recommended that administrators leave general and special education teachers paired together for long periods of time, even years, to allow them time and space to develop into a cohesive team. However, it is recommended that administrators provide inclusion teams with proper levels of support including: (a) scheduling co-planning times, (b) planning for special education teachers to stay in the inclusion classrooms for the entire period, (c) providing curriculum and physical resources requested by teachers, and (d) finding appropriate continuous professional development opportunities and the means for inclusion teams to attend together.

Furthermore, as part of this study, I had hypothesized that the most critical phase of Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development for inclusion teams working to become cohesive collaborate partnerships would be the second stage, conflict/storming. Because of the literature, I presupposed that for teams who do not become effective, the cause would be due to internal or

external conflicts, issues, and challenges that the group members were not able to overcome and work through. I reasoned that this would be the stage where most teams would get stalled and possibly not move beyond. This study showed that this occurred in some of the previous partnerships of the participants.

However, for the participants in this study, the most critical stage was the first stage, orientation/forming. It was during this stage that the teachers had to work to overcome more issues and obstacles than during the conflict/storming stage. When these inclusion teachers were first paired together, the elementary special education teacher, middle school special education teacher, and middle school general education teachers had experienced some negative ordeals within previous inclusion partnerships. For the special education teachers, how some general education teachers treated them led them to feel inadequacy within their teaching ability, negativity toward working within a co-teaching partnership, and initial hesitancy about what this new partnership would bring. For the general education teacher, because the previous special education teachers had not fully participated or shared equally in the workload, she felt hesitancy and anxiety about entering into a new partnership and negativity about working within a co-teaching partnership as well. Therefore, how these inclusion partners started interacting with one another and within their classroom significantly set the stage for them being able to become effective partners.

Both special education teachers expressed that the differences between their previous experiences and their current partnerships started on the first days of class. When the general education teachers introduced them to the students as a co-teacher with equal authority in the classroom, it made a considerable difference because previous general education teachers had not introduced them or had introduced them as helpers rather than teachers. In addition, the way

the teachers communicated openly and honestly with one another from the start of their relationship made a huge difference in their development into a cohesive team. Therefore, this first stage of group development became the most crucial within the teams for this study. These results exemplify that general and special education teachers need to apply all four themes of communication, attitude, teamwork, and perseverance at every stage of group development. Furthermore, the stage of development that might be the most difficult to overcome for one team might vary from another team. It is recommended that teachers receive training on how to work together as part of a cohesive team and to develop their collaborative skills, particularly in teams who struggle to work together effectively.

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory. This study also applied Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory. This study showed a positive correlation between effective inclusion teams and positive learning environments. This study showed that when general and special education teachers had positive attitudes toward inclusive practices, learned to work together, utilized various co-teaching approaches within their classroom, and treated one another with respect and professionalism, it helped to create a positive learning environment that was conducive to successful student outcomes. The administrators in this case study described the inclusion teams' classrooms as happy, positive learning environments where both general and special education students felt comfortable receiving instruction and assistance from the general and special education teachers. It was essential within these effective inclusion classrooms that teachers did not make differences between one another or the students. Within the effective inclusion classroom, everyone was treated with equality, respect, and care. This study showed that when students have a positive learning environment, they can show growth academically, behaviorally, and socially. This study also showed the importance of creating a positive,

inclusive school culture and climate within the entire school. Schools do not want to have pockets of effective inclusive practices only contained within individual classrooms but throughout all of the classes and school.

As postulated by Vygotsky (1978), this study showed that the interactions and relationships between co-teachers as well as among teachers and students are relevant to creating positive learning environments. Moreover, this study showed that teachers' interactions with the students' families contributed to positive classroom and school climates. All of the administrators in this study discussed that they observed these effective teams putting forth high levels of effort toward communicating effectively and frequently with the families of their students and working to develop a positive, working relationship with them. When speaking of the inclusion teachers developing a strong relationship with families, Mr. Wilson stated, "Having the parents' support is critical, I think. And, you get their support when you have their trust. And so, I do think that is a key element to having a successful experience." Therefore, there is also a positive correlation between co-teachers who develop good relationships with their students' families and the creation of a positive learning environment for students. It is recommended that inclusion teams contact families jointly to contribute to the mindset of working together as an equal team.

Empirical Implications

This study adds to the literature regarding best practices among general and special education teachers working together in inclusion classrooms. The participants in this study verified some of the challenges that could occur among teachers working together. These challenges could happen within the team dynamic or from outside the classroom. This study showed that creating effective inclusion teams of teachers begins with the school administrators.

