THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' CONSULTATIVE

INTERACTIONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM MEMBERS: A

TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Meredith Kearney Auscavitch

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general education teachers' lived experiences of consultative interactions with special education team members in an urban school in New England. Information regarding desired outcomes of consultation as well as general education teacher-identified outcomes was explored. The theory that guided this study was the collaboration theory identified by Lee Vygotsky, which details the benefit of collaboration with others to gain knowledge of a task or process using a partnership to support a deeper understanding. A sample of 10 general education teachers provided their perspectives on consultation with special education team members. This phenomenon was examined through interviews, journal entries, and document analysis of consultation notes and meeting minutes. A transcendental phenomenological methodology was utilized to understand and synthesize the data describing teachers' lived experiences of consultative interactions with special education team members. The results of this study indicated the general education teachers value consultation and collaboration with special education team members. The teachers also identified factors that strengthen consultation and present barriers to effective consultation. Finally, general education teachers provided ideas for improvement of consultation and collaboration within their school.

Keywords: special education, consultation, collaboration, general education

Copyright Page

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband. Thank you for encouraging me every step of the way and taking over tasks to make time for me to write. To my daughter, Adelaide, who has known nothing but a mother in school. To baby girl, and any other future children, may you persevere through challenges and lean on your village and know you can do really hard things. To my parents who rocked babies and brought meals while I stayed up working. To my brothers and sister-in-law who encouraged me and supported me every step of this journey. Thank you to Dr. Dilling for your calm, kind, and steady guidance throughout this process and to Dr. Pannone for your guidance and support on this journey. I am grateful for the time and energy you have each spent.

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List of Abbreviations

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Free appropriate public education (FAPE)

Individualized education program (IEP)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Speech-language pathologist (SLP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted, ensuring students with disabilities were provided with access to free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (Goldberg, S. 1989). This act set was eventually amended into today's Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. In 2017, 95% of students with a disability were educated within the general education classroom with services from special education team members inside or outside of the general education classroom (Snyder & de Brey, 2018). These special education team members include special education teachers, school psychologists, school social workers, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists (SLPs), teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, teachers of the visually impaired, board-certified behavioral analysts, and augmentative and alternative communication specialists. Inclusion in general education has resulted in greater academic growth, increased social and communication skills, improved friendships, and increased self-determination in students with disabilities when compared with self-contained classrooms (Argan et al., 2020; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008). Without solid communication between team members, students are at risk of segregation into more restrictive environments and decreased access to inclusion (Argan et al., 2020). However, there is little insight into general education teachers' perspectives on consultative interactions with special education team members. This research study focuses on the lived experiences of general education teachers in their interactions with special education team members. This chapter will offer background on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom as well as a social, historical, and theoretical background of inclusion. Additionally, the situation to self will be addressed to describe any potential biases and paradigm

of the researcher. Finally, the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions will be presented.

Background

Students with disabilities who receive services through an individualized education program (IEP) are spending increasingly more time in the general education classroom with changes in legislation (Carter et al., 2017). Ideally, inclusive education should include collaboration between and involvement of both special education team members and general education teachers in curriculum design and the instruction of students with disabilities. Further, as federally mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), education should take place in the least restrictive environment (Kuntz & Carter, 2021). Extensive research discusses the social and academic benefits of inclusion for both the students with disabilities and students without disabilities who are educated within an inclusive environment (Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). Despite documented benefits and federal mandates, inclusion rates in the preschool setting grew only 5.7% between 1985 and 2012 (Barton & Smith, 2015). Barriers to successful inclusion include policies, personnel allocations, attitudes and beliefs of professionals, and a lack of collaboration between special education team members and general education teachers (Barton & Smith, 2015). As federal mandates have evolved, the relationship between special education and general education has also evolved.

Historical Context

Teacher reform and a push for special education reform have occurred concurrently (Blanton et al., 2018). For example, the movement for teachers to have a broader general knowledge base began around the same time that IDEA was developed. Additionally, issues

within education follow social trends within the general population; for example, as diversity within culture has increased, so has diversity within public education and the need for cultural competence. From the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 70s came IDEA, a foundational act for special education (Yell et al., 1998).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

During the 1970s, a push for both education reform and teacher preparation programs for general education teachers included advocacy for FAPE for students receiving special education services. Special education and the idea of FAPE were viewed as social justice reform. With the enactment of IDEA in 1975 came federal funding to support the reform and preparation of special education teachers (Blanton et al., 2018). Before IDEA, the question of special education was a "'should we or shouldn't we' question. With IDEA, it became a 'how much and in what ways' question" (Osgood, 2008, p. 118). Federally mandated special education, to the extent that the students could cognitively access it, pushed both general and special education teachers to provide additional support and learning opportunities for these students with collaboration from other special education team members. Collaboration and consultation as a method of teaching were introduced because of an increased need for unity between general and special education teachers to provide a well-rounded curriculum for a student with a diagnosed disability (Blanton et al., 2018; Yell et al., 1998).

Education from 1980 to 1999

Standard teacher education and the need for multicultural education both emerged between 1980 and 1999. Groups were developed to support reform and collaboration between universities and schools. The inclusion of art and science professors within teacher preparation programs ensured teachers had a wide knowledge base upon graduation from these programs.

Although the partnerships were well established between general education and special education, the emphasis on highly qualified, well-rounded teachers with a strong knowledge base existed mostly in general education. General education and special education remained two distinct and parallel professional tracks (Blanton et al., 2018; Kearney, 2020).

Federal policies increased teacher accountability during this phase. Standards for both general education students and general education teachers were clearly outlined; however, how those standards applied to special education teachers and students with disabilities was significantly less clear (Blanton et al., 2018; Kearney, 2020; Yell et al., 1998). Collaboration during this time remained constrained by a difference in policy regarding where children with disabilities received their education as many children continued to receive special education services in substantially separate environments outside of the general education classroom. However, preservice collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members was introduced and heavily focused on by teacher preparatory programs.

No Child Left Behind Act

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was enacted in 2004 in the United States as the next wave of education reform (Blanton et al., 2018). NCLB made the overall achievement of students with disabilities public knowledge and held both general education and special education teachers responsible for the academic achievement of their special education students. Students with and without disabilities were held to grade-level academic standards regardless of their cognitive profile or learning needs. With a shift in how teachers were teaching came a shift in how teacher candidates were being taught within teacher preparation courses. Teacher preparation courses shifted their focus to ensuring that teacher candidates had a deep knowledge

base in general education subject matter and encouraged candidates to seek dual licensure or multiple licenses to generate highly qualified general education and special education teachers.

Present-Day Special Education

When IDEA was enacted in 1975 under the name Education of All Handicapped Children, 8.3% of students enrolled in public schools in the United States were serviced through federally funded special education services (Snyder & de Brey, 2018). Today, 13.8% of students within public education are serviced through federally funded special education programs. Of those students, 63.4% spend over 80% of their school day within the general education class, while 13.3% spend less than 40% of their school day within the general education class.

As students on IEPs are receiving most of their education within the general education classroom, it is increasingly important for general education teachers to understand the relationships and form collaborative relationships with members of their students' special education team to best support the students. Projections indicate an increase in the number of students with disabilities who will receive education within general education classrooms as education reform continues to focus on the least restrictive environment, FAPE, and inclusion (Lucas & Frazier, 2014).

Social Context

Glover et al. (2015) highlighted the importance and benefits of collaboration between special education team members and general education teachers. Both general education teachers and special education team members express a desire for increased training, knowledge, and opportunities for collaborative practice to support shared students (Glover et al., 2015; Kearney 2020). Additionally, challenges such as lack of funding, reduced personnel, and lack of resources have been highlighted as barriers to successful collaboration.

Education reform over the past decade has resulted in the revision of IDEA and NCLB and the adoption of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by 43 states, leading to significant change within the realm of special education. Before these changes, education for students with significant cognitive disabilities was focused on functional academic skills and life skills (Petersen, 2016). These special education teachers had often received no additional training from their teacher preparatory programs, which focused on functional academic skills and life skills rather than the general education curriculum.

Theoretical Context

Evolving educational policy and the shift toward inclusion of students with disabilities resulting from IDEA, NCLB, and CCSS have pushed districts to search for creative and effective ways to facilitate collaboration between special education team members and general education teachers. Co-teaching has allowed general education and special education teachers to collaborate to deliver content-specific instruction to a class of students with and without disabilities by both (Shin et al., 2016). The practice of multiple special education service providers working together to support a student, called interprofessional practice, has been suggested to increase collaboration within education (Pfeiffer et al., 2019). Each of these suggested collaboration methods has been met with significant barriers, including general education teachers' lack of knowledge of curriculum accommodations and modifications and special education teachers' lack of content-area specific knowledge (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Kearney, 2020; Pfeiffer et al. 2019; Pugach & Peck, 2016; Shin et al., 2016). Lack of time, a limited shared vocabulary, lack of administrative support, lack of preparatory program course work, and lack of professional development have also been identified as challenges to effective collaboration between the general education teacher and special education

team members. While barriers and facilitators to the consultation have been explored, little is known about the perceptions of the experiences of general education teachers regarding the outcome of the consultation.

Lee Vygotsky (1978) explored the way individuals learn from, collaborate with, and communicate with others within a social and practical setting. This exploration led to the development of collaboration theory. Within education, special education team members and general education teachers must learn from each other to best support students with disabilities within the general education classroom. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development describes the condition in which an individual can access material or solve a problem when assisted by a more capable person or when engaged in collaborative exchanges. The zone of proximal development can be applied to teacher learning as well, as it can occur during peer-to-peer learning among professionals as opposed to traditional teacher-to-student learning (Kuusisaari, 2014).

This study seeks to provide information on general education teachers' desired outcomes of consultations with special education team members and what the current teacher-identified outcomes of consultations are. Classroom strategies, student-specific information, accommodations, and modifications as well as general disability knowledge will be shared and explored. Vygotsky's collaboration theory and zone of proximal development will provide the theoretical framework for this study. Collaboration theory is rooted in Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development. Collaboration theory posits that learners rely on other learners to accomplish tasks or learning that they would be unable to achieve independently. Information obtained from this study will provide knowledge enabling special education team members to provide more effective and meaningful consultations with general education teachers. Effective communication and collaboration between general education teachers and special education team

members support a comprehensive education program for students diagnosed with disabilities as well as the generalization of skills across multiple environments within the school (Nilsen, 2017; Sundqvist et al., 2014).

Problem Statement

The problem driving this study is that without consultation and collaboration, special education team members and general education teachers take a separate approach to educating students with disabilities, leading to a lack of generalization of taught skills, decreased social opportunities, and decreased academic engagement for students with disabilities (Messiou, 2019; Nilsen, 2017; Olson & Roberts, 2020). Students without disabilities who participate in inclusive classrooms demonstrate increased self-esteem, decreased prejudice, and increased moral and ethical development (Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Fisher et al., 2002). Solid communication between special education team members and general education teachers is imperative. Without strong collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members, students with disabilities are at risk for increased time in substantially separate programs, leading to decreased access to inclusive environments and increased social and academic segregation (Argan et al., 2020).

Special education team members offer explicit, skilled instruction to students with IEPs both within and outside the general education classroom. Consultation between special education team members and general education teachers assists in the generalization of these skills from the small group special education setting to the classroom (Glover et al., 2015). General education teachers and special education team members both report a need for consultation with one another. Additionally, they report understanding the worth and value of consultation. General education teachers and special education team members identify several barriers to

collaborative consultation, including lack of time, lack of administrative support, and lack of
shared vocabulary (Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Jago & Radford, 2017; Kuntz
& Carter, 2021; Idol, 2006; Morfidi & Samaras, 2015; Nilsen, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general
education teachers' lived experiences of consultative interactions with special education team
members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. Communication between
general education teachers and special education team members is critical for special education
students' social and academic engagement within the inclusive setting. Gathering general
education teachers' lived experiences of interactions with special education team members adds
to the literature on the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Successful inclusion
benefits students with and without disabilities both academically and socially (Argan et al., 2020;
Copeland & Cosbey, 2008). The theory that guided this study was Lee Vygotsky's (1978)
collaborative learning theory.

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general
education teachers' lived experience of interactions with special education team members in an
elementary school in an urban area in New England. This study has practical, theoretical, and
empirical significance for general education teachers, special education team members, and
administrators. It serves as part of the emerging research related to consultative practices
between general education teachers and special education team members, allowing for a deeper
understanding of the phenomenon and potentially informing and improving future practices.

Theoretical Significance

This study can benefit other researchers by advancing Lee Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory. The results of this study allow researchers to better understand general education teachers' perspectives of collaboration and consultation with special education team members and how this experience impacts the learning of students with disabilities (Boyle et al., 2011; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Additionally, this research provides insight into Vygotsky's collaboration theory and how it relates to general education teacher and special education team member collaboration to better support generalization and increase academic and social success for students with disabilities within the general education environment (Argan et al., 2020; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008).

Empirical Significance

Previous research has explored the impact of consultation between general education teachers and special education team members and the ability of such consultation to increase the generalization of skills for students with disabilities (Argan et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). Additionally, studies have provided insight into general education teachers' descriptions of consultation and the perceived benefits of consultation (Blanton et al., 2018; Eisenman et al., 2011; Yell et al., 1998). Limited research has explored general education teachers' perspectives on these consultative and collaborative interactions. Knowing the thoughts and perceptions of general education teachers on consultation with special education team members is valuable as it can inform how inclusive school districts can support collaboration and how special education team members and general education teachers can enhance communication to engage in more effective collaboration. Therefore, this study has filled a gap in the literature.

Practical Significance

This study provides valuable information to special education team members on general education teachers' perceptions of consultation. This information could provide a different perspective or framework for special education team members. This new information could shift the current consultation model in a way that will be better suited to the general education teacher and generalization of skills for the student with a diagnosed disability. For administrators, this study provides information regarding teachers' lived experiences of consultation and collaboration and may trigger conversations that could influence policy change around consultation and collaboration (Luddeckens et al., 2021; Pedaste et al., 2021; Smith & Smith, 2000).

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Research Questions

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This research study explored the general education teachers' lived experiences of consultative interactions with special education team members. A transcendental phenomenological research method was utilized to carry out this study. Data were collected through interviews with educators, journal prompts, and document review.

Central Research Question

What is the lived experience of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members?

Sub-Question One

Who do general education teachers perceive as the initiator and facilitator within consultation with special education team members?

Sub-Question Two

From the perspective of the general education educator, what benefits does consultation provide to the team?

Sub-Question Three

What do general education teachers perceive as ways to improve consultation?

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Definitions

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1. *Collaboration theory* – Collaboration theory refers to the interpersonal interaction that occurs in an ongoing manner without a significant power imbalance (Vygotsky, 1978).

2. *Inclusion* – Inclusion means that students with disabilities spend their day in the general education classroom where they receive their instruction (Idol, 2006)

3. *Mainstreaming* – Mainstreaming occurs when students with disabilities spend part of their day in the general education classroom and part of their day in a substantially separate environment (Idol, 2006).

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Summary

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Chapter One of this research study provides an overview of the topic, research problem, significance of this study, and the research questions that guided this study. Consultative interactions between general education teachers and special education team members provide an opportunity to support students with disabilities as they work to generalize skills across a variety of school environments and work toward meaningful inclusion within the general education classroom. Lee Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory explains that new ideas are generated through the engagement of a variety of different individuals within a learning environment. It is not known how general education teachers perceive current outcomes of collaboration and

consultation to support the inclusion of students with diagnosed disabilities and what their desired outcomes may be.

The purpose of this research study was to better understand general education teachers' lived experiences of interactions with special education team members. Educators were asked to share their experiences with consultation and collaboration to support students with disabilities within the general education classroom, providing insight into both theoretical and practical applications. This study is significant to general education teachers, special education team members, and administrators, as it provides a better understanding of consultation and collaboration between general education and special education teachers and the desired outcome of these interactions from the general education teacher's perspective. This study also addresses the significant gap in the literature, as there was little to no previous research detailing general educators' lived experiences within a consultation. This transcendental phenomenological study was conducted in a suburban setting in New England with general education teachers of Grades K-5. Purposeful sampling was used to locate a sample of 10 teachers in elementary school, and data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and journal prompts.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to explore barriers to consultation as well as the perceived efficacy of a variety of consultation methods within special education. This chapter presents a review of the current literature related to the topic of study. In the first section, Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory is discussed. Next, a synthesis of recent literature regarding consultation within special education, modes of consultation, and the benefits of consultation is presented. Lastly, the literature addressing the barriers to effective consultation will be discussed. At the conclusion of Chapter Two, a gap in the literature is identified, presenting a viable need for the current study.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this transcendental phenomenological study will be used to guide the qualitative research process. The theoretical framework provides support for the study as well as a lens through which to view the study. Lee Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory, which identifies the relationship between learning and social interactions with others within the learning environment, will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. Recent policy changes within special education, including NCLB, ESSA, and IDEA, have placed an increased emphasis on consultation and collaboration between special education team members and general education teachers to support students with disabilities within the general education classroom. This movement has created an intersection of learning and social interaction for the special education team members who collaborate with general education teachers to support the implementation of services and the generalization of skills for students with disabilities. In education, the ideas of collaboration theory, as they relate to the relationship between the general

education teacher and the special education team member, can provide detailed information about the experiences of this population and their students. As a result, a better understanding of the criticality of consultation and collaboration can be attained. This understanding can lead to more targeted support and more effective behavioral interventions for educators and their students.

