Running Head: SUCCESSFUL CO-TEACHING

Investigating a Framework for Successful Co-teaching to Support Inclusion in an Elementary

School Setting

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Abstract

It is estimated that approximately one in ten children in the United States is exceptional. Although public schools within the United States are legally mandated to provide a free and appropriate education to all students, the approaches for providing this appropriate education to individuals with exceptionalities vary greatly. Research has supported that inclusive educational practices are beneficial for students (both with and without disabilities), teachers, as well as communities. Furthermore, research has supported the idea that co-teaching methods of inclusion could provide unique benefits for students and teachers alike. The purpose of this study was to determine the perceived benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching from the perspective of both general educators and special educators with co-teaching experience. An additional goal was to determine what elements the participants' perceived were most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching practices. The intended result of this study is to provide a framework for successful co-teaching. After surveying and interviewing six teachers with experience with co-teaching, the results indicated that most participants felt that co-teaching was beneficial for students and teachers alike, when implemented successfully. That being said, most participants agreed that co-teaching is a very complex model of service delivery, and several variables, such as teaching styles and philosophies, time, and administration, must work together in order to this practice to be successful. Given this information, the researcher created a framework for successful co-teaching methods of inclusion that discusses some of the most vital elements involved in the practice. Implications for the field of education and the limitations of this research were also addressed.

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Why is inclusion important? Anyone who knows about the history and practices of Special

Education knows that this is a very complex question. However, one of the simplest answers lies

in the fact that there are so many students with exceptionalities who are in need of effective

teaching practices and specially designed instruction (Esteves & Rao, 2008; IDEA, 2004; Kirk,

Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). Although it is very hard to determine exactly how many children

are exceptional, being that exceptionalities are very conditional and look different for every

child, it is estimated that more than six million children in the United States are classified across

the categories of exceptionalities (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). This means that

approximately one in ten children in the United States is exceptional. However, not every child

with exceptionalities will receive special education services. These children may still need

special modifications or accommodations within their general education classrooms, which

makes it even harder for general educators to identify and adhere to the special needs of their

students with exceptionalities. Due to the increasing awareness of different exceptionalities, the

associated special strengths and needs, and the complex process of making appropriate

modifications to general education classroom curriculum and structure, Special Education

Inclusion continues to be a hot topic of conversation within schools (McLeskey, Barringer,

Billingsley, Brownell, Jackson, Kennedy, Lewis, Maheady, Rodriguez, Scheeler, Winn, &

Ziegler, 2017; Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). So, what does it mean to have an

exceptionality?

The term exceptionality includes both children with disabilities as well as those with gifts and talents. Exceptional children are those who differ from their typically developing peers in cognitive characteristics, sensory abilities, communication abilities, behavior and emotional development, and/or physical characteristics (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). To be a person with a disability, these differences are generally so great that they require modifications, accommodations, and/or specially designed instruction (e.g., special education services) in order to access the curriculum. To help classify the different disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) created 12 different categories of disabilities (see *Figure 1.1* in Appendix) including Autism (now referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder), Deafness, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual and Developmental Disability, Multiple disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairment including Blindness (as cited in Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).

It is well established that the first years of life are the most critical to development; therefore, it is crucial to discover any exceptionalities as early as possible in order to properly adhere to the educational needs of these children (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). Today, there are several programs and services accessible to families within their communities and educational systems; however, these services were not always available, as there have been major shifts over the past century in how students with exceptionalities are treated within their communities and classrooms (Esteves & Rao, 2008). This shift includes a major transition from sheer rejection to including and accepting individuals with disabilities as members of society (Esteves & Rao, 2008; McLeskey et. al., 2017). Just over 70 years ago, individual states were in full control of the limited amount of subsidized programs available for students with exceptionalities (Kirk,

Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). However, these programs were not equally accessible across all

fifty states, and families who had children with special needs were beginning to grow tired of

this inequitable distribution of access to necessary assistance for their children (Esteves & Rao,

2008; Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). People across the nation banded together and formed

a call to action, prompting the federal government to get involved, despite the American tradition

of education being under local control.

History of Laws Related to Special Education in the US

The first federal effort was made under John F. Kennedy's administration, with the

passage of Public Law (PL) 88-144 in 1963. This law authorized funding for advanced

professional training and research for those working with students with intellectual and

developmental disabilities (IDD) and deafness (Esteves & Rao, 2008; Kirk, Gallagher, &

Coleman, 2015). Many other federal laws followed, with some of the most influential seen in the

table below:

Figure 1.2 History of Federal Laws Relating to Special Education in the United States

Law	Year Enacted	Title	Provisions
PL 93-112	1973	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act	Addressed protections for students with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance (IDEA).
PL 94-142	1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	Passed to ensure that all children with exceptionalities had access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasized special education programs and resources. There were six key provisions of this law that intended to ensure that all students received access to the resources necessary for their academic success (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).

PL 99-457	1986		Reauthorized PL 94 -142 to extend services to children from birth- age 21, as there was an increasing awareness that early intervention was the most effective in helping students with special needs succeed (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).
(Revision of PL93-112)	1990	Americans with Disabilities Act	Extended "protection against discrimination to the full range of state and local government services, programs, and activities including public schools regardless of whether they receive any Federal financial assistance" (IDEA).
PL 107-110	2001	No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)	This law impacts all school-aged children, but especially those with exceptionalities. Its purpose was to keep schools responsible for getting students to a certain level of competency by requiring them to present data to prove their effectiveness. Understandably, this presents a certain challenge for individuals with disabilities, and in some ways, not enough challenge for those with gifts and talents (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).
(Revision of 94-142)	2004	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Governs local provision of early intervention, special education, and related services to over 6.5 million eligible individuals from birth-age 2 (IDEA).This law became very important for the future of Special Education, as it funded many of the support elements of quality special education programs such as special education teacher training, technical assistance projects, parent education initiatives, and research and outreach projects. This law was critical in creating the necessary infrastructure for special education to operate successfully in a modern

			school system (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).
PL 114-95	2015	Every Student Succeeds Act	Amended IDEA 2004 and states "Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities" (IDEA).

Exceptional Children (EC) Process

Prior to students being placed in special education, education systems in the US used a Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) to address the academic and non-academic needs of students with disabilities (J. McCauley, personal communication, April 5, 2018). MTSS has three main tiers: (a.) Tier I – classroom-wide changes to incorporate a child into the general education classroom, (b.) Tier II – targeted intervention for small groups of students, and (c.) Tier III – individualized programming for particular students (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). At Tier III, the instructional support is provided approximately 4-5 days per week. If a child's needs are still not met by the 6th-8th week at Tier III, a child would then be referred for testing to be eligible for EC placement and possibly begin pullout sessions. Once eligibility is determined services might include a full-time special education placement or a separate special school environment. The important thing to remember is that each child is placed in a program that best suits his or her individual abilities and needs, and sometimes, this can be a mix of two or more tiers.

Child Placement on a Continuum of Service

Given this history of Special Education in the United States, as well as the background knowledge about MTSS, one may begin to wonder how children with disabilities are identified (i.e. Child Find) and placed into appropriate services in order to accommodate their needs. If a child's disability has not been discovered by his or her parents and diagnosed by a healthcare provider, a teacher is often the one who notices a child's learning differences and refers him or her to an MTSS team (J. McCauley, personal communication, April 5, 2018). If Tier II or Tier III supports are still insufficient for that child's needs, the MTSS team would then refer the child to the EC team (J. McCauley, personal communication, April 5, 2018). This EC team would refer the child for testing, and if the child is eligible for disability, he or she would then be placed into Special Education services and a team of stakeholders (usually the general education teacher, special education teacher, LEA representative, parents, and sometimes the student) would come together and develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for that child (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). In an IEP meeting, this team would determine what the child's needs are and where the child falls on the continuum of services, in order to place him or her in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. For those who may not know what that LRE is, it is essentially the setting in which a child can learn that is as close to the general education classroom as possible (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015).

Inclusion

Prior to the push toward more inclusion, which is essentially children with special needs being educated in the same environment as their typically developing peers, many public schools often used a "pull-out" approach for EC services, where students are pulled out of the general education classroom to receive specialized instruction. In recent years, with increasing advocacy

for inclusive education for all students, students with disabilities are more often included in the general education classroom for at least part of the day. As IDEA states, "we have advanced our expectations for all children, including children with disabilities. Classrooms have become more inclusive and the future of children with disabilities is brighter." (IDEA, 2004, para. 3). Since 1975, we have progressively included children with special needs in our public schools, and today, more than 60% of children with disabilities are spending at least 80% of their school day in the general education classroom (IDEA, 2017; IDEA, 2004).

One defense for inclusion is that peer-reviewed literature demonstrates that it is beneficial, both academically as well as socially for students to be surrounded by peers who are currently at a higher academic level (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014). Research suggests that this is particularly true for students who are less skilled than their classmates (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014). Vinodrao (2016) would further this argument by saying that in addition to the multitude of academic benefits, inclusion practices often have emotional and social benefits for students with disabilities as well. It allows students access to peer role models, increases their social initiations and relationships, and prepares them for an adult life in an inclusive society (Vinodrao, 2016). Given all of the benefits of inclusion, one would think that students with special needs would automatically prefer inclusion practices as opposed to pull-out services. However, Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan's 1998 study contradicted this thought, as the majority of thirty-two students that they interviewed identified a preference for pullout methods of specialized instruction as opposed to inclusion methods. In reviewing the literature surrounding current co-teaching practices of inclusion, it was discovered that there was a lack of current studies containing student perspectives; however, there were still some concerns that were expressed regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching

practices (Berry, 2006; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; & Tremblay, 2013). One possible explanation for these findings is that the inclusion practices being used within these studies did not adhere to all of the important elements of successful implementation of co-teaching, and therefore, the error may be attributed to the implementers, not the practice itself. As Vinodrao (2016) argues, creating an inclusive classroom is a challenging task that is dependent on a number of variables such as teacher training and expertise, as well a supportive staff. However, if all of the variables work together properly, an inclusive education can be very powerful and effective in helping students with disabilities succeed academically and socially.

So what does an inclusive classroom actually look like? The concept of inclusion is very theoretical and up for interpretation, and there are several different approaches to inclusion. Two popular approaches today are consultative services and co-teaching, which will be discussed separately below (J. Diliberto, personal communication, March 2, 2018).

Consultative Services. When implementing inclusion using a consultative approach, a child with special needs is included in the general education classroom and the general education teacher consults the special education teacher for instructional or behavioral strategies (J. Diliberto, personal communication, March 2, 2018). This is particularly useful for special education teachers, in that it allows them to provide support to general education teachers without having to set aside a lot of time for co-planning or additional instruction. When students with more profound needs are included in the general education classroom, it may be necessary for general education teachers to have more hands-on help in the classroom and direct guidance from the special education teacher, in order to provide an appropriate, yet stimulating education for all students (J. Diliberto, personal communication, March 2, 2018).

Co-teaching. Starting in the early 1960s, co-teaching is a method of inclusion that has become increasingly popular over the years (Cook & Friend, 1995; Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015). Co-teaching is essentially two or more professionals (usually the general education teacher and the special education teacher) giving instruction to a group of students with diverse academic and learning needs. Within the concept of co-teaching, there are five different approaches, which are outlined below (Cook & Friend, 1995).

One Teaching, One Assisting. The first approach, with one teacher teaching and the other assisting, is one in which both teachers are present in the general education classroom, but one takes more of a leadership role, while the other either drifts around the room or sits and observes the classroom. One of the strengths of this approach is that it requires less planning than other approaches; however, some feel that this method undermines the abilities of the assisting teacher (often the special education teacher) (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Team Teaching. Team teaching, on the other hand, is a model where both teachers are actively involved in the instruction and discussion. It is often a very effective approach, since the efficacy of both leaders is equally appreciated; however, it is often intimidating to many teachers, as it requires a lot of mutual planning and trust (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Parallel Teaching. Parallel teaching is a method that is often used to create opportunities for students to respond to each other and engage in open-discussion. With parallel teaching, students are split in half, with both teachers giving instruction to one of the two groups simultaneously. As one might assume, this method also requires a lot of co-planning for teachers to ensure that each group receives the same instruction. Nevertheless, it is useful in lowering the student-teacher ratio, while still being able to give larger-group instruction (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Alternative Teaching. Another common approach to co-teaching is alternative teaching, where one teacher instructs a larger group while the other leads a much smaller group somewhere else in the classroom. This is often used for students who benefit from re-teaching or small-group settings. Alternative teaching not only allows students to engage in a smaller group setting, but it also allows teachers to informally assess a student's level in order to individualize future instruction. Although this is a very effective method for achieving the specific goals above, teachers must be cautious when grouping students into these re-teaching groups, as it is easy for students to become stigmatized for their learning abilities (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Station Teaching. Lastly, some teachers prefer to use a station teaching method, where teachers divide students into two or more groups around the room and split the content between these stations. This is somewhat similar to the parallel teaching approach, however, in this approach, students are receiving different content at each station. This is often useful for students who thrive in small group settings, and it avoids singling certain students out for their abilities. Thus, this strategy is beneficial for differentiation without being blatantly obvious of the varying skills and needs of students. Unfortunately, this method also requires a lot of planning to ensure that both teachers keep on pace in order to easily transition to the next phase on time (Cook & Friend, 1995).