There is a positive correlation between supportive and proactive school and district-level administrators for effective inclusive education and positive school culture (Al-Mahdy & Emam, 2017; Ryan, 2006). This correlation was confirmed in this study. According to Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017), collaboration within inclusion classrooms is “more than just working together and takes effort, diligence, and training” (p. 52). Particularly in the middle school case, the school administrators provided numerous opportunities for training. However, in both schools the administrators had positive perspectives on inclusive practices. The attitudes and efforts of the administrators at these schools undoubtedly affected the school culture, creating an environment where general and special education teachers could work together effectively.

Effective inclusive practices were affected by the support provided by administrators. Still, they were ultimately dependent upon the communication, attitudes, teamwork, and perseverance of the general and special education teachers at every stage of development within their years of working together. This study showed that with: (a) open, frequent, and honest communication; (b) positive, open-minded attitudes; (c) high levels of respect, professionalism, and working together; (d) and large quantities of persevering through issues and challenges general and special education teachers could learn to work together as effective co-teachers. This study proposed that effective inclusive practices hinge upon what the teachers do together in planning and preparing prior to class, how they co-teach and perform together within the class, but also what the teachers do together after a class. This study also revealed that an additional integral piece occurs when the teachers reflect together on their lessons to determine what is effective or ineffective pertaining to their instructional strategies, co-teaching models, student activities, classroom management, and assessments. These discussions after teaching can be as vital to inclusion teams’ success as their planning before a lesson. It is recommended that

teachers use part of their co-planning time to reflect on past lessons and activities in order to make continuous improvements.

Cross analysis of two effective elementary and middle school inclusion teams revealed numerous similarities across both levels but also revealed some differences due to the age level of the students. For example, once students reach middle school, they have developed an enhanced awareness of their surroundings and are much more concerned with the opinions of their teachers and same-age peers. These differences among students have applications in psychology and sociology. Therefore, teachers at all grade levels need to understand the complexities of human growth and development as it relates to the grade levels in which they are teaching. These are considerations that teachers would need to make when completing planning, instructing, and reflecting together as well as when creating accommodations and differentiating for students' learning needs.

Practical Implications

The themes and sub-themes indicated in this study consisted of: (a) communication (talking, planning, and reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, equal, and support); (c) attitude (perspective, trusting, respect, and willing); and (d) perseverance (work and effort). Some of these concepts were identified in the literature; however, they were not specified within each stage of group development of the effective inclusion team. The themes identified in this study are interconnected (see Figure 4.13). The inclusion teams applied them as best practices across all stages of their team development. Administrators and teachers need to understand that becoming an effective team happens in fluid phases over time and can take years to occur. Also, this study showed that if teachers utilize these best practices during each stage of group

development, they can learn to work together effectively and become a cohesive, collaborative team.

Further, research revealed that “although collaboration between educators is becoming more common in schools, the skills to become an effective collaborator are not at all intuitive” (Pellegrino et al., 2015, p. 187). The elementary school principal in this study expressed, “We’ve been inclusive schools for a while now, so it’s kind of common practice for our teachers. It’s not something that’s shocking to them. It’s common practice for us to be an inclusive school.” However, all of the participants in this study indicated that they had encountered negative experiences with working as part of a co-teaching team, even in recent years. This study confirmed that although inclusive practices have been the norm in education for a couple of decades, there are still deficits in effective collaboration among general and special education teachers. The work toward becoming an inclusive school and the efforts teachers must exhibit in becoming effective inclusion teams is an ongoing process that never stops. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers, school administrators, and district-level administrators participate in continuous professional development opportunities and training on effective inclusive practices.

As this study sought best practices for general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms, best practices for administrators were also revealed. This study showed that it is essential that administrators support teachers by: (a) scheduling common planning times, (b) ensuring that the special education teachers stay in the inclusion classroom for the entire period, (c) providing continuous training opportunities, and (d) helping to create a positive school climate that embraces inclusive practices. This study revealed that within an effective inclusive school, everyone is on the team, including teachers, parents, students, and families. Therefore, it

is recommended that schools and school districts work to proactively involve all stakeholders in their efforts toward increased inclusivity and collaborative practices.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are purposeful decisions the researcher makes to limit or define the boundaries of the study. The potential weaknesses of this study include the demographics and locality of this study. This study was confined in one specific school district within a rural, socioeconomically depressed area of Southwest Virginia. This decision was made based on: (a) the proximity of the school district to the researcher, (b) the gap in the literature regarding best practices for collaboration among general and special education teachers specifically in this region of the United States, and (c) because this school district exhibits some examples of high-quality schools in that it was ranked 11th out of 133 school districts in the state of Virginia for student achievement in 2017/2018 and 10th in 2018/2019 (Virginia Department of Education, 2019). Another weakness of the study may be that the participants were all Caucasian, and there was not an equal distribution of genders as the participants were predominantly female. This may be due to the demographics of the locality where this study took place. However, the researcher felt it was essential to give a voice to the experiences of the teachers and administrators in this locality.

