Implementing the Least Restrictive Environment Through Co-Teaching: The Role of Administrative Support

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ABSTRACT

IMPLEMENTING THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CO-TEACHING: THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Maureen Hatfield, Ed.D.
Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations
Northern Illinois University, 2024
Patrick Roberts, Director

This dissertation investigates the perspectives of educators with the aim of enhancing support for the practice of co-teaching. Co-teaching, an inclusive instructional strategy involving collaboration between general and special educators, holds promise for diverse student populations. However, its effective implementation requires adequate support structures. This research employs a qualitative approach, employing interviews grounded in narrative inquiry and supplemented by a corresponding survey. The key findings illuminate critical areas where principals can enhance support for co-teaching practices within their schools. Through analysis, three primary categories emerged: resources, autonomy, and efficacy. General and special educators identified these areas as pivotal for successful co-teaching endeavors. The implications of these findings underscore the necessity for educators to receive more frequent and robust professional development and resources in the identified categories. By addressing these needs, educational institutions can cultivate environments conducive to effective co-teaching practices, thereby enriching the educational experiences of diverse student populations. This research contributes valuable insights towards fostering collaborative teaching practices, ultimately striving towards inclusive and equitable educational environments.
IMPLEMENTING THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT THROUGH CO-TEACHING: THE ROLE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

BY

MAUREEN HATFIELD

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A DISSERTATION OF PRACTICE SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND FOUNDATIONS

Doctoral Director:
Patrick Roberts
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I am also appreciative of my committee members, Dr. Summers and Dr. Surber for your time and insight. I am very appreciative of your expertise. Thank you all.
DEDICATION

To my Dad: who didn’t get to see me finish but did get me started, and said that education is the one thing that can never be taken from you.

To my husband Bradley: who picked up my slack, never let me quit, and gave me the words, “Just push through.” when I needed to hear them.

To my kids, Fiona and Victor, who wow me with their perseverance every single day: you give me my purpose. This and everything are for you.

To the parents of and children with diverse learning needs: I’ll never stop fighting for us.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Co-teaching has been described as “a common instructional delivery model that meets the needs of all students, including those with disabilities, in K-12 public schools.” by educating all students in their least restrictive learning environment. (McCaw, 2020, p. 1). Currently 13% of American students are designated as having disabilities that require support in their learning, and 63% of those students are receiving their special education services in the general education classroom in a co-taught setting. Co-teaching brings a special education teacher into the general education classroom to service students with diverse learning needs alongside their typically developing peers.

As American public schools move towards becoming increasingly equitable and inclusive spaces, the practice of co-teaching is prevalent in implementing the ideal of inclusion. Friend (2015) found that co-teaching is supported as the most equitable method to service students with disabilities. By servicing students in the general education setting, students with learning needs do not need to sacrifice other opportunities to receive an appropriate education. Friend goes on to state that co-teaching puts a special education teacher in the general education classroom to serve students in their home room environment, an alternative to past practice that focused on removing special education students and educating them in resource settings that fostered exclusion and isolation.
Branch et al. (2013) found that effective co-teaching is not just good for students, it provides benefits to the school at large. Branch et al. said that principals are often seen as owners of their school’s teacher turnover rate and that schools that report successful co-teaching often have lower teacher turnover and attrition rates. Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) determined that hard to staff settings, such as urban schools, should focus on leadership support focused on uplifting teachers as instructional leaders and providing resources to increase confidence in instruction.

Kraft et al. (2015) established that teacher satisfaction is affected by factors that are aligned with successful co-teaching such as the work environment and fellow teachers’ ability to communicate collaboratively, more so than by student attributes. Thornton et al. (2007) conceived that effective co-teaching can naturally reduce some of the reasons that special education teachers give when leaving their teaching positions such as lack of communication with general education teachers and lack of true involvement in their school’s education community. This dissertation aims to explore teacher perspectives around co-teaching in the hope of identifying systems of support that principals can better support co-teaching and in turn reap the positive benefits for their schools.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation addresses what supports teachers should be provided to ensure students are serviced best in their least restrictive learning environment and consists of three papers. The first is a literature review on the topic of co-teaching and how it can be better supported. The second paper provided an analysis of in-depth qualitative research conducted that gathered the voices and perspectives of teachers currently implementing co-teaching in their classrooms. The
The third paper used the first two papers to create a best practice support guide for school principals to help them not just implement co-teaching in their schools but also to foster effective and collaborative co-teaching while increasing teacher confidence in the practice.

The following main research questions guided my study:

- What are the needed supports for effective co-teaching as identified by teaching practitioners?
- How do the factors of the teacher’s work environment impact confidence in co-teaching?
- What is the impact of administrator support on co-teaching implementation?
- How can principals best support effective co-teaching in their schools?

This dissertation began by revisiting and analyzing the history of special education in the United States and how it has evolved to the system we use today through policy and literature review. The evolution of policy surrounding inclusive special education practices was explored in detail. Connection was then be made from past to current regulations and how that shapes current practice in implementation of education in the least restrictive environment through special education co-teaching. The purpose of this analysis was to define the evolution of requirements around educating students in the least restrictive environment. It is important to become familiar with the requirements of implementation that are placed on principals to best understand how they design co-teaching and inclusion in their schools.

This study acknowledged that many teachers and principals believe in the merit of inclusion through co-teaching but can identify ways in which the practice can be improved. Research on preservice teacher preparation and professional development was surveyed for areas of potential improvement. Although teacher preparation programs were not attempted to be changed by this work, it was important to define the gaps in teacher preparation as it relates to
co-teaching so areas of need for teachers can be clearly defined. One thing every teacher implementing co-teaching has in common is that they have and will continue to participate in teacher preparation. Teacher preparation continues to evolve and researched guidance can drive more effective local level teacher preparation. Understanding what teachers do and do not take away from teacher preparation can also identify the gaps in it.

Teacher identified opinions on best practice were investigated. Exploration around administrator voice was explored as well. This work then connected how principals can provide resources to build necessary and effective support and how these supports are viewed by principals. This information was gathered qualitatively through a series of interviews and accompanying surveys. Teacher interviews were done with teachers across grade levels with varying seniority that are currently implementing co-teaching in their general education classroom or are the special education provider in a general education classroom. Administrator interviews were done with principals currently supporting teams of the aforementioned teachers. These interviews took place with employees of schools with a variety of administrative models and practices. The teachers in these interviews were not largely receiving the same resources related to co-teaching, provided a unique variety of perspectives.

In general, school level principals are responsible for ensuring co-teaching is implemented but are provided little guidance on best practice. Co-teaching can provide unique challenges and principals are left to self-solve these challenges. Building principals and district principals are tasked with providing support in both resources and working conditions. School level principals were interviewed to gauge their thoughts on effective co-teaching and what most effective support may be. These factors can drive teacher perceptions about their ability to co-teach effectively.
This study aimed primarily to elevate teacher voice while providing principals with methods to improve the process of co-teaching and provide principals a road map on how to best support teachers. Thirty years of research (Deno, 1970; McMaster & Elliott, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2008) tells us that students with disabilities are best served by a variety of services including instruction in the least restrictive learning environment possible, but building level principals should be provided with a larger toolkit of resources to lead inclusive schools that not only implement co-teaching but implement it most effectively.

Purpose and Significance

The main purpose of this study was to first examine current support in co-teaching and determine the best ways to increase support as identified by teacher practitioners and their administrative supervisors. The secondary purpose of this study was to develop resources to increase efficiency in the co-teaching process and decrease impassivity towards the co-teaching process. Many principals on every level encourage co-teaching but principals could be better equipped to fully support co-teaching. This dissertation aimed to contribute to support provided for principals to do just that. Improving co-teaching in a school can improve instructional outcomes for students and increase satisfaction levels in instructional staff. However, the administrator and teacher perspectives of co-teaching can produce different views and this study hoped to address gaps in current practices so principals are able to support co-teaching successfully.
Intended Audience

The intended audience of my dissertation was school and district leadership staff members. While there is some professional development available surrounding co-teaching methodology, there is little guidance on best practice in co-teaching implementation at the administrative level. Beyond encouraging partnerships, there are many logistical factors for principals to consider and this work helps improve upon that. Teacher and administrator voice was used to identify the areas of support teachers hold in the highest priority, to help guide principals to provide needed resources accordingly. If we hold principals responsible for inclusion within their schools, we should also provide resources as to how to lead their teams in the practice.

Scruggs et al. (2007) determined that the vast majority of teachers have positive beliefs about the effectiveness of co-teaching. The same teachers surveyed by Scruggs et al. cited a need for more robust administrative support to be effective co-teachers. Although this is a common sentiment, specific information and guidance on specific supports is needed. What specific resources teachers would prefer was explored in the analysis of this research. This sentiment is echoed in an abundance of research supporting inclusion through co-teaching in general (Daniel, 1997; Farrell, 2002; Friend et al., 2010). Because of this idea that better administrative support would drive effective co-teaching, the result of this study was a framework of best practice in administrative implementation of co-teaching in their schools to create inclusive environments. The goal was to equip principals to confidently lead school teams into effective co-teaching.
Professional Setting

I am currently employed by an urban Midwestern charter school network. This network of schools is a group of 15 charter schools within the enrollment boundaries of a large city. This network of schools serves approximately 7,000 students primarily identifying as members of the Latinx community. These 15 campuses span the entire geography of a large city and service a variety of neighborhoods. I have served this group of charter schools for twelve years, first as a teacher and currently as the Director of Specialized Services. I support building principals in leading their individual special education departments. Special education students make up 19.7% of the student body. All schools within the network utilize co-teaching in the majority of their classrooms.

Currently the charter school network is managed in a manner that is less centralized. There are few network-wide initiatives. There is minimal network wide professional development and support provided specifically on inclusion or co-teaching. Most of the leadership structure is provided by an independent school structure. This allows principals to provide a variety of resources based on their building’s specific needs. For the purpose of this study, this structure allowed a chance to analyze up to 15 different leadership styles and levels of support.

This charter network operates on a full inclusion model. Currently 83% of students with special education designations at this charter network are LRE 1 students (spending 80% or more of their day in general education). Only three of the 15 schools at this network house self-contained special education programs, two for students requiring a significantly modified curriculum with moderate to intensive support and one communication focused autism program.
The rest of the students receiving special education services in the charter network receive the majority of those services in the general education classroom. This was initially by design and has become a valued principle at this charter network. The budgeting system between this charter network and the larger district in which it resides and is regulated by provides for zero based budgeting. This means that the charter organization designs its instruction, estimates its cost and proposes budget needs to the school district. Zero-based budgeting allows schools to align programs and funding to support student achievement and build inclusive school cultures.

The network of charter schools has a unique support structure for schools and teachers. The network is led by a chief education officer. The managing director of diverse learning and director of specialized services report to the chief education officer and support 15 campuses in their diverse learning, including special education. Each of these 15 campuses has a principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, and depending on the size and needs of the campus, one to three deans. Special education services, including co-teaching, are typically supported by an instructional coach or assistant principal but this varies by campus. Each campus also employs a case manager that is a manager of the special education department but is a union member and therefore does not play a supervisory role.

Conceptual Framework

This conceptual framework for co-teaching acknowledges that both special and general education teachers have background knowledge of best practices surrounding inclusion. With that knowledge, many teachers can provide settings designed to promote success of students with disabilities. All teachers are provided some education prior to participating in the practice of inclusive co-teaching but this education and training may not be robust enough to provide
teachers maximum confidence in the practice and maximum confidence in their personal ability to implement with great success. The overarching idea is that teachers have the ability to co-teach but require adequate and robust administrative support to co-teach with confidence and maximum efficiency. By hearing inclusive practitioner voices as they identify needed resources for effective co-teaching, principals can assist in the improvement of teacher effectiveness in co-taught classrooms.
Inclusion is the educational method that provides students with learning differences the benefit of being educated to the greatest extent possible alongside their typically developing peers. The concept of inclusion encourages a classroom that engages students of all ability levels in a heterogeneous learning environment. Inclusive practices in education provide all students with a more diverse group of peer students to encourage acceptance of differences. Students with disabilities often require support beyond that of their typically developing peers. Inclusion promotes this support being provided to students with additional learning needs alongside their typically developing peers instead of while separated from their peers. Inclusive classrooms have both academic and social benefits for students with disabilities and typically developing students as well (Farrell, 2000). The purpose of this study is to explore both special education and general education teachers’ perspectives on co-teaching along with members of their administrative teams and the areas of need related to support.

Historically students with disabilities were removed from their general education classrooms to be provided support in a separate setting; Now, students are being educated in inclusive general education classrooms more than ever before (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], n.d.). Self-contained education for special education students has not been considered best practice since the 1960’s, when it came under criticism. Gersham (1975) notes, “The forceful critique of self-contained special classes that occurred in the late ‘60s resulted in a
number of proposals for alternative delivery systems” (p. 11). In 1970, the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged an appraisal of the then current model of self-contained classrooms completed by Evelyn Deno. Deno stated that the majority of special education students were being serviced in separate settings. Deno proposed a change in special education to a model that provided a cascade of services that would service the majority of special education students in integrated settings (Deno, 1970). This guidance on best practice developed by Deno is still referenced today as the special education continuum of services, offering a variety of services for a variety of needs.

Now more than ever, as the education system recognizes the responsibility to right historical inequalities in education, inclusive education is recognized as a pathway to that work. Inclusion is a pathway to removing the stigma of disabilities (Juvonen, 2019). Inclusive classrooms can prepare all students to exist in a world where people with disabilities are not seen as separate or members of a different group. Inclusion through co-teaching has been found to benefit teachers, students, and schools in general (Hang & Rabren, 2008). Inclusion services address the learning needs of special education students alongside typically developing peers, instead of ushering students away to have their needs met quietly and separately. Inclusive education has evolved over time and now focuses on including all learners to the greatest extent possible. Inclusive education originates from the principle of eliminating discriminatory and exclusive environments from school settings (Anderson & Boyle, 2015).

Inclusive classrooms continue to become increasingly the norm in public schools in the United States (NCES, n.d.). Inclusive classrooms increase the presence of neurodiversity for all students. Inclusive classrooms typically add a teacher to service the assigned special education services, but that teacher can also assist all students and encourage small group targeted
instruction. Inclusive classrooms foster greater differentiation of curriculum, making instruction more accessible for all students, not just those with disabilities. Special education teachers can provide space for targeted instruction for all students in need of assistance on a particular subject or standard. Students without a disability designation only stand to benefit from the presence of two certified teachers in their general education classroom.

Special education designation does not negate that these students are also general education students as well; A student with academic needs may have the ability or want to display functional behavior in the same way as a general education student. It does not need to be an either/or decision. In their 2012 study, Bryant Davis et al. identified that co-teaching yielded a notable degree of success for students with disabilities, particularly when implemented by teachers who exhibited a high level of comfort and proficiency in the collaborative practice and administrative support can increase comfort and proficiency. A need for learning support does not negate this benefit. Federal law supports this notion by stating, “Special education is a service for children rather than a place where such children are sent” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004, Section 1400, p. 4).

The IDEA (2004) stated that all students shall be provided access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the student’s least restrictive environment (LRE). Although educating students in their LRE is uniformly adopted as a matter of policy, it has proven challenging in practice. As an administrator of special education, I have not encountered any philosophical resistance to this policy, but have witnessed teachers expressing a belief that there may be a breakdown in implementation.

A way to provide special education students with education in their least restrictive environment is through the practice of inclusive special education co-teaching. Co-teaching
allows special education students to receive additional support in the same setting of their typically developing peers. Co-teaching looks a variety of ways in a variety of schools and is viewed with varying levels of commitment by teacher practitioners.

If educators and school administrators understand that inclusion is optimal for students, why hasn’t it become the standard practice everywhere to strive to prioritize and improve co-teaching? Within the pages of this literature review, the insights gleaned from various research studies on co-teaching were explored. This review aims to establish the groundwork for a research endeavor aimed at enriching the existing knowledge base on co-teaching best practices and offering guidance for enhancing co-teaching experiences.

Literature Review

Best practice in education is ever evolving and inclusive practices such as co-teaching are no different. It was previously believed that special education students were best educated in small settings with only other special education students (Gershman, 1975). It is now known, that special education students have the highest achievement outcomes in their least restrictive environment (Deno, 1970; McMaster & Elliott, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2008). We now know students with disabilities are fully capable of academic and post graduate achievement commensurate to that of their typically developing peers. Current literature affirms and provides greater depth into best practice implementation.

This analysis looked at the current literature surrounding co-teaching in special education. First an analysis of co-teaching through establishing its origin and evolution to the practices we see most commonly today was addressed. Second, a review of the literature around how to best support co-teaching, specifically from the teacher practitioner’s and principal
support systems perspective was developed. Lastly, the role of the school administrator in the process, specifically charged with co-teaching supporting co-teaching was discussed.

**Origin of Co-Teaching**

Prior to the presidency of Lyndon B. Johnson, children with disabilities, and particularly those with severe disabilities, had limited access to appropriate public education. Local public schools had a minimal obligation to service the needs of students with disabilities. In 1965 Lyndon B. Johnson led a reform to the services provided to students through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

In 1968, an amendment to the Act added the Education of the Handicapped Act, a federal act that required public school services for individuals with disabilities aged 3–21. In 1975 this became the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA), a federal law also known as Public Law 94-142. This law expanded many times but established federal law requiring and protecting the education of all children with disabilities ages three to twenty-one.

In 1990 amendments were passed to the EAHCA, including a change of name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA, as we now know it, focused on access to education that was equal and ensured a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the student’s least restrictive environment. (LRE). has been determined that it is more beneficial to educate students with disabilities by maintaining expectations as high as those of their non-disabled peers while maintaining access to the general education classroom. This is thought as the best method to prepare students with disabilities to be successful, independent adults (IDEA section 1400, 2004).
The act states that students educated in separated settings were not often held to the same high standards of learning as their typically developing peers or receiving the same evidence-based models of education to facilitate adequate growth. It went on to describe special education as services that should be provided but not a location where children with disabilities are to be educated separately (IDEA, 2004). Students with special education needs no longer need to be removed from general education environments to receive services to address their learning needs. Schools now find themselves tasked with creating inclusive classrooms to the greatest extent possible to provide students with inclusive services.

However, with IDEA came little guidance on how to make appropriate placement decisions for students with disabilities. The preamble to IDEA makes several points in regards to the education of students with disabilities. One of particular relevance is the statement that students with disabilities shall be educated to the greatest extent possible in the general education setting. A second statement of the preamble states that all adults working with students with disabilities should have prior training. This is important as the preamble relates to co-teaching and LRE because it states a shared responsibility over the education of students with disabilities, not a sole responsibility of the special education teacher (Hyatt, 2011). Due to this stipulation, states now require coursework in servicing students with disabilities for all teachers, but those courses are typically high-level overviews in nature (Pittman, 2014).