The image below provides a graphic explanation of each co-teaching model:

Figure 1.3. Co-Teaching Models
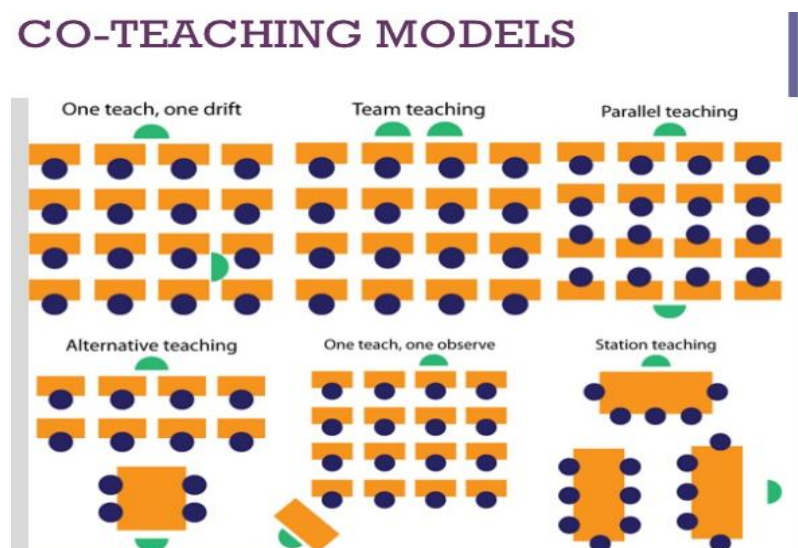
CO-TEACHING MODELS

Note. Taken from "What Does co-teaching Look Like?", 2014.

Given all of this information, we can see how complex and variable inclusion practices can be,

even within the same conceptual model, such as co-teaching.

In addition to the major strengths and weaknesses of each model of co-teaching discussed

above it is also important to outline why co-teaching is increasingly becoming a popular practice

of inclusion (Cook & Friend, 1995). As discussed before, inclusion, as a whole, is a very

complex process, and in order to be successful, all of the differing variables must work together

(Cook & Friend, 1995). One of the most important variables involved in effective inclusion is

professional preparation and teacher efficacy (Burke, Goldman, Hart, & Hodapp, 2016; Gehrke

& Cocchiarella, 2013; González-Gil, Martín-Pastor, Flores, Jenaro, Poy, & Gómez-Vela, 2013;

Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013;

Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016; Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty,

2015; Vinodrao, 2016). Co-teaching is particularly useful in addressing this variable of inclusion,

as it brings together two people who are experts in two very different, yet equally important

areas. For instance, the general education teacher is often the expert in content and curriculum, whereas the special education teacher is often the expert in specialized instruction and addressing the variable needs of students with exceptionalities (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015). This is why co-teaching is often referred to as "a perfect marriage" because each teacher compliments the other's expertise (J. Diliberto, personal communication, March 2, 2018). As a result, students are able to receive relevant content alongside their typically developing peers, while still having all of their individual needs met. Moving further with this same idea, high-stakes testing could also play a role in this method of inclusion (J. Diliberto, personal communication, March 2, 2018). With high-stakes testing comes higher demands on general education teachers to teach content and curriculum, and this presents certain challenges for special educators in finding an appropriate time to pull students out for instruction. Even though co-teaching is a very effective inclusion practice when implemented properly, it often becomes a logistics nightmare for teachers involved in the process due to the extensive amount of planning and coordination involved (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). This is why we must be careful not to undermine the importance of other underlying variables, such as administrative support, that are involved in successful implementation of co-teaching methods.

Conclusion

As Special Education continues to evolve, it is important to look closely at the current methods of inclusion being practiced, and to analyze the components that are paramount to the effectiveness of that practice. Therefore, the purpose of the current research study is to determine what the perceived benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching currently are, and to determine what elements are most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching practices. The results of

this study will help to provide a framework for successful co-teaching. The researcher will conduct a review of the research literature. Additionally, the researcher will conduct interviews with or have surveys completed by elementary school teachers with experience using a co-teaching method of inclusion to identify the characteristics critical for successful implementation of this model. The research questions driving the investigation are as follows:

1. What are the current attitudes of teachers about co-teaching methods of inclusive education?

2. What do teachers who are using/have used a co-teaching model perceive are the benefits/drawbacks of inclusive education using a co-teaching approach?

3. What do teachers who are using/have used a co-teaching model perceive are the elements that are most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching strategies?

4. What are participants' ideas/suggestions for incorporating all of these vital elements successfully?

Literature Review

Before conducting research, it is important to take a look at the prior research on a given topic to see what common themes or findings arise and what areas are still lacking in information. This section provides background information on some of the latest research regarding inclusion and co-teaching practices in order to lay a solid foundation for further research.

What is Inclusion?

Broadly speaking, an inclusive education is characterized by including children from a non-dominant culture in the general education classroom and curriculum (Kirk, Gallagher, & Coleman, 2015). A more specific definition of inclusion is educating children who are exceptional (including both children with developmental disabilities as well as those with gifts and talents) alongside their typically developing peers (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014; Orakcı, Aktan, Düzce Rehberlik ve Araştırma Merkezi, Keçiören Rehberlik ve Araştırma Merkezi, & Keçiören Tevfik Ünsal İlkokulu, 2016). For the purposes of this paper, in addition to the definitions outlined above, we will think of inclusion as "a value as well as a practice" (Vinodrao, 2016, *para.* 13). Inclusive education seeks to provide a free and appropriate education to students with disabilities by restructuring the educational system so that it focuses on each child's ability rather than treating all children the same (Vinodrao, 2016). Vinodrao (2016) exemplified this approach best when stating that, "it is a philosophical move away from the accommodation of students with special needs into a 'normal' system, towards a full inclusion model where everyone is considered normal and where the needs of all can be met" (Vinodrao, 2016, *para.* 5).

Why Inclusion?

Research has found that there are several benefits of an inclusive education across several different groups of stakeholders including students (those with and without disabilities), teachers,

and communities (Vinodrao, 2016). The benefits of inclusion with respect to each group of individuals are explained below.

Benefits for Students. Research suggests that there are several benefits of an inclusive education for students with and without disabilities. These benefits range from academic benefits to social and emotional benefits as well. These benefits with respect to their type are discussed separately below.

Academic. In their study, Justice et al. (2014) found that student's academic growth is positively associated with the skill level of their classmates, with children with special needs being effected much more by their peers than students without special needs. Given this information, a conclusion can be made that it is beneficial for students with disabilities to be surrounded by students with relatively high levels of skills in key areas of achievement. Not only that, but this finding also implies that a confined classroom filled with students with more intensive needs could actually have a negative impact on the academic performance of students with disabilities, thus enhancing the argument for more inclusive practices (Justice et al., 2014). This argument was furthered with evidence from Berry, R. A. W., (2006) and Vinodrao (2016) showing that an inclusive education helps all students, meaning that it is also benefits those without disabilities. Some of the academic benefits for students with disabilities include the removal of barriers to participation and learning, increases in IEP goal achievements, and greater access to curriculum. The main academic benefit for students without disabilities is greater academic achievement through practicing and teaching others (Vinodrao, 2016). Although there is evidence supporting that there are academic benefits for students in an inclusive education environment, research indicates a greater socioemotional impact (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017; Berry, 2006; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Vinodrao, 2016).

Socioemotional. As Vinodroa (2016) would argue, "a segregated education leads to social segregation." Most children figure out who they are and what social group they identify most with through their experiences in an education system. This is why it is important that we foster healthy social relationships in our education systems for all students. It is widely recognized that inclusive education offers significant psychological advantages for students with disabilities (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017; Berry, 2006; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Vinodrao, 2016). These psychosocial advantages stem from various aspects of inclusive education such as more opportunities for developing friendships, access to peer role models, increased social initiations, greater peer acceptance and understanding of diversity, higher self-esteem, and social integration in preparation for integration into adult society (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017; Berry, 2006; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Vinodrao, 2016). In addition to all of these benefits, there is also evidence that inclusion benefits teachers and communities as well.

Benefits for Teachers. As Vinodrao (2016) found, an inclusive education fosters professional development, in that it challenges teachers to offer different teaching techniques in order to adapt and modify their curriculum to meet their students' needs. Young children retain more when they are actively involved, which provides a certain challenge for teachers to be able to engage students on different learning levels with one set curriculum. This allows them to become more dynamic, which will likely lead to greater self-efficacy and greater student enjoyment and performance.

Benefits for Communities. The benefits of an inclusive education for communities mainly pertain to students being more prepared to become independent and respectful members of society (Vinodrao, 2016). Being that students with disabilities are learning how to collaborate within and integrate into their general education classrooms with typically developing peers, the transition to

adult life in society becomes much easier. Furthermore, typically developing peers are likely to

adopt more inclusive and open mindsets to diversity, as they have been practicing respect for

disabilities within their classrooms.

Given all of these potential academic and socioemotional benefits, one may begin to question

how to properly implement inclusive practices within the classroom in order to produce these

positive effects. McLeskey et. al. (2017) offered a framework for High Leverage Practices (HLPs)

that they argue provide a "clear vision of effective teaching for these students" (p.4). Ideally,

teachers gain access to these HLPS, which are identified by special educators in the field, prior to

their induction into the field and continuing through ongoing evaluation and professional

development (McLeskey et. al., 2017). Although there are several approaches to inclusion, that

would likely fall within the framework of HLPs, this paper will focus on co-teaching models of

inclusion.

Co-teaching models

Co-teaching is defined as a practice in which two professionals co-instruct a diverse group of

students (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013; Tremblay, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). As Tschida,

Smith, & Fogarty (2015) explained, Marilyn Friend did much of the early work on improving

outcomes for students through co-teaching, and her work "paved the way" for implementation of and

research on effective co-teaching (Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015, p.2). Marilyn Friend is a

research professional with a background in general education, special education, and administration

who has created several resources for assisting classroom partnerships and inclusive practices, as

well as documents specific to co-teaching materials for educators and administrators. Friend's five

main models of co-teaching, as well as the benefits and challenges of each model, were explained in

detail in the introduction chapter, and research shows that these five models are still being used

today (Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Tremblay, 2013). Tremblay

(2013) found that support teaching, where one taught and the other observed or assisted, was the

dominant configuration in practice. However, other researchers observed that there was great

inconsistency in which model was implemented most, indicating that co-teaching models may be

quite varied in practice (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013; Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015).

Regardless of which model is being implemented, the important thing to remember about co-

teaching is that it is a parity between two teaching professionals, with each professional having

credential in his/her own area of specialization and expertise. Many argue that co-teaching has the

potential to provide the best education for all students, but specifically students with special needs,

as it provides access to the general education curriculum with appropriate modification and

adaptation (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015).

Support for Co-teaching

Advocates for co-teaching models of inclusion argue that co-teaching is effective in allowing

students with disabilities to participate fully, without putting pressure on one teacher, who may not

feel fully equipped to handle the needs of that student on his or her own (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013).

Many teachers appreciate that it fosters collaboration and offers new ways of planning, organizing,

and delivering instruction (Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015). Similar to the benefits of inclusion as

a whole, the benefits of co-teaching practices are split between academic and socioemotional

benefits.

Academic. Many researchers have found that students with and without disabilities benefit

academically from co-taught instruction (Berry, 2006; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos,

Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015). Students with disabilities tend to benefit most, with evidence of

improvements in reading, writing, and math curriculum (Berry, 2006; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015;

Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Tremblay, 2013; Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015). These gains

likely stem from the positive effects of having two teachers, who create a classroom structure that

provides appropriate accommodation without lack of access to the general curriculum. Aside from

content knowledge, there is evidence showing that co-teaching models lead to higher participation

rates, more on-task behaviors, higher attendance rates, and greater interdependence (Berry, 2006;

Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Tremblay, 2013).

     Socioemotional. In addition to the academic benefits laid out above, there is also evidence of

several socioemotional benefits of co-taught instruction. Many of these benefits revolve around

greater student belonging and satisfaction (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013; Rivera, McMahon, &

Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015), increased

interactions with peers (Berry, 2006; Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila,

2015), and access to peer role models (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015).

In addition to all of these student benefits, many teachers often find that they are able to develop

strong relationships with their co-teaching partners and improve their self-efficacy in teacher

preparation and collaboration skills.

     Although it is clear that there is evidence in support of co-teaching methods, existing

research still produces some mixed results. Many of the concerns regarding co-teaching revolve

around a lack of differentiated instruction (Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015), high social demands

on students with special needs (Berry, 2006), as well as some evidence of lower whole-group

performance (Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015). Because of these

concerns, as well as many others, some who doubt the effectiveness of co-teaching inclusion have

concluded that it is only "moderately effective" (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos &

Stefanidis, 2015; Tremblay, 2013). Due to the mixed results regarding the effectiveness of co-

teaching, I feel that it is important to determine what elements are necessary for successful

implementation of co-teaching, leading to positive student and teacher outcomes.

