THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IMPLEMENTING CO-TEACHING MODELS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Chad Davis

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

THE EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS IMPLEMENTING CO-TEACHING MODELS: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by Chad Davis

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Frank S. Bailey, EdD, Committee Chair

Joan Cox. PhD, Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. For this study, co-teaching is defined as the collaborative approach to instruction in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher work together to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess a course that includes general education students and students with disabilities. Using Johnson and Johnson's social interdependence theory as a theoretical framework, this study addressed the central research question: What experiences do teachers have implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms? A purposeful sampling method was utilized and included 10 participants working as secondary co-teachers in inclusive classrooms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document artifacts, and journal prompts from participants. Data were analyzed using phenomenological reduction, descriptive coding, and axial coding. Results revealed that teachers lacked the time to develop their collaborative relationship with their co-teachers required for implementing effective co-teaching strategies. Administrators created structures that minimized planning time and changed co-teacher pairings before effective collaborative relationships could develop. Additionally, results revealed that teachers need more training, both pre-service and after their co-teaching assignments, to effectively implement collaborative co-teaching models to meet student needs in inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: co-teaching, inclusion, special education, collaborative learning

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, who inspires me to serve others and is a reflection of God's love and grace every day. I also dedicate this to my parents, who supported me in every way as I attempted the role of the Phoenix and assisted me during my academic journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Bailey, for his encouragement throughout this process. His attention to detail challenged me to improve continuously, and I am full of gratitude to have had the opportunity to work under his guidance.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

least restrictive environment (LRE)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Defense Education Act (NDEA)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The percentage of students who receive special education services in the general education environment has grown significantly over the past decade (Jones & Winters, 2022). Placement of special education students in co-taught classrooms has increased significantly to place students in their least restrictive environment (LRE) (Bolourian et al., 2020). The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Chapter one provides the background, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions pertinent to the study

Background

The problem and purpose of the study are grounded in the historical, social, and theoretical background. Reviewing the historical background of special education is necessary to understand inclusive education. Furthermore, awareness of how inclusive education prepares students is a foundational component in the social context. Similarly, an understanding and awareness of the theoretical context foundational to inclusive education is necessary to engage in research about the topic.

Historical Context

The history of inclusive education can be understood by examining previous research and government initiatives. The Civil Rights Movement catalyzed equality shifts that laid a social and political foundation in which people with disabilities could influence legislation and public support for equal social participation. The push for equal participation was especially true in education. The most cited case involving education over the past fifty years has been the

Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). Advocates of inclusive education for students with disabilities have often referred to the court's decision to support their efforts, highlighting the unconstitutionality of separate but equal. Education has since been viewed as a "function of government that should be afforded to all citizens on an equal basis" (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2017, p. 12).

One of the critical pieces of legislation that served as a catalyst to promote the rights of students with disabilities was the ruling of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (1972). The court ruled that laws that allowed schools to reject students based on mental capacity were unconstitutional. The court's ruling provided the momentum to cast the rights of students with disabilities at the forefront of legislative agendas (Keogh, 2007). Momentum from the court ruling culminated with passing the EAHCA in 1975. The EAHCA has gone through various revisions and renaming, and is now known as IDEA. With the act's passing, millions of students were included in the public school system from which they were previously excluded (Keogh, 2007).

IDEA underwent revisions in 2004 that greatly impacted inclusion efforts (Kauffman & Anastasiou, 2019). IDEA revisions emphasized the least restrictive environment, focusing on the environment in which students with disabilities were receiving their education. Maag et al. (2019) asserted that students with disabilities need highly specialized instruction, and their needs are usually not met in a general education classroom. In contrast, Krischler et al. (2019) asserted there are numerous benefits in placing students in general education settings, if it is a setting that fits the LRE for that particular student. Placement in the general education setting requires students have necessary support in that environment. Co-teaching has become a compromise in which students have access to the general education curriculum with their peers and the support

of a special education teacher in the same classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Since the passage of IDEA, where and how special education students receive support has been debated. IDEA has led to many school districts pushing inclusion. Some have asserted that pull-out or resource classes are segregated and that all students should be educated with their peers in the general education environment (Strogilos et al., 2023). Some have contended that many students need highly specialized instruction and will make higher academic gains with a curriculum and approach designed explicitly for them outside of the general education classroom (Maag et al., 2019). Special education has made significant progress in educating students with disabilities over the past several decades. The debate continues how to best serve special education students.

While special education policies progressed to provide access to public education for students with disabilities during the late nineteenth century, recent debates have focused on where students receive their education. Section 300.114 of IDEA outlines the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirements. How the LRE requirements are interpreted and lead to student placement in public education is now a primary focus of the debate. The most significant push is to provide all special education services in the general education environment (Maag et al., 2019). Maag et al. (2019) asserted that the efforts for inclusion, while positive in their ideals, focus too much on where the student is rather than the instruction that is taking place. The implementation of IDEA has moved from its original intention of teaching skills for independence (Hannon, 1997). Lloyd and Lloyd (2015) and Maag et al. concluded that inclusion efforts are being put in place without enough emphasis on ensuring that instruction is differentiated and meets the needs of the students it is intended to support. When provided with fidelity with qualified teachers, pull-out services, teaching students with disabilities away from

the general education setting, are designed to meet students' needs that would be difficult or impossible in the general education setting. The LRE is not intended to segregate students with disabilities. However, the overrepresentation of students identified as special education because general education teachers are not skilled in managing their behavior poses issues (Kauffman & Anastasiou, 2019). Inclusion for special education students is growing as it has public support. It will be a positive move if more intentionality is given to practices and instructional strategies that ensure students receive the support they need in the general education setting (Strogilos et al., 2023).

Co-teaching between licensed general education teachers and certified special education teachers began in the late 1970s after the passage of Public Law 94–142 (Stone, 2019). However, few school districts implemented co-teaching and instead focused on resource classes that educated students with documented disabilities in an environment segregated from their non-disabled peers. The early co-teaching model was implemented as a means for student teachers to gain experience teaching with a certified teacher (Stone, 2019). Early research found that K–6 students in a co-taught math and reading class with a teacher candidate and a certified teacher outperformed students with no student teacher (Bacharach et al., 2010). The essential early research suggested that co-teaching improved student learning outcomes. Bacharach et al. (2010) found that co-planning, co-teaching, and co-reflecting offered teachers and teacher candidates time to develop and practice all aspects of their teaching and a collaborative process that supported the students' needs. Teachers, teacher candidates, and students identified through their experiences the positive benefits of co-teaching. Bacharach et al.'s research was used to adopt co-teaching by two licensed teachers for students with documented disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

Social Context

A foundational argument for inclusive education is that it helps prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary opportunities (Nápoles, 2024). In recent years, the significant gap between students with and without disabilities who pursue post-secondary education has become negligible (Southward & Davis, 2020). Although more students with disabilities are seeking post-secondary education, students with disabilities struggle more with independent living, lower graduation rates, and lower employment rates than students without disabilities (National Council on Disability, 2021).

As schools aim to prepare students with disabilities better to contribute to society, placement impacts their readiness for post-school opportunities (Sprunger et al., 2017). Students with disabilities who spent more than 80% of their time in inclusive classrooms achieved higher graduation rates, engaged in more rigorous courses, and were more successful in post-secondary educational and employment opportunities than other students with similar abilities who received their education in resource classrooms (Cole et al., 2023). As the purpose is to prepare students to achieve their goals and contribute to their communities, LRE placement becomes crucial.

Theoretical Context

Various theories have guided co-teaching and inclusive education implementation. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is a foundational component of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978). ZPD is significant as students with disabilities in co-taught settings are surrounded by their general education peers and teachers. Being placed in a setting with peers without disabilities can help students with disabilities close the gap between what they can achieve academically with assistance and independently (Eastman & McMaugh, 2022). Co-taught classrooms that have two teachers lower the teacher-to-student ratio. Lower ratios have

been effective in helping keep students in their ZPD (Casserly & Padden, 2018). Jones and Winters (2022) asserted that extensive research had shown trained teachers implementing collaborative co-teaching models yield more time students spend in their ZPD and result in improved learning outcomes. Understanding teachers' experiences implementing co-taught models is crucial to understanding how they facilitate students in their ZPD.

Bandura's social cognitive theory is also significant in inclusive classrooms. Self-efficacy was one of the tenets of Bandura's (1998) theory, which focused on individuals' perceptions of their capabilities to perform tasks. Aldabas (2020) asserted that when collaborative co-teaching models are implemented, students build confidence and overcome learned helplessness. As collaborative co-taught settings have been shown to improve students' self-efficacy, it is important to understand teachers' experience in promoting self-efficacy through implementing collaborative co-teaching models.

Problem Statement

The problem is that special education students are being placed in co-taught classrooms that are not meeting their needs (Alnasser, 2020; Jortveit & Kovac, 2021; Maag et al., 2019; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2020). The rationale for placing students in co-taught settings is that it sometimes improves student learning outcomes by utilizing collaborative co-teaching models (Brendle et al., 2017; Jortveit & Kovac, 2021). However, many co-taught settings are not utilizing the collaborative co-teaching models shown to improve student learning outcomes (Alnasser, 2020; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2020). As NCLB and IDEA have emphasized the LRE, special education students are increasingly placed in inclusive classrooms (Bolourian et al., 2020). Students previously placed in resource classes with specialized instruction are now frequently placed in general education. With resource classrooms a less common placement for

special education students, it is crucial that the general education environment can meet their needs.

Special education students have positive learning outcomes and improved social and executive functioning skills when placed in a co-taught setting that utilizes collaborative co-teaching models (Jones & Winters, 2022). However, with the exponential growth in co-taught placement, many co-taught classrooms do not utilize collaborative co-teaching models associated with positive student learning outcomes (Maag et al., 2019). Maag et al. (2019) asserted that when collaborative co-teaching models are not utilized, the special education teacher often plays a passive role, reducing the possibility of an improved learning experience for students. Teachers' experiences that impact the selection and implementation of co-teaching models need to be understood so that barriers can be removed (Alnasser, 2020). Understanding teachers' experiences can lead to implementing evidence-based collaborative models that improve student learning outcomes (Jurkowski et al., 2020).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. At this stage in the research, co-teaching will be defined as the collaborative approach to instruction in which a general education teacher and a special education teacher work together to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess a course that includes general education students and students with disabilities. The theory guiding the current study is social interdependence theory.

Significance of the Study

The proposed study has significance and will contribute to current literature theoretically,

empirically, and practically. First, the theoretical underpinnings of co-teaching will be examined. Next, the empirical significance in relation to qualitative research will be stated. Finally, the practical significance and application to the modern educational environment will be highlighted.

Theoretical

Co-teaching can foster collaboration among students and teachers and positively impact student self-efficacy (DeMartino & Specht, 2018). Effective co-teaching exists because of the knowledge of the theories that led to the collaborative co-teaching framework (Cook & Friend, 1995). Alnasser (2020) and Maag et al. (2019) asserted that many co-taught classrooms are ineffective because they depart from the collaborative processes and models that promote student self-efficacy and ZPD. The lack of co-taught classrooms implementing collaborative co-teaching models is concerning with the growth of the number of students with disabilities being placed in inclusive classrooms. If students do not gain the benefits from co-teaching that justified their LRE placement, they are often better served in specialized resource classrooms (Maag et al., 2019). The collaboration necessary to implement collaborative teaching models is crucial for effective, inclusive classrooms (Cook & Friend, 1995). Understanding co-teachers' experiences and collaborative relationships in inclusive classrooms may add breadth to collaborative learning theory and its application in educational environments.

Empirical

Significant empirical quantitative research has shown that students often have positive learning outcomes in co-taught settings (King-Sears et al., 2021). Qualitative analysis has found that implementing collaborative co-teaching models, educators trained in co-teaching models, and co-teachers who shared the same vision led to positive learning outcomes (Jortveit & Kovav, 2021). Describing teachers' experiences implementing co-teaching models is necessary to

understand the barriers preventing teachers from providing educational environments that produce positive student learning outcomes (Strogilos et al., 2023). Understanding the barriers will help fill the gap in the empirical research that guides schools in strategizing and implementing co-teaching in inclusive classrooms (Maag et al., 2019).

Practical

Placing students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms has increased exponentially over the past decade (Bolourian et al., 2020). The proposed site of the study has had an increase in co-taught classes of over 300% in the past three years (School, 2023). Maag et al. (2019) suggested that teachers are not prepared to meet the needs of students with the rate of growth in co-taught settings. Casserly and Padden (2018) concluded teachers are not being trained in effective co-teaching practices and are assigned as co-teachers rather than volunteering. Co-teachers' experiences in inclusive classrooms need to be understood to ensure collaborative co-teaching models are being implemented with fidelity to meet the needs of students.

Research Questions

The central research question has been developed to guide the current study through the lens of the purpose statement. Sub-questions have been derived from the theoretical framework to help narrow the focus of the study. The following proposed research questions will guide this phenomenological study:

Central Research Question

What experiences do teachers have implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms?

Teachers have various experiences in inclusive classrooms (Nápoles, 2024). The placement of students with disabilities in co-taught settings is increasing (Maag et al., 2019). The

positive effects of student learning and development in co-taught settings depend on co-teaching models utilized in the classroom (King-Sears et al., 2021). Understanding teachers' experience implementing co-teaching models is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of co-teaching as a strategy for inclusion (Nápoles, 2024).

Sub-Question One

What barriers do co-teachers experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models?

Co-teachers face many barriers in implementing collaborative co-teaching models (Strogilos et al., 2023). The collaborative relationship between co-teachers is essential for effective co-teaching (Alnasser, 2020). Understanding the barriers teachers experience is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of co-teaching as a strategy for inclusion (Strogilos et al., 2023).

Sub-Question Two

How do teachers counter the barriers they experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models?

There is little research to support understanding how teachers overcome barriers in implementing effective co-teaching strategies (Nápoles, 2024). When teachers encounter barriers to implementing collaborative co-teaching models, they often resort to less effective strategies (King-Sears et al., 2021). Understanding how teachers counter barriers they experience implementing co-teaching models is necessary to understand the effectiveness of co-teaching as a strategy for inclusion (Nápoles, 2024).

Definitions

The terms and definitions listed below are pertinent to the current study and are grounded in the literature related to the topic, theoretical framework, or research design of the study.

1. *Co-teaching* – Co-teaching is a collaborative approach to instruction in which two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher, work together to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess a class that includes general education students and students with disabilities (Cook & Friend, 1995).
2. *Inclusion* – Inclusion is educating all students in age-appropriate general education classes with high-quality instruction that provides support so all students can access and be successful in the core curriculum (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).
3. *Least restrictive environment* – To the maximum extent appropriate, placement of students with disabilities with peers without disabilities in educational setting unless the severity of the disability prevents education being achieved satisfactorily with aids and support (IDEA, 2004).
4. *Special Education* – Process of educating students with disabilities with specialized and differentiated instruction (Kauffman et al., 2018).

Summary

With the growth of co-teaching due to the emphasis on inclusive education, the needs of many special education students are not being met (Maag et al., 2019). As students are placed according to LRE guidelines, more are placed in general education settings, where teachers are not equipped to meet their needs (van Mieghem et al., 2020). Empirical research has shown that collaborative co-teaching models improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities (King-Sears et al., 2021). There is a disconnect between what research has shown as an evidence-based practice and what happens in co-taught classrooms. Qualitative research to determine teachers' experiences implementing collaborative co-teaching models can contribute to understanding what is needed to help schools implement co-teaching with fidelity (Maag et al., 2019). The

current hermeneutic phenomenological study will describe the experiences of implementing collaborative co-teaching models.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic literature review is conducted to explore co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. Chapter two includes a review of the research on this topic. Relevant educational theories are discussed in the first section, followed by a review of recent literature on co-teaching models, effective co-teaching practices, teacher perceptions of co-teaching, student perspectives of co-taught classrooms, administration support for co-teaching, and the co-teacher relationship. Additionally, the literature surrounding barriers impacting co-teaching practices and implementation will be reviewed. Finally, a gap in the literature is identified regarding what is involved in secondary co-teacher experiences in choosing and implementing co-teaching models.

Theoretical Framework

Co-teaching is built on the foundation of cooperative learning (Jones & Winters, 2022). The foundation of cooperative learning is two-fold and is applied to the cooperative relationship between the co-teachers and the learning that occurs during the active learning processes of the students. Three main theories have guided research on cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory was based on the premise that knowledge is socially constructed in cooperative efforts to solve problems and learn. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory stressed that individuals learn through models, imitation, and vicarious learning. Johnson and Johnson's (1989) social interdependence theory posited that the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and others' actions. The current research study has a theoretical framework based on Johnson and Johnson's (1989) work on social interdependence theory and its applications to co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. A brief historical overview of the theory is summarized before framing the research on co-teaching and the cooperative

learning between co-teachers and students in co-taught settings through the theoretical framework of social interdependence theory.

Social Interdependence Theory

Cooperative learning occurs when more than one person works to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Johnson and Johnson (2018) explained that the motivation to accomplish a common goal results from intrinsic tension within each team member or group. Interdependence can only exist with more than one person that dynamically impacts one another, which is the foundation of social interdependence theory (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Social interdependence is differentiated from social dependence, independence, and helplessness, as social interdependence involves two people actively affecting goal achievement. The effect on goal achievement can be positive, in which individuals promote the achievement of common goals, or negative, in which individuals obstruct the ability to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

Social interdependence had its historical roots in the shift toward field theories with the emerging Gestalt psychology at the University of Berlin in the early 1900s (Deutsch, 1968; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). At the Gestalt school of psychology, Kurt Koffka and Kurt Lewin proposed that groups were dynamic wholes, and the interdependence among members of the group led to changes in the dynamic wholes (Deutsch, 1968). Deutsch (1968) posited that how participants' goals are structured determines how they interact and the outcomes, which is one of the basic premises of social interdependence theory.

David and Roger Johnson (1989) coined the term *social independence theory* to expand on Deutsch's (1968) work. Johnson and Johnson identified variables that affect cooperation and investigated numerous dependent variables such as moral development, perspective-taking,

psychological health, self-esteem, social support, and bullying. The five variables posited by Johnson and Johnson were positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, the appropriate use of social skills, and group processing. Through research studies, Johnson and Johnson (2009) found that positive interdependence has more significant effects than interpersonal interaction or group membership. Studies showed that being a part of a group does not produce higher achievement. Positive interdependence is required to increase motivation and personal responsibility (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Social interdependence theory has had applications to education since the transition from individualistic learning to more structured cooperative learning beginning in the 1980s (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Social scientists challenged the effectiveness of individualistic learning that focused on competition as it lacked relational socialization, and peer interaction research was essential for meaningful learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Social interdependence theory has applications to how students learn cooperatively in the classroom. Additionally, there are significant applications to the cooperative relationship between teachers in co-taught classrooms.

The cooperative relationship between teachers is essential for effective co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). For co-teachers to cooperate to meet the goals of a co-taught inclusion classroom, social interdependence theory postulates that positive interdependence is necessary from both teachers. Social interdependence theory, as described by Johnson and Johnson (1989), will guide the study aimed at understanding co-teacher experiences in inclusive classrooms. The research questions for the current study have been developed by examining the social interdependence theoretical framework. Since most research focused on education through the lens of social interdependence theory has focused on student cooperation, the conclusions of the

current study will potentially add to the literature on the theory by focusing on teacher cooperation as part of a group.

Related Literature

The purpose of the literature review is to analyze and synthesize research related to co-teaching practices that either serve as barriers to effective co-teaching or support co-teaching. Though research has been conducted extensively on co-taught environments and outcomes, most research has been conducted on teachers and teaching strategies. Research from the students' and administrators' perspectives is sparse (Strogilos et al., 2023). Minimal research on co-teaching's impact on parents, families, and communities exists (Evenson & Puig, 2023). Co-teaching in the virtual environment is relatively new and has recently been a research focus (Heisler & Thousand, 2021). The research on curriculum resources for co-taught environments is also lacking (Jones & Winters, 2022). The relevant available literature will be reviewed.

Inclusion and IDEA

The social contexts of the period affected the philosophical beliefs that shaped inclusive education. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, deinstitutionalization was a prominent movement in the country (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). Robert Kennedy visited Willowbrook Institution in New York in 1965. After witnessing the environment of Willowbrook, Kennedy gave a speech describing it as a "snake pit" (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015, p. 78). Kennedy's speech motivated Geraldo Rivera to sneak a camera into the institution. Rivera's footage was aired on national TV as he reported the institution "smelled of death" and exhibited subhuman conditions (p. 78).

While Willowbrook was an extreme example and did not accurately represent the reality of most individuals with disabilities, it became symbolic in society of the way people with

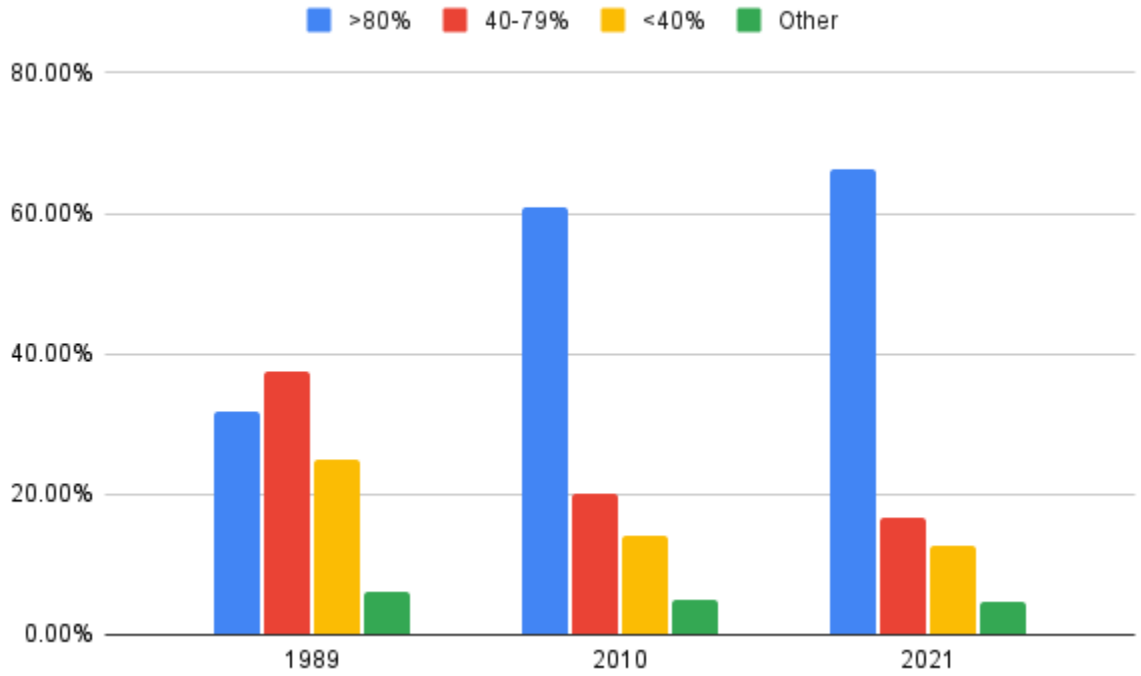
developmental disabilities were treated (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). Deinstitutionalization became an issue that political candidates campaigned on and took action to change legislation (Lamb & Weinberger, 2020). Before the 1970s, students with disabilities were often excluded from public schools. Choices for families were minimal, especially if they had limited financial resources (Lloyd & Lloyd, 2015). Children with disabilities were usually sent to institutions, taught at home, or had private tutors if families could afford it. With the symbol of Willowbrook at the forefront of public debate, public support aided action to include children with disabilities in public education (Lamb & Weinberger, 2020).