Although the least restrictive environment is mandated today, there is minimal guidance on implementation of best practice. Inclusion is necessary in today’s schools and inclusive classrooms with co-teaching present is one way we can provide the least restrictive environment to students with disabilities. Dieker (2001) determined that although teachers are the implementers of inclusion, teachers often cite inadequate training on how to implement co-
teaching effectively. Dieker cited that when describing teachers that principals considered to be effective, they further described those professionals as having excellent skills in planning and collaboration as well.

There are many benefits of co-teaching, the most prominent being academic success for students with disabilities. Bryant Davis et al. (2012) established that co-teaching provided a high level of success for students with disabilities but was most successful with teachers that felt comfortable within the practice. It is now time that we take the next step and determine how to not just implement inclusion but how to make the best possible outcomes available to all students.

Identifying Necessary Supports for Effective Co-Teaching

The initial onset of how teachers are developed in the United States begins with teacher preparation at the university level. Depending on where a preservice teacher is placed for student teaching, their first day in their own classroom may be their first exposure to inclusive practices such as co-teaching. If teachers may be required to co-teach on day one of their teaching career, states have a responsibility to create opportunities for preservice teachers to become familiar with inclusion and co-teaching. Requirements at the university level are driven by state and federal requirements for teacher certification.

Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation programs in the United States are required to have one course devoted to special education and disability awareness for teacher candidates on the general education track and most do not provide more than the minimum (Anderson & Gumus, 2006).
While teachers take multiple courses in other domains of the teaching profession they may encounter (for example: preservice teachers pursuing an endorsement to teach mathematics are likely to encounter multiple courses on teaching literacy) preservice general education teachers will likely only take one course on servicing special education students that they will likely encounter every day of their teaching career. It is reasonable to wonder if additional training and/or coursework in special education, particularly special education co-teaching practices, would increase teacher confidence in the practice.

Ricci et al. (2019) also noted that there are many widely recognized methods to co-teaching (one teach/one observe, one teach/one assist, station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching) and if paired with an experienced supervising teacher, a new to service teacher can progress through the models as their skills and comfort level improve. Ricci et al. concluded it may also be beneficial as an administrator to monitor the use of these models to ensure that a pairing is not sedentary in one teach/one observe or one teach/one assist particularly having the new to service teacher acting as an observer or assistant.

Different co-teaching models have different benefits and may be chosen for a variety of reasons. Dooley (2014) theorized that the one teach/one observe model was best when one teacher was particularly stronger in the pairing and allowed that teacher to take on the majority of the instruction, an example being a veteran teacher and a new to service teacher when tackling a particularly difficult lesson. They went on to describe the one teach, one assist model as the preferred method as being a great method for co-teaching parents that are in their infancy and getting to know each other’s teaching style. Dooley found the parallel teaching approach to be best suited when students should be divided into two groups for reasons such as one portion of the class has mastered a standard while the other portion needs further instruction on the standard
before moving on. Station teaching was described as an effective method when customization to multiple levels for students was needed. For example, reading stations designed to meet up to five reading levels are an example of an appropriate use of station teaching in a co-taught classroom. Dooley discovered alternative teaching to be preferred when only a few students need small group intervention on a skill or standard and one of the two teachers may pull them aside to work on that specific target. Team teaching was described by Dooley as the ideal model in most scenarios that both teachers are comfortable with the content and the students. In this model, roles are interchangeable and an observer would not be able to discern who is the general education teacher and who is the special education teacher.

Identifying barriers to most effective co-teaching is important as an accountability measure to ensure co-teaching effectiveness (Ricci et al., 2019, p. 37). Ricci et al. discovered that effective co-teaching was a developmental milestone for new teachers. Ricci, et. al. recommended a co-teaching method pairing experienced teachers with resident/new to service teachers as a way to develop the skills of both types of teachers. This method also gave voice to two sets of teachers with different perspectives to identify needs in the co-teaching process. After a year of using this method of pairings of a mentor teacher and a resident teacher, co-teachers were surveyed on their needs related to co-teaching. Results are shown in Table 1.

When preservice teachers were provided just one additional course focused on inclusive practices, a notable difference in views around co-teaching in inclusive classrooms has been reported. Anderson and Gumus (2006) designed a course aimed to prepare a group of pre-service teachers to facilitate inclusive classrooms. Prior to specific preparation around servicing students with disabilities, pre service teachers voiced feeling unprepared or resistant to servicing inclusive classrooms. These same preservice teachers voiced in post-course reflection papers that the
Table 1.1

Resident and Mentor Teacher Perceived Barriers to Co-Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barrier</th>
<th>Resident Teacher’s Barriers %</th>
<th>Mentor Teacher’s Barriers %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Logistics of co-teaching</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varied perspectives</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication/feedback</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing authority</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benefits for students</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher motivation</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ricci et al., 2019

A course increased feeling knowledgeable about special education with a 94% increase. Additionally, the number of participants feeling well prepared to teach students with mild disabilities saw a 96% increase (Anderson & Gumus, 2006).

Additional pre-service teacher preparation on co-teaching practices and inclusion could increase the comfort level of these teachers in their practices. Additional preparation can also lead to increased academic achievement. Bacharach et al. (2010) wrote that classrooms led by student teachers that utilized co-teaching practices had higher levels of academic achievement. They also found that teachers and student teachers that experienced both student teaching with and without co-teaching preparation overwhelmingly reported positive attributes of a co-taught student teaching model.

The state of Illinois only requires one course on disabilities for pre-service general education teachers (ISBE, 2024). If these courses focused on collaborative lesson planning and developing cohesive relationships with co-teachers, they could only stand to benefit every educator. Developing these principles of collaborative lesson planning and developing cohesive peer relationships are beneficial in any classroom, both within and outside of the co-teaching
classroom. Cravens and Hunter (2021) asserted that employing teacher-led collaborative groups centered on standards-based lesson planning and implementation resulted in enhanced teacher effectiveness.

One potential method of increasing teacher preparedness for co-teaching proposed by Ricci and Fingon (2017) is modeling in preservice training. Through the practice of co-teaching college courses aimed at preservice teachers, pre service teachers reported a higher level of confidence in the practice of co-teaching and servicing special education students in inclusive classrooms. The first time a teacher witnesses co-teaching should not be during their own first implementation. Allowing for opportunities to observe co-teaching prior to service in the student teaching phase is a starting point, providing opportunity to implement co-teaching while in a student teacher and supervising teacher setting would provide further development.

Special education teachers are not required to be endorsed in the subject matter they support students in the same way as general educators. It was determined by Rodriguez (2021) that a lack of content knowledge of special education teachers can be a source of resistance to co-teaching as a practice. More than 60% of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their day in general education. Ninety percent of students with high incidence disabilities spend more than half of their day in general education. Rodriguez determined that general education teachers’ apprehension towards co-teaching is more pronounced depending on the disability category.

If special education co-teaching is going to be effective, we must adequately prepare both special and general education teachers. All types of teachers should be more than just aware of students with disabilities. Teachers should be prepared to the highest possible level with the resources available on methods of differentiation and most effective strategies to co-teaching and
inclusion. There is little that can be done immediately to change preservice teacher requirements at the state level, so schools and school leaders may look as to how they can better prepare new and existing teachers in their district to not just co-teach, but co-teach effectively and comfortably.

**Working Conditions**

An area of valuable examination is working conditions for teachers employed as co-teaching practitioners. Job satisfaction and motivation can be driven both positively or negatively by a practitioner’s happiness in their work setting. Working conditions for special education teachers can be defined as “physical features,…the organizational structure, and the sociological, political, psychological and educational features of the work environment” (Bettini et al., 2016, p. 178). Beyond the contractual working conditions for teachers are the soft conditions that can be directly affected by school administration. Soft conditions are the personal relationships of staff, communication pathways with leadership, and personal strength of voice in the working environment (Bettini et al., 2016).

It was said by Bettini et al. (2016) that working conditions affect teacher effectiveness. This can be either positive or negative. The tools and materials that are available to teachers can affect the methods they use for instruction. According to the study by Bettini et al., other factors such as workload, responsibilities, and planning time affected effectiveness as well and that when teachers are working in favorable working conditions, special education students are higher achieving. Teachers with negatively perceived working conditions experience higher levels of burnout and turnout. High rates of teacher turnover cause lower achievement rates for
students and lower levels of teacher collaboration, a crucial piece to effective co-teaching (Guin, 2004).

**Co-teaching is both nuanced and incredibly common.** Bryant Davis et al. (2012) found that the instances in which co-taught classrooms reported ineffective progress was often linked to teachers that reported feeling ill equipped to co-teach while implementing adequate classroom management. Individual principals may respectively have work conditions that matter with different weight to their staff. Co-teaching would likely not be the only practice affected positively if principals were able to pinpoint what matters most to their staff and prioritize it. Murawski and Lochner (2010) determined that an effective method to support teachers while co-teaching is frequent observation and providing a listening ear to teacher practitioners through scheduled coaching conversations. Through coaching conversations principals can open two-way communication with their staff to enhance co-teaching practices and allow staff to voice their needs openly. Murawski and Lochner went on to identify that principals with effective co-teaching in their schools are present and immersed in the process of co-teaching with their teachers. Through this practice of observation and coaching conversations, Murawski and Lochner stated that principals can promote greater success for a wide range of students. This communication can not only identify areas of priority for teachers but areas of self-reflection and self-identified areas of needed support and coaching. Using the need for improved working conditions as a way to raise teacher voice may create more cohesive and collaborative learning environments at large.
Analysis of Parent and Former Student Perspective and Lived Experience

Inclusion is a research-based approach that provides students with the great potential for independence and achievement outcomes. However, inclusion can also provide a certain level of discomfort for students and parents. The nature of its value is that it challenges students and requires an amount of support for the students it services. Parents of special education students may find inclusive special education services to feel less personal or simply may not know the potential benefits, if education staff do not communicate with them about it. Although parents may not immediately advocate for an inclusive environment for their child, it is important that parents are given all information and current research to equip them to make the best decision for their child (Hornby, 2021). Lai and Vadeboncoeur (2012) determined that parents are a valuable partner in the special education planning process and can provide a resource of perspective to increase effective practices. Parents and students can be involved in the process of assessing long term effectiveness of inclusionary methods as well.

Hornby (2021) also described that one way to better our practices around inclusion is collecting the reflections of the lived experiences of former student participants in inclusion. This is a rarely utilized approach. Former special education students are rarely consulted for input on their educational outcomes. Hornby noted that communication with former special education students can give us an idea of how we can improve the services for those receiving them and how better to describe how our co-teaching is received than the first-person account of the person receiving it. These former students are rarely asked what they would give as suggested improvements.
In other research, Ochs et al. (2001) examined how parents of children with disabilities advocated for inclusive placement for their children. In Ochs et al.’s study, parents were provided one annual meeting with one opportunity for explanation of their child’s disability. Teachers were not provided a lot more. Parents are often under the impression that they may only have one IEP meeting per year, when the reality is that they are required to have at least one but can request more. Although the children researched by Ochs et al. had advocates at the table lobbying for their inclusive placement, preparation and subsequent updates were lacking. Ochs et al. said that when parents engaged in communication with teachers about specific behaviors and needs, their students were met with increased empathy and kindness. Students in this study were far less engaged when they were neglected and unengaged in the learning and planning process. Ochs et al. concluded that a process that engages all stakeholders beyond the teaching staff can provide various perspectives on how we can improve the inclusive classroom environment. Extending the amount that we consult with the caregivers of special education students in the inclusive settings can provide feedback and a unique perspective towards improving practices.

Teachers’ principals have a legal obligation to inform parents of their rights, and they have an ethical obligation to inform parents of current best practice as it relates to their child. Co-teaching is more expensive and causes difficulty in scheduling. A special education teacher can only service one classroom at a time during co-teaching, whereas pull out groups can house students of multiple grades and chronological years. Rueda et al. (2000) found that parents may prefer the idea of a smaller separate setting for their child if they are not aware of the benefits of inclusion. Without having been informed of current research, parents could easily subscribe to the belief that separate education is best. Education professionals must not gatekeep the current research and guidance around inclusive co-taught classrooms if parents are unaware. Inclusive
classrooms in the least restrictive learning environment have the best outcomes for students and parents should be fully informed of that (Rueda et al., 2000).

**Leadership Role in Co Teaching: Facilitating Effective Support**

Inclusive schools do not occur by chance; they are deliberately fostered and created. Policies are a starting point because shifts in practice are how school systems become more inclusive. McMaster and Elliott (2014) concluded that effective school leadership is a necessary component to making systemic changes to practice. It is even essential that leadership model, promote, and insist on inclusive behavior and practice in their school communities. Sousa and Tomlinson (2018) suggested that this can be most effectively accomplished through creating teams of leaders within the school that can implement and support the most inclusive practices, creating a shift in school culture. Creating more inclusive classrooms requires support for those included learners. Building multi-Tiered systems of support in inclusive classrooms has become a responsibility of school principals.

Multi-tiered systems of support or MTSS a framework for continuous improvement that is systemic, prevention-focused, and data-informed, providing a coherent continuum of supports responsive to meet the needs of all learners (Illinois multi-tiered system of supports, 2024). The argument for MTSS is that intervention can begin in the classroom and service a variety of needs prior to referral for evaluation. Batsche (2013) envisioned a Tiered approach to meeting the needs of all students, beginning with Tier 1 serviced in the general education classroom. Tier 1 begins with universal screening of all students and researched based instructional methods like differentiated instruction and purposeful student groupings with frequent progress monitoring to track student growth. In Tier two more intensive support can be provided such as small groups
and organization and study skill management can be provided in the inclusive general education classroom. The idea of these supports is that through early intervention and ongoing progress monitoring more students can be successful in their general education and receive assistance sooner than methods in the past that required making it through a lengthy special education qualification process before receiving support. The MTSS classroom and the co-taught classroom can exist and assist each other simultaneously.

When Keefe et al. (2004) interviewed both general and special education teachers, asking each to identify challenges in co-teaching, they uniformly agreed on three issues. The three identified issues were collaboration, roles and responsibilities and outcomes. More specifically, they cited a lack of effective collaboration with their co-teachers, inability to choose their co-teaching partner, logistical considerations, limited role of the special education teacher, lack of content knowledge by the special education teacher, and not having clearly defined roles and responsibilities. This set of teachers felt that co-teaching was a value practice but voiced challenges that intervention of principals could potentially relieve (Keefe et al., 2004).

Lalvani (2013) focused on teachers’ perceptions of needs related to inclusion and determined that inclusion and inclusive classrooms should receive the focus of a social justice issue. Through in-depth interviews with 30 teachers, it was determined that negative teacher perception about inclusion was embedded in implicit bias that causes the othering of special education students. In part this is due to the way pre service teachers are taught to focus on student deficits and that teachers should distance themselves from the deficit model and more towards a socially just inclusion model. With a leadership that encourages a school culture focused on equity and social justice can lead to effective co-teaching within inclusive schools.
Cook and Friend (1995) explored the extent to which principals’ supervisory expectations/practices are consistent with the model delineated in the foundational research of inclusion. In part this study examined how principals manage co-teaching, including how co-teachers are chosen. Cook and Friend discussed how some teachers expressed great satisfaction given choice in pairing, but the principals interviewed stated they focus on certification and experience in subject matter rather than teacher choice. Principals interviewed in this research cited that when given choice, teachers often choose to work with someone with whom they thrive socially, which does not always lead to their best performance. These principals did acknowledge the need for mutual respect however in the co-teaching relationship (Cook & Friend, 1995).

The breakdown of these relationships can also often be attributed to a misunderstanding or miscommunication of each member of the pair’s roles (McCaw, 2020). In one study (Ersoy, 2021), teachers felt that co-teaching requires a substantial amount of cooperation from the teacher practitioners. The positive perceptions of co-teaching by the new-to-service practitioners implementing it leads to more positive outcomes for students with disabilities. In this study, teachers that felt they were well supported in co-teaching when asked to describe inclusive classrooms, and special education students used terms that could be described as maternal and related to nature and were generally positive. In the same study, practitioners that did not report feeling supported used more negative language to describe their personal feelings around the practice of co-teaching.

One such consideration that can be made to increase teacher confidence in co-teaching is selective pairing when creating co-teaching teams. New-to-service teachers can benefit from co-teaching relationships that pair them with a mentor teacher. Ricci et al. (2019) suggested there
are six steps to consider when planning for co-teaching: establish rapport amongst teachers, identify individual teaching styles, use them to create a cohesive classroom, open discussion of teacher strengths and weaknesses, discussion of individualized education plans and regular education goals, formulating a plan of action and acting as a unified team towards growth. When pairing a new to service and established teacher as a co-teaching team, they can move through these steps and progress more effectively through co-teaching methods.

Van Mieghem et al. (2020) discussed the impact of teacher attitudes or perceptions of co-teaching and inclusion as a point that can either be a barrier or a benefit. Further discussion described how an amicable attitude towards methods of differentiation are necessary to fostering an inclusive school environment that is conducive to methods like co-teaching. Van Mieghem concluded that school leaders can influence their staff by modeling similarly inclusive practices and positive attitudes towards inclusion in their own practices and leadership. Proactive positive messaging around inclusive practices can increase positive attitudes from staff leading to better student outcomes.

Co-teaching is a practice with promise but in need of development in most districts. However, the needs of special education students are increasingly diverse and co-teaching should respond to this with increasing the practice of active collaboration amongst the practitioners. Friend et al. (2010) suggest that three areas should be studied by schools as programs are assessed: teacher perceptions of effectiveness, logistics (scheduling, resources, planning, etc.), and the impact on student learning measured by academic achievement.

Professional development can affect teacher confidence and positive attitudes towards co-teaching and inclusive practices (Miller & Oh, 2013). Miller and Oh looked at a group of teachers attempting to collaborate and be successful at co-teaching but admittedly falling short.
Teachers were interviewed to determine what was needed to increase effectiveness and the identified need was professional development. This study measured confidence pre and post professional development and determined that co-teaching is the best method only if teachers are prepared and feel that it is a good fit for them. The initial hypothesis of Miller and Oh was that more professional development on co-teaching was a direct pathway to increased teacher confidence in co-teaching, however this study showed additional factors to be considered as professional development did not greatly alter teacher feelings about co-teaching and their willingness to implement it.

Literature Review Conclusion

Current literature provides a variety of reasons why co-teaching can provide benefits for students. Students in inclusive settings are afforded a number of benefits they might otherwise miss. (McMaster & Elliott, 2014; Tomlinson et al., 2008). Schools monitor and report the percentage of students receiving services in their least restrictive learning environment but little data around inclusive practices beyond that is collected.