Elements for Successful Co-Teaching

There is a consensus that, although co-teaching has the possibility of being very effective,

successful implementation of co-teaching is dependent on a number of variables (Kamens, Susko, &

Elliott, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013;

Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Vinodrao, 2016). In summation of elements discussed within

the literature, the main topics discussed were teacher characteristics (including teacher attitudes),

teacher training, co-planning (including teacher relationships, roles/responsibilities, and planning

time), administrative support, and collaboration with parents. It is important to note, however, that

there are several external factors that likely impact the successful implementation of co-teaching

strategies such as current legislation and the social acceptance of disability. However, for the

purposes of this research, the focus remains on internal factors.

Educator Characteristics. The first major factor effecting the successful implementation of

co-teaching practices is educator characteristics. Although there are several different characteristics

with great potential to impact co-teaching practices, the four main characteristics mentioned in the

current research literature were educator flexibility, communication skills, philosophies on teaching,

and attitudes towards inclusive practices (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017; Gehrke &

Cocchiarella, 2013; Orakcı et al., 2016; Rivera, McMahon, and Keys, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri,

2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016). As Rivera, McMahon, and Keys

(2014) pointed out, many schools, even those which have experienced success in co-teaching, report

challenges with educator flexibility. However, flexibility is key to success in co-teaching practices,

as being territorial over one's classroom can lead to distinctive educator and assistant roles, which

limits contributions from each counterpart. Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) furthered this argument

by saying that not only is flexibility important, but ability to communicate effectively is paramount

to successful co-teaching practice, as it helps teachers who are trying to develop a strong co-teaching

relationship. According to the research, good communication skills involve active listening, active

participation, active interest, and ability to depersonalize these conversations when necessary, as to

be as unbiased and open-minded as possible (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). In addition to both

skills above, matching philosophies on teaching is also an important factor for successful co-

teaching (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014). However, this is often a challenge if teachers are

unable to choose their co-teaching partners, which is why administrative involvement in so

important.

  Attitudes. The last, and most well-noted teacher characteristic in the research reviewed is the

educator's attitude towards co-teaching practices. Being that this topic was discussed at great length

in the research literature, I decided to separate it from the other three characteristics. As expected,

co-teaching requires a lot of effort from the teachers involved, and therefore, all teaching partners

must be prepared and go in with the right attitude in order to be successful in their practice. Several

researchers have indicated that attitudes are one of the biggest factors affecting the success of

inclusive education (Orakcı et al., 2016; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016).

According to Oracki et. al (2016), positive attitudes towards inclusive education practices affect

educational practices in a positive way, and negative attitudes affect educational practices in a

negative way. More specifically, Tournaki and Samuels (2016) found that positive attitudes can

actually lead to positive self-efficacy, receptivity, innovative practices, greater confidence, and

greater patience and flexibility when working with students with disabilities. In continuation of this

argument, Strogilos and Stefanidis (2015) found that teacher attitudes are positively associated with

attitudes towards behavioral management strategies, social participation, and learning progress of

students with disabilities. As we can see, positive attitudes of teachers often lead to positive effects

of co-teaching practices for teachers, as well as for students and their overall achievement in the

classroom. Given this information, it seems important to consider the attitudes of teachers who are

currently practicing.

Unfortunately, multiple studies found that classroom teachers actually expressed uncertain or

negative attitudes on inclusion practices (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis,

2015; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016). Most of these negative attitudes stemmed from feeling

unprepared to address the needs of their students with disabilities (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut,

2017; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013).

Compared to general education teachers, special education teachers' attitudes were slightly higher

(Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Orakcı et. al, 2016; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016), however, research

on training has actually shown that these teachers may feel less prepared than our general education

teachers to address students' needs. One study asked teachers specifically about co-teaching

practices of inclusion, and they found that while some expressed positive feelings about the

perceived benefits, such as greater academic and social involvement of students with disabilities and

differentiated teacher expertise, some still expressed negative attitudes regarding the classroom

management strategies and teacher collaboration. (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut, 2017). As we can

see, many teachers are feeling unprepared to implement inclusive practices as a whole, let alone the

specific practice of co-teaching, and as Tournaki and Samuels (2016) argues, it is unreasonable to

expect these teachers to have positive attitudes towards inclusive education practices if they do not

feel prepared to implement these practices successfully. Therefore, many studies focused on

addressing the second major factor effecting successful implementation of co-teaching practices:

professional development and training.

Professional Development and Training. There is a consensus among researchers that

adequate training is vital for successful implementation of inclusive practices for several reasons

(Burke, Goldman, Hart, & Hodapp, 2016; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; González-Gil, Martín-

Pastor, Flores, Jenaro, Poy, & Gómez-Vela, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Rivera, McMahon, &

Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015; Tournaki & Samuels,

2016; Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015; Vinodrao, 2016). Firstly, training provides the necessary

skills and knowledge of a particular practice to important stakeholders (Burke, Goldman, Hart, &

Hodapp, 2016; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Vinodrao, 2016). As a result, sufficient training

leads to greater teacher self-efficacy (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila,

2015) as well as positive attitudes and perceptions of inclusion (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Tournaki

& Samuels, 2016). Even though sufficient training leads to positive outcomes for students and

teachers, there still seems to be a consensus among educators that they are lacking the adequate

training necessary for successful implementation of inclusive educational practices, which presents a

barrier to successful inclusive practices (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014).

According to Gehrke and Cocchiarella (2013), preservice students from a combined dual

certification program in special education and general education as well as those from separate

programs had "significantly more field experiences with students with disabilities than did teachers

from general education, single certification programs". A study conducted by Strogilos and

Tragoulia in 2013 furthered this argument by showing that co-teachers generally admit to having

little to no training before co-teaching, despite their knowledge of its importance. Another study

indicated similar findings within a teacher training program, finding that most teachers who agreed

to host a candidate were often unqualified and unable to model the best practices (Tschida, Smith, &

Fogarty, 2015). Some may not find this information surprising, as it is well noted many general

education teachers feel inadequately prepared to handle the rapidly changing inclusive practices.

However, there is evidence showing that even our special education teachers may not feel as

prepared as we may assume (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013).

In addition to finding a lack of adequate preservice training for general education teachers,

Gehrke and Cocchiarella, (2013) found disturbing information regarding special education teachers'

preservice training. They found that, among their participants, dual certification majors felt prepared

for implementing inclusive educational practices whereas special education majors expressed a lack

of preparation in doing so. Many special education majors felt that they were missing the necessary

skills needed to navigate and create a successful inclusive classroom, which some find disturbing,

being that these are the individuals that we expect to be the most prepared to implement inclusive

practices (Gehrke and Cocchiarella, 2013). Another study conducted by Strogilos and Tragoulia

(2013) supported the notion that many special educators are concerned about their knowledge and

ability to create successful classrooms, and they also found that many general education teachers

express concern about their special educator's knowledge and skills due to their low quality training.

These teachers were actually involved in co-teaching practices of inclusion, which raises some

concerns about the preparation of all teaching partners.

In addition to a lack of training, many teachers have noted that even when supplied with pre-

service or in-service training opportunities, these sessions still prove insufficient in providing them

the necessary knowledge and skills. In the study conducted by Gehrke & Cocchiarella in 2013, many

teachers felt that there was a "disconnect" between their coursework and practices in the field. Many

found it challenging to transition the theory into practice, and although all educators felt confident on

their knowledge of what inclusion is, they felt concerned about their ability to implement inclusive

practices.

Given this information, many researchers have asked for recommendations for future training

programs (Burke, Goldman, Hart, & Hodapp, 2016; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; González-Gil,

Martín-Pastor, Flores, Jenaro, Poy, & Gómez-Vela, 2013; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Strogilos &

Tragoulia, 2013). Such recommendations include incorporating more class discussions, practicing

modifying and accommodating children's needs in lesson plans, including more of the instructor's

first-hand experiences, including more information on specific disabilities as well as English

Language Learners, including more information about educational policy, providing examples of

conceptual frameworks, and focusing on methodological elements for inclusive practices (Gehrke &

Cocchiarella, 2013; González-Gil et. al., 2013; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). When considering co-

teaching practices of inclusion, Pancsofar & Petroff (2013) found that most teachers expressed a

need for more service training that includes topics such as different co-teaching models, problem

solving and co-planning, effective collaboration and communication, supervised practice, and

overall strategies specific to co-teaching.

In addition to the recommendations above, one study found that distance education programs

may be more successful than in-class programs (Burke, Goldman, Hart, & Hodapp, 2016). In their

study, they found that participants enjoyed and actually learned more from their distance education

programs than their in-class trainings, which could pose certain implications for future training

programs. Although this is certainly an interesting finding, what the research conducted on

professional development experiences makes clear is that a single course on inclusive education is

not sufficient in supplying the necessary knowledge and skills for successful implementation of

inclusive education practices (Tournaki & Samuels, 2016). As noted in the Tournaki and Samuels

study (2016), creating an inclusive environment is a complex process, and it takes a lot of time, effort, and practice in order to do so successfully. Additionally, the politics regarding inclusive education practices are constantly evolving, and therefore, professional development programs should be ongoing as well.

Co-Planning. In addition to teacher characteristics and training, many agree co-planning among teachers is an important element of co-teaching practices. (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). Tschida, Smith, and Fogarty (2015) argue that this is one of the most beneficial aspects of co-teaching practices in that both teachers are able to plan and deliver lessons together, which helps prevent pressure from piling onto one teacher. It seems obvious that co-planning often requires a lot of time together and effort from both teachers, which is one reason why a good, strong relationship between co-teaching partners is so important. Studies have shown that teachers believe this is one of the most important aspects of co-planning and co-teaching, as getting to know each other and sharing skills, philosophies, and perspectives are vital to the transition into sharing roles and responsibilities in the classroom (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). Teachers must be able to trust and respect each other, as well as adopt the appropriate attitudes towards co-teaching (Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). One teacher even stated that if you do not establish a strong, positive relationship with your co-teaching partner, "it would [be] really miserable" (Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty, 2015).

Once this relationship has been formed, it is also important for co-teachers to establish their roles within the classroom. As Rivera, McMahon, and Keys (2014) argue, both teachers must view themselves as equally important in the co-teaching partnership. It is important for teachers to switch roles frequently, as this allows for multiple ways of presenting curriculum to students (Rivera,

McMahon, and Keys, 2014; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). When teacher roles are not clearly

identified, many find that general education teachers often dominate the co-teaching relationship by

preceding most of the instruction, leaving special education teachers to support the students with

disabilities or monitor student progress on a more individual basis (Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013).

Many educators already come in with a similar ideal when considering their individual roles in the

co-teaching partnership. Most general educators feel that they are responsible for the class

curriculum and instruction, whereas special educators feel that they are responsible for modifying

curriculum and monitoring progress of students with disabilities (Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut,

2017; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015). As a result, it often ends up that

general education teachers spend significantly less time with their students with disabilities and thus,

these students receive more individual instruction from the special education teacher (Strogilos &

Stefanidis, 2015). McLeskey et. al. (2017) furthered this argument when they noted the difference

in teaching roles among special educators and general educators. For example, they stated that,

"[g]eneral education teachers are expected to use different types of assessment information…"

whereas special education teachers are expected to collect more detailed information, be thorough in

the use of assessment data, and develop a detailed process for tracking process and evaluate

instruction that is tailored to specific needs (p.3). In their opinion, "[e]ffective instruction by special

educators requires a deep and comprehensive understanding of students with disabilities that allows

them to develop highly responsive, explicit, systematic instructional and behavioral interventions…"

(McLeskey et. al., 2017, p.4). As Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) would argue, it is important that

teachers know their area of expertise and utilize their skills and expertise in their co-teaching

partnership and classroom instruction (*Figure 2.1* in the appendix contains suggested roles within

content areas). However, as Kamens, Susko, and Elliott (2013) have suggested, in successfully co-

taught classrooms, the students are unable to differentiate between the content specialist (aka general education teacher) and the special education teacher.

In order to balance all of the complexities of inclusive co-teaching practices, it is often recommended that co-teaching partners designate a time to meet and co-plan together (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). However, arranging time to co-plan presents logistical challenges for many teachers. Some studies indicated that schools often provide this common planning time for teachers (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014), however, others have indicated that teachers lack support in scheduling a co-planning time (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017; Strogilos & Stefanidis, 2015; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013). Although there are modern alternatives to in-person meetings, such as phone calls, Facetime, Skype, or Google Docs, many teachers argue that in-person co-planning time would greatly benefit their co-teaching instruction (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). In addition to planning time, Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013, *para*. 48) found that special educators reported that they experience "a lonely role" and rarely obtain necessary input from outside professionals, such as speech and language therapists, as well as psychologists. Considering all of these findings, it is evident that there are other professionals, aside from educators, that play a role in the successful implementation of co-teaching strategies.