The researcher did not control the study for gender, race, age, or years of teaching experience. The criteria for principal recommendations for teachers for the study were: (a) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom, (b) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years, and (c) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective

collaborative and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms. The decisions for these criteria and not controlling for gender, race, age, or years of teaching experience were made to allow the possible sample pool to be as large as possible. This was ideal to receive the best potential cases of effective inclusion teams at the elementary and middle school levels within this small school district.

Another limitation of this study is that there were only two cases within the study, and the cases were spread over a wide grade range consisting of kindergarten through fifth for elementary school and sixth through eighth for middle school. However, the researcher wanted to not only identify best practices for general and special education teachers at the elementary or middle school levels but to be able to cross-analyze the practices across the two levels of schools. Also, utilizing more than one case increased the external validity of the study by providing replication logic (Yin, 2009).

A final limitation of the study may be that the researcher used to be a general education teacher in inclusion classrooms at the elementary school level. These previous experiences assisted me during the data analysis stages by providing expert knowledge of the lived experiences of the teachers and administrators (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, during the data collection process, I did not want to influence the participants in any way. Therefore, I used a researcher's journal to bracket out my influence so that I would not reduce the information shared by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (see Appendix M). Further, in this study, I clarified my research bias, utilized peer review through continuous documentation checks by my committee members, and used member checking by allowing participants to review the transcripts of their interviews for "accuracy and palatability" (Stake, 1995, p. 115; Yin, 2009).

Recommendations for Future Research

In consideration of the study findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on the study, there are multiple recommendations for future research relating to best practices among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. This research was focused on general and special education teachers; however, some best practices were indicated for administrators relating to supporting co-teaching partnerships; scheduling for inclusion teams and classrooms; and providing for a positive, inclusive school climate. Further qualitative case study research could be conducted to explore these areas for administrators further. It is recommended that researchers use multiple case study research for multiple cases at the elementary level as well as multiple cases at the middle school level to confirm results and increase transferability.

This research study focused on a specific geographic region of Southwest Virginia. Further qualitative case study research could be conducted in other school districts in Southwest Virginia, but also other parts of Virginia as well as other states in the United States. Specifically, research should focus on cases of effective inclusion teams and best practices for effective collaboration and inclusive educational practices across all stages of group development. Since this study applied Tuckman's (2001) stages of development uniquely in the field of education, further research could help increase the validity of the results. Also, quantitative research could be conducted related to this topic. An instrument could be developed and shared electronically across multiple regions of the United States. This type of research methodology would allow for a much larger and diverse sample of participants, which could increase transferability.

All of the participants in this study revealed that they did not feel prepared by their teacher education programs for effective collaboration or inclusive educational practices. Also,

many of the participants felt that they could benefit from further professional development and training provided by their schools or school district. Therefore, additional qualitative or quantitative research could be conducted to determine areas of improvement for pre-service teachers within teacher education programs and in-service teachers for continuous training throughout their careers.

Summary

The purpose of this collective case study was to determine best practices among general and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia. This study utilized Tuckman's (2001) stages of group development as a framework for the phases of development for inclusion teams. Additionally, this study used Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural learning theory to provide a lens for the correlation between effective inclusion teams and their learning environments. This study was comprised of 12 participants. The participants included two teams of inclusion teachers, one at the elementary school level and one at the middle school level each consisting of one general and one special education teacher. Participants also included the school and district-level administrators surrounding the teachers. Case study research allowed for general and special education teachers and administrators to have a voice which provided an in-depth understanding of a real-life phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2009).

Data analysis included coding and pattern matching to identify themes and sub-themes related to the purpose of the study within each case and across the cases (Stake, 1995). Four themes, with sub-themes for each, were identified as significant elements in best practices of general and special education teachers for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms and for the development of a cohesive partnership: (a) communication (talking, planning, and

reflecting); (b) teamwork (sharing, together, and equal); (c) attitude (perspective, trust, respect, and willing); and (d) perseverance (work and effort).