One source that could provide valuable insight are former or exiting special education students. These stakeholders can provide information around their takeaways from being educated alongside typically developing peers. Parents of students benefiting from inclusion may also provide information that can help the improvement of the inclusion and co-teaching practice. Informing parents of the potential benefits and challenges of inclusion can provide a greater knowledge base to measure effectiveness of the practice for their particular child.

One question that is common in the literature about identifying support needs in co-teaching is how preservice teachers were prepared for it. Preservice teachers in the United States
are provided minimal coursework on disabilities and likely no additional coursework specifically on co-teaching and inclusion (Anderson & Gumus, 2006). Co-teaching requires a large amount of collaboration and cooperation from the participating teachers. Teachers with positive perceptions of co-teaching have more favorable outcomes (Ersoy, 2021). Teacher feelings about co-teaching can either have significant positive or negative outcomes. Principals have the capacity to affect these opinions through their own practices, modeling, and ability to support co-teaching (Van Meighem et al., 2020).

General job and work satisfaction can affect teacher effectiveness. One area that affects work satisfaction is described as work conditions, the organizational, physical, or psychological aspect of their particular position (Bettini et al., 2016). Principals can communicate and collaborate with staff to improve these conditions that can lead to teacher burnout and turnover. Keeping burnout and turnover low in a school environment can lead to more effective teaching and positive outcomes for all students (Guin, 2004).

It is both the special education teachers that need to be prepared to co-teach, and the general education teacher as well. Gone are the days where a general education teacher stood at the front of the room and taught a one size fits all lesson while a special education teacher serviced only the students with IEPs, making the lesson accessible for them in real time. There are at least six methods of co-teaching used today and each requires full content knowledge and inclusive engagement from both teachers (Ricci et al., 2019).

Creating an inclusive school is an act of deliberate planning and support by principals. A leadership team that models and promotes inclusivity creates effective inclusive classrooms (McMaster & Elliott, 2014). Creating a culture of leaders within the teacher population can be most supportive to the creation of an inclusive school culture (Tomlinson, 2018). Many factors
such as logistics, collaboration, content knowledge, and roles and responsibilities when managed well by administration lead to better outcomes for students (Cook and Friend, 1995; Keefe et al., 2004; Lavani, 2013). Ongoing professional development aimed at constantly improving co-teaching is beneficial as well (Miller and Oh, 2013). Collaborating with teacher practitioners to identify specific areas of need related to co-teaching, going beyond the typical co-teaching initial training, and seeking out the necessary resources to get over hurdles is a responsibility of principals seeking to improve co-teaching in their schools as well.

The literature makes one thing clear, inclusive schools are driven by supportive administrative teams. Co-teaching cannot be a directive but rather a culture. This can be modeled by principals in their own prioritization of inclusion and co-teaching in their schools. Teachers that feel unsupported in co-teaching widely report feeling ineffective as well (Dieker, 2001). Principals can take the voice of teachers and turn it into support that elevates the level of co-teaching practices and outcomes for students in their respective schools. Having extensively reviewed the existing literature on co-teaching dynamics and its impact within educational settings, the next phase of this study involves transitioning from theory to practice through an empirical investigation. While the literature provides valuable insights and theoretical frameworks, empirical research offers the opportunity to validate these theories in real-world contexts.

By collecting data directly from educators engaged in co-teaching partnerships, this empirical study aims to bridge the gap between theory and application, providing concrete evidence to support the confidence in co-teaching and identifying practical strategies for implementation. Through data collection and analysis, my study seeks to contribute to the
growing body of knowledge on co-teaching practices, ultimately informing decisions and enhancing educational outcomes for students with diverse learning needs.
Inclusion has been a universally adopted principal in education supported by over 30 years of research supporting its benefits for students with special education needs. Research tells us that inclusive classrooms are beneficial for all learners, especially those with special education needs. (Blackorby et al., 2007; Cosier et al., 2013; Dalgaard, et al., 2022; McKittrick, et al., 2022; Pisacone, 2022). As we move past understanding and applying inclusion and into analyzing and evaluating our practices, this study looks towards teachers to hear the voices of those acting as the practitioners of inclusion through co-teaching along with the principals that support them. Enhancing teaching practices involves actively listening to the perspectives and insights of teachers on the topics of support and collaboration.

Research Questions

This qualitative research study and analysis addresses the necessary support to effective co-teaching as identified by teacher and administrator voice and how principals can help build and provide those supports.

The following main research questions guided this study:

What are the needed supports for effective co-teaching as identified by teaching practitioners?

How do the factors of the teacher’s work environment impact confidence in co-teaching?

What is the impact of administrator support on co-teaching implementation?
How can principals best support effective co-teaching in their schools?

Research Methodology

Qualitative research was chosen as opposed to other methods because teacher and administrator relationships, along with school culture, can be complex. Almalki (2016) established when dealing with complex relationships, such as teachers and leaders, qualitative research through interviews can be the most effective method because the reality of the individual is relative to their perspective and a social construct. The benefit of qualitative research in education lies in its ability to delve deeply into understanding the nuances, complexities, and subjective experiences within educational settings, offering rich insights, contextually rich data, and a deeper comprehension of social, behavioral, and cultural aspects influencing learning and teaching processes.

Collecting qualitative data through personal interviews gives voice to teachers who implement co-teaching practices and the principals who support them. This method was chosen for the purpose of developing a comprehensive view of needed support. This method was chosen with principals at the school level as the intended audience to improve support practices in schools implementing co-teaching. The intent of this study was to create a guide that helps principals best support classroom teachers in creating and maintaining inclusive classrooms.

Qualitative research gives us an in depth look at individual perspectives. The perspective of teachers can shape their practice. To analyze and improve instructional practices, teacher perspective can be a powerful tool. There is also value in the notable differences of individual perspective. Priority was made to interview teachers under the tutelage of many different principals to see how the perspective of one’s administration can affect feelings and practices.
around co-teaching and inclusion. Principals in some of these pairings were interviewed as well. By listening to the voices of teachers on this topic, we can develop a greater understanding of how the support of principals affects how teachers experience inclusion.

Administrator voices were also gathered to measure what limitations may exist in their support. Semi-structured interviews took place with many open-ended questions to open conversation and expand insight given from teachers about their co-teaching experiences.

Rahman (2020) also noted that qualitative research methods allow for coexisting realities to be considered. This is particularly relevant in the current study due to the importance of both the teachers’ and principals’ perspectives. Qualitative research shows how the perspectives of individuals may affect practice.

Each group was asked a uniform list of questions (Appendix A). Beyond basic interview questions, interviews attempted to draw out personal narratives from participants. The practice of drawing stories from participants in the interview process for the purpose of eliciting greater reflection is often referred to as narrative inquiry. According to Constantino (2001), narrative inquiry can be an effective tool, particularly when interviewing teachers. One reason given by Constantino was that teachers are beings that do not separate their teacher identity from their social self and that humans are social beings that communicate best through storytelling. Listening to teachers recount stories from their experience allowed for reflection and data collection to help improve their processes.

This study hopes to facilitate positive changes in inclusive classrooms. Bell (2002) said that if we hope to inspire change, narrative inquiry can be effective if we recognize the patterns in teachers’ stories to identify their underlying and implied messages. Bell described that through narrative inquiry, researchers can learn elements of the experience both stated and implied that
gives a greater description of their experience. This is particularly helpful in this study because teachers at times resist directly answering questions that paint their leadership as unsupportive but may find it more comfortable to tell stories that identify times when they felt unsupported. The cross interviewing of principals provided further depth of perspective.

It was said by Hickson (2016) that narrative inquiry allows researchers to hear the stories and allows researchers to hear the participants’ story within our observed context as well as their own stated context. This was especially helpful in the context of this study leaning heavily on teacher voice in regards to teacher working conditions. This study aims to understand the perspectives of teachers interviewed through critical reflection and examining the working conditions and support structures in which their stories took place.

Administrators were selected as participants for this qualitative research study due to their pivotal role in shaping and implementing policies and practices within educational institutions. As key decision-makers, administrators possess unique insights into the challenges and opportunities surrounding co-teaching initiatives, making them valuable sources of information for understanding the complexities of collaborative teaching environments. Additionally, administrators often have a broader perspective on the organizational dynamics and factors that influence the success of co-teaching programs, offering valuable context for interpreting the research findings. By including administrators in this study, I aim to capture diverse perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the facilitators and barriers to effective co-teaching implementation from a leadership standpoint. This insight is crucial for informing strategic planning, professional development initiatives, and resource allocation aimed at supporting and enhancing co-teaching practices in schools.
In addition to conducting narrative inquiry interviews, a corresponding survey was administered to 80 teachers within the same district as the interviewees. One benefit of incorporating a survey into this research was its capacity to capture the perspectives of a substantial number of participants. Utilizing a survey alongside qualitative interviews offers the advantage of gathering information in a relatively non-intrusive manner while also being feasible to administer (Fink, 2013). This survey provided convenient access to a large pool of teachers, albeit it presented closed-ended versions of similar questions as those in the interviews. The purpose was to compare and contrast the perspectives of the interviewed teachers with those of the entire teacher cohort, drawing comparison between individual perspectives and the broader group.

**Setting and Population**

Participants of this study were both special and general education teachers working in a large urban district in the Midwest along with some of the principals that support them. Participants were all employees of the same large, decentralized school district. Participants ranged in grade level taught from kindergarten through high school. The only parameter around participant selection for both the interviews and survey was that they are currently participating or have recently participated in the act of co-teaching as a co-teacher or an administrator tasked with supporting co-teaching.

Each teacher participant’s administrator was notified and also given the opportunity to participate in an interview. Principals gave their perspective to matching questions around the support being received by the teacher’s participating in co-teaching within their buildings. Principals were informed that the final product was designed to support principal practice in the
future. Interviews were conducted only on a voluntary basis. All principals were encouraged to contribute their viewpoints, aiming to enhance their understanding of the constraints they face in providing support.

The organization chosen for my study is a good fit due to the 15 individualized campuses with diverse student and teacher demographics that provided 15 different perspectives. Many districts of this size have students of a homogenous population living in one location. The organization in this study is unique and valuable because the students being serviced do not live in one specific neighborhood but rather throughout a large metropolitan area varying in many demographic factors providing a pool of interview candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Gummesson (2000) found that when gaining access to an organization it is beneficial to provide the organization with information on what you will be gathering research on and how they may be portrayed to remove hurdles to access in that organization. I currently serve in an administrative role in the special education department that does not directly supervise any of the participants. Approval of this project was granted through the charter school organization. It was granted on a few conditions. One condition was that the research findings would be shared with the organization. The charter organization stated that they only grant access to their data when the result could potentially benefit the organization, and it was deemed that access to the findings of this study could be beneficial to the organization.

How participants were chosen was given careful consideration. The focus of this research was the perspective of teacher practitioners, both general and special education teachers, currently participating in co-teaching in their classrooms and some of the principals that support them. The sample of teachers was collected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling, according to Buchanan et al. (1988) is often an excellent method of choosing
participants when researching within an organization. According to Buchanan et al., convenience sampling is a method that ensures you encounter the fewest gatekeepers and quickly gather research based on participant perspective with limited resources. Carr (1994) said that qualitative research can provide more generalized findings when it involves the initial population and a subpopulation as well.

Further, as Subedi (2021) concluded, a small to medium sized sample allows for richer, more in depth and detailed conversations. Each of these interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes. No time constraints were placed on interviews. A small amount of snowball sampling took place because interviews provided unique perspectives and additional subjects were sought; colleagues of the original convenience sample were pursued. The ideal goal was 10 or more robust interviews that provide context of each participant’s unique co-teaching environment and support structure. The final result was 10 teacher interviews and 5 principal interviews. Valuable conversations led to additional conversations, and a variety of perspectives were collected. These conversations all took place over the summer months and away from the classroom setting.

**Researcher Role**

As a researcher, I have some characteristics in common with the study participants. As a former teacher, I have been a practitioner of co-teaching. I have served as a practitioner of co-teaching in two different districts, one being the district in which I conducted my research. I have served as both the general and special education teacher member of co-teaching teams. In the past, as a building level administrator I have been active in the support structure for co-teaching. As a current special education administrator, I currently support schools and school leaders as they support co-teaching. My current and past roles in education provide me with knowledge and
context to analyze the interviews and determine how to best support identified areas of need.

In my current position as Director of Student Services at an urban Midwestern charter school network, I serve as an administrator employed by the network in a capacity designed to provide support to 15 campuses in supporting their special education departments and how to best service students with diverse learning needs. Although I work in a central office capacity, the 15 charter schools within my network are considered to be decentralized. This means that the participants that I interviewed are not under my direct supervision. I do not evaluate or participate in discipline with these employees. It was stressed to participants that no part of their responses will be shared with their employer with identifying information. It was also stressed that the purpose of this work is to improve co-teaching for students and staff and that their responses will help drive a more efficient model of co-teaching in the future.

I must acknowledge for the purpose of validity and reliability that the feeling of the participants may be that I supervise their work, as I supervise their departments. This was clarified and addressed with interview subjects and a period of question and answer was allowed prior to the interview. The significance of my role was taken into consideration when analyzing interviews and identifying trends in data collection. According to Bogdan and Bilken (2007), a researcher can never fully erase the fact that their presence alters the natural setting. Bogdan and Bilken go on to suggest that the more you treat people like research subjects the more they will act as such, thus altering the data. In an attempt to have the most authentic possible conversations with interviewees, attempts were made to keep the conversation casual and recruit subjects where established relationships exist.

Dwyer and Buckle (2009) emphasized the significant advantage of insider status in qualitative research, noting that participants perceive value in having someone who understands
their perspective. They highlighted how participants quickly established trust upon realizing that the researcher shared similar experiences. In my case, having previously worked as a teacher and, more specifically, as a co-teacher within the same district where this study was conducted, enhanced the rapport between myself and the interviewees. They frequently expressed familiarity, saying things like, “You understand how it is,” indicating a greater ease in conversing with me about their teaching environments and challenges.

A second area of positionality to note relates to resource allocation. In my current role I am primarily responsible for the resource allocation at each campus. This process is purely mathematical and relies on student minutes and a formula designed with student service minutes divided by teacher contractual minutes in the work day. However, it is commonly known that I am the administrator responsible for assigning the number of special education teachers each school will receive each school year. It was paramount that I established a role as an interviewer worthy of trust in this research.

Following the guidelines outlined by Bloomberg (2023) for establishing credibility as a trustworthy qualitative researcher, I adhered to the Overview of Trustworthiness Criteria. This framework emphasizes the importance of credibility, which entails establishing oneself as credible within the research setting. Given my decade-long involvement in supporting teachers and students within this specific context, I inherently possess insider knowledge that contributes to credibility. Bloomberg also advocates for demonstrating confirmability and dependability, one way of achieving this being through member checking to ensure objectivity in the research process. Member checking was conducted subsequent to the narrative inquiry interviews in this study. Consistent with these ideas on member checking, each interviewee was provided the transcript of their interview to review and reach out if they would like to have further
conversation. Zero participants asked for further conversation after review of the transcript. The final aspect of trustworthiness highlighted by Bloomberg is transferability and external validity. This involves purposeful sampling to gather comprehensive insights within the research setting. To fulfill this criterion, careful consideration was given to selecting participants from fifteen campuses representing diverse demographics, including both special and general educators across various grade levels and subjects.

Data Analysis

Participation in interviews was conducted both in person and online, in accordance with subject convenience and preference. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Interview transcriptions were coded and analyzed to identify teacher perception of co-teaching, teacher identified necessary supports for co-teaching, and teacher analysis of efficiency of administrator support in the co-teaching process. Bodgan and Bilken (2007) describe grounded theory as a method that gathers and analyzes data in tandem. Using the principle of grounded theory, data was collected through interviews, then an analysis of that data identified patterns, and used these patterns to develop themes. A list of coding categories was developed through open coding while analyzing the data and further narrowed as trends were identified.

The process of data analysis involved open and axial coding, incorporating the constant comparative method to uncover relationships within the collected data. Open coding, a method that entails creating labels and categories within the data, was utilized for studying, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing the information. This approach facilitated the recognition of patterns that existed in distinct categories. By allowing the data to unfold organically in accordance with the revealed concepts, this methodology empowered the researcher to surpass
potential preconceived notions. Following a thorough analysis of the data and the emerging themes, a comprehensive summary of the findings was crafted.

In the second stage of coding, according to Cooper et al. (2017) an axial coding method should be applied to connect relationships of topics and find subcategories within the research. I employed this method in the second stage of analysis and identified subcategories and related codes and data. Following these stages, I engaged in the final stage of the grounded theory or research and developed themes that drove analysis and shaped the third paper of my research. These categories were analyzed later in this paper.

Validity and reliability were considered in the qualitative research process. One method that was employed to ensure validity in the qualitative research process was that of member checking. Member checking is returning to participants and presenting them with the researcher’s summation of interviews to ensure they find the results to be an accurate assessment. Cho and Trent (2006) stated that member checking not only checked how accurately a researcher’s truth matched that of the people they are interviewing, but it was also a socially responsible measure that makes sure one is not speaking for a group but allows members of the group to participate in the narrative that portrays them. Consistent with these principles of member checking, each person who was interviewed was provided a transcript of their interview with the message of please review and communicate if you would like to revisit any interview questions. No participants asked to discuss any of the topics after receiving this transcript.

Moen (2006) determined that by methods that check with participants that their thoughts were accurately portrayed, researchers can ensure that they are collecting facts that are not reflective of their own opinions or biases. Moen went on to also describe teachers as social creatures that have perspectives made up of a variety of past experiences. Moen described that
the relationship between participant and researcher can be an important note in the research process. They found that researchers can receive more valid information when their participants find the interaction to be free of judgement. This member checking process aligns with the ideal of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) that a mutual truth should be established to ensure validity in narrative inquiry.

To ensure validity, Moen (2006) suggested performing this type of research away from the subject’s school and classroom. Moen noted the useful tool available today for video interviews that can occur on neutral time and at a neutral place. This allows the researcher to look at the narrative of the participant through an objective lens, and allows greater insight. Each interview occurred outside of the subject’s classroom and 8 out of ten times away from their school entirely to ensure greater validity.

Triangulation of data is using multiple methods to ensure validity through comparing results through multiple sources. Patton (1999) identifies a type of triangulation called method triangulation, which uses multiple methods to collect data to ensure validity. Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006) believed method triangulation to be important when you are measuring both objective and subjective activities. This applies to my study due to the objective and subjective nature of potential responses. For example, administrator support may be measured as common planning time (objective) and school culture (subjective). Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006) used a method of surveying participants in which they had already interviewed and obtained slightly different data results, finding the participants would verbally state positive feelings while survey reporting neutral feelings.