Administrative support. According to Vinodrao (2016) and Kamens, Susko, and Elliott (2013), in-terms of co-teaching methods of inclusion, principals, teachers, and schoolboards make it all happen. We have already discussed the important aspects of teachers' roles in this process, but what about administration? First and foremost, it is important to note that there is a lack of sufficient research regarding the role of administration in the implementation of co-teaching practices. However, one study conducted by Kamens, Susko, and Elliott (2013) provided input from administrators that provides some groundwork for this important element of successful co-teaching

experiences. In their study, they found that the school's administration plays a vital role in creating a school culture that appreciates and enhances the positive aspects of an inclusive education. The school principal must model behaviors that advance acceptance, integration, and success of students with disabilities into general education classes, and furthermore, principals must be involved in the services that they provide for said students, as strong leadership is crucial for the success of co-teaching as a service delivery model of inclusive practices (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013). One such leadership role includes providing the necessary resources to teachers for successful implementation of co-teaching practices within their classrooms. These resources could include special materials such as adaptive aids and appliances, but regardless of the specifics, administrators should try to provide teacher access to any resources necessary to provide a barrier-free education for all students (Vinodrao, 2016).

In addition to providing the necessary resources, administrators also supported teachers by providing professional preparation and training (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013). As noted in previous research, many teachers express a need for more professional development opportunities, and many administrators agree that it is their responsibility to support co-teachers in this way. When asked about their role in providing the necessary professional development opportunities for teachers, some administrators indicated that they provided outside opportunities, while others reported conducting this training themselves (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013). In this study, it was also noted that some administrators attempted to provide opportunities for observing other co-teachers, as they felt that it was important to observe the process "in-action" (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013). In addition to the above supports, administrators in this study also recognized the importance of providing common planning time, however, they also mentioned that this is often a challenge to arrange (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013).

Aside from their roles as administrators, Kamens, Susko, and Elliott (2013) decided to ask administrators about their expectation and perspectives of co-teaching. They found that, for the most part, they "expect co-teachers to work together, with many responses stating that the general educator and special educator should be sharing responsibilities in the classroom," so much so, that students cannot tell them apart (Kamens, Susko, and Elliott, 2013). When asked to explain their expectations for co-teacher collaboration, many administrators mentioned expecting teachers to create their own structures and models based on their personalities, comfort levels, and preparation. Their responses indicated that co-teaching models are quite varied in practice, which was later supported in the study conducted by Tschida, Smith, and Fogarty in 2015 (Kamens, Susko, and Elliott, 2013). In addition to teaching models, administrators also mentioned that the amount of time a teacher spends in the classroom is also quite varied in practice, with an individual special education teacher sometimes being assigned to work with several teachers in the building. This, no doubt, makes this process that much more complex (Kamens, Susko, and Elliott, 2013).

When asked about their opinions on teacher roles, administrators consistently suggested that the special educator plays the "instructional specialist" role by providing necessary strategies for modifications and differentiated instruction, while the general education teacher is to contribute expertise on content and curriculum. Many shared that they felt that the general educator was primarily responsible for the classroom, however, they also expressed that both are equally important to successful co-teaching practices, and that their contributions are just different (Kamens, Susko, and Elliott, 2013).

Although it is clear that administrators play an important role in the implementation of co-teaching methods of inclusion, Rivera, McMahon, and Keys (2014) suggested that there is often a lack administrative support for teachers. In their study, they found that administrative support was

"the only school-level factor that was not always achieved" with 50% of their teachers experiencing

an unsupportive administration (Rivera, McMahon, and Keys, 2014, p.78). This could be due, in

part, to a lack of administrator knowledge or training, as there is often little formal preparation or

professional development opportunities for administrators regarding co-teaching practices, as a

number of participants in the Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, (2013) study indicated that their training

was "self-initiated." Given this information, many administrators acknowledged a need for more

training opportunities.

   Parental Involvement. Lastly, another important, yet underappreciated element of

successful co-teaching is parental involvement and collaboration with teachers. As Burke et. al

(2016) explained, parents of students with disabilities are often their child's best advocates, however,

they often struggle to collaborate with school personnel. Parents often report difficulty in

understanding their rights, understanding jargon used in education meetings, and discerning which

services are most appropriate for their child (Burke et. al., 2016). Despite these challenges, another

study conducted by Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013) found that many parents report successful and

frequent collaboration with co-teachers; however, many indicated that by the end of the year, this

collaboration was better sustained with the special education teacher than the general education

teacher (Strogilos and Tragoulia, 2013). In their study, thirteen out of eighteen parents played an

active role in their child's education, which is a good majority of parents. Furthermore, fourteen of

the eighteen parents also felt that the special education teachers were not qualified in disability

education, and one special education teacher provided a personal account of how she had to gain the

trust of one particular parent (Strogilos and Tragoulia, 2013). Although it may seem harsh at first

glance, this finding supports the previous claims that there is a need for increased opportunities for

training for both general and special educators. Nonetheless, these parents are particularly valuable

resources for teachers and can provide helpful information regarding their child and his or her individual strengths and challenges. Therefore, it is necessary to include their expertise and opinions when discussing the necessary elements of successful co-teaching practices.

The reviewed literature clearly indicates that there are several important elements involved in the successful implementation of co-teaching practices. Among these are educator characteristics, professional development and training, co-planning, administrative support, and collaboration with parents. This review of literature warrants further research on the perceived benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching, as well as the elements that are most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching practices. As mentioned before, the end goal of the present study is to provide a framework for successful co-teaching based on the results.

Methodology

The overall purpose of this study was to determine what the perceived benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching were from the perspective of both general education and special educations educators who had experience with co-teaching. An additional goal was to get the participants' perceived elements that they felt were most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching practices. The intended results of this study is to help provide a framework for successful co-teaching. The overarching research questions that drove this investigation were:

1. What are the current attitudes of teachers about co-teaching methods of inclusive education?

2. What do teachers who are using/have used a co-teaching model perceive are the benefits/drawbacks of inclusive education using a co-teaching approach?

3. What do teachers who are using/have used a co-teaching model perceive are the elements that are most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching strategies?

4. What are participants' ideas/suggestions for incorporating all of these vital elements successfully?

Research Design

In accordance with these overarching research questions, as well as the main topics discussed within the current literature, a qualitative study was designed and administered via survey or interview to address the following main topics: most common approaches to co-teaching , teachers' attitudes towards co-teaching and inclusive education practices, professional development experiences, teaching characteristics (including teacher flexibility, communication skills, equality within the classroom, teaching philosophies, and attitudes), co-planning experiences (including

teacher relationships, roles/responsibilities, and planning time), administrative support, and

collaboration with parents. A copy of the survey can be found in the Appendix.

After obtaining IRB approval, the researcher recruited participants directly via email using

public school email addresses to request their participation in an in-person or over-the-phone

interview (or survey sent via email if schedules did not align). Participants were selected by current

or prior experience with a co-taught education in an elementary school setting, and therefore, the

researcher used a purposive sampling method. Recommendations from faculty were used to recruit

participants who they knew had experience with co-teaching methods of inclusion. This resulted in

sending a recruitment email to 18 educators, six of whom consented to participate. The educators

who participated were recruited from North Carolina, Virginia, and Florida. In hopes to increase the

amount of participants in this study, the researcher also obtained approval from a local school district

to reach out to the principals of elementary schools in the district to request their assistance with the

names of teachers within their schools who may have experience with co-teaching. No additional

participants were recruited through this method.

In the initial email to 18 educators, the research subjects were given a detailed description of

the study and were asked to provide consent for their participation through completion of an attached

consent form, if they were interested in participating in this study. Consent was obtained from six

educators. Once consent was obtained, based on the participants' preferences, they received either an

in-person visit or phone call by the investigator to complete the interview or electronic copies of the

survey via email, if they did not have time for an interview. They were instructed to answer several

open-ended questions related to each of the above topics based on their personal experiences with

co-teaching. Audio-recordings were used to record responses to make sure all responses

were accurately recorded. There was no identifying information on the recordings, and the

recordings were destroyed once responses were transcribed. All teachers completed the same

interview/survey on co-teaching methods of inclusion. Participation was completely voluntary for all

subjects, and there were no rewards or risks directly associated with completion of this study. Two

of the teachers were interviewed by phone, and four responded to the survey electronically.

Participants

Figure 3.1 Summary of Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Race	Education	Teaching Role	Teaching Experience	Co-teaching Experience
1	39	Female	White	BA in Psychology; M.E.D in LD; PhD in Special Ed (in progress)	Previously worked as both a Special Educator and General Educator	13 years	2 years
2	38	Female	White	BA or BS (not specified); MAT in Special Education; MSA in Administration	Special Educator or Resource Teacher	15 years	~4 years
3	37	Female	White	BS in Education	General Educator	15 years	5 years
4	34	Female	White	BS in Elementary Education; M.E.D in Curriculum Instruction	General Educator	12 years	10 years (off and on)
5	64	Female	White	BS in Elementary and Special Education; M.E.D. in LD	Special Educator or Resource Teacher	30+ years	14 years

| 6 | 28 | Female | White | BA in Elementary Education | General Educator | 7 years | 5 years |

Note. All participants have co-taught within the past 5 years.

The ages of participants in this study as seen in Table 3.1 ranged from 28 to 64 years old,

with a calculated average of 40 years old. The years of overall teaching experience among all

participants ranged from seven years to over 30 years, with a calculated average of 15.3 years. The

years of co-teaching experience among all participants ranged from two years to 14 years, with the

calculated average being 6.7 years.

Data Coding

First, all results were organized by the overarching topic in the survey/interview. After

compiling all of the results within each topic, the responses of all participants were gleaned and

coded for similar or recurrent themes between all subjects. Any major differences between the

responses of Special Educators and General Educators were also noted. The results of the data are

discussed in the next chapter.

Results

This section will cover the results of the survey/interview that was discussed within the previous chapter. The results are categorized by three major themes that arose throughout the entire survey/interview, one area of difference noticed within the survey/interview, and then the major themes that arose within the seven sections of the survey/interview.

Two Major Themes

The following themes were the most prevailing themes of the study. These topics were discussed within several different sections of the survey/interview, by all participants, indicating that they are not only the most important, but also the most influential in co-teaching experiences. Therefore, these have been set apart from the major themes organized by sections from the survey/interview.

Strong Relationships among Co-teachers. One major theme that was pertinent across all participants and within several sections of the study was that the relationship between co-teaching partners is one of the most important aspect of successful implementation of co-teaching practices. Some of the quotes below exemplify their sentiments towards relationships and team building.

"Having a good relationship with your co-teaching partner is very important…It was nice working with a friend, someone that you like. You can, you know, like get snacks and work together. We had a great time together."

"I think that the general education teacher and the special education teacher need to have a strong and trusting relationship. I know for the 5 years I co-taught, each year we got better. We could finish each other's sentences after a year or two. This meant we had spent enough time together that we completely understood each other's expectations… It was never a 'go ask the other teacher

>*what she meant on the assignment' because we already knew…if you do not have*
>
>*that type of relationship…the co-teaching that is going on will not be nearly as*
>
>*beneficial to the students."*

The integrity of this relationship, as many participants stated, is best upheld when the focus remains on the children and their needs. One participant exemplified this best when she stated,

>*"You have to know that everyone's intention is good in this, and you have to have*
>
>*a level of trust, knowing that you both have the same end goal, there are just*
>
>*different approaches…Keeping the mindset that you are focusing on what's best*
>
>*for the kids will keep the integrity of the relationship."*

Time. Another major theme that arose out of this study was that one of the biggest challenges to co-teaching is time. This, in a way, goes back to the relationship between teachers, as one teacher even stated, *"You need time to build those relationships."* Another teacher echoed this in one of the quotes above when she said that she knew they had spent enough time together when they got to the point where they could *"finish each other's sentences."* In addition to the time it takes to build relationships, it takes a lot of time to co-plan and organize everything that needs to happen in order for this model to be effective. Three different participants gave almost identical responses to the challenges of co-teaching as follows: *"TIME is a big challenge to it"*, *"TIME was a big challenge to common planning time"*, and *"The biggest challenge to co-planning is TIME!!!"* Although all of these responses related directly to co-planning, all teachers mentioned that time is a challenge in various ways and at several points within the survey/interview.

Additional Elements Related to the Success of Co-teaching. In addition to time and relationships, which were the main areas of consensus in this study, teachers also mentioned that

open and frequent communication, flexibility, time management, and access to resources were some

overall necessary components for successful co-teaching.

Point of Difference between Special Educators and General Educators

Although there was a great amount of consensus among the participants on all sections of

this study, there was one area of difference that arose in the section on co-planning and teaching

characteristics. This arose out of the questions relating to teaching philosophies and practices. Many

general educators talked about their need to focus on the whole group and getting their students

where they need to be, while special educators talked a lot about specialized and individualized

instruction. One general educator noted that,

> *"My major philosophy is that each kid is unique and our job as educators is to*
>
> *figure out how to support and grow them to be good citizens moving*
>
> *forward…Generally, my co-teaching partners have much more of an individual*
>
> *philosophy whereas I often have to look at the whole…the approaches that come*
>
> *from this are different, which is great because it is often balanced and helps me*
>
> *see things that I otherwise wouldn't necessarily see. [However,] co-teachers may*
>
> *not always understand the pressure on gen ed teachers to give all students what*
>
> *they need but also stay on track."*

In contrast to this statement, one special educator illuminated sentiments from the other side by

saying,

> *"…it was a challenge to have students who had learning disabilities in math and*
>
> *were anxious about passing the Algebra test for graduation and a co-teacher who*
>
> *was negative about student achievement and behavior. It is one thing to work*
>
> *hard to create a positive class culture where students begin to experience success*

and take risks and quite another to face the challenge of an unhappy adult in the

room."