New legislation included a new bill of rights for families with students with disabilities that has seen numerous revisions over the past four decades (Hudson, 2019). In 1986, the legislation included students with disabilities aged 3–5 to IDEA. By 1992, all states had legislation mandating a free and appropriate education to children with disabilities ages 3–5 in accordance with federal law. Amendments to IDEA during the 1990s focused on making the language more inclusive. Other minor changes occurred in 1997 during the Clinton administration, and a significant change came in the aftermath of No Child Left Behind when Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004). IDEA focused on special education services and accountability. While earlier legislation focused on ensuring the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in education, IDEA included LRE requirements, which focused on where and how special education services would be delivered (Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2017). Social pressures focusing on how students with disabilities are educated continue to lead to judicial rulings and movements to influence legislation (Lamb & Weinberger, 2020). Rulings and movements have increased inclusive

education, leading to co-teaching growth in K–12 education (Jones & Winters, 2022). Figure 1 illustrates the drastic growth from 1989 to 2010 as well as continued growth in 2021.

Figure 1

Students With Documented Disabilites Time in General Education



Note: This figure shows the percentage of time students with disabilities are educated in the general education environment in the United States. The data used to create this figure came from the US Department of Education (2023).

Co-teaching

Co-teaching between a licensed general education teacher and a licensed special education teacher to deliver instruction began in the mid-1970s after the passage of Public Law 94–142 (Stone, 2019). However, Stone (2019) and Maag et al. (2019) asserted that few school districts implemented co-teaching and placed students with documented disabilities in

environments segregated from their non-disabled peers. Winzer (2009) stated that the early co-teaching model was implemented as a means for student teachers to gain experience teaching with a certified teacher. Early research found that K–6 students in a co-taught math and reading class, with a teacher candidate and a certified teacher, outperformed students in a classroom without a student teacher (Bacharach et al., 2010). Early research suggested that co-teaching improved student learning outcomes. Bacharach et al. (2010) found that the ability to co-plan, co-teach, and co-reflect offered teachers and teacher candidates time to develop and practice all aspects of their teaching and a collaborative process that supported the students' needs. All three groups of stakeholders overwhelmingly identified the positive benefits of co-teaching that were utilized to provide student teachers with an experience. Bacharach et al. asserted the early research was used to adopt co-teaching by two licensed teachers for students with documented disabilities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

Co-teaching research increased in the 1990s and its benefits were revealed (Winzer, 2009). Paulsrud and Nilholm (2020) conducted a literature review of research throughout the previous forty years to explore the benefits of co-teaching for students who need support. They found that students in co-taught classrooms experienced increased engagement, positive social outcomes, individual teacher attention, differentiated instruction, and improved learning outcomes. Krischler et al. (2019) and Power-DeFur and Orelove (1997) found that general education students in co-taught settings also received many benefits and experienced increased learning outcomes. Cook and Friend (1995) also found many benefits for teachers, including increased skills, higher job satisfaction, and more positive colleague relationships. The benefits found in early research led to an expansion in the utilization of co-teaching as a strategy for

inclusion, and the practice has grown exponentially over the past decade (Jones & Winters, 2022).

The literature reveals that the themes surrounding co-teaching are not exclusive to its implementation and application in the United States. Oh et al. (2017) found in a literature review of studies done in North America, South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa that conclusions were similar in different regions. Co-teaching has been implemented worldwide as a strategy for inclusion, and researching its effectiveness has applications beyond the current educational environment of the United States.

Co-teaching Models

As co-teaching began to expand, a need to define effective practices based on research began to emerge (DeMartino & Specht, 2018). Cook and Friend (1995) outlined approaches in defining five models for co-teaching. They asserted that the chosen model would depend on the subject matter being taught, the student's age and maturity, and the teaching team's creativity. Cook and Friend (1995) suggested that all of the models would have their place in the co-taught classroom based on the needs of the class session but stressed that the most important factor was that students with disabilities be dispersed evenly with their peers in the instructional groups.

One Teach, One Assist

One of the models of co-teaching is *one teach, one assist* (Cook & Friend, 1995). The one teach, one assist model involves one teacher taking the lead while the other observes for data collection or travels around the room assisting individual students. Cook and Friend (1995) stated that the one teach, one assist approach is simple and requires the least planning time. Casserly and Padden (2018) found that it was the model most utilized because it can be implemented with little planning time. Although it is the most prominently used model, Strogilos

et al. (2023) warned that the teacher who observes might feel like a glorified teaching assistant rather than serving in an equitable co-teaching role. Carty and Farrell (2018) found that alternating roles equitably mitigated the theme of the general education teacher serving in a dominant role. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) found that teachers and students perceived the one teach, one assist model more positively when splitting the roles equitably.

Although some of the negative aspects can be minimized, the one teach, one assist model is the least desirable of the co-teaching models (Conderman & Liberty, 2018). Casserly and Padden (2018) found that the general education teacher typically planned most when implementing the one teach, one assist model. Strogilos et al. (2023) concluded that the lack of collaborative planning reduced the benefits of co-teaching. In addition to the lack of collaborative planning, the teacher-to-student ratio that benefits student outcomes are not reduced when using the one teach, one assist model (Conderman & Liberty, 2018). Strogilos et al. found in an analysis of 155 lesson plans that the one teach, one assist model dominated instruction in co-taught classrooms. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) suggested that research is needed on strategies that make the one teach, one assist model as effective as possible with an understanding of its limitations compared to other more collaborative co-teaching models.

Station Teaching

Station teaching was the next model outlined by Cook and Friend (1995). They described the station teaching model as dividing the instructional content into two or more segments, each co-teacher instructing a small group of students. They suggested adding a third station if students in the class can work independently. Cook and Friend expressed that the benefit of station teaching is drastically lowering the student-to-teacher ratio. It also allows for an equitable relationship between the co-teachers in the classroom. They cautioned that noise levels and

distractions might be challenging when utilizing station teaching. Casserly and Padden (2018) also found that students benefited from station teaching because they could work together in small groups and engage in cooperative learning. Conderman and Liberty (2018) asserted that station teaching was the most beneficial model due to lowering student-teacher ratios and focusing on small-group cooperative learning. In 27 interviews with general educators who served as co-teachers, Tiernan et al. (2020) found that teachers regarded station teaching as the most beneficial co-teaching model. Station teaching allows each student to work in a small group under a teacher's direction and provides autonomous and equitable roles for the co-teachers (Strogilos et al., 2023).

Parallel Teaching

Parallel teaching was the third model Cook and Friend (1995) outlined. They described teachers planning the instructional activities together and breaking the students into two groups to lower the student-to-teacher ratio. They suggested using parallel teaching when students need the opportunity to engage in discussion, hands-on activities, or interact with each other, which would demand lower ratios. Noise and activity levels are also a concern, as they are with station teaching. Rytivaara et al. (2019) found that teachers who did not have common planning time but wanted to engage in equitable roles utilized parallel teaching as they could divide the work and plan individually. Additionally, Casserly and Padden (2018) suggested that parallel teaching allows teachers to plan according to their strengths while building a relationship and trust with their co-teacher.

Alternative Teaching

The fourth co-teaching model Cook and Friend (1995) discussed as an effective strategy was *alternative teaching.* They suggested using alternative teaching when smaller groups needed

to frontload information or reteaching was required for smaller intervention groups. They warned that the groups should vary so students would not be stigmatized as frequently needing reteaching. The authors also suggested using alternative teaching to implement social skills groups often. Brendle et al. (2017) suggested using groups for extension or enrichment to mitigate the stigma that the small groups are solely for remediation. Utilizing small groups for enrichment can help students avoid feeling inferior to others (Casserly & Padden, 2018). In contrast, Maag et al. (2019) asserted that alternative teaching in co-taught classrooms was often just a resource classroom without walls. They suggested that students in a co-taught setting receiving alternative teaching instruction would be better served in a resource classroom. Strogilos et al. (2023) suggested further research to understand the effective implementation of alternative teaching.

Team Teaching

The final co-teaching model Cook and Friend (1995) outlined was *team teaching*. They described team teaching as taking turns with varying tasks in whole group instruction. They suggested that a high level of trust and familiarity is necessary for co-teachers to use team teaching effectively. Cook et al. (2021) stressed that no matter what co-teaching model is implemented in the classroom on a given day, co-teachers should approach the class with equitable roles. They described equitable roles as co-planning the lesson, co-teaching the lesson, co-assessing the students, and engaging in a mutual effort to support all students. Brendle et al. (2017) found that *team teaching* requires the most planning and collaboration to be effective. Team teaching also requires the most trust between co-teachers of all models (Conderman & Liberty, 2018). When done well, Brendle et al. (2017) asserted that students benefit from receiving multiple viewpoints and methods of solving problems. Team teaching is also a good

choice for the first few classes of the year to communicate an equitable relationship between co-teachers and the students (Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019).

Co-teaching Effectiveness

The effectiveness of co-teaching has been the subject of numerous research studies in recent years. One of the focuses of recent research has been the use of the co-teaching models. Hanover Research's (2012) meta-analysis of studies over ten years revealed that co-teaching was effective when the more collaborative models outlined by Cook and Friend (1995) were utilized. King-Sears et al. (2021) found in a meta-analysis of 26 studies that examined student achievement in co-taught settings that used collaborative co-teaching models that student achievement was higher for students with disabilities in co-taught settings. Findings of King-Sears et al. supported the Hanover (2012) report. Although King-sears et al. supported the claim that co-teaching is linked to increased student achievement, their meta-analysis excluded studies with participants who lacked expertise and did not implement collaborative co-teaching models. While co-teaching under ideal circumstances leads to many student and teacher advantages, Nápoles (2024) found in a review of 62 studies that high-stakes test scores were not significantly different for students with disabilities in co-taught settings. More research is needed to understand the academic benefits of co-teaching as it is being implemented rather than early studies under ideal conditions (Nápoles, 2024).

Brendle et al. (2017) asserted that previous quantitative research supporting improved student learning outcomes utilized participants and samples of ideal co-teaching conditions and sought to understand co-teaching in a qualitative study. They found that teachers lacked experience implementing collaborative co-teaching models and did not experience the increased student learning outcomes suggested in previous research. Likewise, Nápoles (2024) found in a

review of co-teaching studies that many inclusive classrooms that simply placed a general education teacher and special education teacher in the same classroom did not guarantee improved student outcomes. Brendle et al. and Nápoles found barriers to effective co-teaching and recommended additional training for teachers and administrators who serve as or supervise co-teachers.

Another barrier to effective co-teaching identified in a review of recent research is teachers planning time with their co-teachers. Alnasser (2020) and Aldabas (2018) found that lack of planning time was the number one barrier cited by participants in their research. Cook and Friend (1995) stressed that co-teachers must co-plan for co-teaching to maintain equitable roles and be effective for students. Alnasser found that more than half of the general educators reported doing all of the planning for their courses. Aldabas cited that all of the participants in their study who were special educators were paired with several co-teachers and did not get to plan regularly with them. Lack of common planning time was one of the primary barriers to effective co-teaching reported from teacher perspectives (Casserly & Padden, 2017; Everett, 2017; Jurkowski et al., 2020; Storgilos, 2018).

Another theme from recent research essential to effective co-teaching is a positive relationship between the co-teachers. Jortveit and Kovac (2021) and Hedin and Conderman (2019) had similar findings that successful collaborative co-teaching relationships involved a shared educational philosophy by the co-teaching team. Jortveit and Kovac found that the shared basic education principles fostered team discussion and reflection. Participants who shared principles with their co-teacher enjoyed working together more. The enjoyment fostered collaboration and led to the more frequent use of collaborative teaching models.

Another factor that may lead to effective co-teaching is the opportunity for increased differentiation in inclusive classrooms (Johler & Krumsvik, 2022). While differentiation is effective for all students, students with disabilities often require differentiation to master learning objectives (Gheyssens et al., 2020). Two teachers in the classroom logically allow for more opportunities for differentiated instruction (Idrus et al., 2021). Furthermore, co-teacher collaboration fosters deeper insights during planning, leading to more effective differentiation in co-taught classrooms (Sharp et al., 2020). Milinga et al. (2023) found that teachers experienced more opportunities for effective differentiation in co-taught settings than in general education classrooms with one teacher.

While research on teacher perceptions was valuable in understanding the effectiveness of co-teaching, research on student perspectives is essential as they are the most valuable stakeholders in the education setting. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) found that students positively perceived being in a co-taught class. The authors found that students reported having more access to teachers and were willing to ask for help more often when needed. Strogilos and King-Sears observed that the co-teaching model utilized almost exclusively was the one teach, one assist model. Although one teach, one assist has been linked to challenges and issues in research, they noted that students thought both teachers supported them and felt the class atmosphere was positive.

The overall effectiveness of co-teaching is questionable. There is a consensus in research that co-teaching offers many advantages to students and teachers when implemented under ideal circumstances (King-Sears et al., 2021). However, the specifics of how students benefit academically are unclear (Nápoles, 2024). Murphy and Christle (2024) asserted that some students benefit from the co-taught setting and some benefit more from resource classes. Murphy

and Christle stressed that each co-taught class should be evaluated on how it would meet a student's needs when considering student LRE placement. How instruction is implemented is what is relevant to LRE placement rather than philosophically viewing co-teaching as a placement.

Pre-service Training

One of the variables that most affects effective co-teaching is the amount of training teachers have in co-teaching strategies (Strogilos et al., 2023). Crispel and Kasperski (2021) found that most pre-service teachers did not receive instruction in co-teaching strategies. They asserted that most pre-service general education teachers were uncomfortable or hesitant to work with students with disabilities or in inclusive classrooms. They also found that although most special education pre-service teachers were comfortable working with students with disabilities, they were hesitant to work in inclusive settings.

Many co-teachers who received training during pre-service rarely had a practical component (Shin et al., 2016). Shin et al. (2016) reported that most teachers who had the opportunity for practical application of co-teaching did not have a collaborative relationship with the in-service teacher. Many pre-service teachers do not have adequate instruction and practical application to prepare them for co-teaching assignments (Alsarawi & Sukonthaman, 2021). The literature revealed that most pre-service training did not adequately prepare co-teachers to engage collaboratively in an effective co-taught setting (Shin et al., 2016; Strogilos, et al., 2023).

Co-teaching Implementation

As research has supported co-teaching as an effective strategy for inclusion when teachers have adequate planning time to implement more collaborative co-teaching models, research to understand how co-teaching is being implemented is necessary to evaluate the

effectiveness of co-teaching. Numerous research studies cited in chapter two have concluded that co-teaching is effective when using collaborative models. However, Paulsrud and Nilholm (2020) found that the one-teach, one-assist model is the most used in co-taught classrooms. The authors expressed concern about their findings as the one teach, one assist model has been shown by research to have the least effective positive impact on student learning outcomes. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) argued that the one teach, one assist method should be reconceptualized. They argued that as long as teachers trade off taking the lead role and providing a positive environment, the one teach, one assist method can be positive due to students' positive perceptions of their study. However, their study did not include data about student learning, only citing positive student perceptions of the experience of being in a co-taught class. Jurkowski et al. (2020), Jortveit and Kovac (2021), Pancsofar and Petroff (2016), Casserly and Padden (2018), and Alnasser (2020) agreed with Paulsrud and Nilholm that teachers need more training and collaborative time with their co-teachers to implement more collaborative models which are associated with improved student learning outcomes.

Understanding the reasons for the lack of collaborative model implementation is essential in evaluating the effectiveness of co-teaching as a strategy for inclusion. Teachers need more training to implement collaborative co-teaching models (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Alnasser (2020) reported that teachers did not have sufficient opportunities for professional development, while Casserly and Padden (2018) found that teachers were not adequately trained in co-teaching practices with a sound understanding of co-teaching models before they were assigned to co-teaching roles. A synthesis of the research regarding teacher readiness as co-teachers suggested that teachers need more training before engaging in co-teaching and ongoing training to support their efforts. Byrd and Alexander (2020)

found that schools that adequately prepared general education teachers with professional development in co-teaching resulted in more effective co-teaching.

One of the reasons teachers are unprepared as co-teachers is related to the increase of co-teaching as a strategy for inclusion (Bolourian et al., 2020). Bolourian et al. (2020) concluded that the number of co-teaching class sections has grown faster than teachers can be adequately trained to take on roles as co-teachers. Billingsley et al. (2018) found that administrators assign co-teachers to meet legal requirements and often do not have the training and understanding of what is needed in the classes for effective co-teaching. Billingsley et al. stressed the importance of the compatibility of co-teaching teams. Similarly, the findings of Hedin and Conderman (2019) that a shared vision and personality compatibility lead to the implementation of effective co-teaching practices. Research indicates administrators need more training in understanding how to support co-teaching in their schools, be methodical, and involve teachers as stakeholders in planning co-taught sections and partnerships.

Teachers' Perspectives on Co-teaching

The literature on teacher co-teaching perspectives revealed similar themes regarding barriers. Planning time, professional development and training, co-teacher compatibility, and student ratios were the most significant themes in the literature analysis. From the teachers' perspective, barriers are essential to the literature. The barriers co-teachers faced resulted in an attitude in which the teachers desired to revert from inclusion to specialized small-group instruction for special education students (Casserly & Padden, 2018; Jurkowski et al., 2020). The literature review focusing on teachers' perspectives reveals themes evident in successful co-teaching environments.

Planning Time

Research indicates teachers' negative perceptions of their planning time. The lack of common planning time for co-teachers was one of the most significant barriers to effective co-teaching from the teachers' perspective (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Co-planning is one of the essential components of effective co-teaching (Iacono et al., 2021). Without sufficient time and resources for co-teachers to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess their classes, students with documented disabilities will not receive the support intended by their educational placement (Iacono et al., 2021).

With the absence of adequate planning time to implement effective co-teaching models, the co-teaching model being implemented in co-teaching classrooms significantly more than any other model was the one teach one assist model (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Researchers concluded that the one teach, one assist model was the least effective and should be used sparingly in co-taught classrooms. Casserly and Padden (2018) found that station teaching was the most frequently used model in their study. However, they noted that teachers were not co-planning lessons and dividing responsibilities, and the classrooms often seemed like two separate classrooms without a wall. Station teaching in that manner did not align with the instructional design when creating the co-taught classroom. Although Casserly and Padden's research differed from the other studies that found the one teach, one assist model to be the most frequently used, the themes of lack of teacher planning and collaborative opportunities to implement co-teaching with efficacy were similar.

Research during the 1990s and early 2000s revealed similar themes to current research. Cook and Friend (1995) and Austin (2001) found that the one teach, one assist model was most frequently implemented due to a need for more common planning time. In co-taught classrooms, the general education teacher took a prominent role in planning and instruction (Alnasser, 2020;

Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Jurkowski et al., 2020; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). The prominent role is concerning as early literature on inclusive co-taught classrooms described how the special education teacher often feels like a glorified teaching assistant (Cook & Friend, 1995). Further research is needed to study the reasons and factors that prevent adequate planning time for co-teachers.

Professional Development and Training

Another commonly cited barrier by teachers preventing effective co-teaching was specific professional development and training. From a meta-analysis, Strogilos et al. (2023) concluded that poor preparation had negative impacts. Most teachers engaged in co-teaching did not think they had sufficient training and professional development to implement co-teaching practices effectively (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Hernandez et al., 2016). Pancsofar and Petroff (2016) and Jurkowski et al. (2020) agreed that teachers were not adequately trained in co-teaching strategies. They found a strong correlation between teachers who did not believe they had sufficient training and teachers' negative attitudes about co-teaching. Pancsofar and Petroff and Hernandez et al. (2016) found the inverse to be true in finding that teachers with more hours of professional development specific to co-teaching or specific pre-service training in co-teaching had positive attitudes about co-teaching and implemented more collaborative co-teaching models in their classrooms. Hernandez et al. also found that special education teachers had more positive attitudes than general education co-teachers. They found a correlation to the increased professional development special education teachers receive in co-teaching, leading to more positive attitudes than their general education co-teachers.

Co-teacher Compatibility

The literature is consistent in the importance of the co-teaching relationship from the teachers' perspective. A shared vision for co-teaching and inclusion was evident in effective co-taught classrooms (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Jortveit & Kovac, 2021). Jortveit and Kovac (2021) concluded that a shared vision and enjoying working together fostered the ability to discuss and reflect on practices, leading to the co-teaching team making adjustments to improve learning outcomes. Casserly and Padden (2018) found that a shared vision and compatible teacher personalities and teaching styles were common themes of effective co-teaching teams.

The literature revealed the importance of the compatibility of the co-teacher team. In some cases, a well-paired, compatible team could transcend other barriers. Even in the absence of planning time, Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) found that teachers with solid interpersonal relationships had good perceptions of co-teaching (as did their students), even when limited to utilizing the "one teach, one assist" model. Although co-teacher compatibility had been vitally crucial to effective co-teaching teams, Jurkowski et al. (2020) and Pancsofar and Petroff (2016) revealed that after surveying and interviewing over 150 teachers, 100% of them reported being assigned to a co-teaching team without input during the process. The literature shows that a confusing process has been employed in many cases as teacher perceptions of co-teaching are closely aligned with compatibility with their co-teachers. Nevertheless, they have not been involved in the process of team selection.

Student Ratios

The recommended ratios for students with documented disabilities and students without in a co-taught class should reflect the natural ratios of the school environment (Iacono et al., 2021). The skewed number of students resulting in higher percentages of students with

disabilities in a class was a common barrier reported by teachers (Alnasser, 2020). Teachers had negative attitudes regarding the percentage of students with disabilities in their co-taught classrooms being significantly higher than the ratio of the school. Teachers reported that high ratios negatively impacted their ability to achieve the positive aspects of the design of a co-taught setting. Jurkowski et al. (2020) found that skewed ratios led to general education teachers preferring to revert to specialized settings for special education students. In turn, special education teachers were uncomfortable meeting the needs of the students with many special education students in such a large class.