Profound and worthwhile takeaways from the study include that effective inclusive practices begin with school and district-level administrators. This is crucial because a lack of administrative support in the form of scheduling, resources, and training or absence of positive attitudes toward inclusive practices can greatly hinder the best practices of general and special education teachers. Furthermore, if teachers apply the themes identified in this study from the start of being paired together throughout each stage of development, they will most likely be able to find success as a team. Also, as Mr. Clyde expressed, “It’s a marathon, not a sprint.” Effective inclusion teams take time, patience, commitment, and perseverance to develop; however, it is time and effort well spent because it leads to greater job satisfaction, more content teachers, happier students, and a positive school climate. Ms. Moore stated it well, “Don’t give up even though you might think this is not going to work. Be persistent. Be willing to learn and just keep going at it. If I’d have quit that first year, I wouldn’t have had all of these good years that I could have.”

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APPENDIX A**School District Permission Request Letter**

January 21, 2020

To the Liberty University IRB:

Please accept this letter as our approval to allow Shellie Brown to complete her case study of the best practices of general and special education teachers for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms. This study will be beneficial to learning more about effective collaborative and educational practices within inclusion classrooms.

We look forward to working with Shellie and Liberty University. If we can be of further assistance, please feel free to contact us.

Sincerely,



APPENDIX B**Institutional Review Board Approval Letter**

April 21, 2020

Shellie Brown
Frederick Milacci

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY19-20-58 What Works? A Collective Case Study of Effective Collaborative Practices in Elementary and Middle School Inclusion Classrooms in Southwest Virginia

Dear Shellie Brown, Frederick Milacci:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the date of the IRB meeting at which the protocol was approved: April 21, 2020. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make modifications in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update submission to the IRB.

These submissions can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX C

School Administrator - Principal Recruitment Form

Dear Principal:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia.

I am writing to request recommendations for teachers to participate in this study who meet the following criteria: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms.

If teacher participants are selected from your school, I am also requesting that you take part in the study. If you agree to participate in the study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) agree to participate in a 30 to 45-minute interview, (2) review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (10 – 20 minutes), and (3) answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and information will be collected as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, schools, and the school district to maintain confidentiality.

In order to provide recommendations of teachers who fit the criteria of this study and to indicate your interest in participating in the study, please complete the recommendation form attached to this letter and return it to [REDACTED].

If teachers are selected from your school, I will contact you to schedule an interview and a consent document will be emailed to you one week prior to the interview. The consent document provides additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you have questions, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

Shellie Brown
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

[REDACTED]

Recommendations for Teacher Participants

I would like to recommend the following teachers who meet the participation criteria for the study including: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms. (If you have multiple recommendations, please complete the information for each inclusion team.)

Recommendation for Inclusion Team #1:

General Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Special Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Grade Level(s)	
Subject Area(s)	

Recommendation for Inclusion Team #2:

General Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Special Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Grade Level(s)	
Subject Area(s)	

Recommendation for Inclusion Team #3:

General Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Special Education Teacher Name & Email Address	
Grade Level(s)	
Subject Area(s)	

Principal Name: _____
 Principal Signature: _____
 School: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Case Subject Recruitment Form

Dear Teacher:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

You have received a recommendation from your principal to participate in this study because you have met the following criteria: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms.

I am writing to request your participation in the study. If you agree to be in the study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Agree to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview individually.
2. Agree to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview with your inclusion partner.
3. Provide any artifacts or documents that may help answer the research questions.
4. Review the transcriptions of your individual and team interviews for accuracy (an additional 20 - 30 minutes).
5. Allow the researcher to complete two 60-minute observations in your inclusion classroom.
6. Answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity, via email.

It should take approximately four and a half hours to complete the procedures listed. Names and information will be collected as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, schools, and the school district to maintain confidentiality.

In order to participate, please contact me to schedule an interview at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

A consent document will be emailed to you one week prior to the individual interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. Teacher participants will receive a \$25

Walmart gift card for participation in this study. If you have additional questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Shellie Brown
Doctoral Student, Liberty University



APPENDIX E

School Administrator – Assistant Principal Recruitment Form

Dear Assistant Principal:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia.

I am writing to request your participation in the study because you help supervise the general and special education teachers who meet the following criteria: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) agree to participate in a 30 to 45-minute interview, (2) review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (10 – 20 minutes), and (3) answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and information will be collected as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, schools, and the school district to maintain confidentiality.