Although the negative attitudes of the teacher above were a little more extreme than the attitudes of

general educators within this study, it was well noted by the participants in this study that there is a

lot of stress on general educators, and even administration, in relation to student achievement and

standardized testing. On the other hand, many special educators mentioned the importance of

looking at the student as an individual and having a growth mindset instead of focusing on specific

standards of achievement. This difference in teaching philosophies related directly to the teacher's

role of either a special educator or general educator.

Results by Survey Questions

In addition to the major themes discussed above, there were several themes that arose

throughout this study; however, being that this study was categorized into different sections

according to their theme, a lot of the responses were given as such. Therefore, the following results

are categorized under their overarching theme in the survey, and they exemplify the consensus

among participants within the study. For the rest of the responses in the study, there were no

noticeable trends of responses being more common among special educators or general educators.

Most Common Methods of Co-teaching in Practice. The first section of the survey asked

teachers about their experiences with the five different models of co-teaching in practice today. One

teacher did not respond to this section. Out of all five responses to this question, five had used a one

teaching, one assisting approach, five had used a team teaching approach, one had used a parallel

teaching approach, two had used an alternative teaching approach, and four had used a station

teaching approach. Out of these, the two most frequently practiced were the one teaching, one

assisting method and the team teaching method. Many teachers expressed how the one teaching, one

assisting method was beneficial for students who needed extra help, as it often involves more

opportunity for one on one instruction. One teacher stated,

> *"The majority of the time, we had one teacher do the 'main teaching' while the*
>
> *other would assist students on the carpet and help correct any misconceptions…*
>
> *It was extremely beneficial for students who struggle to focus when there are*
>
> *other students around."*

She continued by saying that the one teaching, one assisting method was also beneficial for teachers

as it, "*was a great way for us to find triggers that might set a student off. There is so much that can*

be noted when you are not trying to focus your attention on 22 other students as well."

As far as team teaching is concerned, many teachers expressed how this method was mostly

only used under special circumstances, such as with an EC teacher during a pilot year of co-teaching

or with a literacy coach for writing. One teacher indicated that they used a team teaching approach

mainly "*for social skills, to model MANY different situations that the students might face."*

Although all five methods of co-teaching were practiced or mentioned at least once, the

others were only practiced *"occasionally"* or in *"extreme cases."*

Attitudes. The second section of the study focused on teachers' attitudes about special

education inclusion and co-teaching methods of inclusion. There were mixed feelings regarding the

benefits and drawbacks of inclusive educational practices, and although most were positive, there

were several potential challenges that were expressed by several participants.

Positive Attitudes Towards and Benefits of Inclusion and Co-teaching. The first major

theme around the positives of special education inclusion related to the benefits for students with

disabilities. One participant explicitly stated, *"I see the benefit (both socially/emotionally and*

educationally) for the student to remain in class and receive support, re-teaching and/or remediation

in the classroom setting." Another participant stated that,

> *"'push in' EC services provide EC students with the least restrictive*
>
> *environment…I think it ensures that students' IEP goals are being met, yet they*
>
> *can also access the rigor of the grade level curriculum with appropriate*
>
> *scaffolding and support."*

She continued by saying that she had seen in the past that,

> *"students who get pulled out for math miss so much of the grade level content*
>
> *because they are being pulled out to another classroom to work on very specific*
>
> *IEP goals that may or may not have anything to do with the current grade level*
>
> *content."*

One participant focused on the social and emotional benefits of inclusive practices for students, as

well as the potential for stronger relationships by stating,

> *"I certainly have a positive attitude towards inclusive education. I think, um,*
>
> *particularly with elementary school we are still the gatekeepers of figuring kids*
>
> *out…Sometimes things aren't in place at home, and when they aren't, I think it is*
>
> *important for students to feel like part of a community and to feel that school is a*
>
> *safe place. If they are in an isolated setting, they may not grow as much as they*
>
> *would with different peers."*

Although there was certainly some consensus among all participants regarding the benefits of

inclusive education for students with disabilities, several participants argued that the benefits of

inclusive education extend to students without disabilities as well. For example, one participant

argued that, *"If done as designed, both the Gen. Ed and EC kids can benefit. Lower performing kids*

will be exposed to more rigorous content and instruction with support, and typically performing kids will learn about differences and diversity." Another participant furthered her argument by saying that, *"students without disabilities need to learn to be empathetic and that normal is a relative term. We do not live in a place where all people are the same."* In addition to these benefits of inclusive educational practices for students without disabilities, a few teachers even mentioned the benefits of Co-teaching practices specifically. One participant argued that, *"One of the biggest benefits [of co-teaching practices] is that students gain access to different approaches and teaching styles."* Another participant agreed with and furthered this statement by saying that, *"different teachers present different strategies that may work for different students, meaning that you can meet the needs of more kids. It also provides more small groups for kids who may not qualify for special education services."*

In addition to the benefits for students, both with and without disabilities, participants also mentioned that even teachers can benefit from Co-teaching methods of special education inclusion. One participant expressed her opinions on this matter by saying, *"I loved that the special education teacher brought a completely different perspective to lessons than I had ever thought of. It was great for the students and it definitely made me reflect more and become a better educator."* Another participant elaborated on this idea by saying,

> *"[Co-teaching] allows teacher to become problem solvers and creative, as well*
> *as develop empathy for students with different needs. It is important to have these*
> *students, [students with special needs], to push [each teacher] to be a better*
> *person and a better educator. It leads to colleagues learning from each other…It*
> *furthered my professional development…"*

Although there were several positive attitudes towards inclusive education expressed in this study,

several participants also mentioned that there are particular challenges and drawbacks of co-teaching

practices as well as inclusive education practices as a whole.

   Negative Attitudes Towards and Challenges to Inclusion and Co-teaching. Most of the

negative attitudes towards co-teaching were related to the fact that teachers feel that inclusive

education practices are not always in the best interest of all students with disabilities. For example,

one teacher stated that,

> *"I do believe that it is not always the right setting for all students. I have had a*
>
> *few students who need more support (either emotionally or academically) than we*
>
> *are able to provide them. I do 100% believe in the least restrictive classroom, but*
>
> *sometimes we need to be realistic before wasting too much of the student's time."*

   In continuation of this idea, another teacher argued that pull-out approaches can benefit

students in ways that co-teaching cannot, in ways such as, "t*he small structure, having no*

competition since they are all on an even playing field, not being afraid to participate and make

mistakes, and most of all, having all of their needs met."

   In addition to this, one negative attitude that is best expressed through the quote below, was

common among all participants: "*It is a challenging model with a lot of moving parts…it is very*

hard to do it right…" Several participants added to this argument by illuminating several important

aspects to successful co-teaching such as adequate resources, administrative support, and most of all,

time. As expressed in the beginning of this chapter, time was the most commonly mentioned

challenge to co-teaching.

   Training. The third section of the survey asked participants about their levels of training,

both pre-service and in-service, for both co-teaching practices and inclusive practices as a whole. All

participants indicated that they had hardly any pre-service training, with a special educator even

stating, *"I have a Master's Degree and I had one inclusion class – that was it."* She was not the only

participant with this experience, as one general educator also stated, *"I had very little training in my*

undergraduate program. I had one special education class that mentioned co-teaching specifically,

and I never had a course that focused on collaboration with colleagues or different teaching

models." In response to the questions about in-service training, however, the answers varied. Half of

the participants felt that they received very helpful and supportive professional development

trainings such as trainings on differentiation, workshops with teachers as leaders, observations of

teachers in action, and team building exercises. Of these participants who experienced a good

amount of in-service training, the best experiences came when the trainings were frequent, meaning

more than once a year. In contrast, the other half of the participants mentioned having little in-

service training. One general educator stated, *"We did not receive very much training on inclusive*

education. I thankfully was blessed to work with two very knowledgeable special education

teachers…" while a special educator stated *"overall there I have received very little in-service*

training on inclusive practices. As mentioned earlier, I have a positive attitude about inclusion and

therefore, have done reading myself."

One thing that all participants had in common though, was that there was still a need for

future opportunities for training and professional development. Some of the recommendations

mentioned were basic trainings on the different models, collaboration initiatives, opportunities to

observe successful co-teaching partners in action, and monthly seminars. All participants felt that

these professional development trainings need to be frequent (at least once a year) in order to cover

any new knowledge, laws, and or/practices that will impact its practice.

Practice in Motion. Originally, the fourth section was designed to cover experiences specific to co-planning and teaching characteristics, however, the results produced a wider range of information that relate to the practice of co-teaching in action. The first major theme under this section related back to the major topic of the teaching relationship discussed in the beginning of this chapter. However, responses related to specific aspects of the teaching relationship such as teaching philosophies, teaching roles, and teaching characteristics. In terms of teaching philosophies, all participants agreed that having similar philosophies of teaching aided in the process of co-teaching. One participant expressed how important this is when she said, *"Fortunately, I share very similar philosophies with the teachers I worked with. But, I heard horror stories of pairs who were not so lucky."* Another participant stated that, *"if both teachers have similar goals and beliefs, the possibilities are endless!"*

When looking at teaching roles and characteristics, it was a common theme that it was important for all teachers to be actively involved in the teaching process, as otherwise, it would be **"***a waste of [their] gifts and talents."* However, this involvement looked different for different co-teaching partners. Some special education teachers said that they *"felt more comfortable taking a 'back-seat' role, helping one kid at a time…"* while others stated that they felt comfortable stepping in if they saw something that they thought *"was not healthy or best for students."* General educators' responses also varied, as one stated that the special educator *"NEVER only focused on the students with IEPs"* while another stated that *"my co-teaching partners have a much more of an individual philosophy."* This could depend on time teaching together, as one participant indicated,

> *"At first, when we co-taught, I did not want to 'step on the gen ed teacher's toes',*
>
> *so I would hold back when I had something to say…But as we became more*

comfortable, we just told the kids that sometimes we would interrupt each

other…like two hands working for one body."

In addition to teaching roles and philosophies, the other main topic addressed within this

section related to co-planning. Although opportunities for co-planning varied amongst all

participants, all agreed that co-planning is important and beneficial and that they would like to have

more time set aside to co-plan with their teaching partners, as time is a huge barrier to co-planning.

Common methods of co-planning included formal sit down meetings (most preferred when

possible), Google Docs, phone calls, texts, and quick chats. One participant indicated that the best

co-planning unites *"with all the specialists present at the grade level planning session, for example the*

AIG, ESL, EC, and Gen Ed Teacher all planning together. Common planning time helps a lot." When

asked if administration played a part in scheduling a time for co-planning, four out of six participants

indicated that their administration did not set aside a time for co-planning, which relates directly to

our next major section of the study.

Administration. The first section of the survey that was not discussed much within the

literature was the role of administration. When asked about what they need from their

administration, three main themes arose. The first major theme was that administration *"should*

schedule for common planning time." As one teacher indicated, *"[i]f this is not done, it is VERY*

HARD to make it work." Another common theme was that teachers should have choice in who their

co-teaching partners are, and if not, administration needs to be *"purposeful in their placement"* to

ensure that philosophies and teaching styles will work together. In addition to these, that last

common theme was that participants felt that administration should play a supportive role, and in

doing this, they should be educated and knowledgeable about the process of co-teaching, structured

and organized, and positive, creating a positive school environment. One teacher stated that

administrators should be, *"very well versed in the methodology and the resources, time, and training needed. They should approach the staff with the view that they are partners and should have some say in how things work."* According to these participants, administrators play a huge role in supporting teachers and creating a positive environment, *"where co-teaching has the opportunity to blossom."*

Parental Involvement. The second section of the survey that was not discussed much within the literature review was the role of parents. When asked about parental involvement, all participants agreed that parental involvement was beneficial for student success. For example, one participant stated, *"I think it is important for parents to know what is happening and to be familiar with the teachers and model."* Another participant expressed that parental involvement is important *"because they are a stakeholder, just like teachers, with their child's education…we should be working together to grow that student."* Although all teachers felt it was important for parents to be involved and advocate for their child's education, many also expressed that they don't want *"a whole lot of 'extra' parent involvement with co-teaching"* and that parents *"need to trust in the teacher's abilities and expertise."*

In terms of communicating with parents, all of the participants, both general and special educators, communicated frequently with parents, ranging from daily to a few times a month. When communicating with parents, participants talked to them about different things. For example, one teacher explained how she devised a form to send home to parents every other day that included things like *"a check-in, what we did today, problems we had, thing they did well, and where we need to go from here."* When communicating about practices at home, participants explained how these recommendations were based on the child's individual needs and what the parents can feasibly do. Some recommendations for parents that were mentioned were writing with sidewalk chalk, making

flash cards for sight words and numbers, potty training, proper bed times, and reading together. Several participants suggested that most parents were receptive to these practices, and some parents would even initiate conversations with teachers, as parents usually want to do what is best for their child. However, there was a consensus that most of their conversations with parents were teacher initiated. One participant elaborated on this idea by saying that,

"In my previous county, it was very much me initiating with both the behavioral and academic reports, either because of time, viewing the teacher as an expert, or having trust issues with the education system. I think a lot of this comes down to their own background and experiences. Parents are bringing a lot into their child's education."