Collaboration Theory

Collaboration within the workplace is rooted in several learning theories, including Lee Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory and collaborative learning theory, the latter of which presents the idea of the zone of proximal development. Social learning theory states that all learning occurs through interaction with others. It is through these social interactions that information is then imprinted in the mental intelligence of the individual (Vygotsky, 1978). The social interactions between individuals, society, and culture all impact what is learned by the individual.

The theory of collaboration addresses three different areas: collaboration, coproduction, and networks (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015). Understanding the first category, collaboration can provide insight into interactions and collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members for the common goal of supporting a child with a diagnosed disability and the child's education within the least restrictive learning environment. Through collaboration, general education teachers and special education team members are more likely to engage higher cognitive processes to problem solve than if they were to individually attempt to solve the problem (Ciconni, 2014).

The process of collaboration can be defined as "arrangements to solve problems that cannot be solved or solved easily by single organizations. Collaborative means to co-labor, to

achieve common goals, often working across boundaries and in multi-sector and multi-actor relationships" (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015, p. 588). Collaboration requires active participation from all involved to create new structures with gained social and organizational capital. During collaboration, all members must be willing to participate and share the responsibility as well as the rewards. All parties invest a significant amount of time to reach a common goal and share mutual trust and respect (Himmelman, 2001; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015). The special education team consists of the service providers on the child's IEP, which may include a special education teacher, special education aide, board-certified behavioral analyst, SLP, occupational therapist, physical therapist, school social worker, deaf and hard of hearing teacher, teacher of the visually impaired, mobility specialists, transition or job coach, and/or augmentative and alternative communication specialists. These members work together to achieve individual goals in their domains; for example, the SLP will work to achieve specific goals and objectives within the domain of speech and language while the occupational therapist works toward goals and objectives targeting fine motor or sensory regulation. Over time, the hope is that the student will transfer these learned skills into the general education classroom, where they can integrate them all. An additional outcome, the generalization of these skills within the general education classroom, is a shared objective among the entire special education team. Effective inclusion will lead to increased social and academic outcomes and increased coordination of services for the student (Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Thomson & Perry, 2006).

Vygotsky's (1978) collaborative learning theory and zone of proximal development were originally focused on the interactions between a child and their peers or adults. Recent research has connected the theories of collaborative learning and zone of proximal development to collaboration and learning within the workplace through adult-to-adult peer interactions and

particularly to adult-to-adult peer interactions within education (Kuusisaari, 2014; Newman & Latifi, 2021; Shabani, 2016). The zone of proximal development, when applied to peer-to-peer interactions between adults in the workforce, can be thought of as the meeting of cognitive, affective, social, and contextual factors within teacher development (Shabani, 2016). Within the educational environment, the zone of proximal development "emphasizes collaboration as a mediating tool" (Kuusisaari, 2014, p. 55).

Collaboration Theory in Inclusion

Inclusive education describes the environment in which students receive special education services within the general education classroom. Principles of inclusion include providing all learners with engaging and challenging but flexible general education, embracing diversity and responsiveness to the strengths and challenges of the individual students, using reflective practices and differentiated instruction, and finally, establishing community-based collaboration with other professionals (Hornby, 2015). "The idea behind inclusion is that every child should be an equally valued member of the school culture" (Dybvik, 2004, p. 45). Becoming a valued member of the school culture means that each student must have access to and be an active participant in their classroom environment academically and socially (Little, 2017). Collaboration is frequently highlighted as an imperative component of successful inclusion, and teachers are encouraged to develop skills that support successful collaboration and consultation (Dybvik, 2004; Hornby, 2014; Little, 2017).

Collaboration theory extends to inclusive education, as many different professionals work together to best support a single student in inclusive education. In addition to specialized professionals, paraeducators often assist students within the inclusive environment with support from special education teachers, SLPs, physical therapists, and behavior analysts. Paraeducators

are often the least trained staff, yet they frequently spend the most time facilitating academic and social inclusion for students with significant disabilities (Dybvik, 2004; Little, 2017). The successful collaboration of teachers and paraprofessionals with special education team members has been shown to increase the instructional options and techniques that can be utilized to educate students with disabilities (Honkasilta et al., 2014; Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Therefore, the successful collaboration of general education teachers and special education team members leads to improved academic outcomes for the student with a disability. In addition to improved academic outcomes, self-esteem and social engagement have been noted to increase for students who are receiving special education services from a team that engages in collaborative practice, while negative behavior incidences were reduced. Successful social inclusion can also be supported through cooperative arrangements and the use of trained aides to facilitate social interactions (Little, 2017). While the benefits of collaboration and consultation are well documented, there continues to be little understanding of the lived experience of those educators participating in collaborative interactions through consultation.

Related Literature

This review of the literature examines collaboration and consultation between general education teachers and special education team members. Historical background of inclusion and the importance of consultation and collaboration, and barriers and facilitating factors within consultation and collaboration will be discussed in this literature review. A detailed overview of studies related to consultation and collaboration within education will be provided to show a gap in the literature that demonstrates the need for this research study.

The Importance of Consultation and Collaboration

Before IDEA was enacted in 1975 under Education for All Handicapped Children Act, teacher preparation programs focused on equipping future special educators with tools and techniques to educate students with disabilities, often in substantially separate classes. Education reform, beginning with IDEA in 1975, shifted the focus of special education to providing FAPE within the least restrictive environment. "The majority of special educators in today's schools are expected to collaborate with general educators to support students from increasingly diverse backgrounds across tiered systems of support, while still providing specialized instruction for students with the most intensive needs" (Shepherd et al., 2016, p. 84). This level of support requires a great deal of collaboration and consultation with between stakeholders in the child's special education team along with significant administrator support at the building, district, and federal levels.

Ritzman et al. (2006) highlighted components of a successful collaborative service delivery model for speech and language interventions, including creative service delivery, curriculum-based intervention, scheduling, collaboration, and advocacy with suggested planning meetings weekly. Administrative support is essential to create time for these weekly meetings; however, at times additional consultation time is needed. With time being one of the most precious commodities in a teacher's world, using communication modes appropriate for consultation is imperative. Although a quick conversation between teachers as they pass in the hallway is communication, it may not be the most effective mode of communication for the recipient as they are unable to take notes. Additionally, these conversations typically constitute information exchange rather than engagement in problem-solving collaboration. Choosing an effective mode of communication for consultation would allow for greater flexibility among

teachers and specialists as well as greater engagement in and comprehension of the exchanged information.

Special education teams frequently consist of a wide variety of specialized staff, including occupational therapists, SLPs, physical therapists, special education teachers, board-certified behavior analysts, school psychologists, student adjustment counselors, teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, vision specialists, and social workers. Collaboration between these specialists is important for the team to be able to support the student's variety of needs consistently throughout the duration of their day and the school year (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Haakma et al., 2021). Additionally, general education teachers should be involved in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of students with disabilities who are receiving instruction in the general education classroom (Kuntz & Carter, 2021). Teachers highlight teacher equality and resource flexibility as benefits of a consultation model and note that the success of educational inclusion is based on effective communication between general education teachers and special education team members (Coben et al., 1997; Eisenman et al., 2011). Research is available regarding the frequency of and satisfaction of parents and educators with collaboration and communication; however, little research exists examining the perceived efficacy of various modes of communication and collaboration (Woods et al., 2018). Through the implementation of various modes of communication and collaboration, barriers such as lack of time can be overcome, increasing communication between general educators and members of the special education team.

Multiple models of service delivery within the collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members exist. A crossdisciplinary approach involves special education team members working directly with students and families without any cross-

communication with other special education team members. A multidisciplinary approach involves special education team members communicating with each other and the family. A transdisciplinary approach involves consultation and collaboration among all special education team members with only one person acting as a direct liaison to the family. A transdisciplinary approach has been found to cultivate an environment of trust and engagement among the team, family members, and liaisons while minimizing repetition or information overload (Bruder, 1998; Forlin, 2007).

Collaborative Practice within Special Education

Collaborative practice and differentiated instruction within education benefits both students receiving special education services within the general education classroom and students not currently identified for special education services. All children learn differently; therefore, resources and support that allow general education teachers to cultivate and teach to these unique learning styles are important for them to successfully educate students with varying learning abilities and styles (Boyle et al., 2011; Moolenaar et al., 2012). Additionally, focusing academic skills as well as larger, transferable skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking skills can assist teachers in educating and providing engaging instruction for students with varying academic skill levels. Independent thinking encouraged through a variety of cognitive strategies can increase a student's self-esteem and self-advocacy skills as well as improve academics.

The interaction of giving and seeking advice inherently rests in a relationship with some amount of trust. When asking for advice, an advice seeker expects the advisor to possess potentially beneficial knowledge and indicates to the advice-giver a desire to learn and improve (Zagenczyk et al., 2008). As teachers engage with other professionals through advice-seeking

relationships, they develop a stronger sense of team and sense of support. The presence of support, interdependency, and teamwork among teachers has been associated with increased student achievement outcomes for all students receiving education in that classroom (Moolenaar et al., 2012).

Through the development of a community of practice, the thinking that informs inclusive education and inclusive practice can be targeted to effect change within school-based education (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010; Wenger, 1998). Within the community of practice, strategies that have been developed for implementation within an organization can be coded and reviewed. This review of active practices and intentions allows the community of practice to create a comparison between intentions and current practices. Through this code, the implications of specific strategies can be clarified and discussed amongst colleagues (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). Through consideration of the social process of learning, methodology for collaboration and inclusive practices can be developed to address issues such as classroom management, adaptation of curricula, and assessment and instruction of students (Scruggs et al., 2007). The community of practice should include special education team members serving students with disabilities and other key stakeholders, including the general education teachers providing instruction within the general education environment. Support from key personnel is valuable, as is sufficient time to communicate and plan instruction. Effective facilitation of the meetings by personnel such as a school psychologist who can link general education and special education is necessary (Solis et al., 2012).

Teacher Attitudes Towards Inclusion

Teacher attitudes on inclusion are key factors in student achievement within a collaborative working environment (Scruggs et al., 2007). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion

and their willingness to implement inclusive practices are the biggest predictors of inclusive education success. Teachers' views of inclusion are generally positive; however, concerns regarding the implementation of inclusion often arise. Concerns including the shared nature of the workload, possession of collaborative teaching skills, and clarity of roles within a collaborative environment have been identified (Damore & Murray, 2009; Foley & Mundschenk, 1997; Mitchell et al., 2019). General education teachers understand their role of accommodating and modifying instruction for students with and without disabilities to access instruction. However, less than 50% of general education teachers report feeling comfortable carrying out this role, demonstrating that while the teachers are willing to take on this responsibility, they do not feel confident in their ability to succeed in supporting students with disabilities (Damore & Murray, 2009; DeSimone & Parmar, 2006).

Bandura (1997) showed that when teachers perceive they are effective within an inclusive classroom, they create a more inclusive environment for students. An educator who demonstrates high efficacy in inclusive practices would then believe that a student with disabilities could be successfully educated within an inclusive environment, whereas teachers with low efficacy in the implementation of inclusive practices would believe that there was little that they could do to include a student with disabilities in the general education classroom (Sharma et al., 2012). Additionally, Kochhar et al. (2000) found that negative teacher beliefs and feelings were one of the three major barriers to inclusive education, with lack of training and lack of support and time from administration and special education team members noted as two other barriers.

While teacher attitudes toward inclusive education vary, they typically develop their views early in their professional career. Once these attitudes towards inclusive education are established, they are challenging to change through professional development and work

experience (Pajares, 1992). In contrast to Pajares (1992), Parchomiuk (2019) concluded that characteristics such as empathy can develop and change across one's lifespan. Personal experiences, course work, professional development, and literature exposure can influence personal qualities and characteristics such as empathy toward students with disabilities (Parchomiuk, 2019). Teachers that demonstrated greater empathy across all aspects of their personality also demonstrated increased empathy toward individuals with disabilities.

The principal's attitude toward inclusion substantially influences the attitudes of everyone in the building toward inclusion. Principals are able to align special education team members' schedules with general education teachers' schedules to allow for shared planning time. In addition to shared planning time, aligned schedules can also allow teachers time to engage in building-level professional development to support inclusive education and to build an sense of community where all educators take responsibility for the education of each student. Generating a sense of collective responsibility for the education of all students among special education team members and general education teachers is a key role of the principal for inclusion success. In addition to increased success of inclusive education, a sense of collective responsibility for student education through collaboration can also increase teacher longevity within schools (Billingsley et al., 2020). Creating a culture of support and collaboration for all students regardless of their abilities involving all staff regardless of their title sets the stage for a school community rooted in collaborative ideologies, benefitting both students and staff.

Consultation within Special Education

Special education teachers, general education teachers, aides, occupational therapists, physical therapists, SLPs, teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing, teachers of the visually impaired, school psychologists, school social workers, parents, and additional service providers

must all collaborate to provide the most comprehensive educational program for a child with special education needs (Friend et al., 2010; Lerner, 1971; Lombardo, 1980; H. B. Robinson & Robinson, 1965). Consultation and collaboration among these stakeholders are important to creating a comprehensive education program for the child. Collaboration and consultation allow stakeholders to coordinate, plan, and deliver services to students with disabilities within the school environment; however, most consultation exchanges within public schools occur to transmit information rather than engage in a problem-solving exchange (Foley & Mundschenk, 1997).

The importance and impact of consultation are clearly evident in light of the documented impact of partner training for children who use alternative and augmentative communication devices to communicate. When a communication partner participated in consultation and training on communication strategies, individuals demonstrated gains in pragmatic language, expressive and receptive vocabulary, syntax, and morphology (Sennott et al., 2016). With these documented language gains and a significant portion of academics, if not all academics, rooted in language, it is reasonable that consultation and collaboration would likely increase gains across multiple domains for the student when executed correctly.

Characteristics of Effective Consultation

An emphasis on collaboration within inclusive education was reported by 65% of special education teachers within their school (Stelitano et al., 2020). A foundation in interpersonal skills, administrative support, and mutual respect among stakeholders support effective collaboration and consultation centered on problem-solving exchanges rather than simply information transfer. Interpersonal skills practiced within effective collaborative consultation include active listening, empathy, positive attitudes, assertiveness, gaining information through

questioning, and obtaining an outcome that is beneficial to all involved through negotiation (Alghazo & Alkhazaleh, 2021; Solis et al., 2012; Tod et al., 2019). In addition to a strong knowledge of special education and curriculum modification, special education teachers must also possess strong interaction skills to engage in consultation (Takala et al., 2009).

A key goal of consultation should be to empower and instill teacher independence when educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Witt & Martens, 1988). Special education team members should be aware that implicit and explicit expert status is often conferred upon them by the education system, as school districts may pay experts at higher salaries or require higher degrees to obtain entry-level positions on special education teams. Additionally, special education team members often provide prescribed interventions within and outside of the general education classroom, which contributes to their status as an expert (Pugach & Johnson, 1989). The strongest single influence on inclusion success and teacher independence within inclusive education is the "principal's role as a norm setter in a school" (Smith & Smith, 2000, p. 171). Other factors enabling collaboration include increased available time for professionals as well as close professional interactions between colleagues. Additionally, shared language and shared understanding of roles as well as similar beliefs and an understanding of individual responsibility aid facilitate a collaborative environment. The presence of policies and frameworks that encourage collaborative practice also increases collaboration (Glover et al., 2015).

Aspects of effective collaboration include "parity, mutual goals, shared responsibility in decision-making, shared resources and accountability, and valuing of personal interactions" (L. Robinson & Buly, 2007, p. 84). While necessary for an effective collaborative relationship, these qualities take time and communication to establish. Since many special education team members

cover more than one building within a school district, finding shared planning time between professionals to collaborate is often one of the biggest barriers to collaboration. Individuals with frequent communication report the highest rates of satisfaction within collaborative exchanges and relationships (Woods et al., 2018). Additionally, preferences for type of collaboration vary, with some general education teachers preferring more causal communication to avoid feeling overwhelmed. Other collaborative teams prefer more formal communication rooted in shared technical language. Establishing strong rapport, agreeing upon style, type, and frequency of communication, and identifying the role of each team member within collaboration will benefit the team and support a stronger collaborative relationship. In this age of technology, professionals have even more modes of communication available for use, including emails, phone calls, video modeling, video chats, and scheduled face-to-face meetings to consider when discussing mode, frequency, and style of communication for the team.