Triangulating data in a qualitative research project, particularly when incorporating surveys, involves the intentional use of multiple data sources or methods to enhance the overall
validity and reliability of the findings. In the context of a survey-based qualitative research project, triangulation can be achieved by complementing survey responses with additional sources such as interviews, observations, or document analysis. This multifaceted approach helps mitigate potential biases and strengthens the credibility of the research outcomes.

For instance, interviews can offer in-depth insights and clarification on survey responses, providing a richer context to participants’ perspectives. Observations can validate self-reported data, offering an additional layer of authenticity. Document analysis may contribute historical or contextual information that complements survey findings. By triangulating data through surveys and other qualitative methods, researchers strengthen the validity of their interpretations, reduce the risk of relying on a single data source, and provide a more robust foundation for drawing meaningful conclusions. This comprehensive approach aligns with the principles of methodological rigor in qualitative research, ensuring a more thorough and reliable exploration of the research questions at hand.

For the purpose of data triangulation and tapping an additional source, 80 teachers within this network of 15 schools were provided with a 10-question anonymous survey. The topics of these questions on the survey closely mirrored the topics of the interview questions but in more general terms. Answers to this survey were gathered using questions with Likert scale response options. Questions had 5 answer options gauging agreement with statements regarding support from administration ranging from disagree to strongly agree. Cicchetti et al. (1985) stated that answer options beyond 7 did not increase validity further. While the survey facilitated easy engagement with a broad spectrum of teachers, it posed closed-ended iterations of questions akin to those explored in the interviews. The aim was to juxtapose the viewpoints of the interviewed teachers with those of the entire teacher cohort, gathering perspectives and the collective stance.
Subsequently, the researcher employed axial coding to analyze interview data, aiming to forge novel connections among the identified categories. The categories, which surfaced as a result of the combined processes of open and axial coding, encompassed a multifaceted spectrum related to the dynamics of co-teaching. These overarching categories were outlined, exploring the core elements that bolster the effectiveness of collaborative teaching initiatives by examining how co-teaching dynamics intersect with the broader organizational and cultural context within schools. This data collection enabled a detailed comprehension of the multifaceted aspects involved in co-teaching relationships, establishing a robust framework for analyzing and interpreting the research results comprehensively.

Findings

This section delves into the comprehensive analysis of findings derived from both interviews and survey responses concerning the practice of co-teaching within the educational landscape. The examination of qualitative insights garnered from interviews and data extracted from surveys provides a multifaceted understanding of the intricacies surrounding co-teaching implementation, its perceived efficacy, and the support needed to be successful in this collaborative endeavor. By synthesizing these two methodological approaches, this section aims to enrich our comprehension of dynamics within educational settings to design better support of co-teaching. In this section I will present the findings of the survey and the interviews.

Survey Results

In this comprehensive study on co-teaching practices, a group of teachers participated in a survey designed to gather insights into various aspects of their co-teaching experiences in order
to triangulate the data of this qualitative study. The 43 surveyed teachers collectively reported an average of 3 years of experience in co-teaching, providing a foundation of practical knowledge. The survey results indicated that these educators perceived their administrative support for co-teaching to be moderate, with an average score of 3.2 on a 5-point Likert scale with 0 being the least confident and 5 being maximum confidence.

Teachers expressed a somewhat moderate level of confidence in their own ability to effectively co-teach, assigning an average score of 2.7 out of 5. This finding suggests that there may be room for targeted professional development or support to enhance educators’ confidence in collaborative teaching practices. In terms of pre-service preparation for co-teaching, the surveyed teachers collectively rated their preparedness at 2.4 out of 5, indicating a potential area for improvement in the training provided during their educational preparation.

The surveyed teachers provided a high average score, suggesting a positive perception of the influence of co-teaching on student outcomes. This sentiment resonated with the more detailed insights gained from the smaller group of teachers interviewed in depth. The statement of the high average score of the teachers highlights a significant convergence between the broader survey findings and the in-depth interviews conducted with a select group of teachers. The focus of the analysis centers on enhancing co-teaching support. Notably, the surveyed teachers collectively expressed a favorable viewpoint, as evidenced by the high average score of 4.1 out of 5 assigned to the influence of co-teaching on student outcomes. This result suggests a prevalent positive perception among the surveyed educators regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching in enhancing student learning experiences.

Regarding the current level of input on co-teaching practices at their schools, the surveyed teachers collectively reported a score of 2.7 out of 5, indicating a perceived room for
increased collaboration or involvement in shaping co-teaching strategies. Additionally, the teachers assessed the impact of their principals on their ability to effectively co-teach, giving an average score of 3.4 out of 5. This implies a moderate influence of administrative support on the teachers’ experiences with co-teaching. The convergence of survey findings with the in-depth interviews suggests a robust representation of teachers’ perspectives on co-teaching practices, providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities within this collaborative teaching model. Table 2 summarizes the survey results.

Table 2.1
Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception</th>
<th>Score*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manageability of caseload</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative support of co-teaching</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teaching implementation confidence</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepared for co-teaching by pre-service</td>
<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student impact from co-teaching</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher level of input into co-teaching</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effect of leadership on students</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of experience co-teaching</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on a 5-point Likert scale

Interview Results

Corresponding versions of each interview question were asked to five special education teachers, five general education teachers, and five principals respectfully. In general, each of these groups displayed overall positive opinions of the co-teaching process. I did not encounter a
participant that was staunchly opposed to the practice, however participants had varying levels of confidence in the process and the support in their current setting.

Through a sequence of narrative inquiry-based interviews and employing data analysis grounded in grounded theory and axial coding, three principal themes surfaced from the dataset. The overarching themes delineated from the responses are resources, autonomy, and efficacy. The initial theme, labeled resources, emanated from the codes transformative practices and collaboration, delving into the perceived outcomes of co-teaching settings. The second theme, denoted as autonomy, stemmed from the codes logistical considerations and scheduling, emphasizing the impact of clear or ambiguous organizational factors on fostering satisfaction and success in co-teaching. The third theme, named efficacy characteristics, emerged from the codes ongoing support and capturing prevalent information types and emotional factors that influence confidence in co-teaching. This categorization facilitated a more granular understanding of the multifaceted dimensions inherent in co-teaching relationships, providing a comprehensive framework for the analysis and interpretation of the research findings. These themes will be explored and discussed in the pages below.

The participants of the interviews were fifteen individuals in total, with five of each category of special educators, general educators, and principals. They spanned ten of the fifteen schools within the network of schools where this research took place. Their demographics are shown in Table 2.2.
Table 2.2

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Type</th>
<th>School #</th>
<th>Years in Co-Teaching</th>
<th>Level Taught</th>
<th>School Population*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General Ed.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Ed.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Exact figures rounded to avoid identifying information.

Resources

The theme of resources in this dissertation emerges from an exploration of the codes Transformative Practices and Collaboration within the context of co-teaching settings. This section delves into the perceived outcomes of co-teaching settings, focusing specifically on the resources—both tangible and intangible—that contribute to the effectiveness and success of collaborative teaching endeavors. By examining the multifaceted dimensions of resources within co-teaching environments, this section aims to shed light on the intricate dynamics that shape the experiences and outcomes of educators and students alike.
Foundations of Successful Co-Teaching Relationships

The foundations of successful co-teaching relationships are rooted in collaborative dynamics, mutual respect, and effective communication. Co-teachers must establish a shared vision and goals for instruction, ensuring alignment with the needs of all students. The co-teachers in these interviews that reported being happy with their current co-teaching partnerships cited feelings of mutual respect and having shared trust between partners. Trust between co-teachers is paramount, as it fosters an environment where they can openly exchange ideas, provide constructive feedback, and address challenges together.

Additionally, co-teachers can leverage each other’s strengths and expertise, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives in enriching the learning experience. Many teachers interviewed described a great point of frustration in their relationships as a blurred line of shared responsibilities. Clear roles and responsibilities should be delineated to avoid confusion and promote accountability. Finally, ongoing reflection and refinement of co-teaching practices based on feedback and evidence of student learning are essential for continuous improvement and success. Most of the teachers interviewed, whether reporting harmonious or contentious co-teaching relationships, expressed a desire for opportunity for communication and reflection with their partners and with their principals. For example, one general educator said, “I’d love to have a scheduled time to work things. It’d be nice to have an admin there, an agenda. We’d make time to make it great.” By nurturing these foundational elements, co-teachers can cultivate a supportive and collaborative partnership that maximizes the potential for student achievement and inclusive learning environments.
**Self-Analysis of Co-Teaching**

All participants were asked to describe co-teaching in their current setting. General and special educators described how their current settings looked, describing classrooms with two teachers and varying models of co-teaching taking place. Principals more broadly described how co-teaching created inclusive schools and spaces, providing less specific and detailed visions of co-teaching. General educators responded in a manner that was positively related to the concept of co-teaching. Special educators uniformly described it positively but with its challenges. Several special educators expressed a feeling of appreciation for co-teaching and the growth in their practices it provided. “It was a challenge at first, not what I was expecting. But after a good day of co-teaching, I feel like I’ve reached a lot of kids. I feel good.” one special educator noted.

In their 2007 research, Scruggs and colleagues also discovered that most teachers hold favorable beliefs regarding the efficacy of co-teaching. This research aligned with that principle, with teachers displaying favorable feelings towards co-teaching generally while pointing out ways it could be better supported and implemented. The interview findings were consistent with those obtained through teacher surveys. Participants in the survey conveyed their sentiments regarding co-teaching, yielding an average rating of 2.7 on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 5 indicating the most favorable disposition. The surveyed and interviewed teachers gave co-teaching a mostly positive endorsement in spite of the challenges they noted they are experiencing.

Principals described environments where co-teaching has emerged as a positive and transformative initiative that has enriched the educational experience in their schools. Principals described teams with a commitment to collaboration and inclusivity, fostering an environment
where students of all abilities can thrive academically and socially. Principals acknowledge educators, whether in general or special education roles, come together to share their expertise and experiences, resulting in valuable approaches to teaching. This collective effort has been described to not only enhance the quality of instruction but has also created a more collaborative learning community where students learn from one another’s strengths and differences.

Teachers, both special education and general education, described co-teaching from a first-person point of view. They described co-teaching partnerships where they are the main character in the story. Some described themselves throughout their career in co-teaching with quotes like this one from a middle school special educator named Eric,

“I used to be in a high school, co-teaching was really, really hard there. I had 4 or 5 teachers a day to try and plan and teach with. I am now with only one co-teacher, several times a day. That is working out much better. It’s not perfect, but it is way better now.

Principals described their current co-teaching environment in ways that framed the principal as an outside observer. Principals did not describe their co-teaching environment from a first-person perspective, describing their role in the process or their history with co-teaching. They described how it looked for other employees of their schools. One Principal said, “Yeah, they are doing a great job. I’m really impressed by how well they are doing this year together.”

According to Ricci et al. (2019), there are several widely acknowledged co-teaching methods and when new teachers are paired with an experienced supervising teacher, they can advance through these models as their skills and comfort level increase. Principals in the study by Ricci et al., when discussing their preferred model of co-teaching in their schools, often emphasize the importance of flexibility and adaptability to meet the unique needs of both students and educators. No principals interviewed mentioned this approach of using co-teaching to pair teachers according to experience as a factor in their co-teaching planning. While there are
various co-teaching models, many principals in my study leaned towards the team-teaching approach, where both the general and special education teachers share equal responsibility for planning, instruction, and assessment. They appreciate how this model fosters a strong sense of partnership and collaboration, as it encourages teachers to jointly design lessons, utilize their respective expertise, and address diverse learning styles effectively.

Principals in my study recognized the value of the station teaching or parallel teaching models, particularly in larger classrooms or when differentiating instruction for various groups of students as well. These models allow for more targeted instruction and smaller group settings, promoting individualized support. Principals may advocate for a combination of co-teaching models, depending on the subject matter, student needs, and available resources. In summary, principals spoke of co-teaching models more than their teacher counterparts with a few teachers discussing their preference of models, but less than the majority.

Preparation for Co-Teaching

Ricci et al. (2019) discovered that successful co-teaching represents a significant developmental milestone for novice educators. Teachers were asked to describe how their pre-service teacher preparation equipped them for co-teaching. The experiences of general educators seemed to vary greatly with many reporting no preparation related to co-teaching and others reporting robust and valuable preparations. This pre-service training played a significant role on the outlook for co-teaching experiences. Those that felt equipped with a solid foundation in co-teaching strategies, also described themselves as confident in collaborating with special education teachers.
General education teachers that described their co-teaching preservice preparation as adequate or above average also mention differentiated instruction, diverse learning needs, and the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment throughout their interviews. These general educators felt that this knowledge has helped them adapt their teaching methods to accommodate all students effectively. Moreover, those with adequate or above average preservice training emphasized teamwork and communication, skills that are essential in co-teaching partnerships. Examining these statements reveals a correlation between departing from student teaching with a sense of readiness and transitioning into co-teaching with a feeling of competence and confidence.

The special education teachers interviewed all expressed limited preparation for co-teaching in their pre-service teacher preparation. This group of special education teachers remarked on the challenging journey of co-teaching without the benefit of pre-service preparation. While their training undoubtedly provided them with a solid foundation in special education and pedagogy as many noted, they have had to navigate the intricacies of co-teaching through on-the-job learning. This situation has required them to adapt their existing skills and knowledge to the collaborative context, often relying on their innate dedication to their students and communication skills. Upon scrutiny, the data reveals a discernible pattern wherein general education teachers perceive having received more comprehensive pre-service training in the practice of co-teaching. Consequently, they articulate a higher level of confidence in their current ability to engage in co-teaching practices. In contrast, a substantial number of special educators interviewed conveyed a perceived deficiency in preservice preparation specifically tailored for co-teaching. Consequently, this cohort reported a diminished level of comfort when collaborating as co-teachers with their counterparts in the educational setting.
Teachers both general and special education noted that exposure to the practice of co-teaching or lack thereof influenced their current ability to co-teach. Teachers with some or an abundance of exposure to co-teaching in their teacher prep attributed that exposure to enhancing their co-teaching practices. In their study, Anderson and Gumus (2006) developed a course designed to equip a cohort of pre-service teachers with the skills to effectively manage inclusive classrooms. That extra exposure to co-teaching in the pre teaching preparation process proved to create new to service teachers that were more confident in co-teaching and the same is reported through this study. These findings are consistent with Ricci et al. (2019) that when teachers in teacher preparation or are new to service are paired with an experienced co-teacher, they are better prepared to use the various models and methods that provide most effective delivery of co-teaching. Additionally, this is consistent with the findings of Cravens and Hunter (2021) that determined that students benefited from teachers who received preparation in collaborative teaching and lesson planning.

Principals were asked to reflect on how their administration preparation programs have equipped them to effectively lead co-teaching initiatives in their schools. These programs, designed to provide aspiring principals with a comprehensive understanding of educational leadership, typically include coursework and training related to inclusive practices, collaboration, and curriculum development. As a result, principals reported that they typically felt well-prepared to champion co-teaching because they have a strong foundation in the principles of effective instruction and teamwork. Principals spoke about programs that prepared them to be efficient and methodical leaders in a general sense, but did not describe any preparation for co-teaching specifically.
Through their preparation programs, principals can gain the skills to identify the strengths and needs of their teaching staff. According to the principals interviewed, administration preparation programs emphasized the importance of communication, data-driven decision-making, and creating a positive school culture, all of which are essential for successful co-teaching. The findings from the teachers who were interviewed closely matched those from the teachers who participated in the survey. Particularly, the question in the survey regarding how prepared teachers felt after completing their preparation programs yielded the lowest rating, with an average score of 2.4 out of 5. Notably, this was the sole category where teachers expressed confidence levels below 50%.

Upon analyzing these teacher responses that delved into the topic of preparation for co-teaching, a discernible theme surfaced, highlighting the varying levels of preparedness reported by educators stemming from their teacher preparation programs. Teachers provided candid insights into their experiences, revealing discrepancies in the adequacy of training and support received during their preparation programs for engaging in co-teaching partnerships. Some educators expressed a high degree of preparedness, citing comprehensive training that equipped them with the necessary skills and strategies. Conversely, others conveyed a sense of inadequacy, indicating gaps in their preparation programs that left them grappling with the intricacies of collaborative teaching. This analysis unveils a spectrum of preparedness among educators, emphasizing the need for more consistent and robust training within teacher preparation programs to ensure uniform proficiency in navigating the challenges of co-teaching.
Autonomy

This section delves into one theme, labeled autonomy, which emerges from an in-depth analysis of qualitative data. The theme of autonomy finds its roots in the exploration of two distinct codes: logistical considerations and scheduling. These codes serve as lenses through which the impact of organizational factors on the satisfaction and success of co-teaching endeavors is examined, shedding light on the nuanced interplay between clarity, autonomy, and pedagogical effectiveness within collaborative teaching settings. Through an exploration of these codes and their associated themes, this section seeks to provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of co-teaching dynamics and the critical role organizational factors play in shaping its outcomes.

School Culture and Organization

School culture and organization play crucial roles in facilitating effective co-teaching practices. A positive school culture that values collaboration, diversity, and inclusivity provides a supportive environment for co-teachers to thrive. Administrators can play a key role in fostering this culture by promoting a shared vision of inclusive education and providing resources and professional development opportunities to support co-teaching initiatives. Teachers interviewed described principals as the drivers of a school culture of inclusion. Teachers spoke of times when they worked in schools that did not have a culture of valuing inclusive practices and directly attributed that lack in inclusive school culture to the presence of a school leader that did not promote inclusion as a priority of the school culture.
Additionally, the organizational structure of the school can either facilitate or hinder co-teaching implementation. Clear communication channels, flexible scheduling, and adequate planning time are essential components of an organizational framework that supports co-teaching. Teachers interviewed that conveyed the lowest amount of confidence in their principals ability to lead co-teaching in their schools, also cited a high amount of workplace frustrations in scheduling, communication, and inadequate planning time. For example, one teacher who reported low confidence in their principal also reported the following, “I would say that scheduling is a hurdle, often. We don’t usually have enough time to plan together. And the schedules change often. Too often.” Furthermore, alignment of school policies and practices with the principles of co-teaching can help ensure consistency and coherence in implementation across classrooms and grade levels.

Teachers that expressed that they felt that co-teaching was treated similar to a scheduling obligation that could be altered regularly, rather than a shift to a culture of inclusion, described higher rates of frustration. Teachers with long standing and consistent co-teaching partnerships due to a school culture priority of the principal, reported higher rates of satisfaction. By cultivating a school culture that prioritizes collaboration and providing organizational support for co-teaching, schools can create an environment where co-teachers can effectively collaborate, innovate, and ultimately enhance student learning outcomes.