A couple of participants mentioned how communication with parents was often done together, with their co-teaching partner. For example, one participant stated, *"I would mention the co-teacher in the conversation and I always informed the co-teacher of the gist of the communication. We always tried to do parent conferences together."* Another participant elaborated on this by saying that,

"I loved this about co-teaching. If I had to do a conference with a parent, it was beneficial for me and my partner to be there together. Sometimes she can explain things better than me and vice versa. It also just gives the impression of a united front…"

Overall, participants agreed that it is important to keep the lines of communication open and that parents are well-informed advocates for their child.

Where Are We? To end the survey, I asked teachers to reflect on themselves and areas in which they excel as well as areas in which they could use improvement. Some of the areas in which

the participants felt that they exceled included communication, planning, flexibility, love, and

enthusiasm for teaching. Some areas of improvement included healthier communication and better

organization and planning.

Following this, participants were asked to rate their school's implementation of co-teaching

practices on a scale of one to ten, with one being least effective and ten being most effective. The

results of this varied greatly. Of the four participants that participated in this section, two were

general educators and two were special educators. One special educator rated her current school a

nine and her previous school a two, whereas another special educator rated her current school a nine

and her previous school a three. A general educator rated her school a six and the other general

educator rated her school an eight point five. Based on these results, it is clear that experiences with

co-teaching are quite varied, even among these four participants.

Discussion

As discussed in the first chapter, the overall purpose of this study was to determine what the

perceived benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching currently are based on the perceptions of educators

who were currently practicing or have practices co-teaching to support inclusion, and to determine

what elements are most vital for successful implementation of co-teaching practices based on the

educators perceptions. The intended conclusion of this study was to use the results of both the

literature review and personal research to provide a framework for successful co-teaching. The

original overarching research questions that drove this investigation were outlined in the

Introduction section as well as the Methodology section. In consideration of these overarching

questions, as well as the findings laid out within the Results chapter, several implications for the

success of co-teaching practices can be made.

Implications for Research Questions One and Two

In regards to the first two overarching research questions, which related to teachers' attitudes

about co-teaching methods of inclusion, as well as the benefits and drawbacks of inclusive

education using a co-teaching approach, almost all participants within this study expressed positive

attitudes towards inclusion and co-teaching practices.

Academic Benefits. Many educators expressed their opinions that inclusive educational

practices, as a whole, are beneficial academically for students with and without disabilities, which

supports the findings from studies covered within the literature review. As Justice et al. (2014) and

Berry (2006) argue, the academic benefits for students with disabilities stem from association with

higher level classmates, removal of barriers to learning, increased IEP goal achievements, and

greater access to curriculum. One participant even mentioned the unique academic benefits of co-

teaching methods of inclusion, as students gain access to two different teaching perspectives, that of

the general educator and the special educator. This concept was supported by several studies within

the literature that discussed the academic benefits of co-teaching practices specifically including

Berry (2006), Strogilos & Avramidis (2016), Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and Tremblay (2013).

As far as the academic benefits for typically developing students, Vinodrao (2016) argued that the

biggest source of higher levels of academic achievement comes from learning through practicing and

teaching others, which was implied but not explicitly stated by participants within the study. In

consideration of these findings, it is supported that there is potential for inclusive educational

practices to produce academic advantages for all students.

   Social-Emotional Benefits. Although the academic benefits of inclusive educational

practices were well noted, the socioemotional benefits were even more predominant among the

participating educators within this study as well as the literature review. Many participants argued

that being in the general education classroom among typically developing peers gives students with

disabilities a sense of belonging and acceptance, and it allows them to feel like they are part of a

larger community. These findings were supported within the literature as well, as Akçamete & Dağli

Gökbulut (2017), Berry (2006), Rivera, McMahon, & Keys (2014), Strogilos & Avramidis (2016),

Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and Vinodrao (2016) all advocated for the psychological benefits of

inclusion on the basis of greater opportunities for developing friendships, access to peer role models,

greater peer acceptance, higher self-esteem, and more social integration.

   For students without disabilities, educators within the current study echoed the arguments

presented in these studies that having these interactions with students with disabilities creates greater

awareness, understanding, and acceptance of diversity. Taking these findings into account, it seems

that the benefits of inclusive education are capable of extending from academic benefits for students

to social and emotional benefits as well.

Better Teaching. Although the benefits of inclusive educational practices for students were given the most attention within the literature as well as this personal study, the benefits of co-teaching methods of inclusion for teachers did not go unnoticed. Several teachers indicated that this method of special education inclusion offered a completely new perspective in working side by side with another teaching professional, which made them a better educator. In addition to the partnership between teachers, the complex task of attaining to the needs of all students in an inclusive environment pushed teachers within this study to become problem solvers, be more creative, and develop empathy for their students, which they all agreed pushed them to be a better educator. This further supports the studies by Vinodrao (2016), Strogilos & Avramidis (2016), and Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), which discussed some of the benefits of co-teaching methods of inclusion for teachers, such as the different teaching techniques, necessity to engage with children at different levels, challenge to modify curriculum, and collaboration with other teaching professionals.

Not the Best Fit for All Students. However, although most participants would argue that as a whole, co-teaching methods of special education inclusion are beneficial for all stakeholders involved, there is still discrepancy over whether or not inclusive educational settings are always the best environment for students with disabilities. As one participant mentioned, inclusive classrooms are not always the best fit for students with more extensive needs. Another participant furthered this argument by saying that pullout sessions may increase participation and comfortability for students with special needs, as pullout sessions offer a more equal playing field and there is often less competition. These drawbacks and challenges to special education inclusion were supported within the literature as well, as Berry (2006), Rivera, McMahon, & Keys (2014), Strogilos & Avramidis (2016), Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and Tremblay (2013) all presented some potential short comings of co-teaching methods of special education inclusion, which included lower-whole group

performance, lack of necessary instruction, and moderate effectiveness for students with special

needs. In addition to these drawbacks of inclusive educational practices as a whole, every participant

in this study mentioned that time was the biggest drawback of co-teaching, meaning time to co-plan

and time to build a strong relationship with their partner, which supports the findings of studies

conducted by Scruggs & Mastropieri (2017), Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and Strogilos &

Tragoulia (2013) when considering time as a major drawback of co-teaching methods of inclusion.

Implications for Research Question Three

In consideration of the third overarching research question, which pertained to the vital

elements involved in the successful implementation of co-teaching practices, the two that stuck out

the most were co-teaching partner relationships and time, which are discussed in greater detail

below.

Strong Relationships among Co-teachers. Almost all participants within this study argued

that having a good relationship with your co-teaching partner will make or break your success in this

practice. In their opinion, this relationship must be developed over time, in accordance to matching

philosophies, and with the focus remaining on what is best for the kids. Studies conducted by Rivera,

McMahon, & Keys (2014), Strogilos & Tragoulia (2013), Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty (2015) also

found that teachers feel that strong, trusting relationships are one of the most important aspects of

co-teaching, with one teacher even saying it would be completely "miserable" without it (Tschida,

Smith, & Fogarty, 2015). It seems evident that a good relationship with someone you are frequently

working with is important. However, the complexities of building this relationship with a co-

teaching partner in accordance to any differences in teaching styles or philosophies cannot be

understated. For example, many participants mentioned that matching philosophies on teaching are

important, with one participant even stating that she had heard "horror stories" of partners who did

not share teaching philosophies. Rivera, McMahon, & Keys (2014) noted the importance of

matching teaching philosophies in their study, mentioning how hard this can be to achieve if teachers

do not have any say in choosing their co-teaching partner.

Going even further, it is even harder for teachers to establish their own roles within the

classroom. One participant mentioned how this often takes time, as building an understanding of

your partner's teaching style and strengths cannot be developed overnight. Some participants felt

more comfortable "taking a back-seat role" while others felt that staying back was a "waste of [their]

gifts and talents." As Akçamete & Dağli Gökbulut (2017), Scruggs & Mastropieri (2017), and

Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015) found, teachers often come in with their own ideal when considering

their roles in the co-teaching partnership, and most general educators feel that they are responsible

for class curriculum whereas special educators feel that they are responsible for modifying

curriculum and monitoring students with special needs, often leading to the manifestation of the

special educator taking a "back-set" role. McLeskey et. al. (2017) argued that this difference in

teaching roles relates directly to their separate teaching backgrounds, as special educators are often

required to look deeper and gain a more comprehensive understanding of students with disabilities in

order to be responsive to their needs. This was well noted within the area of difference of this study

as well with a special educator mentioning her frustration with the general educator's lack of

attention to and appreciation for the progress of students with special needs, while another general

educator expressed her frustration with the lack of understanding on some special educators' ends, as

general educators face a lot of stress with high standards and curriculum modifications. Yet again,

these frustrations, and different manifestations of teaching roles, related directly to their position as

either a general or special educator, which is why Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) argued that all

teachers need to know their own areas of expertise and how they will fit into the classroom setting.

As Rivera, McMahon, and Keys (2014) argued, it is important for all teaching partners to feel

equally important in the partnership, with the optimal co-teaching practices resulting in switching

roles frequently. One participant actually mentioned doing this with her partner, but she mentioned

that it certainly takes time to become this comfortable with each other. At first, she didn't want to

"step on the gen ed teacher's toes" but as time went on and they became more comfortable, they

began working together more fluidly, and it became "like two hands working for one body." In

conclusion of the above evidence in support of the importance of strong trusting relationships, it

becomes evident that these relationships are one of the most vital elements involved in successful

implementation of co-teaching and that building these relationships, despite any controversy in

matching philosophies and teaching characteristics or roles, takes time.

      Time. Following this conversation on the time it takes to build strong relationships, it was

also well-noted among participants that time to co-plan is a vital element in the success of co-

teaching practices. Opportunities for co-planning varied amongst the participants in this study,

however, all participants indicated that having a time to co-plan is important, and they wished that

they had more opportunities for common planning, which is consistent with the findings of Rivera,

McMahon, & Keys (2014), Scruggs & Mastropieri (2017), Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and

Strogilos & Tragoulia (2013). Almost all participants preferred meeting in person, however, other

common methods of informal planning via Google Docs, phone calls, texts, and quick hallway chats

had to suffice if there was no other time set aside, which Scruggs & Mastropieri (2017) supported in

their research. Being that there are obvious logistical challenges to common planning times, some

administrators make a conscientious effort to schedule opportunities for common planning (Rivera,

McMahon, & Keys, 2014). However, more consistent with the findings of Scruggs & Mastropieri

(2017), Strogilos & Stefanidis (2015), and Strogilos & Tragoulia (2013), four out of six participants

in this study indicated that their administration did not set aside a time for common planning, which implies that there is still a need for more structure and planning in order to overcome the logistical challenges to co-planning.

Although strong relationships between co-teaching partners and sufficient time to build relationships and co-plan were the most well noted vital elements of co-teaching practices, participants also mentioned several other important elements of co-teaching that were also discussed within the literature. These elements are all discussed separately below.

Most Common Methods in Practice. According to the results of this study, although all models of co-teaching are being practiced to some extent, the two most frequently and commonly practiced are one teaching, one assisting and team teaching. One teaching, one assisting seemed to be the most frequently practiced among participants, as it works nicely with the distinct roles of general educators and special educators, as previously discussed. This supports the findings of the Tremblay (2013) study, which found that support teaching, aka one teach, one assist, was the dominant configuration in practice. However, it is still important to note that even among these participants, the secondary or additional models in practice varied, which supports the studies conducted by Kamens, Susko, & Elliott (2013) and Tschida, Smith, & Fogarty (2015) which suggested that these models might be quite varied in practice. As mentioned earlier, regardless of which model is being implemented, the important thing to remember about co-teaching is that it is a parity between two teaching professionals, with each professional having a credential in his/her own area of specialization and expertise, and it is important to keep the needs of the students in mind when choosing which model to implement.

Teacher Characteristics. In addition to the characteristics of teaching roles and philosophies, which were included in the section above on teaching relationships, participants also

mentioned the importance of communication skills, flexibility and time management, two of which

were supported with prior research. Rivera, McMahon, and Keys (2014) found that many schools

experience a great deal of challenges with educator flexibility, however, they noted that flexibility is

key to success in co-teaching practices, as being territorial over one's classroom can lead to

distinctive educator and assistant roles, which limits contributions from each counterpart. Not only

that, but as participants mentioned within the study, roles, methods, and situations are always

changing within the education field, and especially within inclusive classrooms, so in order to be

successful, you have to be able to roll with whatever situation is thrown at you. In addition to this,

Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) argued that the ability to communicate effectively is paramount to

successful co-teaching practice, as it helps teachers who are trying to develop a strong co-teaching

relationship. According to their study, these good communication skills involve active listening,

active participation, active interest, and ability to depersonalize these conversations when necessary,

as to be as unbiased and open-minded as possible (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Although time

management skills were not mentioned explicitly within the prior research, it goes without saying

that time management skills are of paramount importance in a practice that involves such complex

planning and scheduling.