Communication topic, mode, and frequency all impact family and teacher perceptions of home and school communication. Parents of younger students report increased communication with the school-based team as well as greater satisfaction with the school-based team than parents of older students. Additionally, parents of children with more significant disabilities report increased frequency of communication with the school-based team. Regardless of the student's age or disability, parents reported decreased satisfaction with the school-based team when communication frequently centered on conduct or behavioral challenges. Teachers reported consistently higher rates of satisfaction than parents with home-school communication regardless of the age of the child, the severity of the disability, or behavior challenges (Woods et al., 2018).

Mutual Respect

Mutual respect within consultation and collaboration is defined as a relationship where both parties see the other as equal and show appreciation (Douglas et al., 2016; Pugach & Johnson, 1989). Collaboration should be rooted in problem-solving, with all members of the team adopting the attitude that they have something to teach and something to learn from each team member. There are many ways to cultivate a relationship with mutual respect. Douglas et al. (2016) found that showing appreciation or only asking other team members to complete tasks that one would be willing to do oneself can help to establish a respectful relationship.

One way to build mutual respect is through "rule-bending behavior." Rule-bending occurs when one professional slightly bends a rule to allow another professional to make a valuable contribution to a student's education (Verdon et al., 2016). Rule-bending behavior refers to a professional's ability to work outside organizational constraints that may not be in the best interest of the child's education. While rule-bending behavior may be one way to facilitate mutual respect, those who engage in it must walk a fine line between supportive and productive practice and destructive conduct with ethical implications (Edwards, 2009). An additional way to gain mutual respect is through observation and discussion with team members. When members of the team engage in conversation surrounding their experiences and challenges, the social, cultural, and political context of the collaborative team can be established, which can help support future collaborative and consultative exchanges.

One practice that can harm efforts to establish a mutually respectful relationship is adopting the role of the expert (Pugach, 1989; Pugach & Johnson, 1989). When a team member adopts the role of expert, the group dynamic shifts from mutually respectful with a focus on problem-solving where each team member is a valuable member to a dynamic of one team

member leading, facilitating, and making the decisions as the expert. When a team member adopts the role of expert, a mutually respectful relationship will be incredibly hard to maintain. Rather than the role of expert, a shared responsibility or "culture of we" must be adopted for effective collaboration within inclusive education (Rock et al., 2016). One study identified a key to systemic change within inclusive education to be the strengths and skills of all educators involved in the change (Fullan, 2011). These findings show that no entity on the team is more important or more powerful than another and all are necessary for effective and systemic change.

Administrative Support

Research supports the value of collaboration (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Haakma et al., 2021; Ritzman et al., 2006; Rock et al., 2016; Shepherd et al., 2016); however, general education teachers and special education team members also report a significant level of concern regarding systemic supports for deep and effective collaboration (Fowler, 2019). Support of administrators, particularly building principals, is a large predictor of inclusive education success and acceptance within the school (Pedaste et al., 2021; Smith & Smith, 2000). Principals can engage with both general education and special education staff within the school, influence educator schedules and shared planning time, and participate in the creation of professional development to support a more inclusive environment. Principals who adopt social justice and inclusion as a school culture tend to promote inclusive education with support from characteristics such as moral and ethical integrity embedded into strong leadership practices (Luddeckens et al., 2021).

When considering inclusive educational practices, principals must take into consideration building support, teacher relationships, and student diagnoses. Additionally, principals must consider others factors that influence student learning such as their economic, social, and cultural backgrounds (Srivastava & Shree, 2019). Authentic leadership can increase administrator

involvement in and support of inclusive education as well as support administrator engagement with the school community, including parents. Authentic leadership requires the principal to have strong self-knowledge and sensitivity toward the understanding of others to support the implementation of practices which influence student academic and social development (Srivastave & Shree, 2019).

Administrative support can lead to more positive working conditions for both special education team members and general education teachers. Improved working conditions have been documented to decrease educator burnout, especially in special education team members who are servicing students with disabilities that often present with significant challenges such as emotional or behavioral disabilities or autism spectrum disorders (Aldosiry, 2021; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020). The involvement of highly effective school leaders such as principals within the work of special education team members can provide additional resources and professional development and improve the working conditions for both the special education team members and general education teachers (Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020). Principal support can also help to alleviate work-related stress related to unmanageable caseloads, paperwork, lack of time for planning and collaborating, and challenges in educating students across a range of grades (Aldosiry, 2020; Bettini et al., 2017). While principals are responsible for creating an environment to support collaboration, teachers and special education team members are responsible for developing interpersonal skills that support effective collaboration and consultation (Bettini et al., 2017).

Interpersonal Skills

Consultation is a human-to-human interaction with a goal of problem-solving rather than information exchange. Collaborative problem solving involves equal parts social skills and

cognitive skills (Chen et al., 2020). Social regulation skills supporting collaborative problem solving include negotiation, self-evaluation, transactive memory, and responsibility initiative. Additional identified skills include goal setting, analyzing of problems, management of resources, collection of information, demonstration of flexibility, and use of systematic approach to problem-solving.

Special education team members who consider themselves strong communicators and accomplished collaborators have been shown to more frequently engage in collaborative and consultative exchanges with general education teachers (Griffin et al., 2009). Communication strategies including modeling, role-playing, and providing feedback were found to be effective for teaching or explaining new techniques to others within education (Brock et al., 2017). While these are effective strategies for implementing systems or programs, skills to support collaboration also must be cultivated within school-based staff.

Additional skills to support collaboration include recognizing the variety of professional roles within the collaborative team, strong communication skills, the ability to engage in problem-solving processes within a team, and strong conflict resolutions processes (Foley & Mundschenk, 1997). Collaborative consultation must include team members who are true collaborators rather than having one member take on the role of expert (Pugach, 1989). Consultation must be a mutual and reciprocal practice rooted in shared respect and professionals learning from each other to be successful (Pugach, 1989). Teachers who possess a strong work ethic as well as strong knowledge of current trends in both general education and special education embody qualities that support successful collaboration. Characteristics such as honesty, passion for educating students with disabilities, confidence, and the capacity to build

strong working relationships also support collaboration within inclusive education (Bettini et al., 2017).

Collaborative problem-solving is the process in which an individual identifies a discrepancy between what is currently occurring and the desired outcome (Chen et al., 2020; Hesse et al., 2015). For problem-solving to occur in a collaborative environment, the general education teacher and special education team members must agree on the desired goal. Through observing, processing information, analyzing observations, identifying conclusions, and reflecting on the process, general education teachers and special education team members can engage in collaborative problem-solving exchanges during a consultation (Chen et al., 2020).

Shared Time

Creating an organized system of collaboration involves considering the above factors of interpersonal skills, administrative support, and mutual respect as well as shared time for the special education team members and general education teacher to engage in collaboration. Collaborative time to engage in conversation with other professionals for both problem-solving and reflection has been shown to generate professional growth and change (Hontvedt et al., 2021). Additionally, teams who participate in ongoing consultation and collaboration educate students with improved outcomes. Kuntz and Carter (2021) found that students of general education teachers and special education team members who participated in ongoing consultation to implement a plan for students with significant disabilities met 67 out of 69 targeted benchmarks at the end of the study. Students with and without disabilities have benefitted both academically and socially from increased collaboration and consultation between special education team members and general education teachers. When students participate in a classroom where the teacher and special education teacher engage in collaborative planning, the

students with and without disabilities experience reduced time not engaged in learning experiences and increased interactions with teachers and peers (Hunt et al., 2003).

The social and academic benefits of collaboration within inclusive education for students with and without disabilities are well documented in the literature (Hunt et al., 2003; Kuntz & Carter, 2021). Benefits for professional practice are also clear for both special education team members and general education teachers who participate in collaborative practice and problem-solving. Additionally, teachers who participate in regular collaborative exchanges with peers are more likely to implement new ideas than teachers who do not participate in regular collaboration (Hontvedt et al., 2021). Having scheduled collaborative time is reflected positively by all involved. Educators involved describe a sense of support and community following collaboration. Additionally, educators report feelings of appreciation for colleagues for taking the time to help problem-solve (Hontvedt et al., 2021). Ongoing support from the administration is imperative to ensure that general education teachers and special education team members have overlapping planning time scheduled on an ongoing basis to continuously support the implementation of inclusive education for students with disabilities (Kuntz & Carter, 2021).

Barriers to Collaboration

Collaboration must be built on some semblance of shared knowledge among the collaborative team. Special education team members have expressed frustration in regard to general education teachers' understanding of how special education works and what it looks like (Iadarola et al., 2015). Using strategies such as establishing a shared goal or vision within a collaborative interaction can be a powerful experience for all team members and help to set a foundation of a shared understanding (Broxterman & Whalen, 2013). Shared goals or visions

ensure the entire team is working with one common focus. Defining team member roles and responsibilities can also support shared understanding and a common goal or vision.

Changing policy in education due to IDEA, NCLB, and CCSS has caused districts to search for creative and effective ways to shift education and service delivery. Some districts have implemented coteaching when possible. Coteaching is the delivery of content-specific instruction to a class of students with and without disabilities by both general education and special education teacher. Shin et al. (2016) examined general education teachers' and special education teachers' perceptions of co-teaching. Both groups identified communication, meeting the needs of students with diverse learning profiles, personalities, challenges with coteaching, and changed views on collaboration. Special education teachers perceived general education teachers' lack of knowledge on curriculum accommodations and modifications as a challenge, while general education teachers expressed special education teachers' lack of content knowledge as an area of challenge in coteaching. Lack of time for coplanning was also identified as a challenge.

Glover et al. (2015) highlighted that the inclusion of a student receiving special education can be aided by regular collaboration between teachers and their colleagues. Both teachers and SLPs reported a desire for better collaborative practices within education. In this study, barriers to successful collaborative practice included a lack of communication between teachers and their colleagues, lack of time for in-person conversations, different frameworks and models among professionals, and differences in the content addressed by teachers and their colleagues (Glover et al., 2015). Teachers report a challenge in developing professional relationships with all those they collaborate with. Barriers to relationships include large age differences, differences in work ethic, and lack of professionalism (Douglas et al., 2016). Additional identified barriers include teachers' lack of knowledge surrounding diagnoses that negatively impact a student's ability to

access curriculum, the needs, role, and responsibility of special education team members, and differing philosophies and terminology (Jago & Radford, 2017; Morfidi & Samaras, 2015).

Teacher Preparatory Course Work and Preservice Learning Experiences

The influence of general education teachers' attitude on inclusion success is well documented, as is the impact of general education teachers' experiences on their attitude toward inclusive education (Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Kuntz & Carter, 2021; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). It is known that teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education form early in their careers and are challenging to change (Carroll et al., 2003). General education teacher preparatory programs and programs preparing professionals on the special education team continue to run using separate models with no crossover or collaboration. This separation solidifies the idea that each specialty is incredibly different and decreases collaboration between professions. Wilson et al. (2016) acknowledged the lack of collaboration between general education teacher preparatory programs and programs preparing professionals who will be part of a special education team. They sought to evaluate the impact of a shared collaborative experience between speech-language pathology students and general education teaching students in the realm of literacy development. Specifically, the impact this shared experience could have on these students' social inclusion and learning was explored. Students found that when they learned material in mixed groups, their comprehension of the presented material as well as their ability to problem solve increased.

Participation in preservice service-based learning experiences has been studied in both general education and special education, including in programs developing special education teachers, occupational therapists, and SLPs (Wilson et al., 2016). General education teachers' preservice experiences have been found to increase their openness and positive thoughts

regarding having a student with a disability enrolled in their general education classroom (Lucas & Frazier, 2014). A larger influence on individual's attitude toward individuals with special education is that individual's disposition. It is important to note that teacher dispositions are fluid and evolving. These evolving dispositions mean a teacher could enter a teacher preparatory course with one set of dispositions and leave the course with changed or evolved dispositions. Lucas and Frazier (2014) found that teachers who believed in the integration of students with disabilities demonstrated increased inclusive behaviors in practice.

Modes of Consultation

Collaboration trends between SLPs and general education teachers have evolved as special education policy and practice has changed (Glover et. al., 2015). Most general education teachers reported that they had more students in their classrooms that would benefit from speech and language services than were receiving them. Through collaboration and consultation, tiered intervention could be offered to these identified students to support their language development without increasing the caseload of the SLP. "Teachers and SLPs both agreed that there was limited time to meet, plan, discuss, or collaborate which affected their relationship and in turn, their ability to collaborate" (Glover et al., 2015, p. 375). As in-person collaboration and consultation can be challenging, a variety of alternatives have emerged, particularly as technology has become more embedded within the curriculum. Video modeling, email, phone call, survey, and form consultation have all been implemented, as have cotreatment and interprofessional collaboration.

Interprofessional Collaboration

Interprofessional practice is an additional collaboration technique available to special education team members to better serve students on IEPs. Per IDEA, interprofessional practice

and collaboration is best practice when both evaluating and treating a student with a disability. Collaboration is defined as "direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work towards a common goal" (Pfeiffer et al., 2019, p. 640). Collaboration within the schools is emphasized by policymakers due to the wide range of professionals within a special education team working to provide students with comprehensive access to the curriculum in the least restrictive environment.

The concept of interprofessional collaboration emphasizes the creation of a shared learning experiences and shared vocabulary by two different fields that work closely together, such as special education and speech-language pathology (Wilson et al., 2016). When special education teacher students and speech-language pathology students shared a preservice experience, both the special education students and the speech-language pathology students demonstrated increased knowledge in literacy development through shared learning, discussions, and common experiences. In addition to increased knowledge, the students demonstrated increased comprehension of targeted concepts following a shared interprofessional practice experience.

Interprofessional practice requires professionals to work together with one another as well as with the families of the students they are serving. Interprofessional practice is more commonly seen in students with severe disabilities; however, it can benefit students with moderate and mild disabilities as well. The results of one study showed that when parents are consulted regarding their perception of interprofessional collaboration, they frequently report a feeling of frustration (Cooper-Duffy & Eaker, 2017). To establish a sense of team, four competencies must be addressed: "values and ethics of interprofessional teamwork and team-

based care, roles and responsibilities, communication, and team-based care" (Cooper-Duffy & Eaker, 2017, p. 183).

Successfully implementing interprofessional collaborative practice requires support from administrators, who must provide time for professionals to participate in team-building exercises, support for professional development to create systems, and the opportunity for professionals to develop a shared vocabulary, as well as define roles and expectations. Similar attitudes and respect toward other professional disciplines as well as the practicing discipline of each educator will also support positive educator and student outcomes within interprofessional teams (Morrison et al., 2011). Critical thinking skills, including strong listening and comprehension skills, along with generating responses that are meaningful and salient to the discussion also create a strong interprofessional team. When trusting relationships are developed within interprofessional collaboration, conflicts are easily resolved among team members, and students demonstrate increased success (Miolo & DeVore, 2016).

The need for collaboration and communication is documented through literature (Petersen, 2016), as is the need for professional development surrounding consultation and collaboration (Sundqvist, 2019). When teachers and special education team members are provided with shared professional development surrounding consultation and collaboration as well as interprofessional collaboration, they can begin to form collaborative relationships based on a shared experience of professional development.

Training Staff

"Collaboration is highly valued in the discipline of special education; however, teachers traditionally are trained to work with students rather than adults" (Compton et al., 2015, p. 255). A four-stage problem-solving process can be implemented by special education team members

and general education teachers within consultation and collaborating. The first step of this problem-solving process involved identifying the problem and the second step requiring the consultees to analyze the problem and set a goal. During step three, intervention is implemented, and finally, the problem is evaluated during step four (Sundqvist, 2019).

Staff training is traditionally provided via an in-person model; however, Tomlinson et al. (2018) explored the efficacy of using telehealth to provide training for the implementation of applied behavioral analysis techniques for students with autism spectrum disorders. Telehealth was found to be effective avenue for providing training for this purpose. Barriers to teaching via telelhealth included technological challenges, the need to protect confidentiality, and the logistics of the use of telehealth equipment. It was found that all barriers and challenges were able to be overcome, making telehealth a reasonable modality for the training of teachers and aides (Tomlinson et al., 2018).