Negative Perceptions

While most research about co-teaching is positive and cites barriers that need improvement to be more effective, research points to negative perceptions about co-teaching. Many general education teachers were forced into co-teaching relationships and had negative experiences engaging in co-teaching (Jurkowski et al., 2020). The majority of general education teachers in their study expressed a desire to return to specialized special education classrooms as they were not equipped to meet the needs of students, and they did not think that special education teachers were comfortable in larger class settings. Chitiyo and Brinda (2018), although concluding a positive effect of co-teaching for students with disabilities, found a correlation between lack of teacher preparation and negative teacher perspectives about co-teaching.

Negative attitudes toward co-teaching from the perspective of special education teachers are also included in the literature. School districts are implementing co-teaching without the proper support in place for students (Maag et al., 2019). Ineffective co-teaching led to diminished student achievement, and students would often be better served in specialized special education classrooms with teachers trained to meet their needs in a small environment. Maag et

al. (2019) were not opposed to co-teaching. Instead, they asserted that the support the students were receiving was more important than where they were receiving their support. They argued that in the absence of a co-taught classroom with trained co-teachers who implement collaborative co-teaching strategies, students are better served in resource classrooms.

Student Perspectives

Research on student perspectives of co-teaching is not nearly as abundant as that of teachers' perspectives. Students with disabilities often viewed their co-taught classes positively and believed they were getting the support they needed with two available teachers (Hang & Rabren, 2009; King-Sears et al., 2014; Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Positive perspectives were found in co-taught classrooms with experienced co-teachers who utilized various co-teaching models and strategies (Casserly & Padden, 2018).

Shogren et al. (2015), found that non-disabled students receiving instruction in co-taught classrooms had positive perceptions. Students without disabilities talked favorably about their co-taught classes and thought they were progressing and developing reading and writing skills (Wilson & Michaels, 2006). Shogren et al. reported that most students without disabilities would enroll in a co-taught class again. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) concluded positive views were due to students constantly feeling they had someone available to ask for help and that two teachers brought more engagement to the environment, and class seemed more fun.

While many studies found positive student perceptions of co-teaching, Fernandez and Hynes (2016) found that some students preferred to receive their education in resource settings. Another factor that led to students' negative perceptions of co-teaching was that many students did not understand the purpose or definition of co-teaching (Embury & Kroeger, 2012). Most middle school students reported having one teacher with a helper and did not understand why

(Harter & Jacobi, 2018). By exclusively using the one teach, one assist model, students were confused about the role of the special education teacher (Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019). Many students reported hesitation to seek help or support from a teacher that does not lead instruction (Casserly & Padden, 2018). Students felt stigmatized when asked to depend on the teacher who does not lead instruction for assistance. Students in co-taught settings where teachers shared equitable roles and utilized collaborative co-teaching models had more positive perceptions than those who utilized the one teach one assist model (King-Sears & Strogilos, 2020). However, King-Sears and Strogilos (2020) also asserted that students in co-taught settings utilizing less collaborative co-teaching models felt less stigmatized than when they were pulled out of general education classrooms to receive additional support. Some students in co-taught settings utilizing less collaborative teaching models still had positive perceptions of co-teaching, citing a willingness to ask for help from the special education teacher because of the relationship that had been established (Strogilos & King-Sears, 2019). The literature revealed that students had positive perceptions of co-teaching when collaborative co-teaching models were utilized, or they had built rapport with the teachers.

Parent Perspectives

Inclusive education aims to fully equip students with the skills necessary to lead independent lives (Evenson & Puig, 2023). Preparing students means co-teaching impacts families beyond what happens at school (Paseka & Schwab, 2019). Students with disabilities often acquire executive functioning skills in inclusive environments that generalize to environments beyond the classroom (Cologon, 2022). Parents can understand their child's learning and build upon it in the home and community. Dell'Anna et al. (2021) found that most parents do not understand the intricacies of academic strategies in co-taught classrooms.

However, they had a positive overall perception of inclusive education because their child developed executive functioning skills. Although most parents' perspectives of inclusive education are positive, parents with students with more severe disabilities believe teachers in inclusive environments cannot meet their student's needs (Bannink et al., 2020).

Co-teaching Leadership

The most critical factor of effective co-teaching practices occurred in schools with effective inclusive leadership (Billingsley et al., 2018; Gupta et al., 2016; Vostal et al., 2019). Vostal et al. (2019) found that administrators with systems in place for positive school change could incorporate inclusion into the school culture where leadership teams led a shift in culture for all, not just those who would be co-teachers. Gupta et al. (2016) agreed with Vostal et al. that successful co-teaching occurred when the administration incorporated a formal change and implementation strategy rather than just beginning co-teaching sections and limiting the conversation to those directly involved in the classroom. Many school leaders have not adequately trained in specific inclusive leadership to lead a school change effort about inclusion (Billingsley et al., 2018).

The literature shows that teachers may misunderstand the administration's role in co-teaching. Teachers viewed the administration role as allowing opportunities for professional development and planning time (Jurkowski et al., 2020). Jurkowski et al. (2020) asserted there is a dichotomy found in the literature, and there needs to be further research on relationships between co-teachers and administrators and training for administrators specific to the successful co-teaching implementation.

Administrators often pair co-teachers with little input from teachers (Iacono et al., 2021). Strogilos et al. (2023) posited that co-teaching teams paired by the administration without

consideration of teaching approaches and personalities are vital factors that negatively influence co-teacher relationships. Lindacher (2020) found that most teams paired by administrators do so without considering personalities or teaching styles. More research is needed on the training of administrators regarding effective co-teaching pairing, as well as what strategies lead to effective pairings (Jurkowski et al., 2020).

Curriculum and Resources for Co-teaching

One of the challenges for co-teaching teams is the lack of curriculum resources for their classes. Jurkowski et al. (2020) found that teacher perceptions suggested that co-teaching classes needed more time to plan for than other classes. The authors cited participants' perceptions that every lesson in a curriculum needs to be adjusted and modified to be delivered using one of the co-teaching models. Their participants asserted that adapting all lessons to co-teaching required even more planning time, which they already had little. Paulsrud and Nilholm (2020) asserted that curriculum designers must consider the needs of a co-taught setting in curriculum design. They described a disconnect because instructional strategies necessary for co-teachers are not considered by teams that develop curriculum. Curricula must be developed for co-taught classes to minimize the disconnect between curriculum and instructional goals in co-taught settings (Jurkowski et al., 2020; Paulsrud & Nilholm, 2020).

Co-teaching Virtually

Virtual education has been the fastest-growing alternative to traditional K-12 public schools in the twenty-first century (Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023). Ward-Jackson and Yu asserted a constant increase in secondary students enrolled in virtual education before the COVID-19 pandemic. That rate has seen exponential growth since the pandemic. Families have chosen virtual schooling for various reasons, including overpopulated classrooms, personal mental and

emotional health concerns, and a shortage of needed courses. Murawski (2020) found that many special education students have chosen a virtual environment due to the flexibility of individual pacing that meets their needs. Svobodova et al. (2022) found that many families have chosen virtual learning for special education students as it minimizes challenging behaviors that arise from stimulating classrooms populated with many peers. As there are a variety of reasons students have enrolled in virtual environments for their education, virtual education for special education students will continue to grow, and co-teaching needs to adapt to become an effective delivery model to meet the needs of students (Kursch et al., 2022; Murawski, 2020; Svobodova et al., 2022; Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023).

Virtual Model

The growth of virtual education and co-teaching in K–12 education have experienced similar trend lines (Veteska et al., 2022). Ward-Jackson and Yu (2023) found that many virtual co-teachers implemented instructional methods different than the co-teaching models defined by Cook and Friend (1995). Teachers implementing co-teaching in the virtual environment usually functioned similarly to the other co-teacher and simply took turns meeting with students (Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023). Similarly, Svobodova et al. (2022) found that co-teachers in a virtual setting strayed from the common models utilized during in-person instruction and recommended further research be undertaken and co-teaching models developed specifically for the virtual environment.

Although many attempts at co-teaching virtually were not successful, successful virtual co-teaching partnerships implemented effective practices similar to in-person co-teaching models (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum, 2020). Brandon and Chizhik (2020) asserted that the one-teach, one-observe model was most effective in virtual co-teaching, even though it was the least

effective during in-person instruction. They described limiting teacher-student ratios as less important virtually. They found one teacher focused on observing students and collecting data for planning future instruction and differentiation enhanced student learning experiences. The limited research on virtual co-teaching focused on the COVID-19 pandemic. A significant gap in the literature exists on virtual co-teaching under non-emergency conditions. Further research is necessary to understand the applications of co-teaching in the virtual environment (Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023).

Co-teacher Relationship

A synthesis of the literature on co-teaching reveals that the cooperative and collaborative relationship between the co-teachers is instrumental in successfully implementing co-teaching strategies associated with positive student learning outcomes (Strogilos et al., 2023). Paulsrud and Nilholm (2020) analyzed 25 qualitative research studies on co-teacher cooperation. They found that teachers who reported a positive collaborative relationship with their co-teachers implemented more collaborative teaching models. Teachers who did not have positive perspectives of their cooperative relationship with their co-teacher extensively used the one teach, one assist model. Likewise, Iacono et al. (2021) found in a review of 21 qualitative and quantitative studies that the one teach, one assist model was used most frequently when teachers did not express having a positive, cooperative relationship with their co-teacher. Iacono et al. asserted that further research is necessary to understand the variables that factor into co-teachers choosing and implementing co-teaching models. Although they claimed future research is needed, they did conclude that the literature shows an association between the co-teaching relationship and the co-teaching model implemented in the classroom.

Learning From Each Other

Development and learning are also critical components of the co-teaching relationship. In addition to formal training and professional development, co-teachers become more effective as they learn from each other (Hargreaves & Elhawary, 2020). In a qualitative case study, Carty and Farrell (2018) found that teachers continually observing their co-teachers exposed them to different teaching styles and problem-solving that aided their learning and growth. Likewise, Rytivaara and Kershner (2012) found in their qualitative case study that each co-teacher's individual knowledge and skill evolved into a construction of shared knowledge between the two in the classroom. As knowledge is co-constructed, the co-teacher relationship is positively affected. Casserly and Padden (2018) conducted a qualitative study of co-teacher teams in eleven schools. They concluded that co-teachers who share ideas and experiences strengthen their cooperative relationship, which aids in developing effective co-teaching practices.

The more teachers collaborate, the more opportunities they have to learn from each other through co-constructions of knowledge (Storglios et al., 2023). Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) found that teachers who learned from each other were likelier to engage in social relationships outside of school, which positively correlated to their collaborative relationships at school. A strong social relationship between co-teachers led to more robust learning and positive instructional experiences for students in the classroom (Pratt, 2014). Further research is needed to understand the variables that lead to a positive social relationship between co-teachers (Lindacher, 2020; Strogilos et al., 2023). However, research has shown trust, flexibility, and good communication are common themes found and observed in positive co-teacher relationships.

Volunteerism

A willingness to co-teach can directly affect the co-teacher relationship (Carty & Farrell, 2018). Strogilos et al. (2023) found that teachers who volunteered for a co-teaching assignment, either due to an interest in the collaborative process or to expertise in the content area (from the perspective of the special education teachers), had a much more successful co-teaching relationship. Sinclair et al. (2018) interviewed 21 co-teaching pairs and found that teachers wanted a voice in their co-teaching assignments. However, the teachers in the study admitted that they might not have much choice because of the lack of available special education teachers for co-teaching assignments. In contrast, Rytivaara et al. (2019) studied three randomly paired co-teaching teams that did not volunteer for their assignment. They challenged the assertion that co-teachers should volunteer for their assignments and concluded that sharing expectations about co-teaching and adequate training led to avoiding mismatched teams. The literature is unclear on how volunteerism correlates to a successful co-teaching relationship. suggested further research on volunteerism as a variable in successful co-teaching teams (Strogilos et al., 2023).

Evolution of Roles

Co-teaching was initially designed where the general educator would have content expertise and the special educator's pedagogical expertise (Cook & Friend, 1995). Many co-teachers reject the idea that one should be a specialist in pedagogy and the other in content (van Hover et al., 2012). Experienced co-teachers revealed that complementing personalities and shared responsibilities is important as they each know content and pedagogy (Rytivaara et al., 2019). Successful co-teachers reported that an evolution of relationships has occurred between general education teachers and special education students and special education teachers and general education teachers (Lindacher, 2020). Effective co-teaching classrooms were environments where students felt that both teachers could meet their needs.

Contextual Influences

Research has shown various contextual features influencing co-teaching. Teachers feel pressure to achieve high standardized test scores that adversely influence their decision-making (Ashton, 2016). Van Hover et al. (2012) found that co-teachers neglected students' pace of learning to keep on track with state pacing guides. Similarly, differentiated instruction is mitigated to focus on standardized test performance, which has been used to evaluate co-teaching effectiveness (Strogilos et al., 2023). Co-planning time is also a contextual factor influencing co-teaching. Teachers reported that using one teach, one assist was not their preferred model to implement in their classroom but was necessary due to lack of co-planning time and emphasis on standardized test scores (Rytivaara et al., 2019).

Summary

The literature review provided information regarding the theoretical framework associated with the current study, social interdependence theory, which revealed that positive interdependence is necessary for students and teachers to achieve common goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). The review of related literature showed that there had been a push for more students who receive special education services to receive those services in inclusive general education classroom settings with their peers (Bolourian et al., 2020). Due to increased inclusion and interpretation of the least restrictive environment, there has been exponential growth in the number of co-taught classrooms in K–12 schools over the past decade (Stone, 2019). Researchers have empirically studied student learning outcomes in co-taught settings for students with learning disabilities compared to placement in segregated instructional environments such as resource classes. Research has identified co-teaching as an evidence-based practice to improve learning outcomes for special education students and students without documented disabilities

(Gargiulo & Metcalf, 2017). Research also shows that the growth of co-teaching has exceeded the rate and amount of training teachers receive and support from the administration that teachers need to implement evidence-based practice elements of co-teaching (Cruz & Geist, 2019). Quantitative and qualitative research reveals a lack of teacher training and preparedness (Byrd & Alexander, 2020), a lack of administration knowledge of what co-taught classroom supports are needed (Vostal et al., 2019), and a preference for service environment rather than service support as the main barriers for co-taught classrooms (Harkki et al., 2021). There has been a growth in co-teaching virtually, but there are no current models designed for effective co-teaching in the virtual environment (Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023). The literature reveals a logical discrepancy as quantitative research showed that student learning outcomes are positively affected when teachers implement more collaborative co-teaching models (King-Sears et al., 2021), yet the collaborative teaching models are utilized the least in co-taught classrooms (Alnasser, 2020; Jurkowski et al., 2020; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). More research is necessary to understand teachers' experiences choosing and implementing co-teaching models. Future research on co-taught classrooms should include teachers' processes in choosing and planning their instruction based on the co-teaching models.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. The increasing placement of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms has changed how students receive instruction. The methodology that was used in the study is reviewed in chapter three. Research questions, setting, and participants are stated. Additionally, the researcher's positionality includes the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions. Next, the data collection plan that includes the analysis plan is detailed for each method used in the study. Finally, the methods that were used to establish trustworthiness are detailed.

Research Design

This study used the hermeneutic phenomenological research design. The primary research methods are quantitative and qualitative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While quantitative research can reveal statistical factors that influence an outcome, it cannot reveal individuals' meanings of experiences or a social problem (Power & Velez, 2020). As the current study focused on co-teachers' perspectives and lived experiences, a qualitative approach was appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

A phenomenological question may arise whenever pausing and reflecting occurs (van Manen, 2014). The current study's research questions were created through reflection on teachers' experiences. The essence of the co-teachers' experiences were described using a phenomenological research design (van Manen, 2014). In phenomenological research, the researcher is the primary instrument for use and addresses individuals' meanings of the

phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2014). Phenomenological research requires that researchers identify a phenomenon and seek to describe its essence through a series of individual perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) asserted that phenomenology is rooted in the intentionality of consciousness. The intentionality of the consciousness idea lies in the foundation that "consciousness is intentional; it is directed toward objects; it always contains an intentional content" (Moustakas, 1994, pp. 49–50). Inner perceptions can be verifiable and are the focus of phenomenological researchers to describe the essence of a phenomenon. Moustakas stated, "In phenomenology, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge, the source cannot be doubted" (p. 52). Moustakas described that new knowledge contributes to the phenomenon with each new perception. To describe the experiences of co-teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms, a phenomenological approach allowed knowledge to be learned about the participants' experiences to understand the phenomenon's essence. Understanding the essence of co-teaching model implementation is necessary before educators can take steps to increase the frequency of models shown in empirical research to improve student learning outcomes.

Phenomenology has led to an understanding of education systems and has developed into a valuable tool for learning (Selvi, 2008). Selvi (2008) described phenomenological inquiry in education as crucial as it describes the direct experience of those involved in learning environments. Describing and ultimately understanding the learner and environment can inform strategies and practices to increase student learning. Although phenomenology does not lead to solutions in education itself in the process, it reveals the description of the phenomenon's essence, which must be understood before informed educational decisions can be made. The

application to education and the proposed research questions made phenomenology a logical design choice for the research study.

More specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology was the research design of the study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is rooted in understanding the experiences and perspectives of the participants (van Manen, 1990). Hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate research design as it focuses on individuals' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their given experiences (van Manen, 2014). In the co-teacher's case, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach explored how participants perceive their teaching roles, their interactions with students, and their collaborative work with their co-teacher. Hermeneutic phenomenology allows researchers to explore ways social structures and power shape experiences (van Manen, 2014). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology allows research into how social structures, such as school policies and administrative structures, influence co-teachers' collaborative work. Furthermore, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed the exploration of the complexity of co-teaching interactions to describe how co-teachers make sense of their collaborative work. Finally, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach allowed descriptions to understand co-teachers' experiences through the theoretical framework.

Transcendental phenomenology involves the researcher seeking to bracket and bias and obtain data free of bias from the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). As I have had years working in the field of education that involved a teacher as a co-teacher, it is not reasonable that complete bracketing can be done. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher's past experiences are essential as they interpret the data and help co-construct the meaning of the participants' lived experiences (van Manen, 2014). The reality of my past experiences makes hermeneutic phenomenology a more appropriate research design choice for the current study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were created to guide the research study in describing co-teacher experiences.

Central Research Question

What experiences do teachers have implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms?

Sub-Question One

What barriers do co-teachers experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models?

Sub-Question Two

How do teachers counter the barriers they experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models?

Setting and Participants

This section explains the rationale for selecting the study's setting and participants. The setting was a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Participants were educators who were selected through purposive sampling and met criteria aligned with the research study's intent.

Setting

North Arkansas Public Schools (NAPS) was the school district participating in the study. The school district contains five schools that serve students in grades 7–12 and has a diverse makeup of ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The ethnic diversity of the district student population is 65% White, 12.3% Hispanic, 9.8% Black, and 12.9% Multiracial (NCES, 2022). Thirty-one percent of students in the district were identified as economically disadvantaged, 10.5% as English language learners, and 13.3% received special education services. Some school sites have over 50% of students receiving free or reduced lunch, and others have less than 10%.

The socioeconomic spectrum of the different school sites represents a diverse range of student populations in different regions of the district.

Although partly selected because of convenience as the district is located close geographically, NAPS is an optimal setting when not considering convenience as a factor. NAPS established an initiative to eliminate resource classes for K–8 students beginning with the 2022–23 school year. Part of the initiative was to initiate a five-year phaseout of all 9–12 resource classes. The inclusion initiative makes NAPS an ideal setting as it increases the number of students receiving co-taught services as part of their special education services and teachers assigned to co-taught class sections. The district reflects structure, organization, and inclusion philosophies that mirror current trends.

Participants

Participants in the current study were certified teachers who teach at least one section of co-taught classes as either a special education or a general education teacher in a 7–12 classroom in the district. The district has over 120 general or special education teachers who co-teach at least one section of a co-taught class for grades 7–12. A balance of general and special education teachers was sought. Similarly, a balance of teachers with less than and more than three years of co-teacher experience was sought.

Recruitment Plan

Purposive sampling provides information-rich analysis from participants who meet the criteria for a study (Patton, 2015). Researchers can understand a phenomenon from a sample, ensuring all participants have experienced the phenomenon. The total sample pool consisted of 120 teachers who met the research criteria. To ensure that all participants experienced the phenomenon, I solicited participation by contacting all current co-teachers from a list provided

by the school district site with an interest survey sent to their school district email accounts (see Appendix A). School district email was used to send a recruitment letter to potential participants based on interest survey results (see Appendix B). The initial sample sought was 20–25 teachers who engaged in co-teaching in secondary schools in the district. The sample intended to account for the attrition that diminished the number of participants and ensured an equitable representation of special and general education teachers.

The ultimate goal was to achieve the participation of 10–15 teachers, with equitable representation between special education and general education teachers that represent diverse schools in the district in terms of ethnic and socioeconomic student representation. Although van Manen (1990) and Moustakas (1994) did not express a quantity of requirement of participants in phenomenological research, 10–15 participants will be an appropriate number to meet data saturation for the study as Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested 5 to 25 participants that experienced the phenomenon. The goal of a sample in a qualitative study is to include participants who can provide significant contributions to arrive at saturation of themes of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Including 10 participants with purposeful sampling met the saturation goal.

Transferability was increased by documenting variations in the participant variables, such as experience, certifications, age, and gender, which were expressed in tables once the data was known (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). School district data showed that the participants had experienced the phenomenon. Participants were willing to undergo a lengthy interview process (van Manen, 2014). Informed consent was obtained from all participants (see Appendix C), and the opportunity to meet with me to discuss the research study and expectations was offered in addition to the written informed consent.

Researcher's Positionality

As an educator who has served both as a general education teacher and a special education teacher in a co-taught setting, I have had experiences and found co-teaching a positive strategy for inclusion. I have had experiences that led to viewing co-teaching as a negative strategy. My experiences have motivated me to research the implementation strategies of co-teaching to further the literature that can be a foundation to meet students' needs best. As I have had experiences with the themes of the current study, I relied on that expertise to help interpret the descriptions of the participant's experiences through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 2014). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) described all investigations as interpretive and stated that established principles and positions guide understanding. The following describes the interpretive framework and philosophical assumptions that guided my beliefs and the study.

Interpretive Framework

The interpretive framework that guided my study is social constructivism. I have been a special education teacher, and one of the most concerning themes I have continuously encountered is how co-teaching in inclusive classrooms often fails to fulfill its goal of supporting students with and without disabilities and often fails to utilize its collaborative models. The nature of co-teaching brings together teachers with different experiences to work collaboratively to support students (Brendle et al., 2017). Creswell and Poth (2018) described social constructivism as relying on participants' views to understand the processes of interactions among individuals. One might think disability inquiry would be a more applicable framework. However, for the current study, I focused on the co-teachers' relationships and approach, not those in their classes with documented disabilities. My experiences and background motivate me

to examine the phenomena in co-teaching classrooms so that research might inform future positive changes to improve co-teaching instructions. My purpose closely aligns with a social constructivist framework.