Training Opportunities. Last but not least, participants also made note of their training

opportunities in preparation for and further development of co-teaching practices. All participants

agreed that they received very little, if any, preservice training, which supports the findings of

several studies within the literature review including Gehrke and Cocchiarella (2013), Pancsofar &

Petroff (2013), and Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013), which all noted the lack of pre-service training

for special education inclusion in both general and special educators. However, the responses to

questions on in-service training were quite varied among participants in this study, with half of the

participants feeling satisfied with their level of supportive professional development opportunities

and the other half feeling that they were very underprepared. Nonetheless, all participants felt that

there was still a need for more opportunities for professional development. Some suggestions

included basic trainings on the different models, supported by research from Pancsofar & Petroff

(2013), Gehrke & Cocchiarella (2013), González-Gil et. al. (2013), and Strogilos & Tragoulia

(2013), collaboration initiatives supported by research from Pancsofar & Petroff (2013),

opportunities to observe successful co-teaching partners in action supported by research from

Pancsofar & Petroff (2013), and monthly seminars. All participants felt that these professional

development trainings need to be frequent (at least once a year) in order to cover any new

knowledge, laws, and/or practices that will impact its practice which supports the argument from the

Tournaki & Samuels (2016) study that stated a single course on inclusive education is not sufficient

in supplying the necessary knowledge and skills. The need for and importance of future training and

professional development opportunities cannot be understated, as proper training provides the

necessary skills and knowledge of the practice which leads to greater self-efficacy (Pancsofar &

Petroff, 2013; Strogilos, Tragoulia, & Kaila, 2015) as well as positive attitudes and perceptions of

inclusion (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Tournaki & Samuels, 2016).

Administrative Roles. New findings that were not as prevalent within the literature were

suggestions for administrative roles and parental roles. Although it seems evident that administration

plays a valuable role in the process of co-teaching, there is a lack in sufficient research regarding this

stakeholder's roles and responsibilities. All participants within this study agreed that administration

played an important role in this process, with three major roles and responsibilities arising. The first

major role of administration was that they should schedule for a common planning time, or at least

take planning times into consideration when choosing co-teaching partners, which further supports

this finding from the Kamens, Susko, & Elliott (2013). In continuation of the idea of choosing co-teaching partners, participants in this study indicated that they would like to have some choice in choosing their co-teaching partners, to ensure that they will be able to build strong relationships. Lastly, participants argued that administrators should play a supportive role, in many of the ways discussed within the Kamens, Susko, & Elliott (2013) study such as being knowledgeable and educated, being structured and organized, providing necessary resources (including proper training), and creating a positive school environment. These findings, as well as the findings on administrative perspectives from the Kamens, Susko, & Elliott (2013) study, could prompt future research on administrative roles and perspectives on co-teaching practices.

  Parental Involvement. Lastly, another important, yet underappreciated element of successful co-teaching is parental involvement and collaboration with teachers. First and foremost, all teachers felt that parental involvement is important and beneficial for student success, especially students with disabilities. As Burke et. al (2016) explained, parents of students with disabilities are often their child's best advocates, however, they often struggle to collaborate with school personnel. This was supported with responses from this study, as one participant mentioned that parents' own background and experiences impact their involvement in their child's education, especially in terms of understanding their rights, understanding jargon used in education meetings, and discerning which services are most appropriate for their child (Burke et. al., 2016).

  Despite these challenges, another study conducted by Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013) found that many parents report successful and frequent collaboration with co-teachers. This idea was well supported with findings from the current study, as participants explained that they communicated with parents very frequently, sometimes even daily, to report about that students' progress and to provide activities and learning goals to work on at home. A couple of participants mentioned that co-

teaching was particularly useful in this domain, as they were able to offer two different perspectives to parents as well as present a united front for the team of professionals working with their child. Nonetheless, these parents are particularly valuable resources for teachers and can provide helpful information regarding their child and his or her individual strengths and challenges. Therefore, it is necessary to include their expertise and opinions when discussing the necessary elements of successful co-teaching practices, which remains an area of need in future research.

A Work in Progress. In addition to these new implications, it is also important to discuss the implications of the last section of the survey/interview in which participants were asked to speak to their level of success in their co-teaching practices. It is evident that even with the comments from only four participants who completed this section, there were still mixed feelings about the effectiveness of co-teaching. Some participants rated their experiences as really high with one school and really low with another. Taking this into account, I feel that this discrepancy relates back to the complexity of co-teaching and the amount of time and resources it takes in order to it to be successful. Some schools, likely those with strong supports in place, are able to practice co-teaching methods of inclusion successfully, while others rush into it without proper supports, leaving teachers and students alike frustrated with the system.

Implications for the Field of Education

In consideration of the results of this study in relation to existing research, it seems fitting to make suggestions for the field of education. Some areas of consideration include pre-service teacher or teacher education programs, in-service teachers and administration, which will all be discussed separately below.

Pre-Service Teachers and Teacher Education Programs. Several participants within this study as well as previous studies mentioned that many teachers enter the field of education feeling

underprepared and inadequately trained for adhering to the diverse learning needs of all of their students, especially those with exceptionalities. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider adding more training opportunities in teacher education programs. Some suggestions for doing so were as simple as learning about the models of co-teaching or other inclusive educational practices, with others being more extensive, such as class workshops or classroom observations of teachers implementing those practices. However, regardless of the method of training, it is evident that more training is necessary to adequately prepare future teachers for implementing inclusive practices, and as several participants argued, these trainings are most effective when they include hands-on experiences and extend beyond one single course.

In-Service Teachers. In consideration of the implications for in-service educators, I feel it is evident that focusing on building strong and trusting relationships with co-teaching partners, students, and parents seems paramount to the effectiveness of this practice. These relationships are at the very core of what co-teaching is, and building these relationships allows educators to gain insight to the students and teachers that they are working with, and collaborate in order to provide coherent and effective instruction. Given the time constraints and logistical challenges of co-teaching, it is important for teachers to be able to communicate and collaborate effectively, to be flexible, and to develop time management skills. It is also important for teachers to consider their students' needs, their teaching styles, and their curriculum when deciding which methods of co-teaching to implement and at what time. It could be very powerful to mix up methods and use a variety throughout the year, if deemed appropriate in consideration of the above criteria. Lastly, as with pre-service teachers, it is important for in-service teachers to be adequately trained and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills needed for successful inclusive practices. That being said, for in-service teachers, attending available workshops and professional development opportunities

regarding the latest inclusive educational practices is very important for the development of their skills and self-efficacy.

Administration. First and foremost, it is important for administrators to become knowledgeable about all of the latest evidence-based practices of providing an inclusive education. Once they are knowledgeable about them, how they work, and what elements are involved in implementing them successfully, they should take it upon themselves to establish their leadership role in this process. This leadership role includes creating a welcoming environment and positive attitude towards inclusion, as well as supporting teachers in any way that they can. In relation to co-teaching methods specifically, it is important for administrators to allow teachers to have some choice or say in choosing their co-teaching partner, try to aid in the process of scheduling planning times, provide adequate and ongoing professional development opportunities, and acquire access to the necessary resources for their teachers and students. Administration is the heart and soul of the logistics side of co-teaching, and without a knowledgeable and supportive administrator, it will be very hard for teachers to experience success in their co-teaching practices.

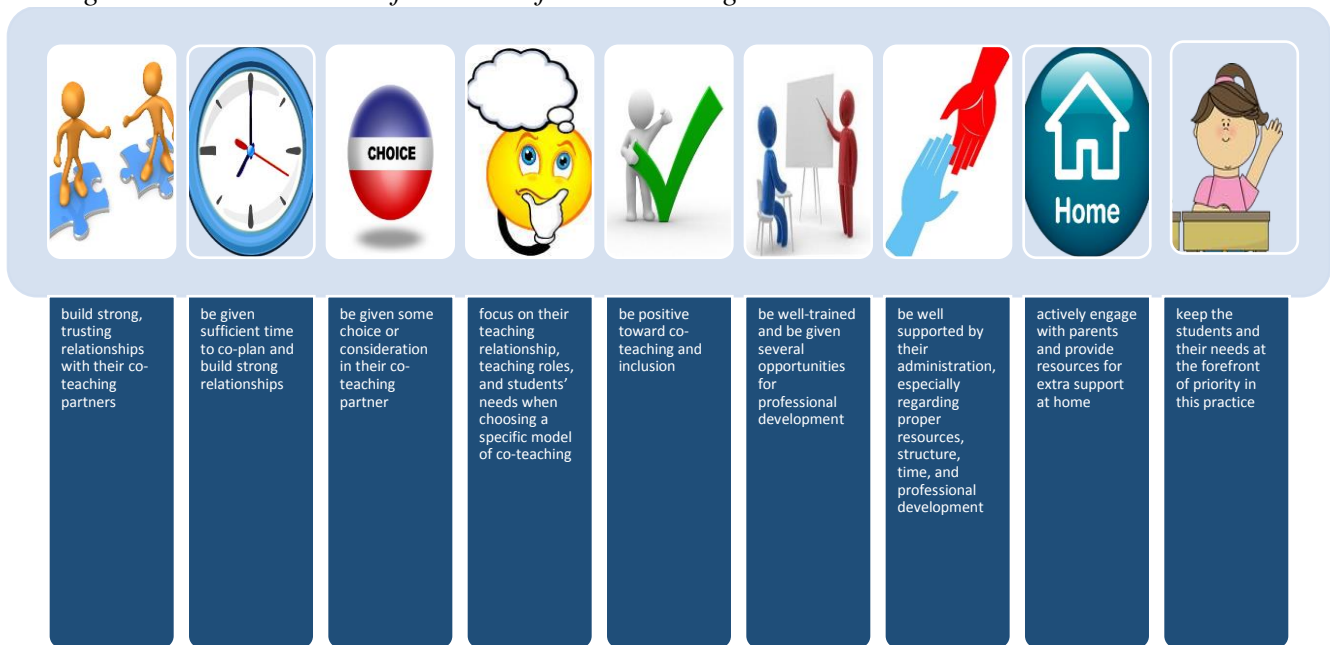## Implications for Research Question Four

Based on the results of this study and the literature, some guidelines for successful co-teaching are indicated. The results suggest that in order for co-teaching practices to be the most successful, teachers must:

- build a strong and trusting relationship with their co-teaching partner
- be given sufficient time to co-plan and build strong relationships with their co-teaching partner
- be given some choice or consideration in their co-teaching partner

- focus on their teaching relationship, teaching roles, and students' needs when choosing a specific model of co-teaching

- be positive toward co-teaching and inclusion

- be well-trained and be given several opportunities for professional development

- be well supported by their administration, especially regarding proper resources, structure, time, and professional development

- actively engage with parents and provide resources for extra support at home

- keep the students and their needs at the forefront of priority in this practice

Figure 5.1 below provides a visual representation of these vital elements of successful co-teaching.

Figure 5.1 Vital Elements for Successful Co-teaching

| build strong, trusting relationships with their co-teaching partners | be given sufficient time to co-plan and build strong relationships | be given some choice or consideration in their co-teaching partner | focus on their teaching relationship, teaching roles, and students' needs when choosing a specific model of co-teaching | be positive toward co-teaching and inclusion | be well-trained and be given several opportunities for professional development | be well supported by their administration, especially regarding proper resources, structure, time, and professional development | actively engage with parents and provide resources for extra support at home | keep the students and their needs at the forefront of priority in this practice |

The HLP framework, produced by McLeskey et. al. (2017), includes the latest guidelines for effective teaching practices for students with special needs. In this framework, there are four key domains to address in order to be successful in teaching practices. These domains include, collaboration, instruction, assessment, and social and behavioral. I would argue that co-teaching successfully addresses all four domains in a unique way (see Figure 5.3 below), suggesting that it could become an evidence-based high leverage practice.