In addition to telehealth, video modeling, self-monitoring, and prompting have also been proven to be effective modalities for teacher training (Andersson et al., 2022; Zoder-Martell et al., 2019). When the teachers were not completing training through video modeling, self-monitoring, and prompting, they struggled to implement the targeted technique within the classroom. "It is important that consultants establish the most time and resource-efficient training strategies" (Zoder-Martell, 2019, p. 332). A narrow focus or subject for professional development as well as a small group of participants and integration of professional development into teaching practice were also shown to improve the outcomes of teacher training for both educators and students (Andersson et al., 2022). In some situations, in-person training is not the most time-efficient methodology, and other modalities need to be explored and considered. Since

the efficacy of video modeling and self-monitoring for teacher training has been proven, these

methods can now be explored for training purposes.

Variables related to the outcome of partner training include time for the special education

team member and general education teacher to engage in training, special education team

member comfort level with training partners, and the use of integrated technology for partner

training (Kent-Walsh et al., 2015). Inclusion of partner training coursework in general education

teacher and special education team member preparation programs would ensure that incoming

special education team members have the knowledge and competence to train communication

partners. Professional advocacy for adequate partner training time that cites the literature

surrounding the benefit of communication partner training should be implemented.

Video Modeling

Video modeling as a means of educating students is becoming a more common practice

in the field of special education (Bellini & Akullian, 2007). The idea of using video modeling to

provide consultation and instruction to general education teachers is relatively new. In one study,

general education teachers reported benefitting from video modeling, as they were able to review

their sessions and have the video function as performance feedback. When video feedback

accompanies verbal coaching, implementation checklists, and modeling, the strategy is

incredibly effective for teaching new skills to general education teachers (Brock et al., 2018).

Luck et al. (2018) found that when teachers were offered a choice of verbal, written, or

video feedback, the teachers overwhelming chose verbal feedback. While verbal feedback may

be preferred, in the current school environments where many professionals are stating a greater

need for consultation, incorporating video modeling may be a solution to the barrier of lack of

time. All feedback methods evaluated in this study demonstrated equal ability to hone skills from

the targeted training with the teachers. Teachers likely prefer verbal feedback because they can immediately ask questions during feedback sessions, a point which should be considered when scheduling consultation within schools (Luck et al., 2018).

Virtual Coaching

The idea of virtual coaching as a means of consultation and furthering the development of educational professionals was explored by Israel et al. (2012). Literature supports virtual coaching as a way to provide immediate feedback that influences teachers' instructional behaviors. One model of virtual coaching consists of four steps. First, remote classroom observations are completed; next, shared goals are set. Following classroom observations and goal-setting, ongoing professional development takes place. Finally, reflection on initial goals completes the virtual coaching process. The first step, remote classroom observations, allows the coach to observe the teacher in action and provide videos for the coach and teacher to review together during feedback sessions. Israel et al. (2012) found instructional trends emerging from video observation of new special education teachers include challenges with efficient classroom structure, missed opportunities for natural communication, and narrow focus. The second step, shared goal setting, requires reflective practice between the mentee and mentor as well as the establishment of shared areas for improvement. The third step integrates ongoing professional education with "bug in the ear" intervention, when the mentee wears a small earpiece, and the mentor delivers real-time feedback. The final step of virtual coaching involves allowing the coach and new teacher the opportunity to sit down and review material (Israel et al., 2012)

The benefits of virtual coaching include that it allows the professionals to work in different buildings, which often occurs, particularly in smaller school districts where schools do not provide a full-time caseload for an occupational therapist, speech therapist, or physical

therapist. Virtual coaching continues to involve time from both the special education team member as well as the general education teacher, a previously identified barrier to consultation and collaboration.

Summary

The value of collaborative learning is clear through current research studies. General education and special education collaboration and consultation have also been prioritized through recent changes in educational policy including IDEA, NCLB, and ESSA to support students with disabilities receiving FAPE in the least restrictive environment. The benefits of inclusion of students with disabilities have been noted for both students with diagnosed disabilities and their typically developing peers. Collaboration theory, conceptualized by Lee Vygotsky (1978), guided this study in examining collaboration and consultation between general education teachers and special education team members.

Several themes emerged from the review of the literature centering on the value of consultation and collaboration between general education and special education team members as well as the benefit of inclusion for both students with diagnosed disabilities and students without disabilities. Barriers to successful consultation and collaboration were also identified, as were characteristics and factors facilitating successful inclusion. Finally, various modes of collaboration were examined to support collaboration and consultation through a variety of methods that can accommodate members of the special education team.

Collaboration and consultation between general education teachers and special education team members create a foundation of communication to support the student with disabilities as they work to generalize skills across all school-based environments and to achieve true social inclusion (Argan et al., 2020). The benefits of increased academic and social success for students

with disabilities are well documented. Increased development of acceptance, morals, and ethical codes for typically developing students who participated in inclusive environments is also well documented (Argan et al., 2020; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008).

Barriers to successful collaboration such as limited shared vocabulary, lack of administrative support, lack of shared planning time, and lack of communication were well documented within research (Glover et al., 2015; Jago & Radford, 2017; Morfidi & Samaras, 2015). Given the benefits of collaboration and its importance within the school environment, comparatively little time is spent discussing consultation methods and models in teacher preparatory programs and professional development (Pfeiffer et al., 2019). Additionally, facilitators for successful collaboration and consultation such as increased shared planning time, shared language, shared understanding of roles, and similar beliefs and shared responsibility are clearly evident within research (Glover et al., 2015; Woods et al., 2018). However, teachers' lived experiences of consultation and collaboration within an inclusive school in urban New England and the perceived goal of the consultation are not well documented.

The goal of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand teachers' lived experiences in consultation and collaboration. Additionally, the outcomes of current consultation models as well as teachers' ideal consultation outcomes were explored. This research study sought to help close the gap in the research on collaboration and consultation between general education teachers and special education team members.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine general education teachers' perceptions of consultation with the special education team members at an elementary school in an urban area in New England. This study provided insight into general education teachers' consultation experiences to better support students within their classroom who receive special education services delivered via an IEP. This chapter contains several subsections: design, research questions, setting, and participants. The researcher's positionality, interpretive framework, philosophical assumptions, and researcher's role are explained. Additionally, procedures, permissions, a recruitment plan, and a data collection plan including data analysis are detailed. Finally, trustworthiness, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and ethical considerations are explained. The study was conducted at Liberty Elementary with a purposive sample of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All necessary ethical principles were honored during and after data collection.

Research Design

Qualitative research inquiry guided data collection for this study, which consists of interpretive practices involving field notes, interviews, photographs, and recordings. Qualitative research allowed the phenomena to be experienced in their natural setting while the researcher attempted to make sense of it or interpret it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Collaborative learning theory and the idea of zone of proximal development were also applied to this study to assess the phenomenon (Vygotsky, 1978).

The purpose of qualitative research is to identify themes from data collected in natural settings. A case study qualitative research design explores a single case within a real-life context

over time. A case can be an individual, group, or organization (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For the targeted research questions explored through this study, the ability to examine a group over time was not necessary; therefore, a case study design would not have been an appropriate methodology for this study.

In phenomenological research, others' experiences with a determined phenomenon are explored. Phenomenological research seeks to identify themes from the experiences of several individuals regarding their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenological research is rooted in philosophy, with discussions of basic ideas involved in conducting the study. The research in turn focuses on both subjective and objective experiences of the participants. Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), a German mathematician, is credited as the founder of phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The targeted outcome of this phenomenological research studuy was to describe what was experienced and how people experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's concept of transcendental phenomenology described intentionality and the inability to separate ourselves from the world (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). The first step of a transcendental phenomenological study is epoché. During epoché, the researcher works to learn to see things in a new way, staying away from the ordinary way of perceiving things. In epoché, the researchers' experiences, assumptions, and everyday understandings are set aside, allowing the phenomenon to be viewed with a fresh perspective. This process begins with the researcher explaining their experiences with the phenomenon and setting aside their own views before continuing to describe the lived experience of the study participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Transcendental-phenomenological reduction can begin after epoché has been completed. During this process, "each experience is considered in its singularity, in and for itself"

(Moustakas, 1994, p. 34). Variations, thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and sounds of each experience are described completely. A complete description from an open self allows meanings and essences to be derived by analyzing data for significant statements and quotes and then organizing those statements into themes. A textual description of the participants' experience is developed from transcendental-phenomenological reduction. After a textural description is developed, the researcher engages in imaginative variation to generate a structural description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon, seeking to present a complete picture of experiences and conditions before the phenomenon. Integration of structural essences and textural essences generates a "textural-structural synthesis of meanings and essences of the phenomenon or experience being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 36). This textural-structural synthesis creates an overall essence of the studied phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994).

I was able to grasp the essence of the identified phenomenon through a phenomenological research approach. This approach was appropriate to gain additional information on teachers' lived experiences of consultation with special education team members at Liberty Elementary School. A transcendental phenomenological design was appropriate for this study, as it allowed me to better understand how general education teachers described their consultative experiences with special education team members. It also allowed social, personal, and institutional factors that impact consultation to be considered (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas focused on Husserl's concept of epoché. Using epoché, I was able to set aside my personal experiences and beliefs regarding consultation. Transcendental research allows "researchers to determine what an experience means for individuals who have had an experience with the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). By identifying the essence of a general education

teacher's lived experience with consultation with special education team members, policies and practices for consultation can be developed to better form a working collaboration. This working collaboration in turn supports the generalization of skills across environments for students with disabilities who receive services through IEPs.

Research Questions

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members at Liberty Elementary School in New England. The research questions consisted of one central question and three guiding questions. The central research question allowed me to explore general education teachers' overall lived experiences in interactions with special education team members. The three guiding questions provided an opportunity to gain additional information regarding the general education teachers' experiences.

Central Research Question

What is the lived experience of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members?

Sub-Question One

Who do general education teachers perceive as the initiator and facilitator within consultation with special education team members?

Sub-Question Two

From the perspective of the general education teacher, what benefits does consultation provide to the team?

Sub-Question Three

What do general education teachers perceive as ways to improve consultation?

Setting and Participants

Liberty Elementary School (pseudonym) is an elementary school in an urban area in New England with a current enrollment of 353 students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Of the currently enrolled students, over half of the students identify as white, with Asian students making up the next largest percent of students followed by Hispanic students, African American students, and Native American students making up the smallest student population. Additionally, over half of the school population is identified as "high needs," with over one quarter of the entire student population qualifying as economically disadvantaged, over one third of the entire student population speaking a first language other than English, just under one fifth of the student population qualifying as English language learners, and just under one fifth of the student population being identified as students with disabilities (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).

Setting

The site was selected for the study because a large percentage of the student population has been identified as high needs, and students with disabilities are present at a percentage equivalent to the state average (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). Students are identified as high needs if they are designated as low income, economically disadvantaged, are a current or former ELL student, or have been diagnosed with a disability. Of the Liberty Elementary School population, 55.8% have been designated as high needs, compared to 33% of students in the district and 51% of students in the state (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). This leads to the general education teachers needing to support a significant percentage of high-needs students, as not all student identified as high needs qualify for support from special education teachers

(Hoglund et al., 2015; Maqsood et al., 2020).

Liberty Elementary School is located within a school district educating a total of approximately 13,000 students. The district is run by a superintendent. Elementary education is supervised by an assistant superintendent who oversees all elementary school principals. The director of student services oversees the multiple program directors for special education. There is one special education program director for Liberty Elementary School and one principal who oversee the 25.8 teachers. Of the 25 full-time teachers, 17 are general education teachers, seven are special education teachers, and 3 are English learner teachers. Additionally, 2 speech-language pathologists, 1 school psychologist, 1 social worker, and 1 occupational therapist are employed to support students at Liberty Elementary School. A physical therapist, deaf and hard of hearing teacher, and board-certified behavior analyst consult with the school on a case-by-case basis (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).

Given the high percentage of high-needs students and the documented drain on teacher time that educating students classified as high needs can have, Liberty Elementary is a school where consultation between general education teachers and special education team members is paramount (Hoglund et al., 2015; Maqsood et al., 2020). Despite the need, time constraints and other barriers, can make consultation between general education teachers and special education team members challenging.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to locate educators at Liberty Elementary School who had at least three years of experience in the classroom. Using purposeful sampling, teachers who have had experiences robust in information were selected. Care was taken to ensure that participants from various grade levels were included in the sample (Patton, 2015). A variety of

educators were included in this study, including educators with varying racial backgrounds. The sample included 10 educators. All these educators were employed at Liberty Elementary School. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants in this study to protect identities and maintain confidentiality throughout the research study process (Patton, 2015). Permission and consent were obtained from all participants before document review, journal entries, and interviews.

Researcher Positionality

As an SLP within a public school setting, I understand the barriers to and importance of consultation with general education teachers to support generalization and carryover of skills across special education team members. However, I lacked the understanding of being a general education teacher, supporting students with disabilities without a professional education in special education. The theory of social constructivism explains that knowledge is constructed through social interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This means that knowledge is a shared experience rather than an individual event. Through social constructivism, this study explores the collaborative nature of learning between general education teachers and special education team members, as the professionals must collaborate and work together to educate students diagnosed with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Interpretive Framework

Social constructivism theory, or the idea that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, helped to guide this study. The belief that knowledge is gained via interactions with others is imperative for successful consultation and collaboration. Collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members allows the professionals working with a student to support the student's variety of needs throughout the duration of the school day. This is called the generalization of skills (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Haakma et al., 2021). The

interaction between general education teachers and special education team members helps to support the generalization of skills, both academic and social, across environments for students with disabilities.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophy within research can help to guide the direction of goals and outcomes, shape research experiences, and support research-related discussions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions were made by me, and these lenses impacted how I approached this research study. Ontological assumptions concern the nature of reality. Epistemological assumptions relate to the relationship between the subject being researched and the researcher. Axiological assumptions pertain to the role of values in the study.

Ontological Assumption

As a practicing Catholic, I believe that there is one singular reality in the form of God's truth. While human understanding of this singular truth is imperfect, God's view and the truth is the most perfect. Deuteronomy 32:4 states, "He is the rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he" (*King James Bible,* 1769/2011). Because I strive to follow God's truth, I believe there is only one interpretation of reality. This interpretation of reality, under the guidance of God's truth, includes caring about all people regardless of ability and striving for the best for others through my work as an SLP.

Epistemological Assumption

After struggling to identify the desired outcome of consultation from general education teachers' perspective, I wanted to fully understand the current outcome of consultation and collaboration as well as the desired outcome of consultation and collaboration from the general education teacher's perspective. Through the ontological assumption of God's one truth, I sought

to find the truth within consultation and collaboration. As an SLP and special education team member, I understood the desire of the general education teachers to engage in effective and meaningful collaboration to support our shared students as they strive to become their best. Knowledge of consultation and collaboration was derived from the participants of the study and their lived experiences with consultation and collaboration to support a student with a disability. Multiple perspectives were obtained through a variety of data, which were analyzed for themes.

Axiological Assumption

As an SLP, I am considered a special education team member and have participated in collaboration and consultation with general education teachers to support students for whom I provide direct services. As an SLP and special education team member, I have always had a passion for working with other team members to best support a student's access to inclusion to create the most meaningful academic and social experience possible. I believe during consultation and collaboration, special education team members and general education teachers should share knowledge and classroom applications, as well as problem-solve challenges to support the student with a disability.

Researcher's Role

In qualitative research, the researcher can influence the study. "All researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a study" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). I have a Bachelor of Science in Communication Disorders with a minor in Education and a Master of Science in Communication Sciences and Disorders. I carry Massachusetts Department of Education licenses in speech-language as well as general education Grades 1-6. Additionally, I am professionally licensed by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association as well as the state of Massachusetts.

I was a human instrument in this transcendental phenomenological study. I analyzed data artifacts that were collected through multiple methods from the perspective of the educators. Contextualized understanding of consultation and collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members was provided through data collected and was analyzed from multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I had a professional relationship with all educators participating in this study. The participants in this study were educators at Liberty Elementary School servicing Grades K-5. I was a colleague and faculty member in the same school system as the educators at Liberty Elementary School and was known to all participants. I was not in a position of authority over any participants in the study.

Procedures

Procedures for this transcendental phenomenological research study will be outlined in this section. Permissions were obtained from Liberty University and Liberty Elementary School and are detailed in the following sections. Additionally, data were collected from multiple participants. Data from interviews, document reviews, and journal entries were collected, analyzed for themes, and triangulated.

Permissions

Before data collection, permission to conduct the study was sought from Liberty Elementary School. I met with the school principal at Liberty Elementary to obtain permission to use the school as the research site. Following site approval (Appendix F), I applied to the Institutional Review Board committee at Liberty University (Appendix A). After I obtained approval from Liberty Elementary School and Liberty University, the school administrator was contacted for assistance recruiting possible participants. A recruitment letter was sent to potential participants (Appendix C), allowing the participants to respond and indicate their interest in

participating in this research study. As researchers have the responsibility of protecting participants before and after research (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I took steps to protect the privacy of the school, participants, and students. Confidentiality was emphasized in both the data and results, educators were coded, and the school and educators were given pseudonyms.