In order to participate, please contact me to schedule an interview at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

A consent document will be emailed to you one week prior to the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you have additional questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Shellie Brown
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX F

Regional Special Education Coordinator Recruitment Form

Dear Special Education Regional Coordinator:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia.

I am writing to request your participation in the study because you help supervise the general and special education teachers who meet the following criteria: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) agree to participate in a 30 to 45-minute interview; (2) review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (10 – 20 minutes); and (3) answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and information will be collected as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, schools, and the school district to maintain confidentiality.

In order to participate, please contact me to schedule an interview at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

A consent document will be emailed to you one week prior to the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you have additional questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Shellie Brown
Doctoral Student, Liberty University

[REDACTED]

APPENDIX G

Division Special Education Director Recruitment Form

Dear Division Special Education Director:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to understand general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia.

I am writing to request your participation in the study because you help supervise the general and special education teachers who meet the following criteria: (1) participants must be general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom in grades kindergarten through fifth for elementary and sixth through eighth for middle school; (2) participants' students must show consistent growth in reading and math Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment data from fall to spring for a minimum of three years; and (3) participants must be recommended by their principals who have observed effective collaboration and inclusive practices within their inclusion classrooms.

If you agree to participate in the study, I would ask you to do the following things: (1) agree to participate in a 30 to 45-minute interview; (2) review the transcription of the interview for accuracy (10 – 20 minutes); and (3) answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity. It should take approximately one hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and information will be collected as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. Pseudonyms will be used for all participants, schools, and the school district to maintain confidentiality.

In order to participate, please contact me to schedule an interview at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED].

A consent document will be emailed to you one week prior to the interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you have additional questions, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Shellie Brown
Doctoral Student, Liberty University
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX H

Case Subject Consent Form

What Works? A Collective Case Study of Effective Collaborative Practices in Elementary and Middle School Inclusion Classrooms in Southwest Virginia

Shellie Brown
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study analyzing the best practices of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom for effective collaboration. You were selected because you received a recommendation from your principal based on consistent MAP (Measures of Academic Achievement) reading and math growth for students over the past three years and principal observations in your inclusion classroom. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of this study. Shellie Brown, a student in Liberty University's School of Education, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the best practices of effective collaborative teams of general and special education teachers inside and outside of shared inclusion classrooms as well as to understand how these effective teams were able to develop into successful partnerships. The study seeks to answer the following central research question: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? The study seeks to answer the following guiding research questions: What are the best practices during orientation/forming, conflict/storming, cohesion/norming, and functional role-relatedness/performing stages of group developing for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Agree to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview individually.
2. Agree to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview with your inclusion partner.
3. Provide any artifacts or documents that may help answer the research questions.
4. Review the individual and team interview transcriptions for accuracy (an additional 20 – 30 minutes).
5. Allow the researcher to complete two 60-minute observations in your inclusion classroom.
6. Answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risk to this study is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you in this study; however, there are societal benefits. These benefits are to provide

further insight of collaborative practices to other general and special education in-service teachers assigned to the same inclusion classrooms. A second benefit is to pre-service general and special education teachers in teacher education programs who are learning how to develop collaborative skills and methods for teaching in inclusion classrooms.

Compensation:

You will receive a \$25 Walmart gift card for participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private by using pseudonyms for all participants, schools, and the school district. Research records will be stored securely in locked files or on a password-protected computer personally owned by the researcher to which only the researcher will have access. All data obtained will be deleted or shredded three years after the date of IRB approval. Digital audio recordings of all interviews will be deleted by the researcher at the end of three years.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. At any time, you may withdraw by contacting the researcher at [REDACTED].

How to Withdraw:

You may withdraw from this study by contacting the researcher, Shellie Brown, or her chair, Dr. Fred Milacci, verbally or in writing. If you choose to withdraw, the digital audio recordings will be emailed to you within two weeks of expressing your desire to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Shellie Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED] or her Dissertation Committee Chair, Fred Milacci, at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board at 434-592-5530 or via 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 understand the above information. I have asked any needed questions and have received answers to all of my questions. I consent to participate in the study.