Self-Described Successes

When principals were asked to describe a time when they felt most successful supporting co-teaching, their responses varied, reflecting the multifaceted nature of co-teaching support. One administrator said, “I’ve seen kids that had been shy and quiet, in a group setting thriving
with better academic achievement than ever and it just affirms what we already know that this is how we best serve students.” Some principals recounted times when they advocated for co-teaching as a whole-school approach, fostering a culture of inclusivity and collaboration. While these depictions of success in co-teaching support differed, they all underscored the importance of tailored, multifaceted support systems where educators can adapt to the unique needs and contexts of each school and its co-teaching pairs.

Some principals cited instances where they had successfully facilitated professional development sessions that ignited a spark of enthusiasm for co-teaching among their educators. Others pointed to the development of resource libraries and collaborative planning tools that empowered co-teaching pairs to excel. These varying depictions of success underscore the multi-layered nature of co-teaching support, highlighting that what constitutes success can vary widely depending on the specific goals, needs, and contexts of each school and its co-teaching teams. Nonetheless, they all expressed a deep commitment to fostering effective co-teaching practices and creating inclusive learning environments for their students.

General educators and special educators alike described times when they felt successful in co-teaching. The general educators felt a sense of success in their co-teaching partnership when they witnessed a transformative impact on their students’ learning experiences. General educators described collaborative efforts that allowed them to tailor instruction to meet the diverse needs of their classroom, ensuring that every student had access to quality education. General educators saw improved engagement, better comprehension of concepts, and a more inclusive classroom community where students supported one another. This success was not just measured in academic achievements but also in the growth of students’ confidence and their ability to work effectively in diverse settings.
The general educators felt they were making a difference in their students’ learning, and this sense of accomplishment reinforced their commitment to the co-teaching approach. General educators described feeling a greater ability to plan rich lessons and more freedom in implementation. Finding it often difficult to plan lessons that reached all students when teaching alone, general educators were grateful to have not just a co-teaching partner but a co-planning partner as well. Special educators felt a profound sense of success during their co-teaching experiences when they witnessed the tangible, positive outcomes in their students’ lives. Success manifested in the form of increased student engagement, improved academic performance, and enhanced social and emotional development. It was the moments when a struggling student grasped a challenging concept with their support, or when a previously isolated child found a sense of belonging within the classroom community that filled them with a deep sense of accomplishment. These victories reaffirmed their belief in the power of collaboration and inclusion, driving their passion to continue working together to create nurturing and inclusive learning environments where every student could thrive. This is mentioned to catalogue the circumstances around teacher successes to shape what administrative supports attributed to them.

Special educators attributed these victories in most simple terms to having an extra set of hands in the classroom. Special educators celebrated not teaching in isolation. Special educators described students that exhibited more confidence being educated in inclusive general education settings. Special educators described classrooms where they could assist with classroom management and the general educator could focus on large group instruction. They also described rooms that had two small classrooms within. Most of all, all special educators interviewed described more engaging learning. They described increased project-based learning and opportunities for more hands-on learning experiences. Each educator interviewed did believe
that co-teaching benefited all learners by providing more valuable learning experiences and environments.

The analysis of teacher interviews brought to the forefront a compelling narrative where educators articulated the profound and positive transformative impact of implementing co-teaching strategies within their classrooms. Teachers conveyed experiences of witnessing tangible improvements in student engagement, learning outcomes, and overall classroom dynamics as a direct result of collaborative teaching efforts. The interviews unveiled a shared sentiment among educators, indicating that co-teaching not only enhanced instructional delivery but also fostered a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. Teachers expressed a sense of empowerment and professional growth, citing the collaborative nature of co-teaching as a catalyst for transformative changes in their instructional approaches. This collective narrative underscores the potential of co-teaching to go beyond conventional teaching paradigms, emerging as a dynamic and impactful method that contributes to positive transformations in the educational landscape.

The general education teachers enthusiastically described their positive co-teaching relationship as a source of inspiration and growth. “When I am paired with a co-teacher that I am in sync with, it makes it better, makes me feel better at it.” said one general educator. They emphasized the professional relationships between themselves and co-teacher. The general education teachers highlighted the successes they experienced in co-teaching when their complementary teaching styles and shared commitment to student success made the classroom environment more engaging. After the transition period of a new co-teaching pairing, general educators described that their collaboration fostered a supportive atmosphere where they could seamlessly exchange ideas, implement innovative strategies, and adapt to the diverse needs of
their students. This harmonious partnership was reported to be contingent on the teamwork of both partners, reflecting their shared belief in the transformative impact of a collaborative co-teaching dynamic.

The entirety of the special education teachers also enthusiastically described their co-teaching relationship as a source of positive impact. Their collaboration not only enriched their teaching methods but also fostered a supportive atmosphere where they could seamlessly exchange ideas, implement innovative strategies, and adapt to the diverse needs of their students. This harmonious partnership was a testament to the power of teamwork in education, reflecting their shared belief in the transformative impact of a dynamic co-teaching dynamic.

Special education teachers in co-teaching partnerships expressed a positive outlook on the collaborative approach, despite acknowledging the scheduling challenges they encounter. They find great value in working alongside their general education counterparts, appreciating the opportunities it brings for enhancing student learning and fostering a more inclusive classroom environment. However, they did acknowledge that constant schedule changes can be a source of frustration, as it can disrupt the rhythm of their collaborative efforts. Despite these scheduling hurdles, their enthusiasm for the benefits of co-teaching remains strong, demonstrating their unwavering commitment to providing the best education for their students.

One special educator named Mark said,

“It’s a craft. It takes developing. And I’m happy to do it, but some disruption always happens. The Art schedule, the lunch schedule, whatever, changes then my schedule changes and no one acknowledges how disruptive that is. I have to start from scratch. It just gets to be a constant disruption. It makes it harder than it needs to be.

This comment suggests that teachers do not always feel that their administration treats co-teaching with the importance of a prioritized instructional approach but rather an extra that
can be compromised as needed. This holds significance in the context of co-teaching and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as outlined in the IDEA. It emphasizes a collective responsibility for the education of students with disabilities, highlighting the shared role rather than placing sole responsibility on the special education teacher (Hyatt, 2011).

Principals spoke of compelling outcomes of co-teaching initiatives that have shown increased student growth. With two educators in the classroom, principals felt teams are better equipped to address diverse learning styles and individualized needs. This tailored support has translated into improved academic outcomes and heightened self-confidence among the schools described by these principals. In these schools, co-teaching has nurtured a culture of inclusion, where differences are celebrated, and students learn the value of teamwork and empathy. Surveyed educators concurred with this perspective, indicating a rating of 4.1 out of 5 in terms of student impact on the efficacy of co-teaching, with 5 representing the highest level of influence.

Principals reported that the success of co-teaching initiatives can be attributed to the dedication of educators and their commitment to ongoing professional development. Principals described teachers that seek ways to collaboratively support each other in most cases. Principals described themselves and their teams as striving to refine their school’s co-teaching strategies, provide workshops, and share best practices with their teachers. As principals, they reported a positive impact of this collaborative approach and remain committed to providing the necessary support and resources to sustain and expand our co-teaching efforts. It’s a testament to the power of teamwork in education and the potential for creating inclusive, supportive, and academically enriching environments for students.

Principals were able to describe many attributes of co-teaching that were working well in their schools. The principals interviewed uniformly held a positive view of the trend towards
increasingly inclusive schools. They reported inclusivity as a reflection of a more equitable and compassionate education system, where students of all abilities have the opportunity to learn and grow together. Principals proudly reported more inclusive schools fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance among students, promoting diversity and mutual understanding. Principals recognized the potential for inclusive education to improve academic outcomes and social development for all students. While they acknowledged that the transition to more inclusive models may present challenges, they viewed these as opportunities for growth and innovation. Overall, principals were committed to creating inclusive school environments that embraced diversity, individual potential, and prepared students for a more inclusive and accepting society.

Principals recognized the invaluable benefits that students derive from the extra support provided through co-teaching in their schools. Co-teaching was described as “a powerful educational approach that enriches the learning experience for all students” regardless of their individual needs and abilities. Principals stated that co-teaching in their schools ensures that each student receives tailored support, fosters a diverse and inclusive classroom environment, and promotes collaboration among educators. Surveyed educators concurred with the observations made by principals and fellow teachers, asserting a collective perception that principals were attempting to support co-teaching and were at a basic level supportive of co-teaching initiatives. When prompted to assess the effectiveness of administrative support for co-teaching, participants assigned a score of 3.2 out of 5, with 5 representing the highest level of support. Principals stated that through co-teaching, teachers were better equipped to address the varying learning styles, strengths, and challenges of our students. It not only enhanced academic outcomes but also nurtured their social and emotional development. Principals described their teachers as generally
dedicated co-teaching team members in schools that positively impact students’ growth and success.

Principals reported increased academic mastery of concepts as a direct result of the implementation of co-teaching in their schools. They view these improved academic outcomes as a testament to the effectiveness of collaborative teaching methods. One administrator said, “Co-teaching has allowed educators to provide more personalized instruction and support, meaning that students receive the help they need to excel academically.” Principals reported that the positive impact on test scores is a validation of principal efforts but also a reflection of the inclusive and supportive learning environments co-teaching can create. Principals described teams that are committed to fostering this collaborative approach, confident that it will continue to yield higher achievement levels and enhance the overall educational experience for their students.

While principals felt strongly that teachers were the main cog in the co-teaching system, both the surveyed teachers and interviewed teachers felt strongly that principals played an equally important role in student success. Surveyed teachers scored the importance of strong administrative support as an effect on leadership with a score 3.4 out of 5, scoring as one of the highest overall categories. Interviewed teachers that felt highly successful in co-teaching also discussed ways in which their principals made this possible.

The conducted interviews reveal a consensus among all involved parties regarding the positive nature of co-teaching. However, a nuanced exploration illuminated that these parties held diverse perspectives on the ideal form and extent of support associated with co-teaching. While unanimity existed in acknowledging the affirmative impact of co-teaching, the divergence emerged in the nuanced details of how each party envisioned and conceptualized the nature of
support within this collaborative teaching approach. This finding underscores the complexity inherent in co-teaching dynamics, where unanimity on the positivity of the practice coexists with variations in the perceived nuances of support structures.

The Role of Administration

Principals acknowledged that they play a pivotal role in creating co-teaching pairings and schedules within their schools. They described methods in which they carefully consider a variety of factors to ensure that the partnerships are effective and beneficial for both educators and students. This process typically involves examining the strengths of each teacher, their teaching styles, personalities, and the unique needs of the students in each classroom. Principals take into account the compatibility of personalities and communication styles among co-teaching pairs. Additionally, they consider logistical factors such as classroom availability, scheduling constraints, and the availability of support staff or resources to facilitate co-teaching.

Once the co-teaching pairs were established, principals described working on creating schedules that allow for dedicated planning and collaboration time between the partners. This often involves adjusting school timetables to accommodate joint lesson planning sessions, meetings, and professional development opportunities tailored to co-teaching. The goal is to ensure that co-teachers have the time and resources they need to effectively plan and implement inclusive, student-centered lessons, ultimately fostering a positive and productive co-teaching environment within the school. Principals admit this doesn’t always happen, confirming the perception of teachers that co-teaching isn’t of the highest priority.

The sense of accomplishment and the tangible benefits of the co-teaching approach reaffirmed commitment to providing the best possible education for our students with special
needs. Special educators described wishing to have consistently in scheduling along with input into scheduling and partnering as a way to enhance co-teaching in their individual situations. Special educators strongly advocated for a more comprehensive and ongoing support system throughout the school year in relation to co-teaching. While initial training and scheduling coordination were described as essential, the complexities of co-teaching, especially in inclusive settings, demand continuous guidance, mentorship, and resources. A robust support structure was suggested to include regular check-ins, collaborative professional development, and access to specialists who can offer insights into effective strategies for diverse learners. With consistent support, special educators felt they could be more equipped and empowered to provide the best possible educational experience for students with disabilities, ultimately fostering a truly inclusive and nurturing learning environment.

General education teachers consistently described a preference for being supported by administration by being assigned experienced co-teachers rather than those selected as a co-teaching partner more due to schedule logistics than being considered the ideal match for the partnership due to credentials or experience in subject matter. General education teachers generally felt that partnership decisions were primarily based on fitting into the available slot rather than assessing compatibility with the other teacher. While teachers typically understood the necessity of managing schedules efficiently, it did raise concerns about whether teaching styles and philosophies would align effectively in the classroom. Nonetheless, general education teachers embraced the opportunity, believing that with communication and collaboration they could still create a positive learning environment for our students.

When general educators described their preferred administrative support related to co-teaching, consistently providing teachers with the essential resources, such as ample professional
development opportunities and dedicated time for collaborative planning, was described as vital
to the success of our educational system. This group of general educators found that professional
development allows educators to stay current with evolving teaching methodologies and equips
them with the tools to address the diverse needs of their students effectively. These general
educators advocate for allocating sufficient time for collaborative planning. The concept of co-
planning was described as enabling teachers to create cohesive plans. Educators felt that when
administration invests in these resources, they support the growth and development of our
educators but also enhance the quality of education we provide to our students.

Special educators described often finding themselves facing minimal support in co-
teaching partnerships, extending beyond scheduling and logistics. While these logistical aspects
are crucial, they represent only a fraction of what is needed for successful collaboration. Many
special educators desired additional resources, such as specialized training, access to adaptive
materials, and ongoing guidance on how to best meet the unique needs of students with
disabilities. Without these elements, the special educators in co-teaching did not feel supported
to create inclusive and effective learning environments to the best of their ability. Special
educator Paul stated, “It’s not just a change of placement. It’s a different approach and we need
research-based practices and support to implement it effectively.”

Special educators described frequent schedule changes and logistical challenges posed
difficult transitions for special educators. Adjusting to new routines and adapting teaching
strategies accordingly demanded flexibility and patience. However, as time passed, they noted
significant progress in their professional practices and student achievement. As time passed into
the transition, they described feeling successful. While special educators adamantly described
positive impact on students, witnessing their growth and development as a testament to our
collaborative efforts, they noted that the journey consistently presented challenges they hoped administrative support could eradicate. These challenges were consistently described as logistical matters such as pairings and scheduling while expressing desire for more ongoing support and professional development.

With continued analysis of narrative responses, a prominent theme emerged, shedding light on the initial logistical hurdles confronted by educators involved in collaborative teaching initiatives. Teachers openly discussed challenges related to coordinating efforts, planning, and addressing disparities in instructional approaches. Despite these early difficulties, a positive narrative unfolded as teachers reflected on their experiences. Many conveyed a tangible sense of progress in their co-teaching practices, attributing this positive shift to a learning curve, shared experiences, and an increasing familiarity with effective strategies to overcome logistical challenges. The interviews painted a dynamic picture of educators embarking on a journey of growth, showcasing resilience and adaptability in the face of initial obstacles. This analysis underscores the transformative potential inherent in co-teaching experiences, illustrating how educators navigate logistical challenges to cultivate enhanced collaborative teaching methodologies over time.

Challenges in Co-Teaching

General education teachers were asked to describe a time when they felt unsuccessful while co-teaching. When asked to describe a time when they felt unsuccessful while co-teaching, the general education teachers shared experiences that highlighted the inherent complexities of collaborative teaching. They recounted instances where miscommunication between themselves and their co-teacher led to confusion in the classroom and unsuccessful lessons. This breakdown
in communication resulted in a disjointed lesson plan that left some students behind or left teachers feeling ineffective. They expressed frustration over not being able to provide the high-quality education they aspired to deliver in the co-taught classroom. However, these experiences also served as valuable learning tools, pushing them to refine their communication strategies and adapt their teaching methods to better align with their co-teachers’ expertise and students’ needs. Most of these teachers describe themselves today as better co-teachers than the teacher they were in the narratives they recounted.

Two co-teachers, Emily and David, discovered themselves in a challenging situation due to a personality conflict. Emily was proud of her meticulous planning and structured teaching style, while David was more spontaneous and flexible in his approach. This difference in personality traits often led to clashes during collaborative lesson planning sessions. Emily felt that David’s spontaneity disrupted their carefully laid-out plans, while David perceived Emily’s rigidity as inhibiting creativity. Their conflicting personalities sometimes resulted in tension and hindered effective communication, making it difficult to present a united front in the classroom. Despite their differences, both recognized the importance of working together for the benefit of their students and embarked on a journey to find common ground and improve their collaborative partnership.

Special education teachers were also asked to describe a time when they felt least successful in co-taught classrooms. Special education teachers were additionally prompted to recount instances when they experienced a lack of success in co-taught classrooms. This request for reflection on their least successful moments while engaged in co-teaching led these educators to offer diverse and detailed recounts of their experiences. Within these shared accounts, they vividly portrayed the multifaceted challenges encountered within inclusive classrooms, shedding
light on the complexities inherent in their roles and the intricate dynamics present in collaborative teaching environments. Through this insightful exchange, a comprehensive understanding emerged, highlighting the nuanced difficulties and hurdles faced by special education teachers striving for effective inclusion within educational settings. When asked to reflect on a time when they felt unsuccessful while co-teaching, the special education teachers shared varying experiences that illustrated the challenges they face in inclusive classrooms.

One described an instance where they struggled to effectively differentiate instruction for a group of students with diverse needs, despite their best efforts. This situation left them feeling frustrated and disheartened, as they keenly understood the importance of tailoring lessons to individual students but found it challenging to strike the right balance in a co-teaching environment. They spoke to a desire for more resources on how to better differentiate instruction to all students from their principal and administrators. Others described when well-planned lessons just fell flat, a common experience of all teachers. However, this experience also served as a catalyst for growth, motivating them to seek additional support and fine tune other practices from outside sources such as unofficial mentor teachers within their building and outside professional development. One teacher interviewed was a dedicated special educator named Sarah who felt herself facing an unexpected challenge in her co-teaching partnership. She had been assigned to work alongside a general education teacher, Lisa, in a bustling third-grade classroom. Sarah was passionate about inclusive education and believed in the power of collaboration. However, there came a day when they were tasked with teaching a complex math lesson on fractions to their diverse group of students.

As they prepared for the lesson, Sarah and Lisa realized they had differing approaches to teaching the concept. Sarah favored a hands-on, visual approach, while Lisa leaned more towards
abstract explanations. They tried to compromise, but the confusion among the students became evident during the lesson. Sara felt the lesson moved on without the special education students. Sarah couldn’t help but feel a sense of frustration and inadequacy. She had always prided herself on her ability to adapt and cater to the unique needs of her students, but in this co-teaching scenario, it seemed like they weren’t achieving the desired results. She worried about the students with disabilities in the class and whether they were getting the support they needed.