Each individual who indicated interest in participation was provided with an informed consent form (see Appendix D). Participants' rights and assent were included in the form. Data were gathered through interviews, document analysis, and journal entries. Information was documented through field notes, recordings, and interview transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, informal processes such as note-taking, daily logs, and descriptive summaries were also used to document information. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and included 12 semistructured questions. The participant interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each, during which time participants were asked to describe their lived experience with the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews took place in person and were audio recorded. The recording was then transcribed. Documents analyzed were consultation and collaboration calendars, notes from consultation and collaboration, and any written communication (e.g., email) to support consultation and collaboration. Participants completed journal entries reflecting on consultative interactions targeting their lived experiences of consultation and collaboration.

Recruitment Plan

The sampling pool of this transcendental phenomenological research study consisted of 17 educators. Ten educators responded to the recruitment letter and were included in the final study. Ten interviews were necessary to reach code saturation, defined as the number of interviews needed for no additional information to be introduced (Hennink et al., 2017).

Criterion sampling was used to identify participants who met the requirement of having had the opportunity for consultation and collaboration with a special education service provider. Therefore, general education teachers who were not currently engaged in consultation with special education team members were not asked to participate in the study. Given the use of transcendental phenomenology methodology for this research study, criterion sampling was appropriate because it ensured that all participants in the study had a lived experience with the phenomenon. After potential participants were identified, they were invited to participate in the study. The purpose and process of the study was outlined in this communication. Selected educators were asked to sign an informed consent form (Appendix D), which explained the risks and benefits of the study. The legal right to withdraw from the study at any time, information regarding steps taken to keep participant identity confidential, data collection and analysis expectations, and my intent to provide the outcome of the study after completion were included in the consent (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Collection Plan

Data were collected through interviews, document analysis, and journal entries. Data from interviews were recorded using sound recordings and field notes, which allowed me to note behaviors and social interactions while focusing on the intent of the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A responsive interview protocol and model was used to help better understand the studied phenomenon (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I began data collection for this study after Institutional Review Board approval was received. Documents such as consultation and collaboration schedules, emails, and meeting minutes were reviewed and analyzed. By completing the document review first, the participants' goals for or decisions about consultation and collaboration were revealed when they may not otherwise have been made known to the

researcher (Patton, 2015). Following document review, participants engaged in an interview designed using a responsive interview protocol. Finally, participants completed journal entries.

Document Analysis

Through document analysis, researchers can interpret data to develop knowledge and better understand a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Documents analyzed for this research study included meeting notes from consultation and collaboration interactions between general education teachers and special education team members that took place during the current school year at the time of collection. Consultation and meeting minutes were important to review and analyze as they depicted the information the general education teachers and special education team members felt to be key during their consultation as well as the future direction for ongoing consultations. Topics discussed in the consultation were apparent through document analysis. Additionally, the frequency and duration of consultations as well as the and educators involved were noted. Document analysis allowed me to gain insight into information that was not available through interviews or journal prompts (Patton, 2015).

Documents were coded, analyzed, and organized into themes (Bowen, 2009). I reviewed the documents multiple times. Codes were identified and separated into themes. I then conducted thematic analysis in the form of pattern recognition (Bowen, 2009). Documents were analyzed for frequency, educators in attendance, consultation or collaboration outcome, and targeted topic of consultation and collaboration.

Individual Interviews

Semistructured interview questions were designed to collect data through one interview with each of the participants. The interview protocol consisted of 12 questions that helped guide the conversation on teacher experiences with consultation and collaboration. Interviews

consisted of open-ended questions to elicit deep, important descriptions of the lived experience

of the phenomenon and were pivotal to understanding the essence of the phenomenon

(Moustakas, 1994). These interviews were completed through face-to-face interactions. The

language of the interview questions was neutral, and the interview began with a short social

conversation to allow for rapport building (Moustakas, 1994). The 12 targeted interview

questions allowed me to understand the educators' lived experiences with the phenomenon

(Patton, 2015).

Individual Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another. CRQ

2. Tell me about your role at Liberty Elementary School. CRQ

3. Describe initiation of consultation with special education team members. SQ1

4. Describe facilitation of consultation with special education team members. SQ1

5. How do interactions with special education team members influence classroom
   interactions? SQ2

6. Describe the outcome of the current consultation model. SQ2

7. Describe your idea of effective consultation. SQ2

8. Describe the outcome of effective consultation. SQ2

9. How can consultation be improved? SQ3

10. Describe your ideal initiation and facilitation of consultation? SQ3

11. Describe systemic support for consultation and collaboration. CRQ

12. What else related to consultation would you like to share? SQ1, SQ2, SQ3

Questions 1 and 2 were included to establish rapport with the educator. The purpose of

Questions 3 and 4 was to gain information on the initiation and facilitation of consultation.

Questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 investigated the benefit of consultation and collaboration from the perspective of the general education teacher. Questions 9 and 10 targeted the general education teachers' perceptions of how consultation exchanges could be improved. Question 11, which focused on the central research question, sought to establish systemic support for consultation and collaboration. Finally, Question 12 allowed the participants to add any additional information regarding the phenomenon that they felt was not adequately captured by the first 11 questions.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

Sound recordings of interviews were obtained, and field notes of the discussions were kept. The field notes allowed me to make notes of my internal responses to the discussion as well as capture body language and facial expressions that were not otherwise captured by the audio recording (Patton, 2015). Interviews were recorded and transcribed in the next stage of data analysis using the audio recording. I then read the transcripts multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon. Following this step, codes were identified and classified into themes through manual coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Saldana, 2021), connecting material to specific aspects of research. Following the coding process, horizontalization was used to ensure that all data were given equal weight (Moustakas, 1994). The transcripts of the interviews were read multiple times and each statement of meaning was then removed and coded (Moustakas, 1994). Themes were based on repeated words and phrases that were directly related to the interview question.

Journal Prompt

Journaling was utilized as a data collection method within this research study. Clear expectations were set, a journaling period was defined, follow-up with educators was completed,

and confidentiality and trust were ensured within the journaling experience (Hayman et al., 2012). Ten educators were asked to complete a journal with a review of consultation or collaborative interactions. Additional insight was added to the lived experience of general educators from these journal entries. Educators were asked to reflect on consultation or collaborative interactions briefly, identifying the setting, the topic of communication, classroom applications, the initiator of communication, and the outcome as well as their feelings about the interaction and the outcome. This increased comprehension of the essences that the educators experienced within this phenomenon (Hayman et al., 2012).

Journal Prompt Data Analysis Plan

Journals entries were manually coded, and the codes were analyzed and organized into themes (Bowen, 2009; Saldana, 2021). I reviewed the journals multiple times to gain a deeper understanding of the studied phenomenon before identifying codes and classifying identified codes into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2021). Thematic analysis in the form of pattern recognition took place (Bowen, 2009; Saldana, 2021). Journals were analyzed for frequency of collaboration or consultation, educators in attendance, outcome, the targeted topic, and educator feelings regarding the interaction.

Data Synthesis

Following individual horizontalization, coding, and thematic analysis of participant interviews, documents, and journal entries, the identified themes were organized into textural and structural descriptions for data triangulation. Through textual description, each phrase was given attention for analysis; all phrases were included in the analysis. Structural description involves the processes of reimagining, recollecting, and judging (Moustakas, 1994). The textual description revealed how the educators experienced the phenomenon using their verbatim

responses. A description of the phenomenon was created using validated constituents and themes from the description (Moustakas, 1994).

Imaginative variation strategy was utilized to view the presented information from a new lens after the development of the textural and structural descriptions. Through imaginative variation, important phenomenon structures were expressed (Moustakas, 1994). A textural-structural description was created containing the essence of the experiences of the general education teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I synthesized the data by connecting the themes back to the research question and sub-questions.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers must gain confidence in the outcome of research through trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Trustworthiness criteria of dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability ensure rigor in the findings of the study (Anney, 2014). Trustworthiness is a critical factor in the rigor of a study as well as the study's value. Transferability shows that the outcome of the study is applicable in another context while dependability shows that the findings can be repeated consistently (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility is defined as the truthfulness of the outcome of the study. Credibility can be established through prolonged engagement, triangulation, referential adequacy, and peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that the purpose of the triangulation process is to ensure research utilizes a variety of methods to show correlations between themes within the targeted phenomenon. Data from interviews and journal entries were triangulated in this study.

Transferability

Transferability describes the degree to which the results of a qualitative research study can be transferred to other studies outside of the initial context and participants (Anney, 2014). To ensure transferability, thick description and purposeful sampling are necessary. A thick description enables researchers to define the transferability of the study through a detailed description of the context of the study, methodology, and data analysis. Descriptions of participants and experiences were provided in rich detail, making the transferability evident in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Each interview was reexamined several times to ensure that every detail was accounted for. To allow other researchers to potentially recreate this study, a complete context was provided.

Dependability

Research methods were documented to ensure they could be reproduced for dependability. Descriptions of the methodology used for data collection, recordings, and samples are included. Interviews were transcribed from audio recordings, and field notes were taken during interviews. An inquiry audit (Appendix E) was utilized by allowing a researcher who was uninvolved with the research process of this study to examine the processes and products to evaluate the accuracy of the products and outcomes of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability

Confirmability is a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Techniques for establishing confirmability include audit trail, peer review, and triangulation. An audit trail (Appendix E) was utilized throughout the study, which enables description and visibility of the research steps taken as the study develops. An audit trail was

used through data collection, data analysis, data synthetization, and data reporting (Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Data were collected through interviews, journal entries, and documents. The data

from each source were coded and categorized before information from interviews, journal

entries, and documents are compared. Finally, a peer expert in the field of special education who

was not connected at all to the study reviewed the study to ensure validity, reliability, and

authenticity.

Ethical Considerations

Within research, ethical issues must always be considered. Reflective and mindful

strategies were used within this study. School and university approval through the respective

institutional review boards was achieved (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, consent was

obtained from all participants. Participants were made aware of the intent of the research.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and all rights of participants were respected and made

clear. Participants were aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell &

Poth, 2018). All data were saved and stored in secure locations where only I had access to ensure

confidentiality of all participants' data and identifying information. Files were password

protected, and paper-based artifacts were stored in a locked cabinet. I was the only person with

the password to access digital information and the key to paper-based information. Additionally,

pseudonyms were put in place for both participants and the school. Safe data storage will be

maintained for up to five years following the completion and publication of this study. After five

years, any stored data will be deleted or destroyed.

Summary

In this chapter, the research method selected to understand teachers' perceptions of

consultative interactions with special education team members is described. The purpose of

transcendental phenomenological research, to describe others' experiences with a determined phenomenon, is outlined. The research design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, researcher's role, data collection, and data analysis are detailed in Chapter Three. Additionally, trustworthiness, including dependability, confirmability, transferability, and ethical considerations, is explained. The purpose and reason for selection of qualitative and transcendental research are included, along with a brief history of phenomenological research.

The criterion sampling technique, a type of purposeful sampling, was utilized in this study (Patton, 2015). Criterion sampling involves selecting individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about the targeted phenomena. The initial sampling pool included 17 general education teachers, and the final sample consisted of 10 educators. Ten interviews were conducted in this study to reach code saturation. A local elementary school was a logical location from which to obtain a sampling pool. All participating general education teachers were currently engaged in consultation with special education team members.

Moustakas's (1994) steps for transcendental research were followed in this transcendental phenomenological study. Journal entries, individual interviews, and document analysis were utilized. I read interview transcripts several times until I felt I had a complete understanding of the phenomenological description. The data that were obtained were then coded and bracketed to identify recurring themes, which described the essence of the phenomena (Bowen, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2014).

This study added to the current body of research surrounding consultation and collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Haakma et al., 2021; Himmelman, 2001; Kuntz & Carter, 2021; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Thomson & Perry, 2006). The results of this study could assist stakeholders, general

education teachers, and special education team members to facilitate more meaningful and effective consultative interactions. These meaningful consultative interactions will in turn support the generalization of academic and social skills for students with disabilities who are participating in inclusive education (Collins & Wolter, 2018; Haakma et al., 2021; Poocharoen & Ting, 2015; Thomson & Perry, 2006).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general

education teachers' lived experience of consultative interactions with special education team

members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. Chapter Four provides a

detailed description of those who participated in the study. Common themes and descriptions

provided by the participants are aligned with research questions and presented to provide insight

into the participants' lived experiences of the targeted phenomenon. Pseudonyms were assigned

and used throughout the study to maintain participant confidentiality. Chapter Four discusses the

participants, results of the study, and summary of the findings within this study.

Participants

Ten participants were involved in data collection. All participants were current teachers

at Liberty Elementary and had at least three years of teaching experience. All participants were

assigned a pseudonym to protect their privacy. Teachers were 26 to 58 years old and had

between four and 26 years of experience. A brief description of each teacher is provided below.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Participant	Years taught	Highest Degree Earned	Grade taught
Alex	9	Master's	5th
Ashley	26	Master's	4th
Devin	8	Master's	2nd
Heidi	3	Master's	5th
Jackie	15	Master's	4th
Kaitlyn	13	Master's	1st
Laura	31	Master's	3rd
Michelle	3	Master's	2nd
Sasha	10	Master's	4th
Sam	5	Master's	K

Alex

Alex is a fifth-grade teacher with nine years of classroom teaching experience. She has taught students in the general education classroom who are receiving special education services through an IEP with a variety of primary disabilities, including emotional disabilities, autism, specific learning disabilities, and health impairments. Alex has engaged in consultation with many different special education team members across her teaching career and reflected on this experience, noting, "I feel like consultation supports my goal of providing students with as many access points to curriculum as possible and ways to show their thinking that I can."

Ashley

Ashley is a fourth-grade teacher with 26 years of classroom teaching experience, all at Liberty Elementary School. She has taught students in the general education classroom and has experience coteaching alongside a special education teacher. Ashley sees value in consultation and collaboration with special education team members, as many special education team members have been working with her fourth-grade students for many years:

It's really beneficial to just have a whole picture [of the student]. A lot of special ed staff

have been working with my students a lot longer than I have, so having that perspective,

say last year, what worked, what didn't. It's just really helpful.

Ashley has engaged in consultation with a variety of special education team members across her

teaching career.

Devin

Devin is a second-grade teacher with eight years of classroom teaching experience. She

has taught first grade in addition to second grade. Devin has experience working with students

receiving special education with a variety of primary disabilities. Additionally, she has

experience consulting with special education team members to best support her classroom. Devin

noted that scheduling consultation and collaboration is a relationship-based exchange: "It's that

reciprocal relationship. Some weeks you may not need to meet and that's okay too, as long as

both people feel comfortable also saying when they do need to meet."

Heidi

Heidi is a fifth-grade teacher with three years of teaching experience at Liberty

Elementary School. She works closely with special education team members. Additionally, Heidi

has experience coteaching alongside a special education teacher. She notes that the coteaching

model "allows me to better collaborate with all team members since it's just a natural part of my

day, so I'm always checking in or running things by special ed."

Jackie

Jackie is a fourth-grade teacher with 15 years of elementary school teaching experience.

She has worked closely with many different special education team members throughout her

career to support students with a variety of primary disabilities. When asked if she had anything

to add regarding consultation at the end of the interview, Jackie noted the challenge of consultation within a fast-paced school environment: "We all can get overwhelmed, and the work of supporting students can get in the way of having the time to do consulting, but it actually serves a purpose. But if we don't carve out the time to do it, it doesn't serve its purpose."

Kaitlyn

Kaitlyn is a first-grade teacher with 13 years of experience and an interest in elementary school leadership. Throughout her teaching career, she has educated several children receiving special education services through an IEP for a variety of primary disabilities and has engaged in consultation and collaboration with the students' team members. In her journal entry, Kaitlyn noted that consultation with accompanying observation and a clear plan of action leaves her feeling "productive and confident to implement the strategy."

Laura

Laura is a third-grade teacher with 31 years of teaching experience in Grades 3 through 5, including experience in a cotaught environment. Laura has also educated many children receiving special education services throughout her teaching career and has engaged with their special education team members through consultation and collaboration to best support all students within her classroom. When asked to describe the outcome of effective consultation, Laura responded, "Help in delivering what my students need or our students need."

Michelle

Michelle is a second-grade teacher with three years of teaching general education. In addition to her experience teaching second grade, Michelle has taught special education at Liberty Elementary School. Through journal entries, Michelle described moments of frustration when she needed to ask special education team members multiple times for materials she needed.