Philosophical Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are the researchers' positions that postulate the course of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Philosophical assumptions include ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Reflecting on how my experiences help co-construct meaning by engaging in hermeneutic phenomenology (van Manen, 2014), thorough and thoughtful self-reflection is necessary to describe my philosophical assumptions.

Ontological Assumption

A researcher's ontological assumption involves their beliefs about the nature of reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I agree with van Manen (2016) that since reality is subjective, individual experiences must also be. I believe in universal truth. However, I do not equate universal truth with reality. Universal truth is divine and singular in God's truth revealed through scripture (*New International Version*, 2011). Realities can be multiple and involve how a person experiences a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). People can have different perceptions of reality that do not depend on universal truth. Life experiences are varied and multiple, which drives me to look for multiple views. My research relied as closely as possible on the participants' views of their experiences to get as close as possible to their lived reality.

Epistemological Assumption

The epistemological assumption deals with explaining knowledge. Qualitative researchers get as close to participants as possible to understand their subjective views of their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If a participant is comfortable with the researcher, it will

lead to more truthful and open expressions of their thoughts and feelings (van Manen, 2014). Honest expressions develop rich and thick descriptions of the phenomenon.

Axiological Assumption

The axiological assumption deals with potential influences on the research study based on the researcher's values (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher's values must be revealed in qualitative research (Moustakas, 1994). I have served as a teacher in a co-taught setting and believe co-teaching should be a vital part of schools' strategy for inclusive education. Values were reflectively observed and documented to show how they help interpret the data of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (van Manen, 2014).

Researcher's Role

To conduct sound qualitative research, the researcher should thoroughly and clearly explain how they serve the study as a human instrument (Moustakas, 1994). Although I did not have any authority over my research participants, we shared much in common. I have served as a general and special education teacher and have co-taught many classes in both roles. I also work in the research setting district. I have also undergone extensive training in effective co-teaching practices to implement collaborative co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms. Due to my experience, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was chosen for the research design. Choosing a hermeneutic phenomenological research design allowed a strong connection to the inquiry of experiences. It fostered the interpretative process to arrive at the meaning of the participants' experiences through data analysis (van Manen, 2014).

Procedures

In this study, data collection steps for hermeneutic phenomenological research, as described by van Manen (2016), were utilized. Individual interviews, documents, and journal

prompts underwent thematic analysis to write structured meanings of the teachers' experiences. The process involved being sensitive to the subtle undertones of the experiences while allowing the language to speak for itself (van Manen, 2014). Data was reviewed constantly until indications of the teachers' experiences appeared.

Before collecting data, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University was applied for and approved (see Appendix D). The first step was completing the required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Next, the research proposal and permission request letters, recruitment letters, consent forms, and research instruments were sent to the IRB through the Cayuse digital platform.

An interest survey was emailed to all teachers in the approved setting that met the research criteria (see Appendix A). A brief presentation with an overview of the study was given to the 60 special education co-teachers at the monthly special education district meeting to solicit participants. Similarly, the same presentation was given at monthly curriculum PLC meetings to solicit participation from general education co-teachers. Before meeting with teachers, permission from the school district office administration was obtained by getting a signed permission request letter (see Appendix E). The permission letter was sent using the school district email account to the data coordinator, who approves and signs permissions for research for the school district. Likewise, school district email was used to send participants informed consent forms and a detailed explanation of the research proposal to ensure full disclosure (See Appendix C). All signed forms were stored on a password-protected computer with a cloud-based backup. Data analysis took place at a private residence.

Data Collection Plan

Using data triangulation minimized subjectivity from a single viewpoint (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) suggested semi-structured interviews with varying supporting data collection methods to achieve triangulation. Data for the current study were collected through individual interviews, document analyses, and journal prompts. The sequence was chosen as individual interviews will be the primary data collection method (Moustakas, 1994). Document analyses supported the interviews in exploring the experiences of the participants. Journal prompts were used last, as interviews and document analyses were used to develop the journal prompts.

Individual Interviews

The individual interview is a typical data collection method to gather data from individuals who have experienced a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To describe the experiences of co-teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms, a semi-structured interview with those teachers is a logical choice for data collection (see Appendix F). Casually sharing a coffee or meal to foster participants' comfort was recommended by van Manen (2016).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers who served as co-teachers in classrooms, including general and special education students. Qualitative responses were sought using semi-structured interviews to solicit open responses rather than closed responses sought in structured interviews (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews should be conversational and not rushed (van Manen, 2014).

Following van Manen's (2014) guidelines and recommendations for interviews, the interviews were planned at a coffee shop away from school, outside of work hours convenient to each participant. School district email was used to contact participants after signed consent forms were on file to schedule the interviews. Personal cell phone numbers were exchanged via email

for more immediate contact. At the beginning of the interviews, coffee was shared with the participants to encourage a comfortable atmosphere, yet not have the many distractions of eating a full meal. Each participant interview ranged from 30–60 minutes. Audio recordings were utilized during the interviews using a computer and smartphone (for redundancy) to generate accurate transcripts.

After the interviews were completed, digital transcripts of the audio recordings were generated using Otter.ai software. Transcripts were checked against audio recordings to identify errors in the digital transcription process. The transcripts were then emailed to participants so they could check for accuracy and ensure they accurately reflected participant experiences.

Table 1

Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself. Tell me about your family and growing up.
2. What experiences did you have that led you to want to be an educator?
3. Describe your background and teaching experience that led to you working in your current position. CRQ
4. Describe the culture of your school relating to the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms. CRQ
5. Describe your training in co-teaching practices prior to becoming a co-teacher. SQ1
6. Describe how your school pairs co-teachers and decides what course sections are co-taught. SQ1
7. Describe the training and coaching you and your co-teachers receive specific to co-teaching methods. SQ2

8. Describe your co-teaching teams' approach to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess your classes. SQ1
9. Describe some of your successful co-teaching partnerships. SQ1
10. Describe some of your unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships. SQ1
11. How do you and your co-teachers approach which model you utilize for each lesson? CRQ
12. What materials and curriculum do you and your co-teacher use in your classes? SQ2
13. Based on your experience, what changes need to be made to make co-teaching a more successful strategy for inclusion? CRQ

The first interview question was designed to allow the participant to engage in informal communication to collect background information and establish comfort to aid in open responses (Moustakas, 1994). Questions two through four were designed to explore the participants' perceptions about the school culture and structure and how co-teaching is supported at their school. Questions five and seven were written to solicit participants' training in co-teaching, which was identified as a barrier in the literature (Jurkowski et al., 2020). Questions six and eight were developed to explore how the participants' co-teaching experience related to previous research regarding panning time and collaboration between co-teachers. Alnasser (2020) asserted that more research is necessary to understand planning between co-teachers. Questions eight through 12 were designed to focus on the central problem identified in the gap in research to explore how collaborative models are chosen and implemented in co-taught classrooms (Strogilos et al., 2023). Question thirteen allows the participant to give details on solutions to barriers to co-teaching.

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan for the semi-structured individual interviews followed the methods outlined by van Manen (2016). He described that in hermeneutic phenomenological research, interpreting interview data requires some expertise in participants' lived experiences. The previous knowledge of inclusive education in the setting will allow for appropriate phenomenological assumptions to aid in sorting and coding interview data. The interviews were digitally transcribed using Otter.ai software. The digital transcripts were manually reviewed and compared against the recording to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were analyzed using phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction allows the researcher to continuously examine and describe the experience to explicate meaning (van Manen, 2014). The analysis continued with horizonalizing to give each interview statement equal value, remove repetitive statements, and leave invariant qualities of each teacher's experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenological reduction was achieved by following van Manen's (2016) approaches to theme analysis to explicate meaning from text. In the first step, the wholistic reading approach was applied (van Manen, 2014). Once all participant interviews were transcribed and checked for accuracy, each was analyzed. A term or phrase was developed to try and capture the meaning of each interview as a whole.

Next, each transcript was imported into the ATLAS.ti software. The second step of van Manen's theme analysis, the selective reading approach, was applied to each participant's interview transcript. Transcripts were read several times, highlighting essential phrases to the experience. Descriptive codes were assigned to phrases using ATLAS.ti software to keep codes sorted and organized. Descriptive codes followed Saldaña's (2021) first-cycle coding techniques. First-cycle coding involves an initial broad coding, which serves as an inventory of data contents (Saldaña, 2021). Following Saldaña's guide for descriptive coding, the assigned themes were

broad noun descriptions of the experience. Organizing data into themes made second-cycle coding more efficient.

The third step of van Manen's (2016) approach to theme analysis is the detailed reading approach. Each sentence was analyzed to see what it could reveal about the participant's experience. A code was applied to each sentence in ATLAS.ti to help organize the data and code sorting. Codes were applied following Saldaña's (2021) second-cycle coding to develop a more select list of themes from the text. Saldaña described axial coding as a second-cycle technique to assign sub-codes with a more specific dimension than the nouns used in the first coding cycle. Axial coding involves analysis to assign codes to each phrase. Saldaña suggested memo writing to document the analysis involved in coding each phrase. Memo-writing was accomplished by saving notes in ATLAS.ti that elaborate on the code assigned to each sentence. The memo-writing process was repeated to achieve saturation when no new information emerged from the coding process (Saldaña, 2021). Codes and sub-codes were grouped and organized based on repetitive codes and themes to identify the overarching themes in the transcripts (van Manen, 2014). Repetitive codes were clustered and defined to ensure a clear definition. Diagrams are encouraged during axial coding to give a visual of the data and help bring it to life (Saldaña, 2021). Tables were created to visually illustrate the data and help reveal the experiences of the phenomenon. Uncovering themes was described by van Manen as the intermediate reflective tool in phenomenological inquiry. Thus, critical examination and elaboration of the themes helped bring meaning to the teachers' experiences.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a valuable tool in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Documents containing text or visual material can be used for data analysis (Morgan, 2022). Morgan (2022)

described that document analysis is best used in phenomenological research for complementing individual interviews. Documents alone usually do not reveal enough vital information for researchers about the phenomenon but can be helpful in qualitative research to triangulate data collected from participant interviews (Patton, 2015). Teachers in the study had several documents that helped answer the research questions.

Documents collected for analysis were chosen using the four factors stated by Flick (2018) regarding authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. The documents chosen also followed Flick's (2018) guidelines to choose documents that will help achieve the goals of the research study. After the individual interview, participants received an email to their school district email account requesting digital copies of documents. Lesson plans, professional learning community (PLC) meeting notes, co-teacher shared documents, and planning documents assisted in triangulating data with interview transcripts and journal responses (see Appendix H).

Lesson plans were collected from participants to explore which co-teaching models were implemented with different types of lessons. PLC meeting notes showed how co-teaching is approached in various teams. Planning minutes and notes were collected from teachers to explore how meeting time was spent and the types of decisions made during collaborative time by the co-teachers. Documents were stored on password-protected computers. The text of the documents was analyzed in the same manner as the individual interviews to reveal themes of participant experiences.

Documents were collected to triangulate the themes derived from interviews on how co-teacher planning time is spent to understand the co-teaching teams' efforts in choosing their co-teaching model. Although teacher experiences are real and lived, it is prudent in qualitative

research to analyze the quantity and quality of planning time the teachers had. It is important to compare teachers' perceptions of planning time shared in interviews. Available curriculum maps, pacing guides, lesson plans, and other documents were collected to explore the teachers' reflections about the implemented co-teaching model and their overall perceptions of the lesson's effectiveness after each lesson.

Document Analysis Plan

Any document that contains text is a potential source of useful data for qualitative analysis (Patton, 2015). A thematic document analysis outlined by Morgan (2022) was used to triangulate document data with data from interviews and journal prompts. Morgan described the document analysis process as similar to analyzing interview data to uncover themes in the text. However, document analysis uses pre-existing data that the researcher does not co-create as they do with interview data. Morgan described collecting pre-existing data in the form of existing documents and artifacts as a useful tool to give qualitative researchers trustworthiness. Pre-existing data collection allowed triangulating data from documents with data from interviews and journal prompts to determine consistency and develop a deeper understanding of the experience. The documents were analyzed to uncover themes and discover if the relevant documents confirmed themes of emotions and thoughts of the teachers' experiences revealed in interviews.

Data were analyzed similarly to the individual interviews. The wholistic, selective, and detailed reading approaches were applied to document analysis (van Manen, 2014). Descriptive and axial coding was used until saturation (Saldaña, 2021). Saldaña suggested axial coding is appropriate when coding multiple data forms, such as interview transcripts, documents, and journals. The same coding assignment was used in ATLAS.ti as will be used for the interview transcripts. For documents that contain graphics, coding was applied to the document's text,

while memo-writing logged the reasoning for the coding.

Journal Prompts

Participants were asked to respond in writing to reflective journal prompts (see Appendix G). Journal entries allowed them to reflect on their experiences of co-teaching and implementing co-teaching models. Journal prompts are valuable in phenomenological research when used with individual interviews as they offer multidimensionality (van Manen, 1990). Even if researchers take measures to enhance a comfortable interview environment, van Manen (2016) warned that some participants might feel more comfortable sharing some experiences in writing. Some participants might be better at expressing their experiences in writing than in conversation. He also suggested that participants with strong interpersonal skills may be more reflective when they can take time with their responses and express them in writing. Participants were emailed to their school district account 1–2 weeks after their individual interview to complete journal prompts, delivered electronically via Google Forms. Participants were asked to respond to each prompt in at least 200 words to provide a sufficient description of their experiences. The Google Form data was exported to Microsoft Excel and input to the ATLAS.ti software for sorting.

Table 2

Journal Prompts

1. In 200+ words, describe what positively affected your experiences as a co-teacher. CRQ.
2. In 200+ words, share the challenges you regularly encounter co-teaching. SQ1.
3. In 200+ words, describe what can improve instruction for students with disabilities in your co-taught classrooms. SQ2.
4. In 200+ words, compare and contrast your experience co-teaching with what you think is an optimal co-teaching environment. SQ2

5. Describe what you know now about co-teaching that you wish you knew before you began as a co-teacher. CRQ, SQ2.

Journal Prompts Analysis

The data analysis plan for journal prompts followed the same steps as the individual interviews outlined by van Manen (2016). Teacher journals were collected digitally, allowing them to be input into the ATLAS.ti software. Analysis of the transcripts using phenomenological reduction was used as described by Moustakas (1994). Horizons are the textural meanings of the experience. Repetitive statements were removed by giving each journal entry statement equal value through horizonalizing to leave the meaning or horizons. Moustakas described horizons as "the grounding or condition of the phenomenon that gives it a distinct character" (p. 95). Horizons were described by van Manen (2017) as unlimited, as each view of an experience can never be completely exhausted. He explained that engaging in holistic, selective, and detailed approaches to analyzing experiences can lead to themes that give meaning to the experience. Descriptive and axial coding was used to discover patterns and reveal emerging themes (Saldaña, 2021).

Data Analysis

After data were collected and analyzed from the individual interviews, document analysis, and journal prompts, the descriptions of the essence of each data source were synthesized. The three-step approach van Manen (2016) described to thematic analysis from text will be applied to the data. First, each transcript and text were analyzed as a whole to identify significant meaning. Next, the text was read and listened to multiple times to identify phrases essential to the phenomenon. Finally, every sentence was analyzed to reveal how the experience of the phenomenon was described.

Saldaña (2021) identified 32 codes grouped as first or second cycles. First-cycle coding strategies are the initial coding of data into broad categories of data. The current study used descriptive coding as a first-cycle strategy to apply descriptive nouns to data. Descriptive nouns allowed for the identification of meanings in the data to discover patterns. Second-cycle coding involves analytic skills to classify, synthesize, and conceptualize the data. Axial coding was used as a second-cycle strategy to sort themes generated from the first-cycle codes. Codes allowed the development of clusters of themes from the data. Clustering of horizons into themes helped develop a coherent textural description of the phenomenon. ATLAS.ti was used as a tool to sort data and cluster the themes.

Trustworthiness

Phenomenological researchers face challenges as the traditional validity measures are incompatible with phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1989) sought to address challenges and define strategies to promote credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. This section details how strategies were applied to ensure rigor in the current qualitative study.

Credibility

Ensuring credibility is one of the most essential parts of a qualitative researcher in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Lincoln and Guba referred to credibility as the extent to which the research truthfully and validly represents the phenomena under the study. Validity is not used in the sense that it is understood in quantitative research (van Manen, 2014). To describe participants' perceptions to the extent they are understood in reality, triangulation, reflective commentary, and member-checking were used to achieve credibility.

Triangulation

The main emphasis of the current study was the data collected from semi-structured individual interviews with teachers who experienced the phenomenon. The collection and analysis of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation. The interview data were triangulated with additional data from participants' documents and journals. Gaps did arise with each data source that others supported and filled (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). Each statement relevant to the topic was examined as having equal value (van Manen, 2014). Since there were multiple data sources, triangulation enabled multiple perspectives to be considered in synthesizing the essence of the participants' experience.

Reflective Commentary

Researchers use a reflective journal to document their perceptions through each research phase (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Guba and Lincoln also suggested that reflective commentary can monitor the developing constructions through progressive subjectivity. Reflective commentary allowed for in-depth evaluation during each step of the data analysis process as the emerging themes were developed to describe the phenomenon.

Member Checking

With hermeneutic phenomenology, data analysis must be completed on statements that accurately describe how participants expressed their perception of the phenomenon (van Manen, 2014). Member checking was essential to confirm concepts and perspectives to ensure the essence of the experience was accurately expressed to allow for accurate data analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transcripts of interviews were given to participants, allowing them to review them for accuracy. In addition to checking for accuracy, participants were asked to provide additional written comments that clarified or elaborated on their experience. After the first coding cycle, participant comments were solicited to ensure that data analysis reflected the

participants' perceptions. Participant comments added a crucial level of scrutiny by allowing participants to examine and report on the accuracy with the ability to respond with feedback (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Transferability

Rigorous research is reliable and valid and has a high level of generalizability or transferability (Patton, 2015). The transferability of a study refers to the extent to which the research findings of one study can be applied to another study of a similar context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that qualitative researchers are generally less concerned with generalizability. The accurate description of the phenomenon takes priority over the generalizability or transferability of the study (van Manen, 2014). However, van Manen (2016) expressed existential generalizations can be made to recognize recurring aspects of the phenomenon. Qualitative researchers can have a higher level of transferability if there is a high level of confidence in the research data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability was established through recovering structures of meaning embodied in the participants' experiences (van Manen, 2014). The study's parameters were listed descriptively so the reader could make their judgments (Cole & Gardner, 1979).

Dependability

Research dependability in qualitative research is achieved when the results show the findings to be consistent and can be repeated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Dependability was shown by including detailed descriptions of the procedures undertaken throughout the study. Procedure descriptions allow for the study to be replicated by examining the procedures. Dependability was achieved through an inquiry audit, which occurred through review processes by the dissertation committee.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which research findings are shaped by participants, not researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Researcher bias, personal motivations, and the researcher's interests cannot shape the study's findings. Instead, the research participants must shape the findings to describe the essence of the phenomenon they experienced accurately. Max van Manen (2016) stated that "prejudices are not only unavoidable, they are necessary, as long as they are self-reflectively aware" (p. 354). Keeping the reflexive journal throughout the study, with one of the primary goals to continuously define and describe presuppositions, helped ensure confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues exist before, during, and after conducting a qualitative research study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The imbalance of power relationships from the researcher's role as an insider/outsider and the fear of disclosure of participants can lead to ethical issues.

Permissions

Before collecting any data, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Liberty University was applied for and approved (see Appendix D). The first step was completing the required Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative. Next, the research proposal and permission request letters, recruitment letters, consent forms, and research instruments were sent to the IRB through the Cayuse digital platform. Before meeting with teachers, permission was obtained from the school district office administration. Approval required submitting the proposal to the data coordinator for review. Once satisfied with the proposed study and use of the site, the data coordinator signed a site permission request letter (see Appendix E). The sensitivity of the vulnerable populations of students is one of the reasons

that observations were not utilized in the current study, as they are not crucial as a data collection method to answer the research questions.

Other Participant Protections

Ethical issues were considered to protect participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) stated ethical standards include establishing clear agreements with participants, recognizing confidentiality, obtaining informed consent, and developing procedures for assuring full disclosure. Participants completed and signed informed consent forms accompanied by a detailed explanation of the research proposal to ensure full disclosure (see Appendix C). Research participants were informed and can provide input and clarity of their transcripts through member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All records, transcripts, and other data were kept in password-protected digital files, and physical documents were kept locked. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were used for all participants, schools, and locations. All data will be destroyed after three years (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2015). Detailing how confidentiality was addressed helped alleviate participants' fears (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

Chapter three described the qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research design. The research questions, setting, and participant criteria were detailed. Next, data collection methods and instruments were stated. The justification of the research design, data collection, and data analysis methods was supported using the primary text of van Manen (2016). The data analysis plan was detailed and included descriptions of my background and role in interpreting and analyzing the data. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study was discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Chapter four includes a description of the 10 purposefully selected participants. Additionally, chapter four presents the study's findings in narrative themes and tables, including outlier data. Finally, the chapter contains answers to the thematic alignment of the research questions.

Participants

The 10 participants in the current study included secondary co-teachers from a school district in Arkansas selected through purposeful criterion sampling. All participants taught at least three co-taught sections at the time of their participation in the study. Five of the 10 participants were general education teachers, and five were special education teachers.

The school district authorized the special education designees to provide a list of co-teachers to contact as potential participants. Teachers on the lists were sent a screening email to gauge their interest in the study and verify their criteria eligibility. Fifteen teachers responded, of which 13 met the participant criteria. Those 13 teachers were sent recruitment emails, and 10 returned consent forms and completed all data collection requirements. See Table 3 for the demographic data of each participant.

Table 3

Teacher Participants

Teacher Participant	Years Taught	Years as Co-teacher	Special or General Education	Content Area	Grade Level
Andy	16	10	Special Education	English	8th

Elaine	3	1	General Education	Social Studies	7th
George	29	13	Special Education	Science	9th
Jan	11	11	General Education	Math	8th
Jerry	12	11	General Education	English	8th
Joey	25	7	Special Education	Math	8th
Michael	8	2	General Education	English	7th
Monica	17	6	General Education	Math	9th–12th
Pam	5	2	Special Education	English	7th
Rachel	10	9	Special Education	Science	7th–8th

Andy

At the time of this study, Andy had been teaching for 16 years. She was a single mother of two children with a bachelor's degree in literature. Andy was the first to respond to the recruitment email and added in her email response, "I think it is great you are doing this study. I hope it will shed some light on ways we can all improve our practices." Andy debated going to law school but decided against it when she had her first child because she was concerned about the time demands. Her sister encouraged her to apply for a teaching position in a geographic area designated by the state as "high needs." Andy mentioned at the beginning of her interview, "I did not think I would be considered because I did not have a license nor even started any

courses." She was immediately hired to teach high school English and pursued a Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) as part of the requirements for her teaching position.