_____ I understand and agree to audio-recordings of all interviews conducted for this study.

_____ The researcher may dispose of the digital audio recordings at the end of three years.

_____ I would like the digital audio recording sent to me for disposal at the end of three years.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Liberty University
IRB-FY19-20-58
Approved on 4-21-2020

APPENDIX I
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
ADMINISTRATOR

What Works? A Collective Case Study of Effective Collaborative Practices in Elementary and
 Middle School Inclusion Classrooms in Southwest Virginia

Shellie Brown
 Liberty University
 School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study analyzing the best practices of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom for effective collaboration. You were selected because you supervise the general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom who are the case subjects for this study. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be part of this study. Shellie Brown, a student in Liberty University's School of Education, is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand the best practices of effective collaborative teams of general and special education teachers inside and outside of shared inclusion classrooms as well as to understand how these effective teams were able to develop into successful partnerships. The study seeks to answer the following central research question: What are general and special education teachers' best practices for effective collaboration in K-8 public education inclusion classrooms in Southwest Virginia? The study seeks to answer the following guiding research questions: What are the best practices during orientation/forming, conflict/storming, cohesion/norming, and functional role-relatedness/performing stages of group developing for an effective collaborative team of general and special education teachers assigned to the same inclusion classroom?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Agree to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview.
2. Review the interview transcription for accuracy (an additional 10 – 20 minutes).
3. Answer any additional follow-up questions that may need to be answered for clarity.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The risk to this study is no more than you would encounter in everyday life. There are no direct benefits to you in this study; however, there are societal benefits. These benefits are to provide further insight of collaborative practices to other general and special education in-service teachers assigned to the same inclusion classrooms. A second benefit is to pre-service general and special education teachers in teacher education programs who are learning how to develop collaborative skills and methods for teaching in inclusion classrooms.

Compensation:

You will not be monetarily compensated for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private by using pseudonyms for all participants, schools, and the school district. Research records will be stored securely in locked files or on a password-protected computer personally owned by the researcher to which only the researcher will have access. All data obtained will be deleted or shredded three years after the date of IRB approval. Digital audio recordings of all interviews will be deleted by the researcher at the end of three years.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision of whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. At any time, you may withdraw by contacting the researcher at [REDACTED].

How to Withdraw:

You may withdraw from this study by contacting the researcher, Shellie Brown, or her chair, Dr. Fred Milacci, verbally or in writing. If you choose to withdraw, the digital audio recordings will be emailed to you within two weeks of expressing your desire to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Shellie Brown. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at [REDACTED] or her Dissertation Committee Chair, Fred Milacci, at [REDACTED]. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to speak with someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board at 434-592-5530 or via 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 understand the above information. I have asked any needed questions and have received answers to all of my questions. I consent to participate in the study.

_____ I understand and agree to audio-recordings of all interviews conducted for this study.

_____ The researcher may dispose of the digital audio recordings at the end of three years.

_____ I would like the digital audio recording sent to me for disposal at the end of three years.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Liberty University
IRB-FY19-20-58
Approved on 4-21-2020

APPENDIX J

Interview Guide for General and Special Education Teachers

1. Please introduce yourself to me. What is your name, and age, and why you became a teacher?
2. Please give me information about your experience as a teacher. How many years have you been teaching, how many years in inclusion classrooms, what grade levels/subjects have you taught?
3. What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?
4. In your opinion, what type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?
5. When you first started teaching in an inclusion classroom within a collaborative partnership, did you feel prepared by your experiences in your college teacher education program?
6. What types of professional development opportunities has your school provided for inclusion teachers?
7. In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?
8. What was the process for determining your collaborative team for your inclusion classroom?
9. Once the team was selected, what was it like for you and your teaching partner when you first started working together in the inclusion classroom?
10. When you first started working together, were there any conflicts or disagreements on any issues with your teaching partner?
11. How did you resolve conflicts or disagreements between one another?

12. Other than challenges in developing the partnership between you and your teaching partner, have there been other challenges within the inclusion classroom or in the school?
13. How did you and your teaching partner overcome these challenges?
14. As you and your teaching partner have worked through various issues and challenges, how has that affected the development of your partnership?
15. What types of things do you and your teaching partner do to continue to grow and work together?
16. What strengths do you feel you bring to the teaching partnership?
17. What weaknesses do you feel you bring to the partnership?
18. How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected student outcomes?
19. How has your collaboration with your teaching partner affected the learning environment?
20. Imagine I am a beginning teacher; what advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?
21. What advice would you give to other teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?
22. What do you think you and your partner have done or do differently than other collaborative partnerships that you have witnessed that makes you successful at collaborating and working together?