Sam

Sam is a kindergarten teacher at Liberty Elementary School with five years of teaching experience. As a kindergarten teacher, Sam has been involved in consultation and collaboration with special education team members as the entire team works to gain familiarity with a new kindergarten student receiving special education services through an IEP. Sam expressed appreciation for consultation, stating, "I like that it's there. It's a moment to be able to talk to a special education team member and not feel like I'm stepping on their time. . . . It's a sacred time that's help for a particular student."

Sasha

Sasha is a fourth-grade teacher with 10 years of teaching experience. Sasha has also educated many students receiving special education services through a variety of primary disabilities and has consulted and collaborated with the students' accompanying special education team members. During her interview, Sasha emphasized the role of the general education teacher within consultation, as "they have the most interaction with the student."

Results

Data were collected via document analysis, individual interviews, and journal entries to gather the essence of general education teachers' lived experience of consultative interactions with special education team members. Interviews were conducted in person. Participants also submitted journal entries and documents during the data collection period. Both digital and paper-based artifacts were collected. Individual interviews were captured using a password-protected voice recorder. Digital artifacts were stored on a password-protected laptop, and paper-based artifacts were scanned digitally and stored on a password-protected laptop. The laptop and voice recorder were stored in a secure location to protect the participants' privacy.

After data were gathered, a thorough review and analysis and manual coding of data using Saldana's (2021) color-coding method of analyzing phenomenological data were conducted. Data collected from individual interviews, journal entries, and document reviews yielded themes of the lived experience of general education teachers within consultative interactions with special education team members. These thematic labels were identified by clustering invariant constituents. Through the coding process, three themes and 10 subthemes arose. The three themes and 10 subthemes are discussed in detail below.

Theme Development

Table 2

Theme Development

Theme	Subtheme	Key words/phrases
Strengths of consult	Schedule	Schedule, initiate, set up, initial consultation, contact, coordinated, case manager, IEP, beginning of the year, establish, variation, reach out, connect, feedback loop, regular, consistent, as needed
	Facilitation	Give and take, varies, facilitation, flexibility, back and forth conversation, casual, approachable, relationship, quick, student needs, schedule needs, mutual, share
	Relationships	Relationships, trust, comfort, strong involvement, uncomfortable, hard to contact, time, facilitates, ally, together, perspective, reciprocal, collaborative, strong relationship, communication, dynamics
Outcome of effective consultation	Classroom strategies	Classroom, approach, bounce ideas, strategize, next steps, beneficial, behavior management, curriculum, accommodation, modification, something to try, tip, guidance, quality education, adapt
	Student impact	Student experience in the classroom, support, generalization, carryover, strategize, next steps, advice, noticing, recommendations, approach the student, coach, encourage, problem solving, adjusting
	Gaining professional support	Together, community, ally, support, not alone, partner, whole picture, opportunity, helpful, beneficial, whole picture, touch base
Ways to improve consultation	Designate time	Opportunities, paid time, separate from prep period, preserved time, busy, time, pressure, prioritize, support, giving up time, built in time, limited time, intentional, debrief, structure
	Engage in multidisciplinary consultation	All providers, multidisciplinary consultation, entire team, multiple providers, all providers, aides, behavior therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, SLP, board-certified behavioral analysts, SPED, school psych, social worker, all staff, parent, coordination of care
	Increase support from administration	Systemic support, administration, principal leadership, coverage, manageable caseload, system, resources, deficit, consistent, follow-up, increased collaboration
	Increased structure through observation	Observe, general education environment, structure, see, watch, outcome, timely, schedule, agenda, notes, preparation, implementation

Factors Supporting Successful Consultation

Teachers highlighted three factors that increased successful consultation and collaboration with special education team members throughout the data. Teachers reported that creating a set, specific consultation schedule, building strong relationships with special education team members, and having back-and-forth facilitation of consultation meetings were supporting factors for success. These factors were discussed positively amongst all participants in the study, with one teacher noting "intentional scheduling and collaboration across service providers, especially different types of service providers" as a significant contributing factor to classroom and student success.

Creating a Schedule

All participants noted consistent scheduling of consultation as a contributing factor to success. General education teachers who participated in this study reported their current consultation experience begins at the beginning of the school year, typically before students arrive in the building. At the time the general education teacher receives the student's IEP, they meet with the special education team member, who acts as the case manager. During this initial consultation, special education team members provide the general education teacher with information such as services the student receives and general strategies to support the student in the classroom. At this time, a consultation schedule with special education team members is established, although which team members are present for the ongoing consultation meetings varies based on general education teacher experience and student profile and will be discussed in a later sub-theme. Alex summarized the initial consultation, stating, "I like to . . . figure out what I should know about them [the student], how I can support them, what their services will be, and then set up a regular [consultation time] from there."

While all general education teachers who participated in this study agreed that regularly scheduled consultation was a factor facilitating effective collaboration, two general education teachers reflected on past experiences and noted a recent change in consultation schedules. Jackie noted that over the course of her 15-year teaching career, consultation has changed for the better. Ensuring a consistent schedule with a set frequency such as weekly, biweekly, or monthly has helped consultation between general education teachers and special education team members occur regularly. Jackie reflected on consultation schedules, stating, "The past few years have been good—they [consultations] have been scheduled and they happen." Sasha elaborated on the benefit of regular and consistent collaboration by stating ,"It's all about constant lines of communication and collaboration for the betterment of the student."

Building Relationships

Building relationships with special education team members was emphasized as a facilitating factor for effective consultation by seven participating teachers. Alex noted that as a fifth-grade teacher, many of the special education team members had been involved with her students for years, as Liberty Elementary serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. By building relationships with special education team members, she is able to gain additional insight into her students' educational history, learning what has worked well for the students in the classroom during past years and strategies that have been attempted and failed during the students' academic history. Sam, a kindergarten teacher, noted that building relationships with special education team members is important because students in her class are always brand new to the school and the special education team; therefore, forming a close team that can problem-solve and support one another and the student is critical for student success.

In addition to providing a platform for information exchange, general education teachers reported that an additional benefit to a strong relationship with special education team members is feeling comfortable seeking help, especially during challenging moments. Laura reported,

> I feel like I have a good relationship with current special education team members, so I can grab someone in the hallway and say, "Hey check in with me," and I'm comfortable having support staff right now in the building in my classroom, especially when things are hard, but I'm not sure that is always the case or that it will always be the case with team members, but right now I feel good.

Multiple teachers reported that a strong relationship with special education team members was a catalyst for feeling comfortable seeking support outside of regularly scheduled consults.

Back-and-Forth Facilitation of Consultation

Nine participating general education teachers reported desiring and preferring a more back-and-forth style of conversation and consultation rather than a consultation structured and facilitated by one professional. The desire for a casual consultation must be mutual between general education teachers and special education team members, with Sam stating, "The back-and-forth consultation works well as long as it's mutual for everyone involved." Teachers reported that a strong relationship was a strong foundation for a comfortable back-and-forth conversation in consultation and collaboration. Alex, a fifth-grade teacher, reflected on her consultative efforts, stating "I do feel like I have done a lot of collaborating. I have a good relationship with a lot of the team members and have planned lessons with them to figure out how to differentiate instruction," Laura, a third-grade teacher, said, "I'm usually pretty comfortable saying, 'This is what's happening this week, and this is what I think I need.'"

Additionally, general education teachers noted that at times, schedules determine who facilitates consultation, as some team members may arrive at consultation meetings late or need to leave early due to student needs and meeting schedules. Those scheduling parameters will determine which area of need is discussed first, and a back-and-forth style of consultation lends this flexibility. Ashley, a fourth-grade teacher, noted that "facilitation based on time and scheduling works, I think it makes it more approachable for people to be able to consistently attend." In addition to schedule constraints, importance of information was also noted by general education teachers as a determining factor within successful consultative and collaborative interactions. Jackie stated, "I usually start with the kid I am most concerned about or has the most needs."

Outcomes of Successful Consultation

General education teachers who participated in this study have a clear vision of the outcome of effective and successful consultation and collaboration with special education team members. General education teachers reported that effective and successful consultation yields tangible strategies that can be applied within the classroom. Additionally, the participants stated that effective consultation has a positive impact on student participation and experience within the classroom environment. Finally, effective consultation provides a feeling of support of the general education teachers from the special education team.

Classroom Strategies

Nine participating general education teachers agreed that having consultation time to generate classroom strategies for areas of challenge is a positive outcome of a successful consultation. Michelle discussed the impact that general education teachers can have on the generalization of skills being taught by special education team members, noting,

I do believe the consultation and collaboration with special education teachers can really

impact the quality of education that students receive because you as the general education

teacher are able to combine everything they are working on and help to facilitate

generalization of skills.

Alex discussed the impact that consultation and collaboration has on her approach to assessing

student growth: "Depending on the student, we do a lot of collaborating, and I think it influences

how I approach any type of informal assessment or way to check in on what the students have

learned."

Students at Liberty Elementary School receive special education services under a variety

of primary diagnoses including autism, emotional disabilities, specific learning disabilities,

health problems, and developmental delays. Given the array of disabilities and the variety of

services these students receive, consultation often extends into behavior management and social

interaction and support. The importance of classroom management and an accessible

environment for all students was also noted within the discussion of gaining classroom strategies

through consultation with special education team members. Multiple teachers described

consultation as a space to gain support and learn strategies for adjusting their teaching style to

better suit the needs of the students in the classroom and continuously evolve as an educator.

Sam discussed classroom strategies, stating, "A lot of times I'll use the special educator to kind

of help me change my behaviors in the classroom to adapt to whatever their [the students'] needs

are." Laura reported, "A lot of times I'll get a good tip. Like, 'Hey, I can try this.'" A clear

implementation strategy and ongoing consultation to review the impact of the strategy within the

classroom environment and make necessary adjustments were reported as being necessary steps

to the continuous evolvement of classroom strategies. Kaitlyn said,

I think having a clear next step to implement in my classroom and then a set time to review how it's been going and adjust from there is really helpful for classroom implementation. Ideally, I would come out of consultation with concrete strategies to implement in my classroom.

Student Impact

A positive impact on students was noted as a benefit of successful collaboration by seven participating general education teachers. General education teachers reported using consultation and collaboration as a forum to adjust how the curriculum was presented to students receiving special education services through an IEP or to relay concepts in the classroom that were particularly challenging for the student to a service provider who would then reinforce and review the concept. Alex noted,

By having these check-ins to collaborate with other people and support these students and discuss their needs, I think that it really impacts their experience in the classroom. I mean that it absolutely impacts their [the students'] day-to-day and the way that I interact with them and the way that I support them, and I think that has a huge influence on their experience, and I think that partnership [with special education team members] has a huge impact on their [the students'] experience.

Student behavior management is also positively impacted through consultation and collaboration. Sasha stated, "Consultation influences the way I approach the student or coach the student or encourage them to approach certain situations or avoid certain situations." Through consultation with special education team members, particularly those providing services related to social pragmatics and social-emotional or behavioral challenges, Sasha discussed the knowledge she has gained regarding social scenarios the student is working to understand as well

as strategies to help support the student navigate complex social interactions within the classroom. With this added knowledge, Sasha can support or use strategies the special education team members are introducing to help the student understand the social world better, and she can better support the student in the classroom by mirroring the language or by selecting positive peer models to be near the student through either classroom seating or group work. These strategies influence the student and create a more positive learning environment in the general education classroom. Jackie noted that "the outcome of effective consultation is that students are being responded to in a way that is helping them to make progress academically, socially, and emotionally."

Gaining Support

Feeling supported during challenging times was noted by four participating general education teachers during data collection and analysis as a positive outcome of effective consultation and collaboration with special education team members. Laura explained that students in her class this year receive special education services through an IEP with a heavy focus on behavioral and social-emotional challenges rather than challenges in more traditional academic skills. She noted that sometimes the outcome of consultation "is a little tweak; other times, it's acknowledging this is not a quick fix but we're in it together, and sometimes that's what I need from a consultation." The importance of the feeling of team, community, and support to decrease teacher workload and share the burden is heavily documented in the literature surrounding teacher retention (Aldosiry, 2020; Bettini et al., 2017; Billingsley et al., 2020). At Liberty Elementary, general education teachers reported consultation and collaboration resulted in increased support and a sense of community. Sam, a kindergarten teacher, reported,

So my idea is that they [special education team members] are there to support me, that's

always what happens. So, if I'm having any issues or if I feel like that student isn't

meeting expectations or their goals or the opposite, they are doing better and we need to

adjust. . . . I appreciate the time; it gives me another person to talk to about my student.

Jackie elaborated on the value of a sense of community by explaining that consultation

and collaboration also provide continued feedback and support across years, noting that

strategies that work with a student one year can be passed on to their teacher the next year or to a

coworker who is struggling with a student with a similar profile, further deepening the sense of

community and support amongst colleagues. Jackie stated,

If there's something I need I feel supported and if there's something that someone else

needs, I can help to support them, and that if there's something better I could be doing in

the classroom, people are able to give me that feedback.

The continued support as a result of consultation and collaboration was an aspect that Heidi

stated made her "feel good and happy that we touched base."

Ways to Improve Consultation

General education teachers mentioned a lack of common available time and lack of

administrative support as areas of consultation with special education team members that need

improvement. General education teachers offered creating designated consultation times,

increasing structure in consultation, and increasing support from the administration as strategies

to improve consultation. Additionally, creating time for multidisciplinary or team consults when

all members of the student's special education team are available on a regular basis was noted as

a strategy to improve consultation effectiveness. Some general education teachers at Liberty

Elementary had experienced multidisciplinary consultations and discussed them favorably, while

other general education teachers at Liberty Elementary voiced a desire for multidisciplinary consults although they did not have frequent experience with this type of consultation.

Create Designated Time

When asked how consultation could be improved, five general education teachers noted creating a designated time for consultation as the main way that consultation and collaboration could be improved at Liberty Elementary School. General education teachers currently note that all consultation and collaboration with special education team providers happens before or after school, outside of contracted hours, or during the general education teachers' one planning period per day. This means that on days that general education teachers are engaged in consultation with special education team members, the general education teachers are not able to use their free period for classroom preparations. Ashley, a fourth-grade teacher, stated, "I'm doing it [consultation and collaboration], so I'm giving up my planning time. Ideally, having a consult time where I can meet with the team and it's not on planning time would be great."

In addition to allowing them to utilize their planning times each day, general education teachers highlighted that creating a designated time for consultation would preserve the act of consultation and collaboration even as the year became busy. Alex, a fifth-grade teacher, noted that

> as the year goes on, things get busy and [consultation] can kind of fall off a bit. I think support comes from classroom coverage. I mean, how do we make this time sacred for our special education team members and teachers and make sure this happens?

All teachers noted that the intentions of both general education teachers and special education team members were to support students in every capacity possible. The lack of time to consult was not due to general education teachers or special education team members not

desiring to engage in consultation and collaborative exchanges. Kaitlyn, a first-grade teacher, explained, "Schedules just fill out so quickly, but consult time is really valuable, but it gets taken away because the kids' needs are so high all of the time that all time is spent hands-on to directly help students."

Incorporate Multidisciplinary Consults

Five general education teachers at Liberty Elementary School who participated in this study preferred engaging in consultation with all members of a student's special education team at one time rather than individually with each special education team member. The general education teachers referred to this type of consultation with all special education team members as *multidisciplinary consults* in which service providers from different disciplines such as a social worker, school psychologist, behavior analyst, special education teacher, and SLP all participated in the same consultation with the general education teacher. Alex, a fifth-grade teacher, noted that multidisciplinary consultation

> is nice, especially for students with multiple providers, to bring everyone together and say, "Hey, this is what I'm seeing in the classroom," and then hearing "This is what SPED is seeing, this is what happens in OT [occupational therapy], in speech, in psych, etc., and this is what home is seeing."

Multidisciplinary consultation capitalizes on the limited time that general education teachers and special education team members have during the school day to engage in collaboration and allows for all members of the special education team to engage in problem-solving exchanges with the general education teacher.

Some general education teachers at Liberty Elementary School reported experience with multidisciplinary consultation during the past school year and reflected favorably on the

experience. Jackie, a fourth-grade teacher, discussed her experience with multidisciplinary consultation:

> I think it has been a nice coordination of care, especially this year having multiple service providers in one room has been really helpful. Having social workers and school psychologists and special education teachers who are providing services to the same student. Not having separate consults. People will say, "You know I can speak to that, or I can provide support for that, or I can reach out to someone about that." It's really provided a nice wrap-around care that I haven't seen in prior years.

She continued to note that she felt students had better, more responsive support because of the multidisciplinary consultation than she has seen in her prior 14 years of teaching experience as this was her first year engaging in multidisciplinary consultation. General education teachers who reported engaging in multidisciplinary consultation typically did so to support students with behavioral or social-emotional challenges. These students' teams consisted of a social worker or school psychologist, special education teacher, board-certified behavioral analyst, and, at times, SLP or occupational therapist. The special education team members worked together to provide overlapping support for the student, and therefore many of the skill areas targeted within the general education environment overlapped and required input from all involved professionals.