Figure 5.3 Four Domains of a High Leverage Practice
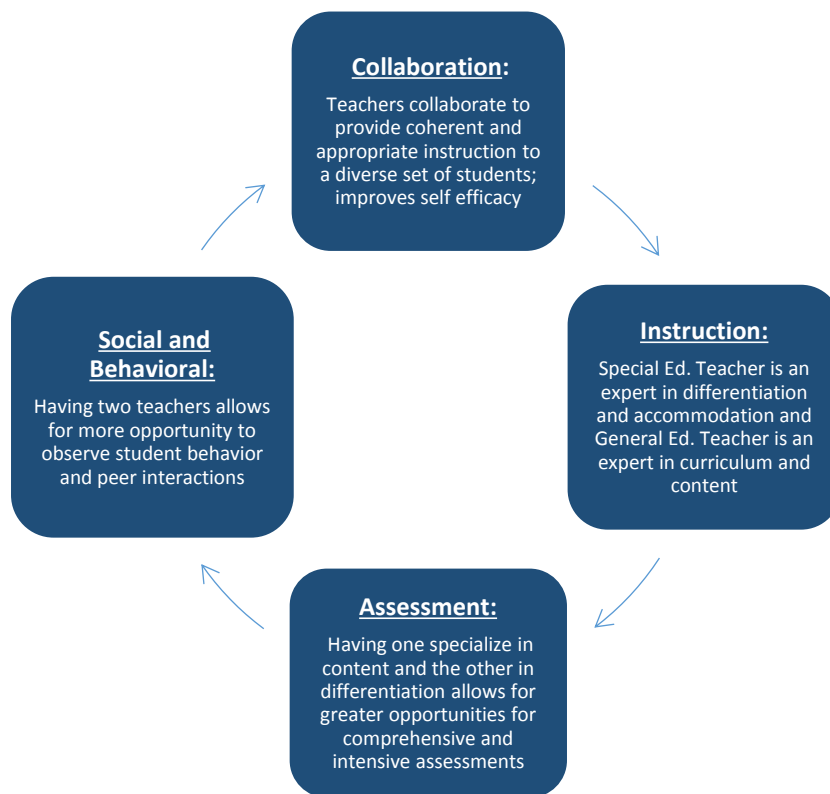
Overall, I would argue that in consideration of all of the major benefits and drawbacks of co-teaching and special education inclusion as a whole, most teachers in this study had an overall positive outlook on co-teaching practices and indicated several potential benefits of its practice when implemented successfully. Although there is a consensus that co-teaching is a very complex model

with a lot of moving parts, one participant of this study said it best when she claimed. *"When it works well, my belief is that there is nothing better!"*

Limitations

One major limitation of the present research is that the participant sample was very small, including only six participants total. Additionally, all six participants were white females, with four out of six being in their thirties, and one being very close to thirty. Although there was a great amount of consensus gained through the participants' diverse teaching experiences, being that two of six were from out of state and teaching roles (i.e. special or general educator) were even among participants, the external validity of the study is challenged by the lack of diversity and small size of the research sample.

Additionally, as with any survey or interview-based study, the open-ended and self-reported nature of the layout of this study poses a threat to its internal validity through self-reporter bias. Being that people generally choose to present themselves in the way that they want to be seen, regardless of if those responses reflect the reality of their situation, there is greater potential for skewed or inaccurate results due to self-reporter bias.

Lastly, one major limitation is that outside of teaching professionals, there is a lack of stakeholder perspectives, such as administrative perspectives, parental perspectives, and student perspectives. In order to accurately reflect the complex nature of co-teaching methods of special education inclusion, as well as discuss its impact on all stakeholders involved, it is important for the opinions of non-teaching professionals to be included. This would provide a more holistic and comprehensive overview of the vital elements necessary for successful implementation of co-teaching practices.

Further Research

As noted above, there is a lack of research regarding the perspectives of other major stakeholders in the process of co-teaching, including administration, parents, and students. The study conducted by Kamens, Susko, & Elliott (2013) provided a basis for the suggested roles and responsibilities of administrators in the practice of co-teaching, such as providing necessary resources and creating a welcoming environment, and it even included administrators' opinions about their own roles, responsibilities, and capabilities in supporting a co-teaching method of inclusion. However, more studies are warranted to gain a more comprehensive view of the roles of administration and their opinions of these roles, as well as the overall effectiveness of co-teaching methods of inclusion.

Likewise, parents play an important role in their child's education, and aside from the studies by Burke et. al (2016) and Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013), no other studies within the literature review mentioned parental roles, and more specifically, parental perspectives in regards to co-teaching, I feel that this area would provide great insight, as it extends the implementation of co-teaching from the school environment into the home environment.

Lastly, students are one of the most underrepresented populations in the discussion of co-teaching methods of inclusion. Although there are certain barriers and obstacles to overcome when including minors in research studies, it is important to gain these perspectives, as students are the ones directly impacted by the implementation of these practices. Along with teachers, I would argue that students are the most important perspective to take into account, and their feedback could greatly influence future inclusive education practices and implementation of those practices.

Appendices

Figure 1.1 The Different Categories of Disabilities Created Under IDEA

Category	Definition
Autism (now referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder)	"A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before after three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance"
Deafness	"A hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance"
Emotional Disturbance	"A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: a. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. b. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. c. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. d. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. e. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes schizophrenia, The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance"
Hearing Impairment	"An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but

	is not included under the definition of deafness"
Intellectual and Developmental Disability (formerly known as Mental Retardation)	"Significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently [at the same time] with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance"
Multiple Disabilities	"Concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in a special education program solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deafblindness"
Orthopedic Impairment	"A severe skeletal impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures)"
Other Health Impairment	"Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment: a. due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention-deficit disorder or attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and b. adversely affecting a child's educational performance"

Specific Learning Disability	"A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations"
Speech or Language Impairment	"A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance"
Traumatic Brain Injury	"An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance"
Visual Impairment Including Blindness	"An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness"

Note. Taken from *"Educating Exceptional Children" by Kirk, S., Gallagher, J., & Coleman, M. R., 2015, 14th, p. 5-6. Copyright 2015 by Cengage Learning.*

Figure 2.1 Possible Teacher Roles in Common Target Areas

Target area	Description	General education teacher role	Special education teacher role
Content learning	Problems involving learning the curriculum sufficiently	• Establish curriculum objectives and prioritize those objectives to maximize learning for the entire class. • Design and direct curriculum and instruction for the whole class.	• Support prioritized objectives to help ensure students focus on most important objectives.
Pace of learning	Problems learning the curriculum in the amount of time allocated	• Focus on most significant content first; reorganize curriculum to address pace issues. • Direct classroom instruction so that appropriate pace is maintained to maximize learning.	• Support pace of learning; help arrange additional time in or out of class when needed to help maintain pace of learning. • Arrange more intensive learning strategies; design peer mediation.
Language	Problems with key vocabulary and other language-based aspects of learning	• Identify most important vocabulary; support special education teacher. • Identify when language strategies would benefit the entire class.	• Implement direct instruction; design and develop experiential activities, vocabulary cards or word walls, peer tutoring with flash cards; teach root words and word families. • Design mnemonic strategies, vocabulary practice activities to take home; implement progress monitoring.
Factual learning	Problems acquiring important factual information in allocated time	• Prioritize and identify most important factual information; support special education teacher. • Identify when learning strategies would benefit the whole class.	• Provide drill and practice with prioritized factual learning objectives; design classwide peer tutoring activities with "fact sheets." • Design visual-spatial learning strategies and illustrations; use mnemonics and other elaborative learning strategies.
Concept learning	Problems acquiring relevant concepts	• Introduce new concepts to whole class; check for understanding. • Use experiential learning, video and technology support when needed. • Support special education teacher. • Identify when concept learning strategies would benefit the entire class.	• Implement direct teaching and feedback, discrimination learning, provision of relevant rules, multiple examples, instances and noninstances, manipulatives, exercises and activities.
Literacy	Literacy problems relevant to grade-level textbook	• Plan instruction that places less emphasis on independent reading from text. • Support special education teacher. • Identify when literacy or comprehension strategies would benefit the entire class.	• Implement text-to-speech readers or audio text; use speech-to-text for written responses; read text with small groups; arrange resource room support; implement peer tutoring or assistance; teach comprehension and self-monitoring strategies.

Target area	Description	General education teacher role	Special education teacher role
Study skills	Problems with effective study of classroom content and materials	• Help students identify important information during lecture and activities and provide suggestions to entire class for note taking, highlighting, and outlining. • Support special education teacher. • Identify when study strategies would benefit the entire class.	• Teach note taking, highlighting, and outlining strategies, and use of guided notes and partial outlines. • Teach use of graphic organizers for complicated content; teach use of self-monitoring sheets for study strategies; teach test-taking skills. • Design tutoring pairs for study and review of course content.
Social behavior	Problems with classroom behavior or sustaining attention	• Implement classroom behavior management strategies; identify students in need of behavior management. • Support special education teacher; identify when behavior management strategies would benefit the entire class. • Support the implementation of schoolwide behavior management systems.	• Use behavior management strategies, such as physical proximity, to target students; direct appeals; individual point sheets with rewards for good behavior; and self-monitoring sheets for attention problems. • Maintain communication with parents, develop individual contracts, and oversee possible temporary removal from classroom activities.

Note. Taken from "Making Inclusion Work With Co-Teaching" by Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017, 49(4), p. 284-29.

Study Interview/Survey

Educator (special educator and general educator) Interview/Survey Questions:

Please check the box below that most identifies your occupational role.

[ ] I am a General Education teacher

[ ] I am a Special Education or Resource teacher

[ ] I am a Gifted Specialist

[ ] Other _____

Have you co-taught within the last 1 to 5 academic years?

[ ] Yes

[ ] No

If not, what was the most recent academic year during which you practiced a co-teaching method of inclusion within your classroom/s?

Please provide the following information regarding your teaching experiences.

    Number of years teaching:
    Number of years of experience with a co-teaching model:

Demographic Questions
1. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male
   c. Prefer not to respond

2. What is your race?
   a. White
   b. Black or African American
   c. Hispanic or Latinx
   d. Native American
   e. Asian
   f. Pacific Islander
   g. Other

3. Year you were born

4. What degrees you have received? Check all that apply
   a. Undergraduate degree (please give degree and area of concentration)
   b. MAT (please give degree and area of concentration)

     c. M.E.D (please give degree and area of concentration)
     d. Ph.D. (please give degree and area of concentration)
     e. Other (fill in the blank)

Please complete the questions in all seven sections below. For the purposes of this study, co-teaching will be defined as a general education teacher and a special education teacher co-instructing students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom. *(If you are completing this survey independently, please email your signed consent form and completed survey in separated, attached documents).*

Part I – Practices

What are some common practices/procedures that you use(d) to implement a co-teaching strategy within your classroom?

Have you used any of the strategies below? If so, please explain further.

One teach one assist – one teacher teaches while the other assists
Team teaching – both teachers teach the whole class at the same time
Parallel teaching – split the class in half and assign one teacher to each half. Teach the same lesson at the same time
Alternative teaching - one teacher teaches a whole group while the other teaches a small group in a designated area
Station teaching – students rotate to different stations and teachers are split among stations

Part II - Attitudes

What are your attitudes towards inclusive education as a whole?

What do you see as the benefits of co-teaching leading to inclusive education vs. pullout?

What do you see as the drawbacks of co-teaching leading to inclusive education vs. pullout?

Part III - Professional Development

What level of pre service training did you have for co-teaching practices or inclusive education practices as a whole?
What level of in-service training do you receive or have you received for inclusive education practices as a whole?

What level of in-service professional development do you receive or have you received for co-teaching practices?

What level of preservice training do you think is still needed for effective implementation of co-teaching practices?

What level of in-service training do you think is still needed for effective implementation of co-teaching practices?

Part IV - Co-planning

Do/Did you co-plan with your teaching partner?
    If so, can you share with me how you co-plan(ed) with your teaching partner?

Do/Did you and your teaching partner share a common planning time?
    If so, then
        Was this time set aside for co-planning designated by your administrator or you and your partner?

    If not, then
        Why do you think there is/was a lack of co-planning involved in your co-taught classroom?

Do you wish you had more opportunities for co-planning? Why/Why not?
    Do you think this would benefit your co-teaching practices? Why/Why not?

What has worked well with your co-planning experiences?

What has been challenging with your co-planning experiences?

Tell me about your co-teaching philosophies of teaching.

Tell me about your co-teaching partner's/s' philosophies of teaching.

    How do/did your philosophies work together?

    Can you share a time when you encountered a challenge?

        If you had a challenge, how did it impact your work together?

            How did you overcome this challenge, or did you?

Who was responsible for choosing your co-teaching partner/s?

    How did this method work for you?

    Was there a method that you feel you would have preferred over this one?

Part V - Administrative Support

What do you think is the role of administrators in school-wide implementation of co-teaching practices?

What does/did your administration do that you feel is/was very supportive of fostering effective implementation of co-teaching practices?

What are some areas of need or improvement in administrative support?

Part VI – Parental involvement

Do you think that parental involvement is important for student success in a co-teaching environment? Why/Why not?

How often do/did you communicate with parents about their students' performance in class?

If you do/did engage often with parents, who often initiates/initiated these conversations?

Do/Did you ever give parents advice for certain skills to work on at home?

If so, what skills do/did you typically recommend?

If so, how do/did you see this as helpful for the student?

Part VII – Overall

Several teachers have mentioned that whether or not they decide to implement a co-teaching method of inclusion that year depends on their students and their needs. How do you determine whether or not co-teaching is the best method to use that year?

What do you think is most important to successful implementation of effective co-teaching practices?

What are the main areas in which you excel related to co-teaching?

What are the main areas for improvement related to co-teaching?

Based on what you have said, how would you rate your school on a scale of 1-10 (with 1 being ineffective to 10 being very effective) in how effective your co-teaching practices currently are/have been in the last few years?

Thank you for participating!

Please feel free to share anything else about your experiences with co-teaching to support inclusion that was not addressed or that you would like to elaborate on further.

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