After the school day ended, Sarah and Lisa had an open and honest conversation about their challenges. They acknowledged that, while their intentions were good, they needed a more cohesive approach to co-teaching. They decided to seek guidance from experienced co-teachers to enhance their collaboration. Misunderstandings or miscommunications of the roles of each pair member can frequently lead to the breakdown of these relationships (McCaw, 2020).

Over time, their commitment to improving their co-teaching partnership paid off. They learned to integrate their teaching styles more effectively, incorporated diverse learning materials, and communicated more clearly with each other. Gradually, the classroom environment became more inclusive and conducive to learning. This experience taught her that even when faced with setbacks, persistence and a shared commitment to students’ success could lead to meaningful growth and collaboration in co-teaching.

I just wish I had an experienced admin to turn to at that time, I think that would have helped. We were lucky to have experienced teachers to turn to but what if we hadn’t? We wanted to be successful so we made it work but it would have been easier to say forget it.

Despite the initial challenges, their commitment to inclusive education and a shared sense of purpose have allowed them to make significant strides in co-teaching. Although none of the special education teachers noted feeling prepared for co-teaching when they started, they did not voice that as a continuous area of concern. One poignantly noted that the first step in being an
effective co-teacher is simply the will to do so, proving that passion and determination can bridge the gap left by the absence of formal pre-service preparation.

Principals described schools placing a strong emphasis on supporting their co-teaching teams. They all reported that they provide professional development sessions that specifically address effective co-teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and curriculum adaptation for diverse learners, recognizing that all teachers can benefit from these areas of expertise. Additionally, they described how they encourage co-teaching pairs to collaborate in planning and resource creation, which directly influences their teaching practices. To facilitate this, the principals allocate dedicated time for these collaborative efforts, hoping that teachers have the support and resources they need to excel in their co-teaching roles. Principals acknowledged they had more time to facilitate this type of support before the start of each school year, before competing priorities presented themselves.

Through a comprehensive analysis of teacher interviews, a recurring theme emerged as educators candidly discussed the challenges inherent in co-teaching collaborations. Teachers shared insights into the complexities they face, ranging from issues related to coordination and differing teaching styles to potential communication gaps. Notably, principals, constrained by time limitations, also featured prominently in the discourse. Their interviews revealed a concerted effort to improve co-teaching practices within their schools despite time constraints. Principals acknowledged the challenges but expressed a commitment to finding pragmatic solutions and enhancing support structures for co-teaching initiatives. The analysis illuminated the dual perspectives of teachers grappling with day-to-day challenges and principals navigating systemic improvements, providing a holistic understanding of the multifaceted landscape surrounding co-teaching in educational settings.
A prominent issue highlighted by educators was the persistent disruptions caused by frequent schedule changes, which emerged as a major hindrance to the smooth functioning of co-teaching arrangements. Among the concerns raised by general education teachers were the frequent changes in partner assignments. They noted that these transitions often brought about challenges and discomfort, disrupting the flow of their collaborative efforts. Despite these initial hurdles, the educators universally conveyed positive feedback once they had the opportunity to work closely with their assigned partners.

Special education teachers echoed similar experiences with the challenges of frequently changing partner assignments. This recurring theme among both general and special education instructors underscores the pervasive nature of the issue within the co-teaching landscape. The consistency of these reported challenges reflects the need for effective strategies to mitigate disruptions arising from partner changes in order to foster a more conducive co-teaching environment.

Interestingly, the reported experiences of educators align with the findings of the corresponding survey. The survey revealed that educators perceived leadership as a significant factor influencing the success of students engaged in co-teaching arrangements. The participants assigned a score of 4.1 out of 5 to this aspect, with 5 indicating the highest level of impact. This alignment between the qualitative accounts of educators and quantitative survey results emphasizes the crucial role leadership plays in shaping the outcomes of co-teaching initiatives.

While educators expressed optimism about the potential for successful collaborations through co-teaching, the challenges associated with frequent schedule changes and partner assignments emerged as notable obstacles. Despite these difficulties, the positive experiences shared by educators after overcoming initial hurdles indicate that with effective strategies and
supportive leadership, co-teaching can indeed yield positive outcomes for both educators and students.

Efficacy

This section focuses on the theme of efficacy. This theme has surfaced through an extensive examination of qualitative data, particularly originating from the themes of ongoing support and the nuanced capture of prevalent information types and emotional factors shaping confidence levels in co-teaching. By exploring the complexities of these codes and their associated themes, this section aims to elucidate the multifaceted nature of efficacy characteristics within co-teaching dynamics, offering valuable insights into how ongoing support and emotional considerations contribute to educators’ confidence levels, thereby influencing the overall success of collaborative teaching endeavors.

Building Confident Teachers

Building confident teachers is essential for successful co-teaching partnerships. Confidence enables teachers to effectively collaborate, communicate, and adapt their teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of students. Professional development programs focused on co-teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and classroom management can help teachers develop the skills and knowledge necessary for successful co-teaching.

Teachers who voiced reservations regarding the effectiveness of co-teaching arrangements additionally conveyed a sense of unease concerning their administration’s capacity to address their concerns adequately. They highlighted a perceived deficiency in ongoing support from administrative personnel, pointing to a need for more robust assistance and guidance in
navigating the challenges associated with implementing co-teaching strategies. This lack of confidence in both the administrative leadership and the level of support provided further compounded their apprehensions about the viability and success of co-teaching initiatives within their educational environment. One special education teacher noted,

It just sometimes feels like I’m on an island. I love co-teaching, love it. In theory. But doing it, and doing it hand and hand with another adult…. That’s easier said than done. Sometimes I just need someone else, an admin I guess, in the conversation on how to fix it when things aren’t moving.

Administrators have an opportunity to increase the confidence of the co-teachers in their schools through creating more structured support systems for teachers that have an ongoing cadence throughout the school year.

Additionally, opportunities for peer mentoring, observation, and feedback can provide valuable support and encouragement as teachers navigate the complexities of co-teaching partnerships. Administrators play a role in fostering teacher confidence by providing ongoing support, resources, and recognition for their efforts in implementing co-teaching practices. By investing in the professional growth and confidence of teachers, schools can create a culture of collaboration and innovation that leads to improved student outcomes in co-taught classrooms.

**Description of Administrative Support**

General educators interviewed for this study found their administration to be supportive in general, but at a basic level. They described an administration that has been generally supportive of co-teaching efforts, but also providing a fundamental level of backing for collaborative endeavors. The general elements described that detailed administrative support led to discuss the autonomy teachers desired to co-teach without interruption due to outside factors.
They described administrative teams that have ensured scheduling and logistics are well-managed, allowing teachers to coordinate classes effectively. Additionally, according to principals, they have encouraged open communication and collaboration, fostering a positive atmosphere where we can exchange ideas and strategies. Echoing the sentiments of her peers, general educator Heather said, “The kids do better when they know it’s consistent. The special education (co-teaching) schedule is always changing. That shouldn’t be the case. But it just always is.” According to Dieker (2001), teachers, despite being the key implementers of inclusion, frequently report insufficient training in effectively implementing co-teaching strategies.

General educators expressed gratitude for times that administration made them feel generally successful in co-teaching. Teachers described principals that have not only facilitated the logistical aspects but have also been champions of collaboration and inclusivity. Jim, a general educator said, “My principal definitely believes in inclusion, no doubt. But believing in inclusion and supporting co-teaching are two different things.” They described times when administration provided them with the necessary resources, encouraged professional development opportunities, and ensured that our co-teaching partnerships are set up for success. General educators appreciated their dedication and recognize that their support is instrumental in making our co-teaching experiences both effective and rewarding for our students. They described more flexible learning in their classrooms due to increased support through co-teaching.

However, general educators voiced they would appreciate more extensive support in terms of specialized training and professional development resources for principals. While acknowledging that administration’s commitment to the basics of co-teaching is a step in the
right direction, the support described reflects a recognition of the importance of teamwork in education; general educators found it had room for more robust resource allocation. General educators did not feel like their administrative support were experts in the field of co-teaching themselves but rather schedulers of co-teaching.

Special educators, when asked to summarize the support they received from their administration, expressed receiving support that was valuable. They described principals that have consistently demonstrated a commitment to the growth of co-taught classrooms and the success of students with disabilities. They described principals that have facilitated training and professional development opportunities that have enhanced co-teaching skills. They described principals that also fostered an inclusive culture within the school, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and providing us with the resources needed to meet the diverse needs of our students. They described knowing that administration values the role teachers play in inclusive education and that has not only boosted confidence but also reinforced dedication to creating an equitable and nurturing learning environment for all students.

Going beyond describing their setting, all participants were asked to describe support of co-teaching practices in their school as well. The interviewees described their experience with co-teaching as somewhat inconsistent, with teachers noting that it often begins on a positively supported note but gradually loses momentum over time. Many teachers mentioned a noticeable enthusiasm at the start, typically in August, which tends to wane and ultimately dissipate by mid-year. Despite these fluctuations, they expressed gratitude for being paired with a supportive partner, highlighting the initial success of the collaborative effort. Principals interviewed confirmed this notion, stating that support is often more robust at the beginning of the school year.
Upon analyzing teacher interviews centered on discussions of co-teaching support systems, a recurring theme emerged, highlighting the prevalence of inconsistencies and interruptions in the established support structures. Teachers expressed concerns and observations regarding the irregular nature of the support systems like ongoing meetings with administration, mutual preparation time, building wide professional development sessions, and facilitated discussions with peer teachers designed to facilitate positive co-teaching dynamics. The discourse illuminated a pattern of interruptions and inconsistencies that impeded the seamless execution of co-teaching practices. This recurrent theme underscores the challenges and disruptions faced by educators in the implementation of co-teaching strategies, shedding light on the need for more consistent and uninterrupted support systems to optimize the effectiveness of collaborative teaching endeavors. The analysis of these interviews not only unveiled the existing issues within the support framework but also provided valuable insights into the practical challenges faced by teachers engaged in co-teaching partnerships.

Description of Additional Needed Supports

When asked where their administration could provide additional support, teacher answers varied but all agreed that they felt additional support would be valuable. Special education teachers passionately advocated for greater support for themselves in the realm of co-teaching. One special educator described an ideal that general educators receive ongoing support by way of coaching by principals and other administrators to enhance their instructional practices while special educators are seen as lone authorities on instructional practices around students with disabilities and rarely receive ongoing instructional method support.
Special educators described administrative teams focused on the logistics of co-teaching, the supplies, the schedules, the classrooms. The special educators described a need for more than just logistical support; a need for ongoing professional development, specialized training, and access to resources tailored to the diverse learning needs they serve. Special educators voiced needs for robust support systems to ensure that co-teaching partnerships are effective and sustainable. With the right support, nearly all of the special educators voiced they wished to grow as co-teachers. Special educator Mark noted,

Our training is different from a gen ed teacher. We don’t know what we don’t know. We need support on how to teach in a large classroom, large groups. It’s fun, it’s better than being alone, but we need different support on different approaches.

Within the realm of co-teaching, special educators articulated a pressing need for continuous and tailored support, particularly emphasizing the necessity of guidance from an administrator well-versed in the nuances of special education best practices. These educators’ recounted instances where they found themselves compelled to navigate through the procedural aspects of various general education practices, such as unit planning, merely to satisfy the expectations of supervisors with a predominant background in general education. The experiences shared by special educators underscored the inherent challenges they faced in aligning their specialized pedagogical approaches with the broader educational framework. Consequently, a recurrent theme emerged, highlighting the crucial demand for a supervisor or coach who not only holds certification but also possesses firsthand experience in the intricacies of special education. The consistency of this call for specialized expertise underscores the unique nature of special education and the imperative for tailored support mechanisms to optimize the collaborative efforts of special educators within the co-teaching model. In essence, the articulation of this need underscores the potential for improved outcomes in co-teaching.
scenarios when principals are well-equipped with the requisite knowledge and understanding of special education practices.

Special educators described feelings of being an afterthought in the co-teaching planning process by administration. Some described feeling like they were just plugged into schedules without consideration of their preferences or expertise. According to Rodriguez (2021), resistance to co-teaching often arises due to special education teachers lacking sufficient content knowledge. Others described wishing they had ongoing support through the year, feeling that there was an abundance of support in the months of August and September but less as the year continued. Special education teachers described scenarios where they found themselves in frustrating situations as they had challenges in their co-teaching partnership but lacked a reliable support system to turn to.

One special educator named Miles described a time where he had a breakdown in a co-teaching relationship with a partner he found to be dismissive of the special education students, as if they were not his responsibility any longer because Miles was also in the room. Miles said,

It went so far as when one of the special education students would raise their hand, he would get my attention and motion to them like ‘your kid needs help, ahem,’ and I felt really bad about that. Kids are perceptive, I’m sure they noticed. But I felt like what can I do? Leave the room? Who does that hurt? I felt like I had no choice but to just stay and ignore it. And that’s not a good solution in that scenario. Just bury your head.

While co-teaching can be incredibly rewarding, it also requires effective communication and cooperation between partners. Special education teachers described at times they may feel that their partner’s teaching style or approach is not aligned with the needs of students with disabilities, leading to frustration and concern. These special education teacher’s dedication to their students and desire for a more harmonious co-teaching experience allowed them to continue in challenging situations, but they felt they may benefit from seeking out resources or mentorship
to navigate these challenges more successfully. In Thornton et al.’s 2007 study, it was discovered that proficient co-teaching could organically alleviate certain concerns cited by special education teachers when they decide to leave their jobs, such as insufficient communication with mainstream teachers and a lack of genuine engagement within the school’s educational community.

Upon scrutinizing teacher interviews focused on their perspectives on co-teaching, a salient theme emerged emphasizing the pivotal role of effective communication in achieving success in co-teaching partnerships. Teachers consistently underscored the significance of clear and open communication as a linchpin for the seamless execution of collaborative teaching practices. The discourse illuminated how successful co-teaching is intricately tied to the ability of educators to communicate efficiently, share insights, and coordinate their instructional efforts. The analysis revealed a shared understanding among the interviewed teachers that effective communication serves as a fundamental element in fostering a positive co-teaching environment, enabling mutual understanding and synergy. This finding underscores the importance of cultivating robust communication channels as a key determinant for the success of co-teaching initiatives in educational settings.

Discussion

The qualitative interviews conducted in this research paper have provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of co-teaching involving teachers and the principals that provide support. Through in-depth conversations and analysis, I have gained a deeper understanding of the challenges, benefits, and collaborative strategies employed in co-teaching environments as well as areas of greater needed support. The perspectives shared by both
teachers and principals have shed light on the multifaceted nature of co-teaching, highlighting the importance of effective communication, mutual respect, shared goals in creating successful partnerships and building inclusive schools.

Primary Research Question

What are the needed supports for effective co-teaching as identified by teaching practitioners?

Central to the success of co-teaching endeavors are the foundational elements that serve as the bedrock for collaborative partnerships between educators. However, despite the recognition of its potential benefits, the effectiveness of co-teaching critically hinges on the establishment of robust foundational elements. This dives deeper into aiming to elucidate how the availability, allocation, and utilization of resources influence the efficacy and sustainability of co-teaching practices. By examining these findings, this study seeks to offer valuable insights into the pivotal role of resources in shaping the collaborative dynamics and outcomes of co-teaching partnerships, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on effective educational practices.

Research Question (a)

How do the factors of the work environment impact co-teaching?

In this discussion of the research, both special and general education teachers were asked to share their perspectives on their current co-teaching environments. General educators tended to express more positive views, while special educators maintained positivity while also highlighting various challenges they encountered. Principals, on the other hand, predominantly
spoke positively about co-teaching environments in their schools, viewing them as valuable additions that enhance inclusivity.

The prospect of adjusting lesson plans, accommodating different class timings, and managing co-teaching pairings was described as overwhelming, especially if the changes are frequent or abrupt. Additionally, teachers often invest a great deal of time and effort in creating a conducive learning environment, and sudden scheduling changes can disrupt the established classroom dynamics, making it challenging to maintain continuity in their teaching methods. Furthermore, concerns about workload, personal time, and the impact on work-life balance can heighten their anxieties. Despite these challenges, the teachers in the study expressed that they remain dedicated, striving to adapt and provide their students with the best possible learning experience regardless of the shifting work conditions.

Surveyed teachers responded similarly but more favorably about the balance of the workload in the co-teaching pairings. Surveyed teachers report a 3.4 out of 5 how manageable they find their setting and caseload. The teachers in this setting seem moderately well managed in perspective to caseload and location of co-teaching. What was measured through interviews on this topic was that the environment is typically manageable; it’s the constant altering of those aspects that creates challenge.

Both special and general education teachers express a need for consistency in work conditions, highlighting issues such as ever-changing schedules and co-teaching pairings. Bettini et al. (2016) delved into the relationship between teacher satisfaction with their working conditions, specifically concerning the environment, and its impact on their effectiveness. These changes, driven by administrative needs, cause inconvenience and interruptions in learning, leading to teachers feeling apprehensive and stressed. The challenges include adapting to
unfamiliar routines, adjusting lesson plans, managing different class timings, and coping with frequent or abrupt changes. Sudden scheduling changes disrupt established classroom dynamics, making it difficult to maintain continuity in teaching methods. Teachers also face concerns about workload, personal time, and work-life balance, heightening their anxieties. Despite these challenges, many teachers remain dedicated to adapting and providing the best possible learning experience for students.

However, the manner in which each category of interviewees described their co-teaching experiences differed in scope. General education teachers typically focused on individual classrooms, addressing specific initial challenges and adjustment periods. Special educators, on the other hand, discussed multiple classrooms with varying dynamics and levels of difficulty. Many special educators mentioned serving multiple classrooms, each presenting unique challenges.

Many special educators interviewed described varying perspectives on co-teaching within the school day. Often special educators said they are currently serving multiple classrooms and while one classroom is very challenging for them, another was less challenging. Administrators approached the topic of co-teaching from a broader perspective, discussing it as a centralized initiative. They spoke in their sentences using “Co-Teaching” as a proper noun such as, “Co-teaching is going great” while the teachers implementing co-teaching on a daily basis were more likely to use it as a noun, “While I am co-teaching” for example.

This linguistic difference between administrators and teachers suggests that administrators view co-teaching as a singular initiative, while teachers perceive it as an ongoing process requiring continuous support. This divergence may offer insights into why principals tend to speak more positively about co-teaching initiatives in their schools compared to teacher
practitioners. Principals described it as a large initiative while teachers described it as something that they participate in multiple times per day. This highlights that administrators see themselves playing a big picture role supporting co-teaching but not necessarily involved in the day-to-day pieces that bring challenges to classrooms and teachers.