While a shared aide or one-on-one behavioral technician is included in the child's special education team, general education teachers reported that the aides and behavioral technicians, the student's direct support staff, rarely participate in consultation between the general education teachers and special education team members. Consultation between the student's support staff and general education teachers typically happens throughout the school day as the two adults are working in the same classroom. However, consultation and collaboration between the student's

direct support staff and special education team members typically occur during times when the general education teacher is not available to participate. Ashley reflected,

> I would love for the aides to be part of [consultation] with the professional staff. . . . They are the ones doing the data collection or implementing the behavior plan, so I think ideally having them included at some point or in some capacity would be amazing for continuity of care.

Inclusion of direct support staff was not the focus of this study, but it is worth noting that general education teachers reported the need for consultation among direct support staff, general education teachers, and special education team members when asked how consultation could be improved.

Increased Structure

Four general education teachers who participated in this study reported desiring increased structure in consultation. General education teachers offered observation of the student in the general education classroom either before or in response to consultation and an agenda for the consultation as ways to increase structure within consultation while continuing to maintain a back-and-forth style of consultation. Sasha, a fourth-grade teacher, highlighted the importance of observation of students by special education team members by saying,

> When there are hands and eyes on the student, rather than just receiving information from me or the parents, it has proven to be helpful when that person is also in the room and observing or at recess or wherever that issue at hand is so that they can see the student in action.

General education teachers felt that consultation alone was not nearly as effective as having special education team members to come into the general education classroom and observe the

student in that environment, either because of or before a consultation. General education teachers noted that the observation did not usually need to occur every week and suggested short monthly observations as sufficient.

In addition to observation, general education teachers offered consultation agendas or checklists of topics to be discussed as ways to increase structure in consultation. "I think there should be a set schedule of things we should cover. I feel as though the check-in should be more, there needs to be more structure, and I think that things should be implemented quicker," stated Michelle. Sam noted, "Making sure everyone comes prepared and comes with ideas and having the special educator truly support, like, materials. I don't feel like I should be expected to create materials for students." During document analysis, checklists or agendas for consultation were not found. Additionally, action items or next steps were inconsistently noted, and the format of the next steps varied based on educator and consultation date. Consultation schedules and meeting notes or minutes were produced detailing subjects discussed or information gained from special education team members. General education teachers had a range of forms of consultation meeting minutes or notes, including digital documentation, paper-based documentation in a specific notebook, or paper-based documentation in planning books or scrap paper. Additionally, some general education teachers reported relying on special education team members to maintain consultation notes and minutes.

Support from Administration

When asked to discuss systemic support for consultation and collaboration, six general education teachers who participated in this study reported feeling a significant lack of support from the administration to engage in consultation and collaboration. Heidi noted, "I don't think it's a lack of trying or that stakeholders don't find it important. It's a time and resources deficit."

General education teachers in this study reported that there was not a consultation system in place at Liberty Elementary School and that consultations varied in style and attendance between special education team members and between students' special education teams, with Devin adding, "Hopefully, that [administrative support] will change with new leadership; hopefully, there's a system that gets put into place" and Laura noting, "I would love for there to be a framework and I think it's a problem that there's not."

General education teachers in this study suggested that administration could offer coverage of the general education classroom for consultation and collaboration time with special education team members as a way to support consultation and collaboration. By having their classrooms covered for these collaboration times, general education teachers would no longer need to use their planning time for consultation and collaboration and could rather spend the time preparing materials and lessons for their classroom. Alex suggested that improvement to consultation "comes from coverage. I mean, how do we make this time sacred for our special education team members and teachers and make sure that this [consultation] happens?"

Outlier Data and Findings

This section discusses the unexpected findings from the study that were noteworthy as they added dimension to the study. Most data collected through individual interviews, document analysis, and journal entries fell within the three themes and 10 subthemes. One outlier finding did emerge surrounding involving parents within the regular consultation and collaboration between general education teachers and special education team members at Liberty Elementary. This finding is explored below.

One teacher noted desiring to involve parents in the consultation and collaboration process regularly. Parent involvement ranges at Liberty Elementary from regular contact with

special education team members and general education teachers to involvement only as needed as well as at the student's annual IEP meeting and parent-teacher conferences. Parental involvement varies based on student needs, the impact of the home environment on the student in the school environment, and parent preference. As discussed in the identified themes and subthemes, one of the outcomes of consultation is noted as outreach to the parent, meaning that one team member, either a general education teacher or a special education team member, reaches out to communicate with the parent regarding a specific topic or to obtain information about the student. Sasha, a fourth-grade teacher, desired more parental involvement than is currently occurring within Liberty Elementary School, stating that "the parent piece of it has to be super important. We [general education teachers and special education service providers] can collaborate here all day long, but the parent really needs to be on board."

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Research Question Responses

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Research findings for each of the research questions are detailed below. The central research question is addressed first, followed by the three sub-questions. Explanations below are supported with evidence from the lived experiences of general education teachers in consultative interactions with special education team members.

Central Research Question

What is the lived experience of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members?

The study results show that general education teachers value consultation and collaboration with special education team members and find both to be beneficial for their students. Three strengths of consultation as well as four ways to improve consultation were

identified. Additionally, three positive outcomes of consultation with special education team members were identified by general education teachers.

General education teachers identified having regularly scheduled consultations at either weekly, biweekly, or monthly intervals as a factor supporting successful consultation. General education teachers reported that they felt having consultations scheduled at regular intervals has helped ensure consistency of collaborative time with special education team members. A regular and consistent feedback loop between general education teachers and special education team members created a positive environment to engage in problem-solving interactions as well as exchange information and maintain communication.

Established relationships between general education teachers and special education team members were noted as another contributing factor to successful consultation and collaboration. Michelle, a second-grade teacher, reported that the success of consultation "depends on who the staff member is. Different teacher dynamics really impact the consultation and the outcome of it." Other general education teachers commented on the vulnerability they may feel when asking for help or bringing up a challenge in their classroom to a special education team member and acknowledged that having a positive relationship with the team member is what makes the general education teacher comfortable in those moments of vulnerability. Laura noted, "There are some people that I just don't feel as comfortable with."

In addition to strengths, outcomes, and ways to improve consultation, teachers did voice frustrations with consultation and collaboration. Inconsistency of consultation across special education team members was discussed, with general education teachers noting that some special education team members regularly engage in consultation with general education teachers while other special education team members engage in consultation on an as-needed basis and still

others are challenging to find time to engage with. General education teachers were quick to add that they understood that the variation in consultation and collaboration was not due to poor intentions but rather caseload demands and prioritization of student needs from the perspective of the special education team members. An additional frustration noted was the production of needed materials for students. General education teachers reported feeling unsure who was responsible for generating materials such as visuals or graphic organizers for students on IEPs and felt that it should be the responsibility of the special education team members to generate these materials for the student. An additional teacher commented on the amount of time that generating materials can take, stating, "There've been times where I've said, 'I need this for a student,' and it's taken a while or constant reminders to get it."

Sub-Question One

Who do general education teachers perceive as the initiator and facilitator within consultation with special education team members?

General education teachers overwhelmingly responded that special education team members initially reached out to schedule regularly occurring consultations. In particular, the case manager of the student's IEP was most frequently reported as the special education team member who initiated consultation. Devin, a second-grade teacher, reported, "If it's someone [on the special education team] that I haven't heard from, then I'll reach out to set it up." General education teachers did not indicate what they believed would be an ideal initiation of consultation, feeling that special education team members reaching out to schedule a regularly occurring consultation at the beginning of the school year was working well in the current environment at Liberty Elementary.

All general education teachers agreed that consultation was not facilitated by one specific person but rather was a back-and-forth style of conversation beginning with either the educator with time constraints or the most pressing concern. General education teachers reported preferring the back-and-forth style of consultation that currently occurs, acknowledging the flexibility that this type of casual facilitation offers to the exchange. Ashley, a fourth-grade teacher, felt that facilitation

> depends a lot on the student. It depends on how they are doing in class at the moment and then what the history of that student is. It depends [on] who has more information to relay in that moment. I feel like it's a give and take, like "This is what I'm noticing; this is where I need support especially."

General education teachers did acknowledge that a strong relationship between general education teachers and special education team members helps to support a more casual, back-and-forth style of consultation.

Sub-Question Two

From the perspective of the general education teacher, what benefits does consultation provide to the team?

The benefits of consultation and collaborative interactions with special education team members identified by general education teachers clustered into three themes. General education teachers identified gaining classroom strategies and positively impacting a student's classroom experience as benefits to consultation. Additionally, gaining professional support from colleagues was identified as a positive outcome of consultation with special education team members.

Alex, a fifth-grade teacher, agreed that a benefit of consultation included gaining strategies to apply in the classroom:

> I think it influences how I approach any type of informal assessment or way to check in on what the students have learned, and also giving kids a break or trying really hard to use specific language to support problem-solving with students.

General education teachers reported that from consultation and collaborative interactions with special education team members, they gain insight into how to best incorporate strategies from special education team members into the general education classroom. Once they implement these strategies, they can then revisit the strengths and challenges of implementation at subsequent consultations. The feedback loop of discussing a challenge, generating a strategy, implementing that strategy in the classroom, and then adjusting the strategy based on the application was identified as a benefit to regularly occurring consultation by fourth-grade teacher Jackie. A positive impact on students as a benefit of consultation and collaboration was also noted by general education teachers. Grouping students and incorporating specific language, graphic organizers, or visuals to support a student both academically and socially were noted as specific positive student impacts by Alex, a fifth-grade teacher.

Sub-Question Three

What do general education teachers perceive as ways to improve consultation?

Four ways to improve consultation emerged from the data gathered from the 10 general education teachers who participated in this study. Designated time for consultation and collaboration as well as increased support from the administration were suggested as factors that would improve consultation and collaboration. Additionally, a desire for multidisciplinary consultations, in which multiple members from the student's special education team would

participate, was noted by multiple general education teachers. Finally, increased structure through the incorporation of regular observation of the student by the special education team members within the general education environment was suggested as a factor to improve consultation.

> First-grade teacher Kaitlyn discussed designating time to improve consultation:
>
> I would love it if we could have some paid time to sit down and meet; that would be an ideal system to have in place. The caseloads are so heavy for SPED [special education] that it can get put to the wayside, but I think having that time to meet, even if it's just a once-a-month time for service providers to observe and share feedback of what they've noticed, I think that would be a huge improvement.

General education teachers at Liberty Elementary School are currently using preparation time or before- and after-school hours to consult with special education team members. Laura, a third-grade teacher, noted that it would be great if consultation "was so important that we set aside time to make sure that it happened."

> Some general education teachers commented that designating time for consultation and collaboration would require an increase in support from the administration both at the school and district level. Many general education teachers did not feel consultation and collaboration were well supported by the current administration, with fifth-grade teacher Hilary stating, "I don't think it's a lack of trying or that stakeholders don't find it important; it's a time and resources deficit." Specific suggestions for increased support for consultation and collaboration included administration providing coverage of general education classrooms for consultative interactions to occur between special education team members and general education teachers.

Finally, general education teachers proposed consultation improvements through increased structure to include time for special education team members to observe the student within the general education environment either prior to or following consultation. First-grade teacher Kaitlyn noted,

> I think having the consult in a silo or isolation where I'm giving information without them [special education team members] seeing it is challenging. It would be better if they could be in [the general education classroom] and see it.

Third-grade teacher Laura echoed this sentiment, stating, "I wish there was more seeing how it is in the general education classroom, but it feels like no one really has time for observation." General education teachers also reported that observation before the consultation would help ensure that all participants in the consultation arrived at the meeting prepared with ideas to support the student in the general education environment.

Summary

General education teachers value consultative interactions with special education team members. General education teachers identified three factors that facilitate meaningful consultation as well as four ways that consultation at Liberty Elementary School can be improved. Additionally, general education teachers noted three themes of positive outcomes from consultative interactions with special education team members.

Scheduling consultation at regular weekly, biweekly, or monthly intervals was identified as a facilitating factor for successful consultation at Liberty Elementary School. Additionally, a casual, back-and-forth style of consultation between the general education teacher and special education team member was a preferred by general education teachers who participated in this study. The casual, back-and-forth style of conversation was supported by strong relationships

between general education teachers and special education team member. General education teachers reported that when they had a strong relationship with special education team members, they felt more comfortable seeking support from them during challenging moments within the general education classroom.

Positive consultation outcomes were highlighted as gaining classroom strategies, impacting students' classroom experience, and gaining support from colleagues at Liberty Elementary School. General education teachers reported that they frequently learned helpful tips, strategies, or specific language to use with students to support their access to academics and social interactions within the general education classroom. Teachers also reported generalizing some of these tips and strategies to other students in their classroom who may not receive special education support but have challenges with a particular topic or skill.

Four ways to improve consultation were identified by general education teachers. Increased support from administration, specifically to designate school time aside from general education teacher planning periods to engage in consultation with special education team members, was highlighted. Additionally, general education teachers desired increased structure to consultation and identified observation of the student by the special education team member within the general education classroom as a way increase the structure of consultation. Finally, general education teachers felt multidisciplinary consultations were beneficial to both the classroom teacher and the student. Not all teachers had experience with multidisciplinary consultation at Liberty Elementary. Teachers that had engaged in this form of consultation reported increased positive outcomes and decreased time spent engaged in consultation. Teachers who did not have experience with multidisciplinary consultation reported a desire to engage in it

in the future to provide greater continuity of care for the student as well as decrease the time

spent in individual consultations with multiple special education team members.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general education teachers' lived experience of consultative interactions with special education team members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. Communication between general education teachers and special education team members is critical for special education students' social and academic engagement within the inclusive setting. Gathering general education teachers' lived experiences of interactions with special education team members will help inform future studies related to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Successful inclusion benefits students with and without disabilities both academically and socially (Argan et al., 2020; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008). This final chapter discusses the research findings as well as the theoretical and empirical implications of the study. Limitations and recommendations for further research are included in this final summary. This study was guided by Lee Vygotsky's (1978) collaborative learning theory.

Discussion

This section discusses the findings of this study in relation to theoretical and empirical literature identified in Chapter Two. The findings of this study confirm that there are factors that contribute to positive outcomes of consultative interactions between general education teachers and special education team members at Liberty Elementary as well as factors that are perceived as barriers to consultation between general education teachers and special education team members. Additionally, ideas for improvement of consultation from the perception of the general education teachers were identifed. This chapter will discuss interpretations of the findings of this

study, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and empirical implications, limitations and delimitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

Interpretation of Findings

A transcendental phenomenological research approach described by Moustakas (1994) was used to capture the results of this study. Vygotsky's collaborative learning theory (1978) provided a theoretical framework for this study. The themes included factors that benefitted consultation, positive outcomes of the consultation, and suggested improvements for consultation at Liberty Elementary School.

Three themes were identified in this study: factors that strengthen consultation, positive outcomes of consultation, and suggested improvements for consultation at Liberty Elementary School. In addition to the three themes, 10 subthemes were identified. These subthemes included: scheduling, back-and-forth facilitation, building relationships between special education team members and general education teachers, gaining classroom strategies, positively impacting students' classroom experience, and gaining support from colleagues. Additionally, designating time for consultation, engaging in multidisciplinary consultation, increasing support from administration, and increasing the structure of consultation through observation were noted as subthemes. Each of these themes and subthemes helps to better understand general education teachers' lived experiences in consultation with special education team members.

Consultation Is Valued

All general education teachers at Liberty Elementary School who participated in this study spoke about the value that consultation with special education team members brings. General education teachers noted improved classroom strategies, increased student support, and a stronger a sense of community and support from colleagues, especially during challenging

moments, as a benefit of consultation. While Witt and Martens (1988) noted that a key goal of consultation should include empowering and instilling teacher independence, no general education teacher at Liberty Elementary School noted empowerment or independence as an outcome or desired outcome of consultation and collaboration.

General education teachers reported understanding the positive impact that effective collaboration between general education teachers and multiple special education team members can have on a student's classroom experience. As a result of consultation and collaboration, students are able to have a positive experience within the classroom and access learning and information regularly; however, it takes accommodations, modifications, and collaboration to continue to increase student access and improve their experience.

Mutual Respect Is Important

Throughout the study, all general education teachers noted the importance of respect in some capacity. Regarding the facilitation of consultation, general education teachers felt that a casual, back-and-forth style of conversation with a mutual understanding and give and take worked best. About scheduling, teachers noted that respect for each participant's time was highly important and that the consultation schedules could be fluid if there was mutual respect among all team members.