Andy's first teaching assignment was at a small high school. She shared, "I taught English 10, 11, and 12. Some of the students had me all three years. I loved getting to build a strong relationship over the years like that." Ten of the 11 years at her first school included at least one co-taught section of high school English. After 11 years, she moved to northwest Arkansas and continued teaching high school English at a virtual school that had increased special education numbers because of the pandemic. Andy went on an additional licensure plan (ALP) to become a special education teacher and received a master's degree in special education. She currently serves as the special education co-teacher in eighth-grade English. Andy stated during her interview:

> Having several years of teaching English as the general education teacher, and also having co-taught sections as the general education teacher, gives me a unique perspective and gave me a solid foundation to now be the special education co-teacher. I feel comfortable with new or experienced co-teachers.

Although Andy feels confident working with co-teachers whose experience and personalities are varied, she stressed during the interview that just because she feels comfortable does not mean it is the best-case scenario:

> Because I have multiple co-teachers, I feel like I do a good job making modifications or differentiating on the fly. I learned to do that with so many virtual students during COVID. However, just because I can do it doesn't mean that is what should be done. I would love the chance to get to plan with my co-teachers so that I do not have to make so many decisions on the fly.

Andy explained during her interview that she feels like an outlier as an English co-teacher. She expressed, “Most of the special education teachers I work with often feel like classroom assistants. I think because I taught English as the teacher of record for so many years, I do not feel like that.” Although Andy is happy with the progress the district and her building are making in improving co-teaching practices, she reported being apprehensive about the upcoming year:

> I think we are going in the right direction. I am just a little concerned for my position next year. All of our 8th grade English teachers have moved to other positions so we will have an entirely new team next year. A lot of unknowns.

Elaine

At the time of this study, Elaine had been teaching for three years. Elaine grew up in Arkansas with a focus on education. She described her childhood: “Both of my parents were teachers. Their parents were teachers. I had no choice but to do well in school. I knew if I did not, I would not be able to do anything fun.” Although her two older siblings followed in the family’s footsteps and became educators, Elaine did not intend to teach and received a bachelor’s in criminal justice. She decided she didn’t want to do anything in the criminal justice field and transitioned to education by earning her MAT.

Elaine has taught as a social studies teacher in the district for three years. She expressed that she may have a unique perspective on co-teaching:

> I am a social studies teacher. It was math and English teachers that have been doing co-teaching much longer. However, I had many conversations with my family that had me thinking about co-teaching before I ever became a co-teacher. My mom was an administrator, and my sister is an assistant principal in another district. We have talked

> about strategies and ways to make schools more inclusive. So even though I did not have any training in co-teaching, I think I had a better idea than many other social studies teachers when they said they were expanding co-teaching to social studies.

Elaine was chosen by her principal to serve on her school building's inclusive leadership team. She was excited about the opportunity and passionate about improving all students' learning. When asked about her unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships, Elaine said, "I have not really had much success. We have not been able to plan together, and she does not know much about what we are covering. It definitely feels like I am the teacher, and she is the assistant." However, Elaine still expressed optimism about co-teaching and has advocated for her principal to schedule courses and for teachers to improve co-teaching. At the close of the interview, Elaine expressed looking forward to the next school year:

> I asked to do all co-taught classes next year. He (the principal) was all about it, and I will have the same co-teacher for every section next year. And we will have the same planning period together. I have seen teams that teach together all day and what it can look like, and that gets me excited about it.

George

At the time of this study, George had been teaching for 27 years. George received a bachelor's in psychology and had no intention of teaching as both of his parents were teachers. After trying a career in music, he went back to school out of state, receiving a master's in special education. George taught in a Florida charter school with 50% special education enrollment and worked as the special education coordinator for two years. He expressed a strong passion for co-teaching and inclusive practices. George's interview took more than twice the time of any other

participant because of the detailed and elongated responses. George was also the first participant to return journal prompt responses and included more detail than other participants.

George recapped his experience working at the Florida charter school:

> When you work at a small charter school, and you are piloting co-teaching, you get to experience it from the teacher side and the administrator side. I was more like a assistant principal than my title of special education coordinator. That experience opened my eyes to how co-teaching can benefit students. It also showed me that co-teaching can be negative for students if it is not structured appropriately.

George moved to public schools and worked as a special education guidance counselor. After teaching for nine years and working as a coordinator for eight years, he moved to Arkansas and desired to return to the classroom. He started in the district thirteen years ago as a special education teacher. George mentioned in the interview, “I have had 20 co-teachers and feel like I have seen it all. When the state said they were going to push the co-teaching model and inclusion, I was happy to be part of the first teams and help other teams learn what has been working.”

Jerry

At the time of this study, Jerry had been teaching for 12 years. Jerry received a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and had no desire to be a teacher. He worked as an administrative assistant for 13 years and then wanted to get into education to serve students and get on the same schedule as his children. Jerry pursued his teaching license non-traditionally and earned his MAT. He has taught eighth-grade English in the district for 12 years at the same school.

Jerry explained that administrators at his campus have been asking for more co-teachers. He wrote in his journal, “The principal has been asking for more co-teachers to reduce the

burden on individual teachers and provide more inclusive support for students." Jerry said that although he wished he had individual planning time with his co-teachers, they have a team plan that makes the best of their situation. He stated in his interview:

> Since we do not have the ability for common planning periods, they at least scheduled our team plan together. The co-teacher meets with all three of us, and we implement the same lesson so they feel comfortable supporting each classroom.

Jerry discussed how his feelings about co-teaching have evolved. He mentioned that early in his career, "Co-teachers were more of a burden my first few years. I felt like I had to meet student needs and then also supervise the co-teacher." He explained that he had negative feelings about co-teaching but accepted it as part of the job. When resource classes were removed, Jerry was very concerned and didn't feel prepared to meet student needs with a higher percentage of special education students. However, Jerry stated, "Things have been changing since they removed resource." He mentioned in his interview that co-teaching has been improving recently, "I have had co-taught sections since the very beginning, but this past year was the first year I felt like was true co-teaching. That makes me look forward to my co-taught sections next year."

Joey

At the time of this study, Joey had been teaching for 25 years. Joey received a Bachelor of Science in Theoretical Mathematics and taught math for two years. Joey did not think he was a good fit to teach teenagers as he was so young and went to work for the government. Joey retired from government service after serving his country in the CIA for 26 years. He returned to teaching and has been in the district for 25 years. Seven years ago, Joey wanted a change and earned his master's in special education and has been working as a special education teacher in

co-taught math courses for the past seven years. Joey expressed his philosophy, which drives his approach as a teacher:

> I am usually for change. I embrace new approaches and am always willing to try them. However, I know that most strategies or approaches are theoretical. There is theory that supports why a specific approach may be effective. So, I am willing to try them, but I am always focused on paying attention to my students' needs. My goal is to support my students, not fully adhering to a specific strategy.

Joey also expressed that he thinks that co-taught classrooms offer many benefits beyond academics. He said, "I am willing to do whatever I need to do to help students. Sometimes that is just building a relationship, so they feel comfortable coming to class and to school." Joey felt that other co-teachers might have equitable relationships, but if he were to have that type of relationship, it might get in the way of constantly evaluating how to meet individual student needs. He mentioned:

> If I am focused on teaching the entire class, I am not picking up on the small cues that allow me to sit down with a student and help them in real-time. The one teach, one assist works good for me in my ability to help students.

In his interview, Joey mentioned many positive aspects of co-teaching. He also praised the inclusion of various students in the general education environment. When asked about his successful co-teaching experiences, Joey said, "I have been co-teaching for many years now, and I think there have been several students who have been accepted into the classroom that, I think previously, the administration would have wanted to send them somewhere else."

Jan

At the time of this study, Jan had been teaching for 11 years. Jan grew up in a blended family with an older sister and two younger brothers. She expressed that they did not have much when she was school-aged. She said in her interview, “I wore secondhand clothes and had to earn my way to softball tournaments that other teammates just had their parents write a check for. Looking back, I am proud of the work ethic I learned.” Jan expressed that her mother wanted more for her. She wrote in her journal response:

> My mom always thought education was the great equalizer. That definitely rubbed off on me. I viewed it as my way to provide stability, and now as a teacher I know it can help my students work their way above the poverty level.

A similar mindset was evident in how Jan approached diversity and inclusion. She said in her interview:

> I was one of the only white girls in my class. But I love that. My education, growing up, looked more like the real world. And that is what I wanted when I started teaching. I wanted to make sure I was teaching in diverse environments that look more like the real world. Other teachers view it as challenging, but I view it as a blessing.

Jan earned her teaching license traditionally and taught for 10 years in another district within the state. She was always good at math and wanted to coach softball. She became a math teacher and has had at least one co-taught section every year of her teaching career. She just completed her first year as an eighth-grade math teacher in the district. In her interview, Jan said she is attracted to co-teaching because “I always seek the most diversity. I want to teach and live in environments that feel like real life. I think co-taught classrooms offer that diversity.”

Although Jan liked co-taught classes' diversity, she has not had positive co-teaching experiences. She said, "It seems like I am often paired with a co-teacher who doesn't understand the math content. The class seems easier to me when they are not even there." Jan talked and wrote extensively about the challenges of having a co-teacher who is uncomfortable with the academic content. Although she expressed a lack of content knowledge as a significant barrier, she has hopeful feelings for her future co-teaching assignments. Jan stated, "This district dots their i's and crosses their t's way more. They seem to be on top of finding ways to improve co-teaching, so I am looking forward to what comes."

Michael

At the time of this study, Michael had been teaching for eight years. Michael received his bachelor's degree in secondary English Language Arts (ELA) education and has spent the first eight years of his teaching career as an eighth-grade English teacher in the district. Michael enjoys teaching literature to students and prefers to work with advanced students. When asked how he came to be in his current position, Michael said, "I would prefer to go to the high school and teach AP courses. I haven't had experience teaching AP so it is difficult to get my foot in the door."

For the past two years, Michael has been co-teaching three sections. Although Michael has been co-teaching, he expressed that he had little knowledge of co-teaching models. When discussing collaborative co-teaching models, Michael stated, "I know there are stations or other things that you are supposed to be doing that are helpful for students. I don't really know much about it."

Michael often spoke about his enjoyment of teaching advanced students who can comprehend and discuss difficult literature. Michael also talked about not being very passionate

about basic skill-building in ELA and that some students would be better off with resource classes. During his interview, Michael stated:

> I think the co-taught classes are good for some students. I think the old resource classes would be better for some students. They would do better with more individual help and small classes. I still do not know about the whole co-teaching thing.

Monica

At the time of this study, Monica had been teaching for 17 years. Monica received her teaching license out of state and taught secondary mathematics for 10 years. She shared that she just finished her master's in mathematics and would like to start adjunct teaching at the local community college. Monica is a mother of two and is very involved in her church, where her husband is the pastor. She views teaching math as something much more than just building academic skills. When asked how she became an educator, Monica said, "It is my mission field. I get to build relationships with students and help build their confidence in learning to master things many struggle in at first."

Upon moving to Arkansas, Monica worked in the district for a year as an instructional coach before becoming the secondary math teacher at the district's virtual school, where she has taught for the past six years. Monica spends her time working with students one-on-one and enjoys the support she can offer students that she could not offer in the traditional school setting. Monica described her position:

> Every time I am working with a student, we are one-on-one. That is how our program is designed. I can fully individualize the experience for students whether they are general education or special education students. There is no way I would go back to the

> classroom. I know in this model I can meet all of my students' needs and meet with them as much as I need to for them to meet their learning goals.

Monica was unsure whether co-teaching should exist in the asynchronous virtual learning model. She stated, "Co-teaching is supposed to lower the ratios, right? *I mean* [emphasis added], I work with all of my students individually, so is that even necessary?" Although she was undecided about co-teaching in the virtual environment, she had strong beliefs about inclusion in the virtual environment. When asked about her unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships, Monica shared:

> For several years, I had students on my roster I never met or talked to. The special education teacher would meet with them. No other general education teacher or I have worked with them. It felt very segregated. Special education felt like something not a part of our school. Now, I work with all students and meet with the special education teacher to make sure we are meeting the students' needs. We see them at field experiences, and they are included in all of our activities just like other students. Having our special education students work with each general education teacher instead of solely with one special education teacher for everything has helped them grow beyond belief.

Pam

At the time of this study, Pam had been teaching for five years. Pam received her bachelor's degree in secondary ELA education out of state and taught high school ELA for three years. She accepted a job in the district as a coach and was not sure of her teaching assignment. She was given the choice to co-teach ELA as the special education teacher on an ALP or teach an elective. Because of her desire to stay in ELA, she accepted the ALP. She completed the Arkansas grant-funded program for general education ELA and math teachers to earn their

special education certification. She taught for two years as a special education co-teacher and stated she is pursuing her master's in special education. During the interview, Pam said, "I said I would never do special education, *ever* [emphasis added]. And it took a very special person to do this job. And I'm like, never say never because God can put you in your place real quick and open your eyes."

Pam talked positively about her experience and expressed that she enjoys her current assignment. However, she lacked experience and confidence during her first two years as a special education teacher. Pam described her experience:

> I did not have any special education training. So, for the first year, and even the second, everything was brand new. The paperwork, the meetings, I felt like every few seconds someone was throwing out an acronym I did not know. I was trying to figure out all of the paperwork side of special education, so I was not focused on learning classroom strategies.

Despite learning on the fly, Pam positively views co-teaching. She said, "I am a coach and I love teamwork. So, I love having a team and a co-teacher." She expressed concern about the co-teaching structure at her campus. "I am a coach, so I do not get a planning period, so I am not sure I am the best choice for a co-teaching assignment since I cannot plan with my co-teacher." She was also concerned about the planned looping of co-teachers for her campus. She explained that looping would mean special education teachers stay with students as they progress grade levels, resulting in new co-teaching relationships each year. She stressed, "If we get a new co-teacher every year, we are just wasting what we have been building." Although she is always looking to do what is best for students, Pam mentioned, "I would apply for an ELA job and go

back to the general education side if it opened up. I want to be confident in what I am doing and do not feel that way right now."

Rachel

At the time of this study, Rachel had been teaching for 10 years. Rachel comes from a family of educators. She graduated with a degree in elementary education and worked her first year as an elementary math coach. She enjoyed working with small groups and individuals, which motivated her to earn her master's in special education. Rachel has worked as a special education co-teacher in the district for the past nine years. She had difficult experiences for the first two years working with six teachers and six preps. However, she persevered and has worked with the same teacher for the past seven years, co-teaching middle-level science. During her interview, Rachel said:

> Since we have had the opportunity to be together now for seven years, our inclusion classroom is extremely cohesive, like a fine-oiled machine. I absolutely love it now. I can see other teachers on the verge of quitting and wanting what we have. I remember being in that place and I want to help other teams get there.

Results

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Co-teaching has become the primary strategy for the inclusion of students with disabilities with non-disabled peers in general education classrooms in the district. The current study was guided by a central research question and two sub-research questions. Data were collected from individual interviews, journal prompt responses, and documents. The Otter.AI software was used to create digital transcripts of the interviews. Each

data source was thoroughly read and examined many times, giving equal value to each statement. Statements were coded using the ATLAS.ti software. Participants' experiences provided rich, thick descriptions that allowed themes and subthemes to emerge using phenomenological reduction. A total of four themes and eight subthemes were derived from data analysis, as well as two outliers. See Table 4 for themes and subthemes.

Table 4

Themes & Subthemes

Theme	Subthemes	
Pairing and Scheduling Co-teachers	Benefits of Planning Together	Considerations for Pairing Teams
Co-teaching Preparedness	Lack of Training and Professional Development	Lack of Coaching and Ongoing Support
Collaborative Relationships	Equitable Roles of Co-teachers	Need for Consistency and Stability
Inclusion as Part of School Culture	Teachers' Beliefs About Inclusion	Recent Progress and Hope for the Future

Pairing and Scheduling of Co-teachers

Participants expressed a desire to implement collaborative co-teaching models to meet student needs. However, how co-teachers are paired and scheduled impacts the ability of teachers to meet those needs. The first theme that developed from the data analysis was the "pairing and scheduling of co-teachers." "Pairing and scheduling of co-teachers" was derived from participants' experiences in how they are paired and assigned courses and how it impacts their co-taught classes. Descriptive codes "common planning time," "master schedule," "team pairing," "prepared to meet student needs," "choice," and "content experience" were clustered to

form the theme of pairing and scheduling of co-teachers. “Pairing and scheduling of co-teachers” was the most prominent theme, as the associated codes were included in all 10 participants’ data and appeared 409 times in interview transcripts, journal responses, and documents. Additionally, “pairing and scheduling of co-teachers” was expressed as the primary reason co-teaching is successful or unsuccessful by all 10 participants. When asked what changes need to be made to make co-teaching more effective, George said:

> Scheduling is the most important. The master schedule needs to be built with inclusion at the center. When it is an afterthought, we end up working with many co-teachers and not having time together to plan. When it is a primary concern in the scheduling process, we end up with what I had last year: working with one teacher all day with common planning time and being able to meet students’ needs.

Benefits of Planning Together

The first subtheme identified under “pairing and scheduling of co-teachers” was the “benefits of planning together.” Teachers who had planning time together experienced a more positive co-teaching experience and felt better equipped to meet their students’ needs. “Benefits and planning together” were derived from the codes “common planning time” and “prepared to meet student needs.” “Common planning time” was the most frequent code of data analysis, occurring 164 times and being expressed by all 10 participants. Seven participants expressed that they did not have a common planning time with their co-teacher built into their schedule, which led to negative experiences. Three participants expressed positive experiences having common planning time with their co-teacher. All three also expressed past experiences of not having common planning time and that common planning time is necessary for effective co-teaching. When asked to share about successful and unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships, Jerry said:

> It was not until last year that I had the same planning period with my co-teacher. Before, they would walk into class and have no idea what we were doing for the day. They had no idea. There are still a lot of teams in our building like that. But now, my co-teacher and I get to fully plan together which allows us to fully co-teach and divide responsibilities.

The "prepared to meet student needs" code occurred 57 times and was expressed by eight participants. Participants viewed multiple co-teaching partnerships or lack of common planning time as negatively impacting their ability to implement collaborative co-teaching models to meet student needs. When Pam described her approach to co-teaching, she said, "I often walk into the room blind and just make modifications on the fly, which is not good for the students." Conversely, Rachel said:

> We plan everything together, and we plan every day. We are on the same page and are prepared to meet the needs of our students because of the time we have together. That is what it is all about. The time together means the students get what they need.

When asked how they choose which co-teaching model to implement with each lesson or activity, two of the 10 participants said that they use co-teaching models. All 10 stated they had never planned which model to use. Rachel stated, "We use a variety of models, but we just feel out in the moment what works best. We never plan in advance what we are going to do."

Considerations for Pairing Teams

The subtheme "considerations for pairing teams" was derived from the codes "team pairing," "choice," and "content experience" and occurred in all 10 participants' data. The code "team pairing" occurred 91 times. Nine participants expressed a desire to have one co-teaching partnership and remain together all day rather than be scheduled with many co-teachers. When

asked to describe her unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships, Rachel stated, “For two years, I was with six different co-teachers, six different subjects.” Rachel expressed that the experience almost led her to leave education. When describing her positive co-teaching experiences, Rachel said, “I have been with the same co-teacher for seven years. I know it is unheard of, and it is a dream.” In her journal, Rachel responded, “If co-teaching is going to be successful, it needs to be one team together throughout the day.”

The code “choice” occurred 34 times. Three of the participants had a choice in their co-teaching assignments. The administration scheduled the other seven with no input from teachers. When asked how the school pairs co-teachers, George responded, “My co-teacher volunteered to co-teach all day, and I was given the choice to partner with her.” George later stated, “It is much better when you have two people who volunteered and chose to co-teach together.” Conversely, Elaine stated, “I was just told you are co-teaching, and we will let you know with whom. It did not go well.”

The code of “content” occurred in all five of the general education teachers’ data and two of the special education teachers a total of 63 times. General education teachers experienced frustration and negatively viewed co-teaching partnerships when they were scheduled with a co-teacher who had limited knowledge of the course content. Jan wrote in her journal prompt entry, “It is extremely frustrating when our job is to teach the kids math, and they know math.” She went on to write, “That isn’t a good experience for anyone. Teachers or students.” Likewise, Joey expressed similar experiences from the perspective of the special education teacher. When asked to explain how co-teachers are paired at his school, Joey said, “I was scheduled to co-teach in an English class. I am a math major. I don’t know what they were thinking.”

Co-teaching Preparedness

Participant experiences revealed that teachers desire the skills and knowledge to implement co-teaching models to serve their students adequately. However, teachers' experiences reflect their lack of preparation or training for their co-teaching assignments. The second theme that developed from the data analysis was "co-teaching preparedness." "Co-teaching preparedness" was derived from participants' training and support experiences before and after becoming co-teachers. Descriptive codes "preservice training," "professional development," "skills," "admin support," and "co-teaching models" were clustered to form the theme of co-teaching preparedness. The codes associated with "co-teaching preparedness" occurred in all of the 10 participants' data a total of 317 times. All participants expressed that the level of training and support had been minimal. When asked to describe preparation and training for co-teaching, Jan said:

> I don't feel like I have had hardly any training, and that is something that is lacking. I had one SPED course in college, but it was just an online class and didn't talk about co-teaching. Now I have been co-teaching for 11 years and haven't had any training still. I just have figured it out on my own with my co-teachers and try and teach the kids the best I can, whether I am in the room by myself or with someone else.

Lack of Training and Professional Development

None of the participants had training specific to co-teaching prior to their assignments as co-teachers. Seven participants reported that they have never had any official professional development for co-teaching. Most teachers agreed that they are learning what works by trial and error and are not sure what the expectations are for their co-taught classes. Michael wrote in his journal responses, "I haven't had any training in co-teaching. Before or since." George mentioned, "I think there is an assumption that the special education teachers have been trained

in inclusive practices, and that is not the case."

Many participants have learned from their co-teachers and try to share that with other co-teaching teams. In his journal, Jerry wrote, "I had been co-teaching for several years. Then, I was paired with a very knowledgeable and skilled co-teacher. She came in and shared best practices with me and really elevated our co-taught classes." Jerry reported that the administration let him and his co-teacher provide a presentation for other co-teaching teams in the building prior to school starting. Document analysis of the presentation showed it contained information on co-teaching models and best practices for co-taught classrooms.