Another critical facet identified wins regards to the classroom environment, wherein educators sought guidance on fostering an inclusive space that accommodates not only students with special needs but also integrates the special education teacher seamlessly into the shared learning environment. The aspiration was to create a cohesive setting rather than one where the special education teacher merely visits periodically. Moreover, within the instructional domain, special education teachers specifically highlighted their requirement for increased guidance and coaching concerning subject-specific teaching methods. This sought-after support aimed to bolster their confidence and efficacy in delivering content-specific instruction effectively. The findings of the study revealed that such satisfaction can exert both positive and negative influences on teacher effectiveness.

Successful co-teaching relationships are built upon a foundation of collaboration, communication, and mutual respect between educators. In today’s diverse classrooms, co-teaching has emerged as a promising approach to meet the diverse learning needs of students. By bringing together general education and special education teachers, co-teaching leverages the unique strengths and expertise of each educator to create inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive. However, the effectiveness of co-teaching also hinges on the establishment of strong foundational elements that underpin collaborative partnerships. Through this exploration, we aim to gain insights into how educators can collaboratively work together to enhance student outcomes and promote equity and inclusion in education.
Research Question (b)

What is the impact of administrator support on co-teaching implementation?

Teachers interviewed emphasized the pivotal role of principals in fostering a culture of inclusion within schools. They recounted experiences in environments where inclusive practices weren't prioritized, attributing this directly to the leadership of principals who didn't champion inclusion. Furthermore, the organizational setup of a school can either facilitate or impede the implementation of co-teaching. Effective communication channels, flexible scheduling, and ample planning time are integral aspects of an organizational framework conducive to co-teaching. Those teachers who expressed the least confidence in their principals' ability to lead co-teaching initiatives also reported significant workplace frustrations related to scheduling, communication, and insufficient planning time.

Ensuring alignment between school policies and the principles of co-teaching can promote consistency and coherence in implementation across classrooms and grade levels. Together, school culture and organization create the context in which teaching and learning occur, exerting a profound impact on student outcomes and overall school effectiveness. The culture and organization of a school are fundamental components that significantly influence the teaching and learning experiences within its walls. School culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape interactions among students, educators, and administrators. Meanwhile, the organizational structure of a school determines how resources are allocated, decisions are made, and policies are implemented. Principals reported that they did feel prepared to manage co-teaching but in their responses what they actually spoke about was leadership training that was not specific to co-teaching. They spoke about their ability to lead people and
logistics in their schools, not actual coursework on the topic of co-teaching. This realization was eye opening. Principals voiced that they felt their general ability to lead qualified teams to adequately lead co-teaching. Teachers repeatedly voiced a desire for more co-teaching professional development for themselves, but in reality, professional development on co-teaching was also entirely absent for principals as well.

Interviews led to a discussion on how principals can provide the most effective support in schools to enhance co-teaching practices. Teachers expressed a consistent desire for ongoing support beyond initial planning periods, while principals admit to a lack of awareness regarding teachers’ preference for such ongoing management. There was a consistent disconnect as principals believed teachers prefer to self-manage co-teaching relationships, whereas teachers expressed difficulty navigating the personal aspects of co-teaching and desire formalized structures to facilitate the process. Teachers that felt most secure in their co-teaching relationships also described appreciation for administrative teams that helped foster and maintain the health of these relationships.

In their 2021 study, Cravens and Hunter discovered that students stand to gain potential benefits when instructed by teachers proficient in collaborative lesson planning and skilled in cultivating collaborative relationships. The applicability of these skills extends beyond co-teaching contexts. Cravens and Hunter further emphasized that teacher-led collaborative groups, centering on standards-based collaborative lesson planning and implementation, were associated with heightened levels of teacher performance and effectiveness, Cravens and Hunter concluded. None of the teachers interviewed described participating in collaborative teacher-led groups with some stating they also do not have common planning time with their co-teacher. Principals could provide greater support in this area to foster rich co-teaching partnerships.
The educators in my study articulated a requirement for heightened assistance from administrative entities, expressing a need for increased support within the educational framework. Conversely, principals appeared content with the level of support they were extending to the teaching staff. The variance in perspectives between teacher-administrator pairings regarding the perceived level of support suggests a premise advocating for ongoing check-ins and support mechanisms being implemented between principals and co-teaching teams of teachers. This dichotomy in viewpoints implies a potential establishment of regularized monitoring and support initiatives taking place between the administrative and teaching cohorts. This weaves into the next theme, named efficacy characteristics, emerged from the codes Ongoing Support and captures how support structures widely influence confidence in co-teaching.

These findings highlighted that while principals are enthusiastic and fundamentally supportive of co-teaching, they did not feel the need to have additional coursework or preparation to support co-teaching effectively. They felt their general leadership ability would suffice, while teachers spoke of a desire to be supported in a more micro way, down to their daily methods. Perhaps increased professional development for teachers isn’t the only need but also increased professional development for principals is needed as well.

In alignment with these interview responses, Ricci et al. (2019) proposed a comprehensive framework comprising six key steps for effective co-teaching planning. These steps encompass the establishment of rapport among teachers, identification of individual teaching styles, their strategic utilization to foster a unified classroom environment, initiation of discussions on teacher strengths and weaknesses, exploration of individualized education plans and regular education goals, and the formulation of a collaborative action plan. When pairing a
novice and an experienced teacher as a co-teaching team, adherence to these steps facilitates a more efficient progression through various co-teaching methodologies, promoting enhanced effectiveness in their collaborative efforts.

When recounting successful instances of co-teaching, participants described scenarios where they witnessed effective collaboration within their schools or observed previously marginalized students being included. The responses of both teachers and principals exhibited a range of perspectives, highlighting the diverse facets of co-teaching support. For example, one principal remarked, “I’ve witnessed previously shy and reserved students thriving in group settings, achieving beyond expectations.” This confirms that principals are pleased to have co-teaching implemented in their schools and genuinely aspire to promote inclusion. Interestingly, the majority of principals interviewed emphasized the overall inclusivity of their schools rather than focusing on the specific operational details of co-teaching practices. When principals spoke of times when they provided resources as times of success, they spoke of the beginning of the year professional developments or resources provided to teachers such as books or materials.

Only two principals interviewed shared anecdotes of observing significant academic and social growth in students directly attributable to co-teaching initiatives they championed. But even in those moments, principals described that type of outcome as near magic, describing those scenarios as specific to one teacher or pairing using words to describe those teachers like “incredible” and “amazing.” They described these successful teachers in a way that described them as somehow different, remarkably above average. This shows that this group of principals find co-teaching to be something of an anomaly, something incredibly hard to get right, while at the same time being resolute in the fact that it is going well in their schools.
The teachers interviewed spoke of more common, almost daily successes in co-teaching. They described ongoing successes and not magic moments. They described co-teaching outcomes that were quarter or semester-long in their wins. Kids moving the needle, making new friends. They described getting along with their partner and feeling empowered to tailor instruction. They described feeling satisfaction in delivering higher quality instruction because they had a partner in the room. General educators described being better equipped to meet the diverse needs of all students and special educators described seeing improvements in their student’s confidence and social skills while receiving the same quality learning they would receive in a smaller resource setting. Not one single special educator interviewed expressed that their ability to provide differentiation to students with diverse needs was compromised by co-teaching.

Comparing the difference in how these groups describe successful co-teaching shows that teachers and principals have different perspectives of success related to co-teaching. While principals described success as teacher success, teachers described success as student success. While general educators described the success of students more widely as entire classes or groups of students, special educators recounted tales of individual students and spoke of specific measured growth. Principals did not recount individual student successes in the academic realm, but were very appreciative of the social gains and benefits they have witnessed. One may notice that the successes principals described could be visually observed in passing whereas specific academic gains would have to be deliberately pursued and interpreted.

Teachers spoke at length about the success they felt in collaboration, whereas principals did not mention collaboration as much. Perhaps because it happens in motion, outside of the full group professional development sessions, or because it grows throughout the year beyond the
initial implementation period, principals do not get to see ongoing collaboration in action. What principals do get to see is the final result of effective collaboration which is the teaching moments which may seem amazing if they are not involved in the ongoing collaborative process. These moments seemed to be described by teachers as less magic and more of the finish line at the end of a long well-planned race.

One commonality in preparation for co-teaching was that none of the groups interviewed or surveyed felt completely prepared to deliver or support instruction in the co-teaching setting. General educators reported no coursework on the subject and special educators reported very little. Corresponding survey results showed this the area where surveyed teachers reported their lowest score. In terms of pre-service preparation for co-teaching, the surveyed teachers collectively rated their preparedness at 2.4 out of 5, indicating a potential area for improvement in the training provided during their educational preparation.

Undoubtedly, co-teaching presents its own set of challenges. When prompted to articulate their perspectives on the most prevalent challenges in co-teaching, some discrepancies emerged among the three groups. General educators spoke predominantly of areas where they felt misaligned with their partners while special educators spoke more of logistical and instructional challenges. Principals typically avoided the topic of pitfalls in their schools but when they did discuss shortcomings, they focused on time and resource constraints. While their accounts were not drastically divergent, each group’s depiction of the primary issues they encounter offers valuable insights.

General educators spoke a great deal about when co-teaching relationships and methods of communication broke down. General educators showed a greater priority for planning than both other categories of interviewees. They spoke a great deal about having misaligned priorities
with their co-teachers. Special educators spoke a lot about not feeling adequately prepared or
equipped to deliver instruction in the general education environment. They often spoke of
challenges differentiating to a greater extent or to a greater number of students as a challenge,
one they felt ill equipped for.

In this case, although the teachers are speaking to different challenges, it seems their
challenges might be fixable with the same remedy. All of the mentioned issues in co-teaching
might be cured with more common planning time. General educators’ disdain with lack of
collaborative communication with special educators could be corrected with more opportunity to
communicate. Special educators spoke to feeling challenged instructionally, perhaps more
common planning time to communicate with their general education counterparts to plan their
differentiation needs ahead of the lesson.

In this same thread, while principals shied away from painting their schools in a negative
light in terms of co-teaching, one domain many of the principals were quick to voice a need for
was time. When principals did speak to co-teaching, they voiced time constraints and a lack of
resources for professional development as two common causes. Looking back on the challenges
voiced by teachers and the conclusion of a need for more common planning time, it makes sense
that the largest constraint felt by principals is available time to give their teacher, or devote to
their schedules, while also feeling a need to provide greater professional development but
lacking the resources to do so.

In addition, while teachers did express feelings around methods and models of co-
teaching they spoke about how they wished their principals had a greater knowledge of the
different models and their purpose. One teacher remarked feeling like their principal wants to see
both teachers standing at the front of the room teaching in a team-teaching model and this was
frustrating, “That’s not always the best approach. For some groups of students yes, but not all. Some of my students need access to the curriculum at their instructional level and that is not going to work with me at the front of the room.”

Principals conveyed that they understand that there’s no one-size-fits-all approach, and their preference often aligns with the specific context and goals of their schools. However, principals were vague in stating their personal preferences in co-teaching methods and approaches. They displayed a knowledge of what could be done but did not convey an opinion or stance on how it should be done. This further highlighted their perspective of being somewhat of an outsider to the co-teaching process and rather a general manager of the people tasked with carrying out co-teaching.

Co-teaching, as a collaborative instructional approach involving the partnership of general and special education teachers, holds immense potential for meeting the diverse needs of students in inclusive classrooms. However, the success of co-teaching hinges on the confidence and competence of the educators involved. Confident co-teachers possess the skills, knowledge, and self-assurance needed to effectively collaborate, differentiate instruction, and create inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive.

Therefore, investing in the development of confident co-teachers is essential for ensuring the success and sustainability of co-teaching initiatives and ultimately advancing the goal of inclusive education for all students.

Research Question (c)

How can principals provide the most effective support in their schools to best elevate the practices of co-teaching?
One of the key findings of this research is the significance of collaborative planning and professional development in enhancing co-teaching practices. Teachers and principals emphasized the need for continuous training and support to address diverse learning needs and ensure the seamless integration of instructional strategies. Although all the principal interviewed portrayed an awareness of the need for collaborative planning and professional development, their teachers reported a need for more time for collaboration and increased professional development.

General educators expressed having little training on how to best serve students with diverse learning needs, while special educators expressed a discomfort that they are often seen as experts, tasked with doing their job while helping their general educator learn tools and techniques as they go. Both types of educators seemed to desire coaching that did not exist in their schools related to co-teaching. While principals seemed to echo the belief that co-teaching requires collaboration and professional development, they mostly described beginning of the year professional development. This divergence points out a few points. One point of divergence seems to be that what teachers and principals seem to think is the correct amount of time set aside to train and support staff in co-teaching greatly differs. While principals seemed satisfied with a few hours of training a few times a year, teachers felt co-teaching required ongoing, yearlong support for classroom teachers.

Murawski and Lochner’s (2010) findings corroborate the notion that regular observations and discussions initiated by principals yield favorable outcomes. Their study suggests that such engagements contribute positively to the improvement of co-teaching practices in classrooms. However, it was observed that principals did not routinely communicate their observations of co-teaching. Both general and special educators reported infrequent instances of their co-taught
classrooms being observed outside of formal evaluation periods. The divergence in these thoughts from teachers and principals shows a need for ongoing observation and perhaps increased observation tools for principals on what to look for in a day-to-day co-teaching environment. Teacher voice on this matter is supported by research of Murawski and Lochner (2010) who determined that an effective method to support teachers while co-teaching is frequent observation and providing a communication platform of frequent coaching discussions.

Teachers described breakdowns in communication as a time when co-teaching can break down. Principals did not speak to this generally, however. Additionally, the role of trust and open communication emerged as fundamental factors in fostering positive co-teaching relationships. Ongoing communication facilitation was identified as a necessity throughout. The findings from these interviews align with Ersoy’s (2001) research, which established that effective co-teachers depend significantly on cooperation from their co-teaching partners. Ersoy further identified that fostering positive sentiments regarding co-teaching support yielded advantageous outcomes for children with disabilities.

Furthermore, both special education and general education instructors underscored the necessity for supplementary assistance in managing their joint professional responsibilities as co-teaching partners. While administrators expressed providing robust support early in the year, they did not speak of ongoing coaching and support. Teachers did express a desire for more structured meetings and support systems to better navigate their shared roles and duties effectively. Additionally, there was a collective plea for improved planning and coordination of schedules and partnerships in co-teaching arrangements. Teachers voiced the need for meticulous planning to minimize disruptions, ensuring a smoother collaboration conducive to effective teaching practices. The present reports are congruent with the conclusions drawn by Ricci et al.
(2019), wherein it was ascertained that the optimal support for co-teaching necessitates the implementation of a meticulously structured support framework. This framework should address individual teaching styles and formulate a cohesive plan that strategically leverages the strengths of both professionals, thereby fostering a symbiotic partnership. Moreover, it is imperative that principals actively contribute to the perpetuation of this collaborative endeavor by providing essential support and oversight.

My study has underscored the importance of recognizing and valuing the unique perspectives and contributions of both teachers and principals in co-teaching partnerships. Both lenses provided valuable insight. Teachers bring their classroom expertise and instructional knowledge, while principals provide valuable organizational support and resources. Acknowledging and appreciating these distinct roles can lead to a more harmonious co-teaching environment, where each participant feels empowered and motivated to contribute their best to student learning.

By promoting a culture of collaboration, providing targeted training, and fostering supportive environments, schools can enhance the quality of co-teaching experiences for both teachers and principals. Principals can effectively bolster co-teaching by actively listening to the specific areas highlighted by teachers in this study. Moreover, acquiring further professional development in supporting various facets of co-teaching is imperative. This includes honing skills in assisting with co-taught planning, cultivating inclusive classroom environments, refining instructional strategies within co-teaching frameworks, adeptly managing the professional responsibilities inherent to collaborative teaching, and refining administrative efforts related to co-teaching initiatives.
A notable observation pertains to the diverse spectrum of available resources across the ten schools under scrutiny. Within this cohort, variations are discernible, ranging from smaller, antiquated school facilities to expansive, well-populated institutions situated in affluent neighborhoods, equipped with cutting-edge facilities. This variance prompts contemplation: if educational institutions, irrespective of budgetary differences, cite resource insufficiency for co-teaching, does this suggest a deficiency in financial allocation or a potential deficit in administrative prioritization towards supporting co-teaching initiatives?

Teachers spoke to a need for additional training for themselves at length. While their asking for ongoing coaching, resources, and professional development workshops certainly is justified, it also brought up an interesting paradox. While administrators also would agree that they had not received extensive or adequate training, none of the principals interviewed mentioned that they felt that they needed additional professional development. This highlights an idea that while principals see themselves as owners and managers of the process that is co-teaching, involving schedules and logistics, they did not express that they saw themselves as needing to be experts of the practice of co-teaching. Principals equipped with the instructional tools needed to deliver co-teaching in practice would be principals better prepared to support co-teaching through their leadership.

While providing principals with additional resources to assist with the logistical aspects of co-teaching would undoubtedly be beneficial, it is imperative to recognize that their primary need lies in comprehensive training on the instructional practice of co-teaching. While logistical support is essential for the smooth implementation of co-teaching initiatives, effective instructional practices are what truly drive student success and inclusive learning environments. Therefore, investing in training programs that equip principals with the knowledge, skills, and
strategies necessary to support and evaluate co-teaching teams in their instructional endeavors is paramount. Such training should focus on understanding the various co-teaching models, promoting effective collaboration between teachers, and fostering a supportive school culture conducive to collaborative teaching partnerships. By prioritizing training on instructional practices, principals can play a more active and informed role in advancing co-teaching practices within their schools, ultimately enhancing educational outcomes for all students.

Principals can play a pivotal role in facilitating the success of co-teaching initiatives within schools. However, many principals may lack comprehensive training and understanding of the intricacies of co-teaching practices. As such, there is a pressing need for principals to receive more targeted training and professional development on co-teaching instruction, planning, and practices. Training should encompass various aspects, including the principles and benefits of co-teaching, strategies for supporting co-teaching teams, methods for evaluating co-teaching effectiveness, and techniques for fostering a positive school culture conducive to collaborative teaching partnerships. By equipping principals with the knowledge, skills, and resources needed to effectively support co-teaching initiatives, schools can enhance the implementation and sustainability of co-teaching practices, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for all students.

Limitations

Qualitative research conducted by an administrator within the school district faces inherent limitations stemming from potential conflicts of interest and biases. Firstly, my dual role as both an administrator and a researcher may compromise the study's objectivity, as personal biases or professional agendas could influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation.
Moreover, participants may feel pressured to provide responses aligning with the administration’s expectations and/or organizational goals, leading to skewed findings. Furthermore, my close affiliation with the school network may limit their capacity to critically evaluate or challenge existing practices, thus constraining the study’s insights. Overall, while qualitative research conducted by an administrator offers valuable perspectives, these inherent limitations necessitate cautious interpretation of findings.