Current literature notes that strong interpersonal skills are a predictor of effective collaboration (Alghazo & Alkhazaleh, 2021; Solis et al., 2012; Tod et al., 2019). Skills such as showing empathy, active listening and having a positive attitude were all noted within effective collaborative interactions. General education teacher perceptions at Liberty Elementary School support this literature, as the teachers noted that obtaining a clear outcome or strategy that can be applied within the classroom setting is the preferred outcome of consultation and collaboration.

Additionally, general education teachers reported feeling a sense of team and community, particularly during challenging moments in the classroom. The sense of team and community is a direct outcome of team members engaging in active listening, having positive attitudes, and displaying empathy. As a third-grade teacher Laura stated, "Sometimes it's acknowledging, 'This isn't a quick fix, but we're in it together,' and that's what I need for consult."

Teachers Were Enthusiastic to Share Their Experiences

The qualitative approach to this study gave general education teachers a voice and a forum to express what they felt was going well within consultation and collaboration with special education team members. General education teachers were also eager to share their ideas for change and improvements to consultation and collaboration. Each participant quickly and freely shared at least one idea to improve consultation and collaboration at Liberty Elementary School, and many shared more than one. General education teachers' suggestions for improvement were categorized into four subthemes; designated time, engagement in multidisciplinary consultation, increased support from administration, and increased structure to consultation through observation.

Literature shows that general education teachers have concerns regarding inclusion specifically surrounding shared workload, possession of collaborative teaching skills, and clarity of roles within an inclusive environment (Damore & Murray, 2009; Foley & Mundschenk, 1997; Mitchell et al., 2019). General education teachers who participated in this study suggested that a designated time for multiple members of the special education team to consult with general education teachers could be created with increased support from the administration at Liberty Elementary School and the district administration. General education teachers who participated in this study shared strategies to elevate some of the concerns noted in the literature such as staff

training and lack of time. General education teachers who participated in this study desired the

inclusion of students' direct support staff, including one-to-one behavioral technicians and

shared student aides, within consultation meetings with special education team members.

Additionally, general education teachers desired special education team members observe

students within the general education classroom on a regular basis. General education teachers

suggested monthly observation as an appropriate frequency. When provided with a forum to

engage in conversation surrounding improvement to consultation and collaboration, general

education teachers readily offered concrete suggestions that could be implemented and supported

these desired improvements with thoughts on why a change would result in an improvement to

consultation and collaboration with special education team members. Allowing general

education teachers to provide input into the consultation will foster a stronger collaborative

relationship and therefore support learning through Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Significant implications for policy and practice were generated from the findings of this

phenomenological study. Special education team members, principals, and other administrators

at Liberty Elementary School and within the school district can benefit from both the policy and

practical implications of this study. Consultation and collaboration between general education

teachers and special education team members can be improved with the application of the data

extracted from the study. Awareness of barriers and facilitators of successful consultation

between general education teachers and special education team members as well as general

education teachers' desired consultation format and outcomes can inform new policy and

practice to influence the successful inclusion of children receiving special education services

through an IEP. The implications for policy and practice as they relate to consultative

interactions between special education team members and general education teachers are discussed in this chapter.

Implications for Policy

Liberty Elementary School is a small elementary school within a large, urban school district containing 15 elementary schools (K–5), four middle schools (6–8), and two high schools that educate over 12,000 students, with 17.1% of all students receiving special education services through an IEP (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021). These students receiving special education services attend any schools within the district, meaning all schools have general education teachers engaged in consultation with special education team members. At Liberty Elementary School, general education teachers suggested designating time for consultation to improve current consultation models. Administration at the school and district level could providing coverage to the general education teachers to ensure those general education teachers can engage in consultation and maintain a planning period each day. Additionally, at the district level, providing special education team members with monthly time to complete observations of students receiving special education services could positively impact how general education teachers engage in consultation with special education team members and facilitate a more effective and impactful consultative interaction.

Implications for Practice

The study yielded implications for practice that school administrators, general education teachers, and special education team members may consider when engaging in consultative interactions. Special education team members and general education team members may consider taking time to establish rapport together as strong relationships are reported to support consultation and collaboration (Douglas et al., 2016; Pugach, 1989). Through observation and

discussion, general education team members may build mutual respect and increase rapport to support consultation (Edwards, 2009).

Special education team members engaging in consultation with general education teachers should consider incorporating observation of students in the general education classroom into their schedule on a consistent basis. General education teachers who participated in this study voiced a desire for special education team members to observe students either before or after consultation in order to provide feedback and engage in a more productive conversation. Additionally, special education team members and general education teachers at Liberty Elementary School should consider developing a documentation system for consultation meetings. General education teachers reported a variety of documentation strategies for consultation, including both paper-based and digital systems. A consistent documentation system would allow all professionals engaged in consultation to follow up on the topics discussed during consultation and complete any next steps. Finally, special education team members and general education teachers should seek to agree upon a single action step at the end of each consultation meeting that can be implemented either in the classroom or within special education services in order to support student's access to the general education environment or curriculum. General education teachers who participated in this study voiced a desire or a preference for leaving consultation meetings with a strategy to implement and then reflecting on the implementation during the subsequent consultation meetings.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to describe general education teachers' lived experience of consultative interactions with special education team members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. Prior research has placed an

emphasis on specific aspects of general education teachers' experience in consultative interactions, such as barriers to consultation (Broxterman & Whalen, 2013; Douglas et al., 2016; Glover et al., 2015; Iadorola et al., 2015; Shin et al., 2016), attitudes toward inclusive education (Bandura, 1997; Kochhar et al., 2000; Pajares, 1992; Parchomiuk, 2019; Sharma et al., 2012) or the benefits of consultation (Alghazo & Alkhazaleh, 2021; Solis et al., 2012; Tod et al., 2019) but never on the cumulative experience of consultation. This transcendental phenomenological study examined the perceptions of 10 educators who are actively engaged in consultation with special education teachers. The previous literature discussed in Chapter Two is expanded on by the results of this study. The study's findings as they relate to empirical and theoretical research are discussed below.

Theoretical Implications

Vygotsky's (1978) collaboration theory emphasizes the relationship between learning and social interactions with others within the learning environment. Recent policy changes such as NCLB, ESSA, and IDEA have placed an increased emphasis on consultation and collaboration between special education team members and general education teachers to support students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Consultation and collaboration create a combined learning and social interaction between general education teachers and special education team members. Within collaboration and consultation, educators are more liking to engage in higher cognitive processes to problem-solve than if they were to individually attempt to solve the problem (Ciconni, 2014).

Collaboration within the workplace is rooted in Vygotsky's social learning theory and collaborative learning theory, which is tied to the zone of proximal development. Social learning theory notes that learning occurs through social interaction with others and that through these

social interactions, information is then imprinted on the intelligence of the individual (Vygotsky, 1978). The zone of proximal development is the area of learning where an individual can perform a task with assistance from another but cannot yet do it unaided (Vygotsky, 1978). While research on the zone of proximal development and social learning theory initially focused on student interactions with teachers within the classroom, more recent research has applied these theories to adult-to-adult interactions within the workplace (Kuusisaari, 2014; Newman & Latifi, 2021; Shabani, 2016). This study continued to support the application of the zone of proximal development and social learning theory in adult-to-adult interactions within the workplace. Given that general education teachers reported value and significance in consultation and collaborative interactions and view establishing rapport and relationships with special education team members as a facilitating factor to effective collaboration, social learning theory within the workplace has been further established.

Empirical Implications

Research has explored the impact of consultation between general education teachers and special education teachers on the generalization of skills for students with disabilities (Argan et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosby, 2008; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). Additional studies have gained insight into general education teachers' descriptions of consultation and their perceived benefits of consultation (Blanton et al., 2018; Eisenman et al., 2011; Yell et al., 1998). This study sought to close the gap in the literature by gathering the thoughts and perceptions of general education team members regarding consultation with special education team members.

Narratives from general education teachers were collected regarding their lived experiences in consultative interactions with special education team members to further examine general education teachers' perceptions of these interactions at Liberty Elementary School.

Previous studies have shown the ability of consultation between general education teachers and special education team members and to increase the generalization of skills for students with disabilities (Argan et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). Additionally, there have been studies on general education teachers' descriptions of barriers to consultation and the perceived benefits of consultation (Blanton et al., 2018; Eisenman et al., 2011; Yell et al., 1998). Knowing the thoughts and perceptions of general education teachers regarding consultation with special education team members is valuable because it reveals how inclusive school districts can support collaboration and how special education team members and general education teachers can enhance communication to engage in more effective collaboration; therefore, this study has filled a gap in the literature.

By centering on the general education teaching experience, the outcome of this study added to previous research. Facilitating factors to successful consultative interactions such as creating a consistent schedule, engaging in back-and-forth facilitation, and establishing a rapport between general education teachers and special education team members were identified. Previous research had not identified multiple facilitating factors from the perspective of the general education teacher. Additionally, this research continues to support prior research by outlining positive outcomes of consultation (Argan et al., 2020; Carter et al., 2017; Copeland & Cosbey, 2008; Idol, 2006; Nilsen, 2017). The research expands on previously identified positive outcomes by adding the creation of community and support as a positive outcome of consultative interactions. Finally, specific suggestions for improvement to consultation within Liberty Elementary School from the perspective of the general education teacher were gained from this study. These findings extend prior research on consultative interactions between general education teachers and special education team members, allow a deeper understanding of the

general education teacher's perspective of consultative interactions, provide greater insight into consultation and collaboration at Liberty Elementary School.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were both limitations and delimitations to this transcendental phenomenological study. The setting and participant pool was limited to Liberty Elementary School general education teachers over the age of 18 with more than three years of teaching experience to precisely explain the targeted phenomena. Liberty Elementary School contains a high percentage of students identified as having high needs, which include students requiring special education. Given the percentage of high-needs students, general education teachers at Liberty Elementary School had intensive experience in collaboration with special education team members. Using purposeful sampling to delimit the participant pool allowed me to include only cases rich in information for this study (Patton, 2015).

Limitations of this research study included the setting of a small elementary school serving kindergarten through fifth grade within a larger urban school district. Additionally, the selection of an elementary school with a high percentage of high-needs students may mean that general education teachers are engaged in collaboration with special education team members at a more frequent rate than general education teachers within schools with a lower population of high-needs students. The setting likely limits the ability to generalize the outcome of this study. Additionally, some data in this study were self-reported, meaning general education teachers were able to control how they responded to individual interview questions and journal prompts, including only information that they felt comfortable sharing.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on consultative interactions between special education team members and general education teachers should be conducted in both urban and suburban school districts across all grade levels from early childhood through high school. Additionally, this study included teachers with at least three years of experience; therefore, additional studies should be completed to include teachers who are new to the field of teaching to allow for perspectives on initial relationships with special education team members to be explored.

A transcendental phenomenological methodology was used in this study, which focused on the lived experiences of general education teachers. Future research could be conducted using transcendental phenomenological methodology with participants in each field represented in a special education team in order to gain additional insight into the lived experience of general education teachers and special education team members across a variety of settings and grade levels. Consultation and collaboration between general education and special education within a public school setting are complex interactions facilitated and inhibited by relationships, logistics, and time. Future research could explore special education team members' experience in consultation with general education team members as well as administrators' perspectives of supporting consultation between general education teachers and special education team members to develop a complete picture of consultation within settings.

Conclusion

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to better understand general education teachers' lived experiences within consultative interactions with special education team members in a small elementary school within a large urban school district in New England. Utilizing a transcendental phenomenological design approach allowed me to

understand the phenomenon as it is described by those who experience it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Individual interviews, journal entries, and document analysis were utilized in data collection. Data were collected, analyzed, and triangulated. Insight into the lived experiences of general education teachers in consultative interactions with special education team members was gained through data analysis. From data coding, three themes and 10 subthemes emerged. General education teachers reported that consultative and collaborative interactions with special education team members are valuable within the public school setting. Building strong relationships with special education team members and establishing a schedule for consistent consultation facilitate effective interactions. General education teachers reported desiring designated time to engage in consultation enabled by increased administration support. Additionally, the inclusion of observation of the student by the special education team member within the general education environment was reported as a desired change to the structure of consultation at Liberty Elementary School.

Limitations of this transcendental phenomenological study include a setting of a small elementary school serving students in kindergarten through fifth grade with a large percentage of students designated as high needs. Selection of this setting likely limits the generalizability of the outcome of this study. Future research across all grades in suburban and urban school settings will assist in creating a full understanding of the perspective of general education teachers in consultation. Additionally, studies focusing on special education team members' and administrators' lived experiences within consultative interactions or supporting consultative interactions will assist in providing a more complete picture of consultation and collaboration in public school settings.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Permission

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 15, 2022

Meredith Kearney
Rebecca Dilling

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY21-22-1070 THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GENERAL EDUCATION
TEACHERS' CONSULTATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION TEAM MEMBERS: A
TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Dear Meredith Kearney, Rebecca Dilling,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in
accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug
Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review.
This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in
your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations
in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR
46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests
(cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or
observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the
following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity
of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to
the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required
by §46.111(a)(7).

**Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be
found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study**

on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) 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(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

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

Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself to me, as if we just met one another. CRQ

2. Tell me about your role at Liberty Elementary School. CRQ

3. Describe initiation of consultation with special education team members. SQ1

4. Describe facilitation of consultation with special education team members. SQ1

5. How do interactions with special education team members influence classroom interactions? SQ2

6. Describe the outcome of the current consultation model. SQ2

7. Describe your idea of effective consultation. SQ2

8. Describe the outcome of effective consultation. SQ2

9. How can consultation be improved? SQ3

10. Describe your ideal initiation and facilitation of consultation? SQ3

11. Describe systemic support for consultation and collaboration. CRQ

Appendix C

Recruitment Letter

Dear Mr./Mrs._____:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand general education teacher perceptions of consultation with special education team members. The purpose of my research is to describe the lived experience of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be general education teachers with at least 3 years of teaching experience, and currently engage in consultation with special education team members, and currently have a student receiving special education services in their classroom. If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to share consultation notes and schedules, participate in an audio recorded interview, and complete a journal entry. The time required to share documents is no more that 5 minutes. The individual interview will last approximately 30 to 60 minutes and the journal entries will take approximately ten minutes. I will provide you with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality of your information and responses.

To participate, please contact me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ schedule an interview.

A consent document is attached to this email. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

Sincerely,

Meredith Kearney Auscavitch
Education Doctoral Candidate
▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Appendix D

Informed Consent

Title of the Project: The Lived Experiences of General Education Teachers' Consultative Interactions with Special Education Team Members: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Meredith Kearney Auscavitch, M.S. CCC-SLP, Education Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a general education classroom teacher with at least 3 years of experience and currently engage in consultation with special education team members. You also must currently have a student receiving special education services in your classroom. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of this study is to describe the lived experience of general education teachers' consultative interactions with special education team members in an elementary school in an urban area in New England. Communication between general education teachers and special education team members is critical for special education students' social and academic engagement within the inclusive setting. Gathering general education teachers lived experiences interacting with special education team members will help expand more studies related to the successful inclusion of students with disabilities.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:
1. Provide access to consultation schedules and meeting notes. Notes and schedules can be shared digitally or though paper-based copies. This task should take 5 minutes.
2. Participate in a semi-structured individual interview. The individual interview will be audio recorded and will take approximately 30 to 60 minutes.
3. Journal entries will be completed digitally across a two-week period. This should take no more than 10 minutes.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include providing valuable information to special education team members regarding the general education teacher's perception of consultation. This information could potentially provide a different perspective or framework for special education team members. This new information could shift the current consultation model in a way that will be better suited to the general education teacher and generalization of skills for the student with a diagnosed disability.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. There is a risk that confidentiality could be breached should data be lost or stolen.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Meredith Kearney Auscavitch. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at ████████████ or ███████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Rebecca Dilling, at ████████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix E

Inquiry Audit

Date	Events
1/24/2022	Defined research problem for examination
2/17/2022	Finalized research methodology
6/16/2022-6/17/2022	Participant solicitation
6/18/2022-7/3/2022	Data collection
7/4/2022-7/7/2022	Organization and transcription of data
7/7/2022-7/10/2022	Phenomenological reduction
7/11/2022-8/1/2022	Narrative description of finding developed

Appendix F

Site Permission Letter

███████████
███████████
███████████
███

May 9th, 2022

Meredith Kearney Auscavitch
Education Doctoral Candidate
███████████
███
███████████
███

Dear Meredith:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled The Lived Experiences of General
Education Teachers' Consultative Interactions with Special Education Team Members: A
Transcendental Phenomenological Study, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our
faculty and invite them to participate in your study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

X I grant permission for Meredith Kearney Auscavitch to contact general education teachers
with at least 3-5 years of teaching experience to invite them to participate in her research study.

 I am requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and/or publication.

Sincerely,

███████████████████████████

███████████
███
███████████