APPENDIX K

Interview Guide for Inclusion Teams

1. Please introduce yourself to me. What is your name and are you a general or special education teacher?
2. How many years have you worked together as an inclusion team?
3. What grades/subjects have you taught together and currently teach together?
4. If you were asked to help an inclusion team who was just getting started with collaborating together, what would be your suggestions for best practices during the initial formative stages of the team?
5. What would be your advice for co-teachers on how to handle conflicts or challenges that arise within the team?
6. Now that you have become a well-established inclusion team, what types of things do you continue to do to ensure that your partnership remains strong?
7. There are many models of co-teaching. I'm going to go through some models and ask if you have ever used that model. If it is a model you have ever used, I will ask what you like or dislike about the model and if you would continue using that model.
 - a. One teach, one observe where one of the co-teachers leads large group instruction while the other teacher observes and gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students?
 - b. Station teaching where students are divided into three groups and the two co-teachers each provide instruction at two of the stations, students work independently at a station, and the students rotate through the three groups?

- c. Parallel teaching where each of the co-teachers instructs half of the students and present the same lesson, but provide some instructional differentiation?
 - d. Alternative teaching where one teacher provides instruction to the majority of the students while the other teacher works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, or assessment?
 - e. Teaming where the co-teachers lead large group instruction by both lecturing, representing different viewpoints, and multiple methods of solving problems?
 - f. One teach, one assist where one co-teacher leads the instruction while the other teacher circulates among the students providing individual assistance?
8. What are the benefits for teachers working in an inclusion team?
 9. Are there any disadvantages for teachers to working in an inclusion team?
 10. What are the benefits for special education students in inclusion classrooms?
 11. What are the benefits for general education students in inclusion classrooms?
 12. Are there any disadvantages to general or special education students being in an inclusion classroom?
 13. Both of you have expressed that you have worked in effective inclusion teams and in partnerships that were not as effective. What effect does a negative or strained partnership between inclusion teachers have on the learning environment? What effect does a cohesive, well-adjusted partnership between inclusion teachers have on the learning environment?
 14. Are there any final thoughts you would like to share about becoming an effective collaborative team or working within in an inclusion team?

APPENDIX L

Interview Guide for Administrators

1. Please introduce yourself to me. What is your name, and age, and why did you enter the education profession?
2. Please give me information about your experience as a teacher and as an administrator. How many years did you teach, what grade levels/subjects did you teach, how long have you been an administrator, and in what capacity?
3. What is your perspective on inclusion classrooms?
4. What type of learning environment best provides successful outcomes for special education students: self-contained, inclusion, or a mixture of both? Why is that the best choice?
5. In general, what do you see as best practices for effective collaboration in inclusion classrooms?
6. How are inclusion teams selected within your school(s)?
7. When you think of successful collaborative partnerships, what best practices do these teachers utilize?
8. When you think of weaker collaborative partnerships, what do these teachers do that causes them to be less effective?
9. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their collaborative partnership grow and develop?
10. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what types of challenges or issues have you seen them overcome, and how have they overcome them?
11. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, would you categorize them as a cohesive team, meaning that they are able to work together collaboratively in an effective, professional

manner? If so, what practices do you think make them cohesive and successful in their partnership?

12. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, what strengths and weaknesses do you think each teacher brings to the partnership, and how does that affect their success in working together?

13. In thinking of the teachers for this case study, how have you seen their successful partnership affect the learning environment and general and special education students?

14. What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district been able to provide that has helped general and special education teachers working together in inclusion classrooms?

15. What type of administrative support or resources have you, the school, or the district been able to provide to help inclusive practices for improved student outcomes?

16. Imagine that I am a beginning teacher. What advice would you give me as a first-year teacher in an inclusion classroom for teaching, collaborating, and meeting the needs of all learners?

17. What advice would you give to teachers on how to work through becoming partners who can work together effectively in an inclusion classroom?

18. Overall, what practices do you think have worked for effective collaborative partnerships in inclusion classrooms?

APPENDIX M

Research Journal Excerpts

Below are several excerpts from the researcher's journal entries made before and after interviews with participants to bracket out the researcher and to minimize the opportunity for reducing the voices of the participants.

May 7, 2020

Before Interview

Today is my first interview for my dissertation. I am a little anxious for how it will go; however, I am very excited to be starting the actual data collection phase of my dissertation. Today feels like a huge step forward.

After Interview

I feel like the interview with the middle school gen ed teacher went well. She provided a lot of interesting information. I particularly liked how she said that the students had to become ours, not mine. I feel like that's an important insight into how co-teachers should feel about their class. It was a little intimidating going into the middle school because they had signs all over saying, "No admittance to public" due to COVID-19. It's unusual walking into the school with no students there, very quiet.

May 14, 2020

Before Interview

Today's interview is with the special education middle school teacher. I look forward to getting her perspective and seeing if it is different than her partner, who I interviewed last week...