Although most participants expressed not having professional development in co-teaching, two of the participants had professional development with their co-teachers. George said, "The team needs to train together. Even though I have been through the training before, I went with my new co-teacher." Similarly, Joey expressed, "I wish I would get to go through a training with each of my co-teachers. It doesn't do much if you do not do it with your co-teacher."

Lack of Coaching and Ongoing Support

Teachers expressed that ongoing coaching and support are necessary to improve their co-teaching. All 10 participants expressed that they had no coaching or ongoing support for their co-taught classrooms. Michael stated, "I have my annual teaching observation, but there is nothing said about co-teaching. Just the usual stuff." Elaine said:

> We had a Powerpoint at the beginning of the year with an overview of the six models. They just kind of said, "This is what we want you to do." Then we moved on to something else. They never said anything about it again or helped us with how to implement those models.

Collaborative Relationships

Collaborative relationships are crucial for effective co-teaching (Strogilos et al., 2023). Teachers desire a collaborative relationship and view barriers to collaboration as negatively affecting their co-teaching. The theme of "collaborative relationships" was developed from participants describing their relationships with their co-teachers and what makes an effective co-teaching partnership. The theme was derived from the codes "relationship," "equity," "together," "personality," "looping," and "conflict," which occurred a total of 246 times. All ten participants expressed that effective co-teaching required collaborative relationships. When asked to describe her successful co-teaching partnerships, Rachel said:

> It is all about relationships. You can have everything else they say you need to have for co-teaching, but if you do not have a relationship where you work together well, then it is not going to go well. I have experienced both sides of it.

Equitable Roles of Co-teachers

The majority of teachers desire an equitable role with their co-teachers. Three of the 10 participants expressed that they feel they have an equitable role with their co-teachers. George wrote, "We are completely equal in every way. We trade off grading and teaching and completely divide roles evenly. We have the same amount of physical space in the room. None of the kids know what our titles actually are." Likewise, Jerry said, "In the past I was definitely the teacher with a helper. But this past year was amazing. She planned, taught, graded. I felt like we were truly equal." All three participants who experienced equitable roles had positive feelings about the equitable relationship. They also expressed equity in the classroom, which led to various co-teaching model usage.

Six participants expressed that they desired an equitable relationship but had not experienced it. Pam described her experience:

> I just don't feel we have an equitable relationship at all. I mean, they say this class is equally yours. But that does not make it so. We have a great relationship, and I am not bashing them. I just don't feel like either of the classes are mine when I walk-in. They are completely different rooms, too. I have to adjust how I act in each one. I have figured out how to help the students best I can, but I don't feel the rooms are in any way mine.

Both general and special education teachers expressed wanting equity. However, Andy expressed that achieving equitable roles as a special education teacher is unrealistic if she has multiple co-teachers. Andy said, "If I do not have time to plan and work on the lesson, then I cannot expect to have an equal share of the classroom." General education teachers expressed equitable roles are desired if the teacher has planning time with them and the co-teacher is comfortable with the content. Jan wrote, "I want equal roles in the classroom. However, it has to be someone that is there when we are lesson planning and is comfortable teaching the math curriculum."

Four of the participants experienced a structure where the special education teacher missed class one day a week to hold meetings and complete paperwork. Both the general education teachers and special education teachers viewed the special education teachers' weekly absence negatively. As a general education teacher, Elaine said, "I guess it is good for paperwork. But it is hard to build equal roles when one teacher is gone one-fifth of the time." Likewise, Andy expressed her experience from the special education perspective when she stated:

> A dedicated day for meetings and paperwork sounds great. But it is not worth it because it means I don't get a planning period and miss one day of class per week. The way that they have it set up prevents equal roles. I do not know what they were trying to do.

Desire for Consistency and Stability

Teachers agreed that they desire consistency and stability in their co-teaching relationships. Four participants have worked with their co-teacher for over a year and view the consistency positively. George said, "We have been together two years now and we finish each other's sentences. It just feels natural. Other teams want what we have." Pam was able to compare and contrast her experiences in sharing why consistency with her co-teacher is important:

> The teacher I worked with and collaborated the best with was the one that I worked with the year before. The other, it is our first year together and…well…it is not awful, but we definitely do not collaborate and mesh well like my other partnership. But if you asked me last year, I would have said the same thing about the teacher I work well with now. So, I think just being together longer, having time to learn each other, and how to work together has a lot to do with it.

Teachers agreed that being paired with multiple teachers was a barrier to building collaborative relationships with their co-teachers. Andy shared that she was assigned to multiple co-teachers and could not build a strong relationship with her co-teacher. When asked about her unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships, Andy stated:

> I feel like I am assigned here or there, and even changed in the middle of the school year at times. I look at the co-teaching teams that have been together for a long time and get very jealous. I want to have that. I think I could collaborate and be a much better teacher

> if I had the time to develop the relationship with my co-teachers like I have seen others be able to do.

Three participants shared negative feelings about their building's move to a looping strategy. General education teachers expressed frustration that the looping would mean they would not have the same co-teacher for consecutive years. Michael shared, "Admin said it was better for the SPED teachers to stay with their students. That means I will get a new co-teacher every year." Special education teachers shared similar frustrations. Pam stated:

> I am very concerned with the looping. We already had one special education teacher quit because of it. I understand wanting to keep special education teachers with their caseload for multiple years, but it is ruining co-teaching on our campus. As soon as I develop a relationship with my co-teachers, I know it is about to end, and I will be paired with someone else and have to start all over.

Inclusion as Part of School Culture

"Inclusion as part of school culture" emerged as a theme developed from participants' shared experiences working in schools that have increased inclusion efforts. Participants wrote and discussed their lived experiences of the school culture regarding inclusion. The codes "inclusion beliefs," "inclusion push," "resource," "progress," "hopeful," "punishment," and "motivation" occurred 194 times during data analysis and were clustered to develop the theme of inclusion as part of school culture. All participants viewed inclusion efforts in their schools positively and believed the majority of teachers on their campus had a positive outlook on inclusion. George wrote in his journal response, "Things have come a long way. We are in the middle of a paradigm shift where the way we have thought about special education is changing.

Most staff are on board." Teachers believe the school district has made inclusion a priority. When asked about the school culture, Elaine said:

> The district has formed inclusion leadership teams and the same thing is happening at the school level. They are not just saying we need to push inclusion because the state is pushing it. They are taking action and creating a foundation to support the increasing inclusion efforts.

Teachers' Beliefs About Inclusion

Teachers believe that most school staff have positive beliefs about inclusion efforts. The state of Arkansas, and subsequently the school district, has been pushing for more inclusive environments for students with disabilities. Eight of the participants' interviews included the code "inclusion push." The number of co-taught classrooms has grown drastically over the past three years. Jerry described the trend during his interview: "Three years ago, we had two co-taught sections of English. Two years ago, it was four. Last year was five, and I hear we will have six next year."

While teachers agree that staff beliefs of inclusion are positive, their agreement does not correlate with their desire to teach inclusive classrooms. Michael said during his interview, "We try to make it even, so everyone has the same amount. That way, no one gets all honors, and the other English teacher gets stuck with all co-taught." Five participants talked about their experiences hearing other teachers' apprehension. Andy said, "There are many teachers at our grade level that support co-taught classes. They just don't feel confident in their skills or experience to teach in a co-taught setting." George had experiences witnessing stronger apprehension. He said, "Our assistant principal told us we would pass co-taught assignments

each year so no one has to do it two years in a row. Although they say they want inclusion, it is treated as if it is a punishment."

Teachers agreed that co-taught settings are beneficial for most special education students. Four participants expressed concern that they have students with significant disabilities where the co-taught setting may not be appropriate. Elaine wrote in her journal response:

> When resource classes were taken away, there was a bit of a panic. However, most people have embraced co-teaching and inclusive efforts. But without resource, some students are in classes several grade levels beyond their grasp. Even with a co-teacher the students get frustrated. We can definitely tweak the way we do to serve this small population of students much better so they are meeting their learning goals.

George expressed inclusive settings offer many benefits to students beyond academics. He suggested that teachers should be made aware of IEP goals unrelated to academics, which may be why a student is placed in the co-taught setting. George wrote in his journal response:

> While inclusion is great for many students, we are doing a disservice by expecting grade-level work, even with heavy modifications, for some students. We need to educate some parents earlier about non-diploma routes. If we know that a student is in our class for social goals or other reasons, and they do not have to master grade-level standards, we can help those students learn to their potential and include them in a way that makes their inclusion placement much more effective.

Recent Progress and Hope for the Future

Teachers agreed that their district and school are making positive strides for more effective co-taught classrooms. Rachel wrote in her journal, "Even some of the negatives are because we have tried something new. That is how we figured out it was not successful. That is

part of being on the right path for continued progress." Participants expressed varied perceptions on whether administration actions were supporting progress. Pam said, "Admin keeps making decisions that keep us from being able to plan together and have consistency with our co-teachers." Conversely, Elaine said, "We asked our principal if we could have one team for every core subject. They heard us and we are getting to try that next year."

All participants expressed that they believed their administrators valued progress in co-teaching effectiveness. Jan mentioned, "My principal wants me to try collaborative models, I just do not know how." George said, "I think they all want to improve co-teaching. Just like our teachers, some aren't trained and may not know exactly what the needs are." Pam said, "Our principal has already scheduled many professional development opportunities over the summer and is passionate about supporting us as we move forward."

All participants also expressed hope for the future of co-teaching. When asked about what can be done to improve co-teaching at her school, Rachel said:

> I have mentioned so many challenges. And that is real. There are many. However, we have to remember where we were ten years ago, five years ago, even last year. We have already made so much progress, and now the district is making it a top priority. I am very hopeful for what the future brings and I am excited to be part of it.

Outlier Data and Findings

Teachers had various experiences with the themes derived from the data. For example, although some teachers experienced opportunities for professional development and some did not, they all expressed a need for more professional development to make co-teaching more effective. However, two outlier themes in the data from participants did not align with the other nine. In qualitative research, an outlier is an unexpected finding and theme representing a

participant variation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The two outlier themes in the data were "desire for one teach, one assist" and "can't apply the models."

Desire for One Teach, One Assist

Teachers desire to use more collaborative co-teaching models in their classrooms. However, most teachers reported using the one-teach, one-assist model most frequently. Nine of the ten participants expressed a desire to change their circumstances so they could implement more collaborative models. The descriptive code "co-teaching models" occurred 84 times during first-cycle coding. However, during second-cycle coding, the axial code "co-teaching models: negative view of collaborative models" occurred with one participant. Joey viewed collaborative co-teaching models negatively and desired to use the one teach, one assist model. When asked to describe his approach to co-teaching, Joey stated:

> I like to walk into class and not know what is going to happen. I think if I am going through the lesson the first time along with the students, I am better able to help them as they need assistance. I know some people want to be a co-teacher, but I do not think that is necessary to help the kids. I think our class is better if I let the teacher teach, and I can support the students as needed.

Can't Apply the Models

The second outlier theme was "can't apply the models." Monica works for the virtual school in the district and reported that she does not teach in a traditional setting. All her work with students is one-on-one and does not fit in any co-teaching models. When asked how she approaches co-teaching, Monica stated:

> I know we have students with co-taught services on their IEPs. I still really don't know how that fits with our model of education. I cannot do any of those when I just work with

all of my students, IEP or not, one-on-one. I talk with the special education teacher about the students and how we are going to modify the curriculum and support students, but none of the co-teaching models really apply to what we do.

Research Question Responses

This hermeneutical phenomenological study was guided by one central research question and two sub-research questions. The research questions were created to describe co-teacher experiences implementing collaborative co-teaching models. The themes identified during data analysis: (a) pairing and scheduling co-teachers, (b) co-teaching preparedness, (c) collaborative relationships, and (d) inclusion as part of school culture support the participant's experiences that answer each of the research questions.

Central Research Question

What experiences do teachers have implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms? Co-teachers have few experiences implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms. Most teachers described not being intentional or cognizant of utilizing co-teaching models in their classrooms. Co-teachers viewed the structure in which they were paired and how they were scheduled as the biggest factor resulting in successful or unsuccessful co-teaching implementation. "Pairing and scheduling co-teachers" was the prominent theme derived from participants' experiences. George stated in his interview, "When I have one co-teacher, and we have time to plan together, we utilize various co-teaching models. When I was paired with many teachers or did not have time to plan, we did not."

Participants desire consistent and equitable co-teaching partnerships. Participants expressed that collaboration is required for consistent and equitable partnerships, which generated the theme of "collaborative relationships." The lived experience of "collaborative

relationships" was varied. Rachel shared, "I have had the same co-teacher for seven years. I share responsibilities with my co-teacher, and we collaborate every day. I know that I am the exception and not the rule."

Sub-Question One

What barriers do co-teachers experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models? The participants revealed that the most significant barrier to implementing co-teaching models was the lack of time to plan and collaborate. They also viewed a lack of training and professional development as a significant barrier. The themes of "pairing and scheduling co-teachers," "co-teaching preparedness," and "collaborative relationships" were all derived from the participants' lived experiences of barriers to co-teaching. Andy said, "I have many co-teaching partnerships and don't plan with any of them. I do not get the chance to develop a good teaching partnership with them and often do not know exactly what is going on until I walk into class."

Sub-Question Two

How do teachers counter the barriers they experience collaborating to implement co-teaching models? Teachers invest in building a school culture of inclusivity and solicit support from the administration to counter the barriers they experience implementing co-teaching models. Participants viewed school culture as foundational for effective co-teaching. They discussed their lived experiences of working in school buildings that mostly supported inclusive environments, resulting in the theme of "Inclusion as Part of School Culture." Jerry said in his interview, "Our building really wants all kids to have the opportunities. Special Education doesn't feel segregated anymore." Participants are proactive in addressing their needs with school administrators. Elaine said, "Our principal wants to help us and is working with us to

work through issues. I asked to do all co-taught next year, and he is giving me one co-teacher with the same planning time."

Summary

Data analysis yielded the four themes: (a) pairing and scheduling co-teachers, (b) co-teaching preparedness, (c) collaborative relationships, and (d) inclusion as part of school culture were aligned with the research questions. Participants experienced a desire to collaborate with their co-teachers and implement collaborative co-teaching models. However, how co-teachers were paired and scheduled, and the lack of training and professional development they received created barriers. Participants also expressed positive feelings about the school culture regarding inclusive practices. However, staff members' positive beliefs about inclusion did not correlate with a desire to teach in inclusive classrooms.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Interpretations of the findings, implications for policy and practice, and theoretical and empirical implications are discussed in chapter five. The study's limitations, delimitations, and recommendations for future research are also discussed.

Discussion

Teachers' lived experiences implementing collaborative co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms were explored in this study. Individual interviews, journal prompt responses, and document artifacts were analyzed, triangulated, and categorized into four themes: (a) pairing and scheduling co-teachers, (b) co-teaching preparedness, (c) collaborative relationships, and (d) inclusion as part of school culture. The discussion was composed using my experience following the hermeneutic phenomenological design.

Summary of Thematic Findings

The thematic findings were derived from analyzing participants' individual interviews, journal prompt responses, and document artifacts. The following themes emerged from data analysis: (a) pairing and scheduling co-teachers, (b) co-teaching preparedness, (c) collaborative relationships, and (d) inclusion as part of school culture. Two subthemes were developed within each theme.

The theme of "pairing and scheduling co-teachers" had subthemes of "benefits of planning together" and "consideration for pairing teams." All participants discussed how they are paired and scheduled with their co-teachers, directly impacting their ability to plan and

collaborate. Seven participants experienced barriers to implementing co-teaching models because they did not have time to plan with their co-teachers. Six participants also discussed that collaborating with their co-teacher and implementing co-teaching models was impossible because they were assigned many co-teaching partners.

"Co-teaching preparedness" was another major theme that emerged as participants discussed their lived experiences. The subthemes "lack of training and professional development" and "lack of coaching and ongoing support" were developed within the theme of "co-teaching preparedness." No participants had co-teaching training before being assigned to co-taught classrooms. After becoming co-teachers, most participants did not have training or professional development in co-teaching models and strategies. Participants viewed their lack of training as a significant barrier to implementing co-taught models and meeting student needs. All participants expressed a desire for more training and ongoing support so they would be able to meet student's needs.

The theme of "collaborative relationships" emerged with subthemes of "equitable roles of co-teachers" and "desire for consistency and stability." All participants discussed their desire to have the same co-teaching partner rather than being assigned new partners each year. Participants viewed consistency as necessary for working toward an equitable relationship with their co-teachers. Three participants experienced consistency and stability in their co-teaching relationships. Consequently, those three participants were the only ones who experienced equitable roles with their co-teachers.

The final theme that emerged was "inclusion as part of school culture." The two subthemes that developed within the theme were "teachers' beliefs about inclusion" and "recent progress and hope for the future." All participants discussed positive school culture regarding

inclusion. Participants have experienced progress and improvements each year, which gives them hope that co-teaching will continue to improve. All participants discussed inclusion as a current priority and focus of the district, and they are hopeful they will receive more support in improving co-teaching strategies.

Interpretation of Findings

Hermeneutic phenomenology involves the researcher actively participating in the interpretive process (van Manen, 2014). The thematic findings were derived through phenomenological reduction to allow the true essence of the participants' experiences to be understood. As I have worked as a co-teacher, my expertise and background are part of the following interpretations of the findings in the study.

Building Administrators' Beliefs Are Crucial

Much of the extant literature on co-teaching has focused on teacher experiences. The descriptions of teachers' lived experiences from NAPS revealed that administrators' beliefs about co-teaching were the most crucial aspect of effective co-teaching implementation. Administrators directly impacted all four themes derived from the participants' experiences. Since the state or district did not provide cohesive direction to individual campuses, building administrators had carte blanche to structure and schedule their approach to co-teaching. Although some autonomy may be suitable for meeting individual school needs, the drastic differences in each school's approach created a muddled approach to co-teaching. Participants repeatedly expressed their desire to plan together, engage in more training, and spend time developing collaborative relationships with their co-teachers. The barriers negatively affecting their efforts were frequently caused by the structures put in place by administrator decision-making.

The theme “pairing and scheduling co-teachers” included the subthemes “master schedule” and “pairing teams.” One administrator in each school created a master schedule and paired co-teaching teams. Pam said, discussing her principal, “He created the master schedule knowing we would not have planning time together. So, I am not sure how effective we can be.” The school administrator created the master schedule that did not allow planning time for co-teachers. Conversely, at a different school in NAPS, Elaine said of her administrator, “He really believes in co-teaching and wants us to be successful. This year, he is building the co-teaching schedule first and then building around that.” The variance in approach to the master schedule by two principals in the same district showed how administrators’ beliefs about co-teaching affected the efficacy of implementation.

The theme ‘co-teaching preparedness” was also associated with administrator decision-making. Although administrators did not impact teachers' pre-service training, administrators decided on the training for their staff at the beginning of the school year. Jan said:

> We had all sorts of training not applicable to what we were doing. Then it was like, do parallel teaching with your co-teacher. And that was it. I think we can do much better if we are given more training and better direction.

Participants described their principals as meeting the requirements and doing the best they could with the resources they had. All participants desired more training for effective co-teaching implementation. Scheduling training is within the purview of the school administrator. If administrators have positive beliefs about co-teaching, scheduling necessary training would benefit co-teachers' ability to meet student needs.

The theme “inclusion as part of school culture” was directly related to administrators’ beliefs. School principals should reinforce the school vision with every action and decision

(Vostal et al., 2019). Participants expressed that administrator decisions that impacted co-teaching directly affected the inclusive school culture. In trying to understand teachers' experiences implementing co-teaching models, the importance of administrators' beliefs about co-teaching became evident. George said of his administration, "They speak about co-teaching like it is a chore. That attitude seeps into the school culture. We have many that might be great co-teachers but do not want to take it on because of the negative perception of the administrators." Participants described many opportunities for more effective co-teaching implementation with changes to administration decisions. To ensure such effective implementation, administrators need more training and awareness to fully understand the importance of how they approach their structure for co-teaching on their campuses.

Collaborative Relationships Take Time to Develop

A collaborative relationship is necessary for effective co-teaching implementation (Jones & Winters, 2022). Extant research that stressed the importance of collaborative relationships in co-teaching was the basis for selecting Johnson and Johnson's (1989) social interdependence theory as the study's theoretical framework. Although previous researchers concluded that personality, classroom management, and vision compatibility were necessary for positive collaborative relationships, the participants expressed that time was the most important aspect of the collaborative relationship (Jones & Winters, 2022). Collaborative relationships take time to develop.

Giving collaborative relationships time to develop was evident in Rachel's experience. Rachel expressed a negative experience working with a co-teacher their first year together. The partnership evolved and developed and she reported a positive relationship during the second year:

> We did not have much time to plan together. So, we were basically learning each other during class in front of our students. That first year was horrible and I wanted to quit co-teaching. I was dreading the second year, but it was completely different. We learned the other's strengths and preferences. It was pretty awesome the second year. I think we served the students better because we had a better relationship.

When teachers worked in a dynamic system frequently changing co-teaching partners, they did not have time to develop their co-teaching relationship. Teacher's need more than one school year to develop their collaborative relationship.

Participants accepted that they would be paired with co-teachers with little personality compatibility. Jan mentioned, "My co-teacher has a very different approach than I do. That is okay. We are professionals and can work together to do what is best for students." Most participants iterated Jan's sentiment. Participants were less concerned about compatibility and more concerned with a system that allowed them to develop a relationship with their co-teachers over multiple years. Pam discussed her experience with a co-teacher, which was negative in the first year but positive in the second year. Pam stated, "I do not think it matters who it is or how well we mesh personally. That first year is rough as you learn each other and what each can best bring to the table." While strategically pairing co-teachers can increase the chances of successful partnerships, a system allowing partnerships to stay together for multiple years is necessary for building collaborative relationships. A strong collaborative relationship takes time, but will lead to teachers better meeting student needs.

Co-teaching Focuses on Compliance

School districts have become overly focused on legal compliance in implementing students' IEPs (Gupta et al., 2023). Gupta et al. (2023) described the systemic flaws that result in

schools being more focused on avoiding lawsuits and disciplinary action from government oversight than meeting students' needs. Participants in the current study expressed that the schools' approach to co-teaching felt more like ensuring compliance rather than being student-focused. Mandatory professional development was required of participants in special education law, yet not in instructional strategies. Although legal compliance is important, the focus on legality over teaching had a negative effect on co-teaching.

Special education teachers mentioned directives from the district when writing IEPs. Andy described her approach:

> We are told not to write IEPs for the total number of class minutes in the week. That way, if they need to pull me out of class or I have to cover something else, we are still in compliance with the minutes per week in the IEP. So, I do not understand how we are supposed to have this equitable relationship and truly co-teach when they are essentially writing IEPs so we can miss class a couple of days a week.