After Interview

The interview went well. The teacher seemed to feel very comfortable speaking to me. I felt like she really opened up, especially when talking about some of the bad experiences she has had working with some gen ed teachers. As the parent of a special needs student with a learning disability in math, it is refreshing to hear how passionate she is about helping her students...she really seemed to want her students to like math.

May 15, 2020

Before Interview

It worked out with the teacher's schedules for me to interview the middle school team just the day after interviewing the special ed teacher. I am thankful for the teachers' working with me and getting the interviews done so quickly. This will be my first team interview. Having both teachers there might add an interesting dynamic to the interview.

After Interview

I feel like this was a really good interview. These teachers have had great opportunities for extra training that most teachers don't have, in my experience. They have really worked hard on their partnership and teaching practices. They handed me a whole stack of artifacts, so I'm glad to receive a lot of information to use.

May 21, 2020

Before Interview

Today I will get to interview the elementary school general education teacher. Since I used to teach elementary school, it will be interesting to see if her experience is a lot different than mine. When I taught, I was put in a very difficult inclusion classroom my first year of teaching. I remember that I did not feel prepared by my college classes for how to really work with the special education students and definitely did not feel ready for how to work with another

teacher. The special ed teacher that I had at that time would just come in and work with a couple of students and then leave. We never really even thought about co-teaching or how to do it better.

After Interview

This was a really interesting interview. This teacher had a similar story to mine because she started teaching in inclusion classrooms from her very first year of teaching. However, she was lucky that she got a very experienced special education teacher who was able to help her. My first year of teaching, I was working with a special education teacher who had only been there a year or two. So, neither of us really knew exactly what we were doing or how to really co-teach. Now, that I am more experienced, I look back and see things that I could have done better.

May 6, 2020

Before Interview

Today I will interview my first administrator, the elementary school principal. It will be different to get the perspective of a principal rather than teachers. When I pulled into the parking lot, it struck me how different everything is this year with COVID-19 because there are barely any cars and normally at this time of day you would probably hear kids playing on the playground.

After Interview

It was difficult to get the principal to open up. She seemed much more reserved and short with her answers. I kept asking follow-up questions trying to gather more information, but it was difficult. Sometimes she would just look at me and say she can't answer that. I will have to work on my interview techniques, especially with administrators. Something that was interesting

was that she described all sorts of professional development she had personally done with the teachers at this school when she became principal, but when I interviewed the gen ed teacher last week, she said that she had not done any professional development. I will have to see what the special ed teacher says when I interview her.

May 28, 2020

Before Interview

Today I will be interviewing the Director of Middle Schools. When I interviewed the middle school teachers, his name kept coming up. It's a little intimidating to go to the Central Office building and interview one of the higher up administrators in the district.

After Interview

...He was very personable and forthcoming. He really spoke with a lot of pride about the work they did at the middle school to improve their inclusive practices. Since he started as a special education teacher, it really seemed to make a big difference in his demeanor and attitude toward special education and inclusion.

June 5, 2020

Before Interview

Today I will interview the special education regional coordinator. She is in a different sort of role and I look forward to getting her perspective on everything.

After Interview

The interview went well, but it was kind of difficult to get her to answer my questions directly. I would ask her a question specifically about the inclusion teams for this study and she would give kind of a generalized answer. I don't want to come across as frustrated or anything,

so I just kept going and kept trying to ask follow-up questions to gather as much information as I could.

June 11, 2020

Before Interview

Today will be interesting because the middle school administrators both want me to interview them today. It just worked out best for their schedule, so I will interview the principal first and then the assistant principal. I feel like I'm getting better with interviewing the participants the more practice I have. I'm feeling more comfortable with it and really enjoy getting to hear all of the different perspectives.

After Interview

The interview with the principal was probably the best I've had. She provided so much information. Just kept talking and talking, which was good. She seemed very open and honest about everything and had a really great attitude about inclusion. She shared that she is the mother of a special needs child, so that's always in the back of her mind when she's making decisions. I wanted to tell her that I am also, but I did not want to interfere or insert myself, so I didn't. I have learned that with interviewing, you just have to sit back and listen and try to pull as much information out of the person as you can. ...The assistant principal's interview was different than the others I have had so far. She did not have good experience working with special education teachers when she was a teacher and she was very negative about the whole process. It's sort of interesting to consider how this type of negative perspective might cloud her decision making as an administrator? Thankfully, the middle school seems to have worked very hard to become very inclusive and the principal is very positive about everything, so hopefully that will rub off on the assistant principal and she will have better experiences.