With the state directive to increase co-teaching and the district pushing to expand co-teaching, compliance has become the priority. Instructional strategies to improve student learning outcomes have not been the focus. District and schools shifting their approach to teaching compliance through instructional strategy training would allow them to ensure compliance with the law while maintaining a student-focused approach to individualizing education, which is part of the district vision.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Policy initiatives drastically increased the placement of students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms. Stakeholders can use the current study's findings to implement changes in policy and practice. Implications for policy and practice are discussed to improving co-teaching

collaborative relationships and the implementation of collaborative co-teaching models.

Implications for Policy

Two policies could benefit co-teachers' abilities to better meet student needs. The first is to add required inclusive practices, which include evidence-based co-teaching strategies, to university curricula for pre-service teachers. The requirement should include pre-service teachers on the traditional licensure track and those pursuing a non-traditional teaching license. No participants had training in co-teaching practices or using co-teaching models to meet student needs before their co-teaching assignments. Participants' lack of training corroborated extant literature that most co-teachers do not receive pre-service training in co-teaching strategies (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Strogilos et al., 2023). With the increase of co-teaching implementation in the state, there is a high likelihood that special and general education teachers will have co-teaching assignments. The state approves all pre-service and non-traditional curricula for pre-service teachers. If the state requires education and skill practice in inclusive and co-teaching strategies in university curricula, it would provide a foundation for teachers to assume their first co-teaching assignment with more knowledge and skills to meet student needs.

The second recommended policy change is to require professional development on inclusive practices each year for co-teaching teams. No participants received professional development specific to co-teaching. Only two participants experienced training with their co-teaching partner. The district required 48 hours of professional development each year. Requiring inclusive practice professional development annually would ensure co-teachers develop knowledge and skills to implement collaborative co-teaching models. Required professional development will ensure that new co-teaching teams experience training together. Training together may benefit co-teachers' collaborative relationship by shortening the time the

team takes to develop trust in one another and accelerate the path to an equitable relationship.

Implications for Practice

The findings resulted in four implications for practice. The first recommendation focuses on administrators' scheduling of co-teachers. Administrators at each school building were given autonomy to pair and schedule co-teachers. All participants desired one co-teaching partnership with a common planning time. However, teachers knew the complexity of creating a master schedule and expressed that having more than one co-teaching partnership would be acceptable, given a common planning time with each co-teaching partnership. By providing training and guidance to school administrators, the school district can ensure each building administrator understands the needs of co-taught classrooms and the implications administrator decision-making has on co-teaching relationships. Administrators' level of understanding may reduce the variability that exists from building to building within the district. Likewise, suppose building administrators put into practice scheduling and pairing strategies that require common planning time and encourage partnerships to stay together for multiple years. In that case, many barriers experienced by teachers may be mitigated. Similarly, practices that routinely schedule special education teachers away from the co-taught classroom should be eliminated. Such practices reinforce inequitable roles and interfere with the collaborative relationship. Scheduling and pairing implications of practice may benefit other schools as it was evident in extant research that common planning time is the primary concern for co-teachers (Iacono et al., 2021).

Another implication of practice is for administrators to provide mentor co-teaching teams for new co-teacher partnerships. The district valued mentorship, as all new teachers were assigned a mentor. In a similar fashion, new co-teaching teams can benefit from the support of more experienced teams. Participants shared that their experience of growth as co-teachers was

due to successful teams informally sharing tips and strategies. By offering a formal mentorship program as practice, skilled and experienced teams can support newer teams in developing their collaborative relationship and implementing collaborative co-teaching models. A mentorship program may also benefit other sites if experienced co-teaching teams are available.

The third practical implication is that co-teaching teams should receive non-evaluative coaching and observations throughout the year. Participants who received professional development only at the beginning of the year in co-teaching strategies experienced challenges implementing co-teaching models throughout the year. The state has resources that provide state-funded coaching and support outside of district resources. One resource is year-round observation, coaching, and support for co-teaching teams throughout the year that builds on beginning-of-the-year professional development. Continual support would allow a highly skilled and experienced professional to provide low-stress and non-evaluative coaching and support to co-teachers as they implement collaborative co-teaching models in their classrooms.

Another practical implication is to educate general education teachers and survey their interest in co-teaching. General education teachers discussed being assigned co-teachers suddenly, resulting in negative experiences. Providing opportunities to educate general education teachers and highlighting the positives of co-teaching as a matter of practice can promote inclusive school culture and generate interest for potential co-teachers. Regularly issuing surveys of general education teachers' interest and reasons for apprehension for future co-teaching will help administrators pair willing co-teachers and continue promoting a healthy, inclusive school culture.

Empirical and Theoretical Implications

This study described teachers' experiences implementing collaborative co-teaching

models in inclusive classrooms. The study's results both corroborated and diverged from extant literature. Participants experienced positive interdependence as defined by social interdependence theory. This section presents the study's empirical and theoretical implications.

Empirical Implications

Empirical literature identified a lack of common planning time as the most significant barrier to implementing collaborative co-teaching models (Alnasser, 2020; Casserly & Padden, 2018; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Although all participants in the current study expressed that planning time was the most significant barrier to their successful co-teaching, participants who had common planning failed to use their planning time to evaluate student needs and implement co-teaching models accordingly. While participants' positive perceptions corroborated the literature that common planning time is linked to positive co-teaching experiences, common planning time did not result in using collaborative co-teaching models (Iacono et al., 2021).

Most pre-service teachers did not receive instruction or training in co-teaching strategies (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021). Similarly, most teachers believe they have had insufficient training and professional development to implement co-teaching practices effectively (Strogilos et al., 2023). The current study corroborated the existing literature, as no participants received pre-service training in co-teaching. Participants also discussed inadequate training and professional development to implement co-teaching strategies. Hernandez et al. (2016) found that teachers with adequate training felt comfortable implementing collaborative co-teaching models to meet student needs. This study could not corroborate the conclusion of Hernandez et al.as no participants reported having adequate training and professional development.

Previous researchers concluded that despite being the least effective, the one-teach, one-assist model was used most frequently in co-taught classrooms (Strogilos et al., 2023).

Experiences at NAPS were similar to the findings of Strogilos et al. (2023), as all participants at NAPS expressed that one-teach, one-assist was used most frequently in their classrooms. Strogilos and King-Sears (2019) found that general education teachers often took a prominent role in planning and instruction, resulting in special education teachers feeling like assistants. Eight participants in the current study experienced themes similar to those of Strogilos and King-Sears. Participants reported that a lack of common planning time and training with their co-teachers contributed to their co-taught classrooms' heavy reliance on the one teach, one assist model.

An evolution of co-teacher roles is evident in the literature. In the past, the idea that a general education teacher should be an expert in content and the special education teacher an expert in pedagogy was foundational for co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). More recently, successful co-teaching teams reported that both are comfortable with content and pedagogy and can exchange roles to meet student needs (Lindacher, 2020). Eight participants from NAPS discussed that they or their co-teacher did not feel comfortable teaching the course content. Participants' experiences aligned with recent research where both teachers must be confident in content and pedagogy. Special education teachers were not confident in content areas, and even with strong pedagogical skills, they could not meet student needs in co-taught classrooms.

The findings of the current research regarding teacher perceptions diverge from previous research. Jurkowski et al. (2020) found that general education teachers were likelier to have negative perceptions about co-teaching. Special education teachers from NAPS had more negative experiences co-teaching than general education teachers. Although general education teachers expressed a lack of support from their co-teachers, they did not view it as impeding their ability to meet student needs. Jan stated in her interview:

> When my co-teacher is not there, I do not change anything. Most of the time I feel like it does not matter if she is there or not. To be honest, sometimes I think I serve students better when she is not there.

General education teachers expressed mild frustration with unhelpful co-teachers. Conversely, special education teachers expressed higher levels of frustration. Four special education teachers were paired with multiple co-teachers and often walked into classrooms unaware of the planned learning activities for the day. The four participants with many co-teaching partnerships expressed negative experiences and questioned the ability to meet student needs in co-taught classrooms. Pam stated:

> It is extremely frustrating to walk in a classroom and not know what is going on. They expect us to miss planning time to have IEP meetings and complete paperwork. Then they expect us to be equal teachers in the classroom. It is not realistic.

Participant experiences of co-teacher compatibility in the current study diverged from the extant literature. Casserly and Padden (2018) found that similar teacher personalities and teaching styles led to effective co-teaching partnerships. Many teachers in the current study reported having different teaching styles and personalities than their co-teachers. However, they shared their experiences positively as they felt the differences brought a good balance to their classroom for students. Participants did not equate similarities with compatibility.

The research at NAPS contributed to the literature by revealing that progress and hope for the future of co-teaching affect teachers' attitudes about co-teaching more than the current state of co-teaching. Teachers expressed recent frustrations with barriers to effective co-teaching. Teachers who did not have recent negative experiences had negative experiences in the past. However, despite the barriers, participants' overall outlook on co-teaching and inclusive

strategies was positive. There was an acceptance that with recent inclusion pushes, there will be challenges as co-teaching in the district progresses. The idea of progress and hope transcending current challenges was not evident in extant literature but emerged as a theme from the current study.

Theoretical Implications

The study's theoretical framework was Johnson and Johnson's (1989) social interdependence theory. Co-teaching is built on the foundation of cooperative learning (Nápoles, 2024). Cooperative learning occurs when more than one person works to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Johnson and Johnson (2018) explained that one's motivation to accomplish common goals results from intrinsic tension within each team member or group. Interdependence can only exist when more than one person dynamically impacts another (Johnson & Johnson, 1989). Co-teachers aim to meet student needs, which requires positive social interdependence. The effect on goal achievement can be positive, in which individuals promote the achievement of common goals, or negative, in which individuals obstruct the ability to achieve a common goal (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

Participants' shared experiences reflected a high level of positive interdependence with their co-teachers. Although participants expressed several barriers to implementing collaborative co-teaching models, most experiences reflected that each co-teacher was invested and motivated to meet student needs. Participants who discussed inequitable roles did not view the other teacher as a negative barrier to the goal of effective co-teaching. Instead, they viewed the structure and system they were asked to co-teach as barriers to their collaborative relationship. Participants and their co-teachers frequently positively experienced the five variables of social interdependence theory that affect cooperation. Although mostly used as a framework to study student

cooperative learning, social interdependence theory proved to be a relevant and effective framework to study the cooperative relationship of co-teachers.

Although social interdependence theory was chosen because of the implications of the cooperative relationship between co-teachers, it unexpectedly guided the interdependence between co-teaching teams and their administrators. When viewing co-teaching implementation on a school campus level rather than an individual classroom, an interdependence exists between the co-teaching teams and their administrator. Participants' experiences reflected positive interdependence with their co-teacher to promote the achievement of common goals. However, there was negative interdependence with administrators who often created structures that obstructed the ability to achieve the goals for co-taught classrooms. Previous researchers concluded that positive interdependence is necessary between students to engage in cooperative learning to meet learning goals (Jones & Winters, 2022). Likewise, the results of the current study showed that co-taught settings require positive interdependence between co-teachers and administrators to meet student needs.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations are potential study weaknesses that are outside the researcher's control. Delimitations are decisions made by the researcher to define the study's boundaries. Two limitations and four delimitations were identified in this study.

Limitations

Two limitations should be considered when interpreting the study's results. First, the data collection methods were limited because the chosen site for the current study restricted access due to student privacy. Observations of classes and student data would benefit data triangulation during data analysis. A second limitation was that co-teachers of participants who agreed to the

study were also asked to participate. However, none of them agreed to participate. Analyzing how co-teachers experienced the phenomenon with both team members may have yielded stronger results.

Delimitations

One delimitation of the current study was requiring participants to have been assigned to at least three co-taught sections for the school year. Requiring the three sections ensured that participants had sufficient experience of the phenomenon. However, participants discussed other co-teachers who only teach one section and their perception of those teachers' experiences. Excluding teachers whose co-teaching is a small part of their school day affected the transferability of the study's findings. Second, the study had a small sample size of 10 participants. Although the use of multiple data collection methods for the same phenomenon made the results more credible, future research should include more participants because of the significant variety of how the participants experienced the phenomenon.

A third delimitation was the study's geographical location. The school district chosen for the study site ranks near the state's top in household income. The number of district staff devoted to administration and instructional support per student is also among the top in the state. The level of district support poses problems for transferability to school districts with more socioeconomic diversity or fewer resources.

A fourth delimitation was the decision to include all secondary grades in the study. Extant research suggested the need to understand secondary teachers' experiences implementing co-teaching models. In the current study, differences in how participants who teach junior high and high school experienced the phenomenon were evident. Future research focusing on junior

high and high school in separate studies rather than including all secondary grades may yield results that better support educational decision-making.

Recommendations for Future Research

A recommendation for future research is to conduct qualitative studies similar to the current study at various sites. Although the state has pushed for more inclusive practices, districts take significantly different approaches. Additional research that expands the participants to various sites may yield results that inform different implications for policy and practice.

The current study found that co-teachers face many barriers within administrator decision-making. Most research on co-teaching has focused on teacher and student perspectives. Qualitative and quantitative research focused on administrators rather than teachers would significantly add to the literature. Understanding administrators' training in inclusive practices, supervising co-teaching teams, beliefs about inclusion, and scheduling and pairing teams are areas of need for future research.

Previous researchers concluded that co-teaching strategies are ambiguous in the virtual environment (Ward-Jackson & Yu, 2023). Given the variety of virtual instruction methods, future research on co-teaching in the virtual environment, or whether co-teaching is necessary in the virtual environment, would significantly add to the literature. Virtual education enrollment continues to increase, and virtual educators must be prepared to adequately support students with disabilities in such environments.

Qualitative and quantitative research should focus on co-teachers who have been trained, have common planning time, and implement collaborative co-teaching models. Under ideal conditions, qualitative research focused on student perspectives receiving instruction under optimal conditions would add significantly to the literature. Additionally, quantitative research

under ideal conditions focused on student learning outcomes would add to the literature and possibly confirm co-teaching's effectiveness as a strategy for inclusive education.

Conclusion

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms at a public school district in northwest Arkansas. Johnson and Johnson's (1989) social interdependence theory guided the current study's theoretical framework. Data were collected from 10 participants through individual interviews, journal prompt responses, and document artifact collection.

Phenomenological reduction was used during data analysis to derive four themes from participant experiences: (a) pairing and scheduling co-teachers, (b) co-teaching preparedness, (c) collaborative relationships, and (d) inclusion as part of school culture. Data were used to answer the research questions regarding teachers' experiences implementing collaborative co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms.

Teachers need a structure for co-teaching that fosters their collaborative relationships. Teachers experienced being paired with co-teachers without common planning time or the ability to collaborate. The constant fluctuation of partners created barriers for most participants in building collaborative relationships with their teachers. Administrators pairing and scheduling co-teachers with time to plan together each day and keeping teams together for multiple years would mitigate many barriers to implementing collaborative co-teaching models.

Participants revealed they did not have training in co-teaching strategies as pre-service teachers, which aligned with extant research. Similarly, all participants reported insufficient professional development since becoming co-teachers. Teachers need preparation and training

before being given co-teaching assignments. Additionally, teachers need professional development with their co-teachers to develop a shared approach and skill base to implement collaborative co-teaching models.

References

Aldabas, R. (2018). Co-teaching in the classrooms: Literature review of teachers' perspective, readiness, and knowledge. *Journal of Education and Practice, 9*(9), 156–161. https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/JEP/article/view/41748

Alnasser, Y. A. (2020). The perspectives of Colorado general and special education teachers on the barriers to co-teaching in the inclusive elementary school classroom. *International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 49*(6), 716–729. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2020.1776363

Alsarawi, A., & Sukonthaman, R. (2021). Preservice teachers' attitudes, knowledge, and self-efficacy of inclusive teaching practices. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education,* 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2021.1922992

Ashton, J. R. (2016). Keeping up with the class: A critical discourse analysis of teacher interactions in a co-teaching context. *Classroom Discourse, 7*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/19463014.2015.1077717

Austin, V. L. (2001). Teachers' beliefs about co-teaching. *Remedial and Special Education, 22*(4), 245–255. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F074193250102200408

Bacharach, N. L., Heck, T. W., & Dahlberg, K. (2010). Changing the face of student teaching through co-teaching. *Teacher Development.* 1. https://repository.stcloudstate.edu/ed_facpubs/1/

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Bandura, A. (1986). *Social foundations of thought and action.* Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1998). Personal and collective efficacy in human adaptation and change. In J. G. Adair, D. Bélanger, & K. L. Dion (Eds.), *Advances in psychological science, Vol. 1. Social, personal, and cultural aspects* (pp. 51–71). Psychology Press.

Bandura, A., (2019). Applying theory for human betterment. *Association for Psychological Sciences, 14*, 12–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/174569161885165

Bannink, F., Nalugya, R., & van Hove, G. (2020). They give him a chance- parents' perspectives on disability and inclusive primary education in Uganda. *International Journal of Disability, Development, and Education, 67*(4), 357–375. https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2019.1593326

Beggs, D. W. (1964). *Team teaching: Bold new venture*. Indiana University Press.

Billingsley, B., DeMatthews, D., Connally, K., & McLeskey, J. (2018). Leadership for effective inclusive schools: Considerations for preparation and reform. *Australasian Journal of Special and Inclusive Education, 42*(1), 65–81. https://doi.org/10.1017/jsi.2018.6

Blackwell, W. H., & Rossetti, Z. S. (2014). The development of individualized education programs: Where have we been and where should we go now? *SAGE Open*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014530411

Bolourian, Y., Tipton-Fisler, L. A., & Yassine, J. (2020). Special education placement trends: Least restrictive environment across five years in California. *Contemporary School Psychology, 24***,** 164–173. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-018-00214-z

Brandon, R. R., & Chizhik, E. W. (2020). Making virtual co-teaching work in a covid-19 environment. *Issues in Teacher Education, 29*(1–2), 142–148.

Brendle, J., Lock, R., & Piazza, K. (2017). A study of co-teaching identifying effective implementation strategies. *International Journal of Special Education, 32*, 538–550. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1184155.pdf

Brewer, J., & Hunter, A. (1989). *Multimethod research: A synthesis of styles*. Sage Publications.

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

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor. (2022). Persons with a disability: Labor force characteristics—2022. *U.S. Department of Labor*.

Byrd, D. R., & Alexander, M. (2020). Investigating special education teachers' knowledge and skills: Preparing general teacher preparation for professional development. *Journal of Pedagogical Research, 4*(2), 72–82. https://doi.org/10.33902/JPR.2020059790

Carty, A., & Farrell, A. M. (2018). Co-teaching in a mainstream post-primary mathematics classroom: An evaluation of models of co-teaching from the perspective of the teachers. *Support for Learning, 33*(2), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12198

Casserly, A. M., & Padden, A. (2018). Teachers' views of co-teaching approaches in addressing pupils with special education needs (SEN) in multi-grade classroom. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 33*(4), 555–571. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1386315

Chitiyo, J., & Brinda, W. (2018). Teacher preparedness in the use of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms. *Support for Learning, 33*(1), 38–51. https://doi.org.10.1111/1467-9604.12190

Cole, J., & Gardner, K. (1979). Topic work with first-year secondary pupils. In E. Lunzer & K. Gardner (Eds.), *The effective use of reading* (pp. 167–192). Heinemann Educational Books Limited.

Cole, S. M., Murphy, H. R., Frisby, M. B., & Robinson, J. (2023). The relationship between special education placement and high school outcomes. *The Journal of Special Education, 57*(1), 13–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669221097945

Cologon, K. (2022). Is inclusive education really for everyone? Family stories of children and young people labeled with severe and multiple or 'profound disabilities. *Research Papers in Education, 37*(3), 395–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/02671522.2020.1849372

Conderman, G., & Liberty, L. (2018). Establishing parity in middle and secondary co-taught classrooms. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas, 91*(6), 222–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2018.1524358

Cook, L., & Friend, M. (1995). Co-teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children, 28*(3), 1–16. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/31ca/3592c18acdd238ce488cd7184017b904b646.pdf

Cook, S. C., Collins, L. W., Madigan, J., McDuffie Landrum, K., & Cook, L. (2021). Coaching co-teachers: Increasing specialized instruction in inclusive settings. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 4005992199747. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059921997476

Cook, S. C., & McDuffie-Landrum, K. (2020). Integrating effective practices into co-teaching: Increasing outcomes for students with disabilities. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 55*(4), 221–229. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053451219855739

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Crispel, O., & Kasperski, R. (2021). The impact of teacher training in special education on the implementation of inclusion in mainstream classrooms. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 25*(9), 1079–1090. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1600590

Cruz, L., & Geist, M. J. (2019). A team-teaching matrix: Asking new questions about how we teach together. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal, 12*(1), 1–15

DeMartino, P., & Specht, P. (2018). Collaborative co-teaching models and specially designed instruction in secondary education: A new inclusive consultation model. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth,* 62(4), 266–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2018.1446413

Dell'Anna, S., Pellegrini, M., & Ianes, D. (2021). Experiences and learning outcomes of students without special educational needs in inclusive settings: a systematic review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *25*(8), 944–959. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1592248

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.

Deutsch, M. (1968). Field theory in social psychology. In G. Lindzey & E. Aronson (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (2nd ed.). Addison Wesley.

DiCicco-Bloom, B., & Crabtree, B. F. (2006). The qualitative research interview. *Medical Education*, *40*(4), 314–321. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2929.2006.02418.x

Eastman, K. B., & AldabasMcMaugh, A. (2022). Teacher understanding of trauma in the classroom and their professional learning experiences: every little bit counts, *Professional Development in Education,* https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2022.2155984

Embury, D. C., & Kroeger, S. D. (2012). Let's ask the kids: Consumer Constructions of co-teaching. *International Journal of Special Education*, *27*(2), 102–112. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ982865

Evenson, T. L., & Puig, V. I. (2023). Harnessing abilities and talents: Parents' perspectives on responsive inclusive early childhood education. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 31*(1), 75–91. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2127825

Everett, D. (2017). Helping new general education teachers think about special education and how to help their students in an inclusive class: The perspective of a secondary mathematics teacher. *International Journal of Whole Schooling, 13*(3).

Fernandez, N., & Hynes, J. W. (2016). The efficacy of pullout programs in elementary schools: Making it work. *The Journal of Multidisciplinary Graduate Research, 2*(3), 32–47.

Flick, U. (2018). *An introduction to qualitative research.* Sage Publications

Gargiulo, R. M., & Metcalf, D. (2017). *Teaching in today's inclusive classrooms: A Universal design for learning approach.* 3rd edition. Cengage Learning.

Gheyssens, E., Griful-Freixenet, J., & Struyven, K. (2020). Differentiated instruction: The diversity of teachers' philosophy and praxis to adapt teaching to students' interests, readiness, and learning profiles. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1812739

Gupta, S., Rous, B., & Schertz, H. (2016). Understanding change and implementation: how leaders can support inclusion. *YC Young Children, 71*(2), 82–91. https://www.jstor.org/stable/ycyoungchildren.71.2.82

Gupta, A., Chaplot, I., Detamore, B., Thakkar, S., Nguyen, K., Camilli, S., & Nguyen, D. (2023). Individualized Education Program (IEP) under examination: A literature review of systemic flaws in education for students with disabilities.

Hang, Q., & Rabren, K. (2009). An examination of co-teaching: Perspectives and efficacy indicators. *Remedial and Special Education, 30*(5), 259–268. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0741932508321018

Hannon, R. C. (1997). Returning to the true goal of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: Self-sufficiency. *Vanderbilt Law Review, 50*(3), 715–752

Hanover Research. (2012). The effectiveness of the co-teaching model. *Hanover*.

Hargreaves, E., & Elhawary, D. (2020). Exploring collaborative interaction and self-direction in teacher learning teams: Case-studies from a middle-income country analyzed using Vygotskian theory. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 50*(1), 71–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2018.1502609

Harkki, T., Vartiainen, H., Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, P., & Hakkarainen, K. (2021). Co-teaching in non-linear projects: A contextualized model of co-teaching to support educational change. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 97.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103188

Harter, A. & Jacobi, L. (2018). Experimenting with our education or enhancing it? Co-teaching from the perspective of students. *Inquiry in Education, 10*(2). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1197967

Hedin, L., & Conderman, G. (2019). Pairing teachers for effective co-teaching teams. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 55*(4), 169–173. https://doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2019.1659063

Heisler, L. A., & Thousand, J. S. (2021). A guide to co-teaching for the SLP: A tutorial. *Communication Disorders Quarterly, 42*(2), 122–127. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525740119886310

Hernandez, D., Hueck, S., & Charley, C. (2016). General education and special education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. *Journal of the American Academy of Special Education,* 79–93. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1129749.pdf

Hudson, B. (2019). Epistemic quality for equitable access to quality education in school mathematics. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 51*(4), 437–456. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2019.1618917

Hunter, W., Holbrook, J., Dieker, L., & Christopher-Allen, A. (2018). A better blend: Structure and strategy increase co-teaching's impact in an inclusive classroom. *The Learning Professional, 39*(2), 56–60. https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/abetter-blend.pdf

Iacono, T., Landry, O., Garcia-Melgar, A., Spong, J., Hyett, N., Bagley, K., & McKinstry, C. (2021). A systematized review of co-teaching efficacy in enhancing inclusive education for students with disability. *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.1900423

Idrus, F., Asri, N. A. Z., & Baharom, N. N. (2021). Has differentiated instruction gone 'awry' in online teaching and learning? *Journal of Language Teaching and Research, 12*(3), 501–510. https://doi.org/10.17507/jltr.1203.21

Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).

Johler, M., & Krumsvik, R. J. (2022). Increasing inclusion through differentiated instruction in a technology-rich primary school classroom in Norway. *Education 3–13,* 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2022.2143721

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. (1989). *Cooperation and competition: Theory and research.* Interaction Book Company.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2009). An educational psychology success story: Social interdependence theory and cooperative learning. *Educational Researcher, 38*(5), 365–379.

Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2018). Cooperative learning: The foundation for active learning. In (Ed.), *Active Learning - Beyond the Future*. IntechOpen. https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.81086

Jones, N., & Winters, M. A. (2022). Are two teachers better than one? The effect of co-teaching on students with and without disabilities. *The Journal of Human Resources, 57*(3). https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0420-10834R3

Jortveit, M., & Kovac, B. (2021). Co-teaching that works: Special and general educator's perspectives on collaboration. *Teaching Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2021.1895105

Jurkowski, S., Ulrich, M., & Müller, B. (2020). Co-teaching as a resource for inclusive classes: teachers' perspectives on conditions for successful collaboration. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1821449

Kauffman, J. M., Hallahan, D. P., Pullen, P. C., & Badar, J. (2018). *Special education: What it is and why we need it*. Routledge.

Kauffman, J. M., & Anastasiou, D. (2019). On cultural politics in special education: is much of it justifiable? *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, *30*(2), 78–90. https://doi.org/10.1177/1044207318822262

Keogh, B. K. (2007). Celebrating PL 94–142: The education of all handicapped children act of 1975. *Issues in Teacher Education, 16*(2), 65–69.

Kilpatrick, L., Searle, M., Smyth, R. E., & Specht, J. (2020). A coaching partnership: resource teachers and classroom teachers teaching collaboratively in regular classrooms. *British Journal of Special Education, 47*(1), 24–47. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12296

King-Sears, M. E., Brawand, A. E., Jenkins, M., & Preston-Smith, S. (2014). Co-teaching perspectives from secondary science co-teachers and their students with disabilities. *Journal of Science Teacher Education, 25*(6), 651–680. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10972-014-9391-2

King-Sears, M., Stefanidis, A., & Brawand, A. (2019). Barriers to the implementation of specialized reading instruction in secondary co-taught classrooms: an exploratory study. *Teachers and Teaching, 25*(4), 434–452. https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2019.1627311

King-Sears, M. E., & Strogilos, V. (2020). An exploratory study of self-efficacy, school belongingness, and co-teaching perspectives from middle school students and teachers in a mathematics co-taught classroom. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(2), 162–180. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1453553

King-Sears, M. E., Stefanidis, A., Berkeley, S., & Strogilos, V. (2021). Does co-teaching improve academic achievement for students with disabilities? A meta-analysis. *Educational Research Review*, *34*, 100405. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2021.100405

Krammer, M., Gastager, A., Paleczek, L., GasteigerKlicpera, B., & Rossmann, P. (2018). Collective self-efficacy expectations in Co-teaching teams – what are the influencing factors? *Educational Studies, 44*(1), 99–114. https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2017.1347489

Krischler, M., Powell, J., & Cate, I. (2019). What is meant by inclusion? On the effects of different definitions on attitudes toward inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 34*(5), 632–648. https//doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.150837

Kursch, P. M., & Veteska, P. J. (2020). Advantages and disadvantages of co-teaching. *IADIS Conference, Charles University*. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1215-7956

Kursch, M., Liska, R., Tureckivoa, M., & Kriz, J. (2022). Efficiency of virtual co-teaching. In B. Pitula & M. Kowalski (Eds.), *Co-teaching: Everyday Life or Terra Incognita of Contemporary Education?* (pp. 145–164).

Kurth, J. A., Love, H., & Pirtle, J. (2020). Parent perspectives of their involvement in IEP development for children with autism. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, *35*(1), 36–46. https://doi.org/10.1177/1088357619842858

Lamb, H. R., & Weinberger, L. E. (2020). Deinstitutionalization and other factors in the criminalization of persons with serious mental illness and how it is being addressed. *CNS spectrums*, *25*(2), 173–180. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1092852919001524

Leafstedt, J. M., Richards, C., LaMonte, M., & Cassidy, D. (2007). Perspectives on co-teaching: Views from high school students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal, 14*(3), 177–184. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ803307

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage Publications.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1989). *Fourth generation evaluation*. Sage Publications.

Lindacher, T. (2020). Perceptions of regular and special education teachers of their own and their co-teacher's instructional responsibilities in inclusive education: A case study. *Improving Schools, 23*(2), 140–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/1365480220906697

Lloyd, J. W., & Lloyd, P. A. (2015). Reinforcing success: What special education could learn from its earlier accomplishments. *Remedial and Special Education, 36*(2), 77–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932514560025

Lofthouse, R., & Thomas, U. (2017). Concerning collaboration: teachers' perspectives on working in partnerships to develop teaching practices. *Professional Development in Education, 43*(1), 36–56. https//doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2015.1053570

Maag, J. W., Kauffman, J. M., & Simpson, R. L. (2019). The amalgamation of special education? On practices and policies that may render it unrecognizable, *Exceptionality, 27*(3), 185–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/09362835.2018.1425624

McCoy, J. W. (2016). The teaching methods of Jesus. *The Journal of Biblical Foundations of Faith and Learning, 1*(1). https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/jbffl/vol1/iss1/9/

Milinga, J. R., Amani, J., & Lyakurwa, S. E. (2023). Teachers' perceptions of differentiated instruction for academically high-achieving secondary school students in Tanzania. *Journal of Advanced Academics, 34*(1), 68–102. https://doi.org/10.1177/1932202X221129970

Morales, C., & Parks, A. (2019). Personalized learning in co-taught classrooms: The role of technology in the education of unique learners. *Proceedings of E-Learn: World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education*, 849–853

Morgan, H. (2022). Conducting a qualitative document analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 27*(1), 64–77. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.5044

Mngo, Z. Y., & Mngo, A. Y. (2018). Teachers' perceptions of inclusion in a pilot inclusive education program: Implications for instructional leadership. *Education Research International, 2018,* 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1155/2018/3524879

Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Sage Publications.

Murawski, W. A. (2020). Ensuring co-teaching continues virtually: A school leader's imperative. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development, 5*(S1), 21–29.

Murphy, M. R., & Christle, C. A. (2024) Co-teaching for students with learning disabilities: One middle school's journey. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 68*(1), 16–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2022.2138250

Myers, C. (2018). Coactive vicarious learning: Toward a relational theory of vicarious learning in organizations. *AMR*, 43, 610–634. http://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2016.0202

Nápoles, J. (2024). Co-Teaching: A review of the literature. *Update: Applications of Research in Music Education*. https://doi.org/10.1177/87551233231226131

National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *Common Core of Data: Public School District Data.* https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/

National Council on Disability. (2021). National disability policy: A progress report (National Council on Disability). *National Council on Disability*. Retrieved from http://ncd.gov/publications/2021/

Navarro, S., Zervas, P., Gesa, R., & Sampson, D., (2016). Developing teachers' competences for designing inclusive learning experiences. *Educational Technology & Society, 19*(1), 17–27. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1087142

New International Version Bible. (2011). Bible Gateway. https://www.biblegateway.com/passage (Original work published 1973)

Oh, K., Murawski, W., & Nussli, N. (2017). An international immersion into co-teaching: A wakeup call for teacher candidates in general and special education. *Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship, 6*(1), 1–20. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1149569.pdf

Pancsofar, N., & Petroff, J. (2016) Teachers' experiences with co- teaching as a model for inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 20*(10), 1043–1053. https//doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2016.1145264

Paseka, A., & Schwab, S. (2019). Parents' attitudes towards inclusive education and their perceptions of inclusive teaching practices and resources. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 35*(2), 254–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2019.1665232

Patton, M. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Paulsrud, D., & Nilholm, C. (2020). Teaching for inclusion: A review of research on the cooperation between regular teachers and special educators in the work with students in need of special support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education.* https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2020.1846799

PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 334 U.S. 1257 (1972).

Power, S. A., & Velez, G. (2020). The MOVE framework: Meanings, observations, viewpoints, and experiences in processes of social change. *Review of General Psychology*, *24*(4), 321–334. https://doi.org/10.1177/1089268020915841

Power-DeFur, L. A., & Orelove, F. P. (1997). *Inclusive education: Practical implementation of the least restrictive environment*. Aspen Publishers.

Pratt, S. (2014). Achieving symbiosis: Working through challenges found in co-teaching to achieve effective co-teaching relationships. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 41*, 1–12.

Rytivaara, A., & Kershner, R. (2012). Co-teaching as a context for teachers' professional learning and joint knowledge construction. *Teacher and Teacher Education, 28*(7), 999–1008.

Rytivaara, A., Pulkkinen, J., & de Bruin, C. L. (2019). Committing, engaging and negotiating: Teachers' stories about creating shared spaces for co-teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 83*, 225–235.

Saldaña, J. M. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Sanagi, T. (2016). Teachers' misunderstanding the concept of inclusive education. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research (CIER), 9*(3), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.19030/cier.v9i3.9705

Scruggs, T., & Mastropieri, M. (2017). Making inclusion work with co-teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 49*(4), 284–293. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059916685065

Selvi, K. (2008). Phenomenological approach in education. In Tymieniecka, A., *Education in human creative existential planning* (pp. 39–51). Springer. http://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6302-2

Sharp, K., Jarvis, J. M., & McMillan, J. M. (2020). Leadership for differentiated instruction: Teachers' engagement with on-site professional learning at an Australian secondary school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(8), 901–920. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1492639

Shin, M., Lee, H., & McKenna, J. W. (2016). Special education and general education preservice teachers' co-teaching experiences: A comparative synthesis of qualitative research. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 20*(1), 91-107.

Shogren, K. A., Gross, J. M., Forber-Pratt, A. J., Francis, G. L., Statter, A. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 40*(4), 243–260. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1540796915583493

Sinclair, A. C., Bray, L. E., Wei, Y., Clancy, E. E., Wexler, J., Kearns, D. M., & Lemons, C. J. (2018). Coteaching in content area classrooms: Lessons and guiding questions for administrators. *NASSP Bulletin, 102*(4), 303–322.

Southward, J. D., & Davis, M. T. (2020). Summary of performance: Bridging the transition from high school to post-secondary education for students with SLD. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 64*(4), 316–325. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2020.1769012

Sprunger, N. S., Harvey, M. W., & Quick, M. M. (2017). Special education transition predictors for post-school success: Findings from the field. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 62*(2), 116–128. https://doi.org/10.1080/1045988X.2017.1393789

Stone, D. H. (2019). The least restrictive environment for providing education, treatment, and community services for persons with disabilities: Rethinking the concept. *Touro Law Review, 35*(1), 20. https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2955&context=lawreview

Strogilos, V. (2018). The value of differentiated instruction in the inclusion of students with special needs/disabilities in mainstream schools. In *SHS Web of Conferences* (42), 00003. EDP Sciences.

Strogilos, V., & King-Sears, M. (2019). Co-teaching is extra help and fun: perspectives on co-teaching from middle school students and co-teachers. *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs,19,* 92–102. https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12427

Strogilos, V., King-Sears, M. E., Tragoulia, E., Voulagka, A., & Stefanidis, A. (2023). A meta-synthesis of co-teaching students with and without disabilities. *Educational Research Review, 38.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2022.100504

Svobodova, Z. (2021). Virtual co-teaching: Reflection, reality, and potential. *Czech Andragogy Society.* 36–43.

Svobodova, Z., Veteska, J., & Dvorakova, D. (2022). Virtual co-teaching through the eyes of primary and secondary school students. In B. Pitula & M. Kowalski (Eds.), *Co-teaching: Everyday Life or Terra Incognita of Contemporary Education?* (pp. 145–164).

Tiernan, B., Casserly, A. M., & Maguire, G. (2020). Towards inclusive education: instructional practices to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs in multi-grade settings. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(7), 787–807. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1483438

van Hover, S., Hicks, D., & Sayeski, K. (2012). A case study of co-teaching in an inclusive secondary high-stakes World History I classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, *40*(3), 260–291. https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2012.705162

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy.* State University of New York Press.

van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing.* Routledge.

van Manen, M. (2017). Phenomenology and meaning attribution. *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology, 17*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2017.1368253

van Mieghem, A., Verschueren, K., Petry, K., & Struyf, E. (2020). An analysis of research on inclusive education: a systematic search and meta review. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(6), 675–689. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1482012

Veteska, J., Kursch, M., Svobodova, Z., Tureckiova, M., & Paulovcakova, L. (2022). Longitudinal co-teaching projects: Scoping review. *Orchestration of Learning Environments in the Digital World*, 35–53.

Vostal, M., LaVenia, K. N., & Horner, C. G. (2019). Making the shift to a co-teaching model of instruction: Considering relational trust as a precursor to collaboration. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 22*(1), 83–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458918796876

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Ward-Jackson, J., & Yu, C. (2023). Impact of online learning in K–12: Effectiveness, challenges, and limitations for online instruction. In *Research Anthology on Remote Teaching and Learning and the Future of Online Education* (pp. 60–78). IGI Global.

Wilson, G. L., & Michaels, C. A. (2006). General and special education students' perceptions of co-teaching: Implications for secondary-level literacy instruction. *Reading & Writing Quarterly, 22*(3), 205–225. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560500455695

Winzer, M. A. (2009). *From integration to inclusion: A history of special education in the 20th century*. Gallaudet University Press.

Appendix A

Participant Interest Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions and reply to this email:

1. Do you hold a valid Arkansas teaching license?
2. How many sections do you currently co-teach?
3. What content areas do you co-teach?
4. What grade levels do you co-teach?
5. Are you a secondary general education core subject teacher or a secondary special education teacher?

Appendix B

Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms. I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Eligible participants must hold a valid Arkansas teaching license as a secondary general education core subject teacher or a secondary special education teacher. Participants must teach a minimum of three courses that are designated as co-taught classrooms by the school district. A co-taught classroom is a classroom that includes one licensed general education teacher and one licensed special education teacher.

Participants will be asked to:

1. I will ask you to meet with me in person or via Zoom virtually for an individual interview. The interview will last 45–60 minutes and will be audio recorded.
2. I will ask you to review the interview transcripts for accuracy and to make sure they express your view of your experience. You may also elaborate in writing on any points when reviewing the transcript. This task should take 10-15 minutes.
3. I will ask you to email me documents and artifacts to analyze. That can be lesson plans, PLC meeting notes, co-teacher-shared documents, and planning documents. This process should take 10-15 minutes to collect and send the email.
4. I will ask you to respond in writing to journal prompts. I will provide the prompts, and you may email me responses to the prompts. Responses to journal prompts should be returned within 7 days of being received. The estimated time to complete the journal responses is 20–30 minutes.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but participant identities will not be disclosed.

To participate, please reply to this email. I will email you a few short screening questions to ensure you meet all of the participation criteria. If you meet participant criteria, I will then contact you to schedule an interview. A consent document will be sent to you in a separate email if you are found eligible. 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 before the interview.

Sincerely,

Chad Davis
Doctoral Candidate
[redacted]

Appendix C

Participant Informed Consent

Consent

Title of the Project: The Experiences of Teachers Implementing Co-teaching Models: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study
Principal Investigator: Chad Davis, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Eligible participants must hold a valid Arkansas teaching license as a secondary general education core subject teacher or a secondary special education teacher. Participants must teach a minimum of three courses that are designated as co-taught classrooms by the school district. A co-taught classroom is a classroom that includes one licensed general education teacher and one licensed special education teacher. 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 the study is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms.

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:

1. I will ask you to meet with me in person or via Zoom virtually for an individual interview. The interview will last 45–60 minutes and will be audio recorded.
2. I will ask you to review the interview transcripts for accuracy and to make sure they express your view of your experience. You may also elaborate in writing on any points when reviewing the transcript. This task should take 10-15 minutes.
3. I will ask you to email me documents and artifacts to analyze. These can be lesson plans, PLC meeting notes, co-teacher-shared documents, and planning documents. This process should take 10-15 minutes to collect and send the email.
4. I will ask you to respond in writing to journal prompts. I will provide the prompts, and you may email me responses to the prompts. Responses to journal prompts should be returned within 7 days of being received. The estimated time to complete the journal responses is 20–30 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 a better understanding of how co-teaching is implemented as a strategy for inclusive education. Understanding the collaborative relationship of co-teachers can help all stakeholders structure and approach co-teaching to ensure that it is an effective strategy for educating students with disabilities.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

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 by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and all physical data will be kept in a locked drawer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer and phone for three years and then deleted. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants' compensation for participating in this study will be limited to the researcher paying for drinks and snacks during the in-person interview.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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 Chad Davis. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him a[redacted]r [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Frank Bailey, [redacted]

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 IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is 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 D

IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 26, 2024

Chad Davis
Frank Bailey

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY23-24-1573 The Experiences of Teachers Implementing Co-teaching Models: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study

Dear Chad Davis, Frank Bailey,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application per 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 described in your IRB 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).

For a PDF of your exemption letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page. Your information sheet and final versions of your study documents, **which you must use to conduct your study,** can also be found on the same page under the Attachments tab.

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, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix E

Site Permission

February 22, 2024

[redacted]

[redacted]

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The title of my research project is: The Experiences of Teachers Implementing Co-teaching Models: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study**.** The purpose of my research is to describe the experiences of secondary teachers implementing co-teaching models in inclusive classrooms.

I am writing to request your permission to contact the teachers of [redacted] to invite them to participate in my research study.

I will utilize school email services to solicit possible participants by emailing a questionnaire to current school district co-teachers. Those who express interest will be sent a recruitment letter with further details. Participants will be asked to sign an informed consent information form prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. Once informed consent is secured, I will ask the participants to complete an in-person interview with me that will be audio recorded. This interview will not take place on school district property. I will use the school district email to send participants writing prompts to complete and email back to me. I will also use the school district email to ask participants to verify transcripts and themes of their previous responses to me.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Chad Davis
Doctoral Candidate

Appendix F

Interview Questions

1. Tell me a little about yourself. Tell me about your family and growing up.
2. What experiences did you have that led you to want to be an educator?
3. Describe your background and teaching experience that led to you working in your current position.
4. Describe the culture of your school relating to the inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms.
5. Describe your training in co-teaching practices prior to becoming a co-teacher.
6. Describe how your school pairs co-teachers and decides what course sections are co-taught.
7. Describe the training and coaching you and your co-teachers receive specific to co-teaching methods.
8. Describe your co-teaching teams' approach to co-plan, co-teach, and co-assess your classes.
9. Describe some of your successful co-teaching partnerships.
10. Describe some of your unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships.
11. How do you and your co-teachers approach which model you utilize for each lesson?
12. What materials and curriculum do you and your co-teacher use in your classes?
13. Based on your experience, what changes need to be made to make co-teaching a more successful strategy for inclusion?

Appendix G

Journal Prompts

1. In 200+ words, describe what positively affected your experiences as a co-teacher.
2. In 200+ words, share the challenges you regularly encounter co-teaching.
3. In 200+ words, describe what can improve instruction for students with disabilities in your co-taught classrooms.
4. In 200+ words, compare and contrast your experience co-teaching with what you think is an optimal co-teaching environment.
5. Describe what you know now about co-teaching that you wish you knew before you began as a co-teacher.

APPENDIX H

Document Analysis

Thank you for your participation in this study. Please reply and attach relevant documents that would be helpful for the researcher to understand your experience in choosing and implementing various co-teaching models. The documents or artifacts may include:

1) Pacing Guides
2) Lesson Plans
3) Documents Related to Co-teaching Model Chosen/Implemented
4) Notes from planning meetings
5) PLC notes

Note: No documents should be sent to the researcher that include any data or identifying information of any individual (students and staff). The documents included should be the sole creation of the participant or common resources with no individual-identifying content.