Conclusion

Inclusive education continues to grow in America. Students with disabilities and diverse learning needs no longer need to be taught away from their typically developing peers to receive necessary instruction. Because of this evolution of education, the needs of the general education classroom have changed. Teachers and administrators can identify where they are in need of additional support to not just provide inclusive spaces but to provide effectively taught inclusive classrooms. This study gathers voices to identify how principals can best support teachers in co-taught classrooms.

Gersten and Brengelman (1996) determined that principals that are provided adequate resources are better equipped to lead effective special education practice in their schools. It was also found in their work that principals who are up to date on the latest research are best equipped to run special education programs in their schools more effectively. The work outlined in my research study and final product aims to provide both resources and research to principals to better inform their operations of inclusive schools. Through this work the important work of teaching will hopefully be a less challenging task for teachers and principals with the ultimate goal of improving classroom practices for students.
The practice of co-teaching is complex and nuanced. This work was able to provide a platform for teachers to assist in analyzing the needs in providing the most effective co-teaching. This study through narrative inquiry gathered the perspective of teachers immersed in the practice and what hinders their ability to best service all students. The knowledge gained from this study was used to equip principals with a toolkit to help teachers with the very important lift of co-teaching in more effective ways. It is certain that with correct support, any co-teaching partnership classroom can have improved processes.
PAPER 3
BEST PRACTICES GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS

Paper 3 is intended to provide a best practice guide to be used as an administrator-facing professional development and resources to enhance co-teaching practices in their schools. It highlights what teachers and principals in this study indicate are unmet needs and supports. It also outlines recommendations on how to meet identified needs based on research and literature review. The framework focuses on what teachers and principals described as ideal support in co-teaching. The framework also outlines specific actions principals can take to provide this teacher identified ideal support structure. The structure of the professional development is a for-hour learning experience for principals. The stated objective of the professional development is that upon completion principals will be able to increase inclusivity in their school through improved support of co-teaching.

Principals and other school principals are the leaders of special education departments and inclusive classrooms. However, Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) believed that these leaders of special education practices in schools are often not included in special education professional development. Di Paola and Tschannen-Moran’s study found that school principals are expected to lead without adequate coursework or professional development provided to them to be successful. This study determined that these principals did not feel that they have the authority or resources to make decisions to drive decision making in their schools.
DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran (2003) discovered that district-level initiatives and principals should furnish resources and deliver professional development opportunities to principals. This is essential for enhancing their understanding of the knowledge base related to disabilities, thereby empowering them to make more informed decisions. Without this knowledge, DiPaola and Tschannen-Moran stated that they cannot administer special education programs effectively. DiPaola et al. said that principals are the ones responsible for communicating a culture of inclusivity and to be able to do this, professional development around these inclusive practices are needed.

My research study and corresponding professional development aims to meet that need for the principals of the network of schools in which it was developed. With this in mind, my study contains a professional development program aimed at giving principals the tools they need to feel confident to make changes to drive inclusive best practices in their schools. The knowledge and research gained from my research is a point of focus used in creating professional development that will best serve principals to lead inclusive schools with co-taught classrooms. The most current and relevant research and literature was used to develop best practice guidance along with any supporting documents or templates that will assist principals in supporting co-teach and creating inclusive school environments. The intended impact is that an administrator can use this document in their training when planning for co-teaching.

Both special education instructors and general education educators in my empirical study highlighted areas requiring administrative backing for effective co-teaching. Within the realm of planning and preparation, teachers emphasized the necessity for ongoing administrative assistance throughout the academic year, extending beyond the initial back-to-school planning phase. Another crucial area requiring support was the classroom environment. Teachers sought
guidance on fostering an inclusive environment not only for special education students but also for the special education teacher, aiming to create a shared space rather than a setting where the specialist merely visits. Instruction emerged as the third critical domain, where special education teachers expressed a desire for increased coaching and support in delivering content-specific instruction. In the fourth area, both special education and general education teachers identified the need for added support in managing professional responsibilities between co-teaching partners. Furthermore, there was a collective call for more deliberate planning of co-teaching schedules and pairings to minimize disruptions from both groups of educators.

The structure of this document and professional development begins with an introduction that includes description of the schools studied for its development and description of intended audience. The first section describes a summary of what was found to be important to teachers to feel supported in inclusive school environments that utilize co-teaching. The 5 domains in my professional development discuss each teacher identified areas of need for administration support in these inclusive school environments. Each section includes a description of research, literature on best practice for this topic, a practice guide, next steps, and any references that may be useful. When templates or supporting documents are relevant, they are included as well.

Principals of the network of schools in which it was developed will be given this final product along with an introductory professional development session. This professional development session will focus on best practices around support co-teaching while directly matching best practice guidance with sections of the document to provide ongoing support. Principals will leave this introductory professional development with a tangible and digital copy of the document for future reference to be used to best support teachers in co-taught classrooms. Questions and needs addressed in this professional development can identify where the highest
areas of needs are for principals. Ongoing professional development in the format of office hours will be offered on each specific topic discussed in this paper. For example, when scheduling is covered in the first professional development session, a scheduling office hours will be held at a later date where principals can bring their schedules and troubleshoot potential solutions to times or constraints of their schedule to facilitate paths to successful co-teaching in their schools.

This document intends to be an easily accessible guide for principals to make small, inexpensive, changes to practice that will improve co-teaching practices at their school. It is concise and provide maps to navigating processes related to co-teaching such as scheduling, planning, and professional development. This document addressed the problem of practice by identifying teacher and administrator identified needs for effective co-teaching while providing principals with guides and templates to address these gaps. This guide is written with a goal in mind of not creating more work for principals, but rather making tasks related to inclusivity less cumbersome. The goal of this paper is to improve current and future support of inclusivity and co-teaching by making the tasks that are required to implement it less difficult.

Administrator Co-Teaching Guide

As educators, we understand the critical role that collaboration plays in creating inclusive and effective learning environments. Co-teaching, a dynamic partnership between educators, fosters an environment where diverse strengths, perspectives, and strategies converge to meet the needs of all learners.

Throughout this professional development, we will delve into the principles, strategies, and best practices that underpin successful co-teaching partnerships. Whether you are new to co-teaching or seeking to enhance your school’s existing collaborative practices, this session aims to
equip you with valuable insights and practical tools to maximize the impact of co-teaching in your classroom.

We will explore the foundations of co-teaching, emphasizing the importance of communication, trust, shared responsibilities, and mutual respect between co-teachers. From co-planning and co-instructing to assessing student progress and fostering a positive classroom climate, our sessions will provide you with actionable strategies to create a cohesive and supportive co-teaching environment.

Furthermore, we recognize that every co-teaching partnership is unique, influenced by individual teaching styles, student needs, and subject matter. Hence, our discussions will encompass adaptable approaches and flexible frameworks to empower you in tailoring co-teaching practices to your specific context.

As we embark on this professional development journey together, we encourage active participation, reflection, and collaboration among all participants. Let’s explore the transformative power of co-teaching, working together to create inclusive, engaging, and enriching educational experiences for all students.

Summary of Findings

This professional development was designed using a review of current research and literature surrounding best practices in co-teaching while incorporating a new body of qualitative research. This research took place in 2023 among 15 non-selective public institutions within a large public school district in a densely populated urban locale. As we move past understanding and applying inclusion and into analyzing and evaluating our practices, this study looks towards classroom teachers to hear the voices of those acting as the practitioners of inclusion through co-
teaching along with the principals that support them.

Both special education teachers and general education teachers expressed areas of need in administrative support of co-teaching. In the domain of planning and preparation, teachers expressed a need for ongoing administrative support in their planning and preparation beyond the back-to-school planning period. A second area of expressed necessary support was that of the classroom environment, specifically support on how to make the classroom environment inclusive of not just the special education students, but the special education teacher as well, creating a shared space rather than a space where the special educator visits. The third domain of identified necessary support was that of instruction, with special education teachers expressing a need for greater support and coaching with content specific instruction. In the fourth domain, both special education and general education teachers expressed a need for additional support in management of professional responsibilities between co-teaching partners. Additionally, both special and general education teachers expressed a need for more careful co-teaching planning of schedules and pairings with minimal disruptions.

The professional development program centered on co-teaching emerged from a recognition of an evolving educational landscape that increasingly emphasizes inclusive practices. In response to the diverse learning needs of students in modern classrooms, educators must utilize collaborative strategies that optimize teaching effectiveness. The rationale behind this professional development was rooted in the acknowledgment that traditional teaching approaches may not fully meet the unique needs of every learner and that supporting co-teaching is not a topic previously addressed for school level principals. The priority to develop a comprehensive professional development program centered on support of co-teaching arose,
aiming to empower principals with tools, and collaborative frameworks essential for fostering inclusive learning environments.

This program stemmed from a commitment to equipping teachers with the tools necessary to cultivate an inclusive classroom culture that maximizes student engagement, facilitates diverse learning styles, and promotes academic achievement for all learners, regardless of their abilities or backgrounds.

What is Inclusion vs. Co-Teaching?

Inclusion refers to a broad belief system or philosophy embracing the notion that all students should be welcomed members of a learning community, which all students are part of their classrooms even if their abilities differ. Co-teaching is the instructional method that allows typically developing and atypical students to receive instruction in the same classroom with support of 2 or more teachers.

Why?

Several factors contribute to the ongoing expansion of co-teaching as an educational approach for students with disabilities, gifted/talented individuals, and English language learners. Specifically, three notable sets of factors play a significant role in this trend.

- Federal law and policy and the state law and policy that must adhere to federal mandates.
  - Federal legislation has established rigorous academic benchmarks for every student. Numerous experts recognize that the sole method to achieve these benchmarks is by guaranteeing that all students can access grade-level standards and top-Tier curriculum.
• Frequent movement of students in and out of classrooms often results in missing substantial parts of the instruction as well as non-instructional opportunities such as socialization and team efforts. Generally, there is no system in place to assist these students in catching up on the material or opportunities they missed while outside the general education classroom.

• When professionals work with each other, they often share their knowledge and skills. As a result, all of them become more effective educators. Each co-teaching pairing puts two qualified individual instructors together in front of students to enhance the learning process.

• Research and evaluation studies demonstrating the potential of co-teaching to positively affect student outcomes.

• My research study interviewed and surveyed a group of teachers in both general and special education. My research found that 95% percent of teachers surveyed believed that co-teaching enhanced student learning and was a beneficial practice.

• Teachers interviewed reported feeling confident in their co-teaching effort but cited administrative support as the largest factor of influence on their ability to co-teach effectively. Of those surveyed, they reported their confidence at 2.7 out of 5, with 5 being the most confident. That same group rated the effect of leadership support on co-teaching either with positive or negative results at 3.4. The vast majority of teachers interviewed and surveyed reported increased administrative support as the factor with the greatest ability to improve co-teaching practices.

• The worldwide trend toward inclusiveness and social justice.
○ Students attending co-taught classes frequently encounter improved chances to grasp social, behavioral, and cultural norms through informal interactions with both peers and educators.

○ The diversity among learners today often suggests that many students benefit from the services that specialists can offer within the context of the general education classroom.

○ The various points of view and specialized skills of co-teachers bring to a classroom enable instruction to be richer, deeper, and tailored to each student’s needs.

**How?**

**Domain 1: Planning and Preparation**

- Develop a flexible plan or lesson template enabling participation from both sides, catering to their respective needs, while setting clear expectations and responsibilities.

- Empower teachers to adjust lessons according to the specifications outlined in students’ IEPs by making necessary accommodations and modifications.

- Carefully choose the co-teaching model(s) to be used for each lesson, considering the specific requirements of students, as well as provide materials (daily lesson plans, activities, texts, graphic organizers, assessments, assignments, etc.) no less than 24 hours prior to the class. Establish a consistent procedure for sharing and communicating these materials, whether through Google Drive, emails, shared to-do lists, etc.
- Distribute or assign the duties related to planning and materials.

- Create a communication strategy for interacting during a lesson, outlining preferred methods and what should be avoided (e.g., raising hand for clarifications, interrupting, using a whiteboard, whispering, employing hand signals).

- Take proactive steps and strategize for situations when someone is absent, outlining a plan for handling such instances.

- Maintain regular communication through scheduled planning sessions, collaborative meetings, hallway encounters, before or after school interactions, or via digital platforms like Google and email.

- Facilitate conversations where expectations are established. Continue ongoing conversations throughout the entirety of the school year.

- Resources:
  - Beginning of the year co-teaching checklist,
  - Beginning of the year co-teaching reflection
  - What/How/Who CT Lesson Plan Template
  - Station Teaching Lesson Plan Template

**Domain 2: Classroom Environment**

- Engage in professional interactions with each other while presuming positive intentions.

- Facilitate conversations around what is physically needed to provide co-taught services. (Furniture, supplies, space, etc.)

- Employ inclusive language when referring to one another, the classroom, and students, utilizing terms like “we,” “our,” and “us.”
● Encourage an environment that does not “belong” to any one teacher.

● Promote dialogues that enable educators to respect one another’s decisions and reinforce adherence to established rules and routines through mutual support.

● Distribute responsibilities for managing the classroom.

● Arrange the seating of students with disabilities across various areas of the classroom.

● Promote collaboration for and assume responsibility for all students.

**Domain 3: Instruction**

● Offer students precise strategic guidance, encompassing clear step-by-step instructions, demonstration, guided practice, and independent work opportunities, among other approaches.

● Collaborate in sharing the responsibility of leading instruction.

● Take on dynamic and adaptable roles to optimize the impact of instruction.

● Require educators to involve students with disabilities actively and equally alongside their peers in general education.

● Provide support to offer accommodations and modifications to students discreetly and subtly.

● Evaluate students’ work and progress, offer feedback, and provide additional teaching as needed.

● Provide ongoing coaching around co-taught instruction.

● Provide templates that assist in differentiation.

● Administrator Resources to facilitate this domain:
  ○ [Teacher Actions During Co-Teaching](#)
Domain 4: Professional Responsibilities

- Set, uphold, and engage in regular meeting times and/or agree on collaboration expectations. Determine methods for mutual accountability.
- Require all parties to arrive prepared for collaboration, contribute to meetings, and come with planned action items.
- Actively engage in IEP development and meetings, using positive language to discuss student progress to promote ownership of all facets of the student achievement amongst all educators.
- Ensure timely and accurate completion of relevant special education and general education paperwork and data.
- Monitor student advancement and maintain regular communication with families.
- Foster a professional relationship based on equality, effective communication, respect, and trust.
- Encourage inquiry, openness, vulnerability, and assume positive intent, supporting each other in acquiring new knowledge and strategies.
- Reflect on the effectiveness of the current co-teaching relationship, planning, instructional methods, and classroom environment, making necessary adjustments when required.
- Ongoing evaluation and observation of the co-teaching environment.
- Administrator Resources to facilitate this domain:
  - Co-Teaching observation tool
  - Co-teaching reflection/observation tool connected to Danielson
Domain 5: Additional Administrative Responsibilities

- Engage in dialogues with stakeholders to elucidate inclusive values, vision, purpose, and the overall climate.
- Conduct an evaluation of needs pertaining to existing student services and instructional models.
- Create initial class rosters and schedules. Strive for shared planning periods, and if not feasible within the daily schedule, proactively plan for collaboration at alternate times.
- Offer professional training or professional growth opportunities.
- Establish explicit guidelines for expectations among co-teaching teams.
- Institute continuous coaching for co-teaching teams, encompassing collaborative and individual sessions.
- Inform parents about the purpose and details of co-teaching.
- Gather and assess data, sharing it as needed and offering required assistance or support.
- Resources:
  - Co-Teaching Scheduling tool
  - Co-Teaching Roll Out Plan
  - Co Teaching Needs Assessment
Co-Teaching Models

One model of co-teaching does not fit every co-teaching relationship or lesson. Flexibility and preplanning the co-teaching model will help make the lesson run seamlessly and allow every adult to know their role. My Research found that teachers were most satisfied in co-teaching when they felt they planned their model in advance and their administration had an understanding of appropriate co-teaching models.

Model 1: One Teach, One Assist

Figure 3.1 illustrates Model 1.

![Diagram of Model 1: One Teach, One Assist](image)

In this instructional model, one teacher takes the lead in delivering the lesson while the other assists students’ learning through various means. The lead teacher often introduces new concepts, demonstrates skills, or exemplifies the use of different strategies. Meanwhile, the supporting teacher moves around the classroom, aiding students by assessing comprehension,
clarifying instructions, offering additional explanations, providing immediate feedback during guided practice, and more. It’s crucial for both teachers to share the lead role periodically, ensuring equal opportunities for leading lessons. This approach fosters a perception among students that both teachers possess equal abilities, authority, and support, thereby strengthening their rapport and trust with both educators. See Figure 1.

**Model 2: One Group, Two Teaching the Same Content**

Figure 3.2 illustrates Model 2.

![Figure 3.2. One group, two teaching the same content.](image)

In this instructional format, both teachers collaborate to lead the lesson together, assuming distinct roles and responsibilities. Co-teachers employing this model freely exchange teaching roles, offering students diverse and comprehensive information to accommodate various learning styles and needs. One educator might present new concepts, while the other assists in reinforcing content through note-taking, visuals, or utilizing multimedia resources. One teacher
may propose problem-solving approaches or comprehension strategies, while the other demonstrates alternative methods or suggests different strategies to enhance student comprehension. Through this approach, each teacher leverages their individual strengths to bolster the learning of all students.

Model 3: One Teach, One Assess

Figure 3.3 illustrates Model 3.

![Diagram of Model 3: One Teach, One Assess](image)

Figure 3.3. One teach, one assess.

In this co-teaching approach, one teacher assumes the lead in delivering the lesson while the other moves around the classroom to assess students. The assessment duration can vary, spanning from a brief period within the class to an extended evaluation, depending on its purpose and the targeted student group. The teacher conducting the assessment typically observes specific students’ language use, takes notes, or utilizes checklists or rubrics to evaluate their performance. Additionally, the observing teacher might gather data on techniques or strategies
employed by the lead teacher, aiming to gain deeper insights into supporting learners within the class.

**Model 4: One Pre-Teaches, One Teaches Grade-Level Content**

Figure 3.4 illustrates Model 4.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 3.4. One pre-teaches, one teaches grade-level content.

Students often benefit from group instruction aimed at establishing background knowledge, introducing key vocabulary, and previewing essential lesson concepts. In consideration of these objectives, co-teaching partners can collaboratively identify students who might benefit from pre-teaching based on their readiness levels and familiarity with the subject matter. One teacher will engage with these selected students to bolster their background knowledge, thereby enhancing their engagement with the upcoming topic. Simultaneously, the other teacher will focus on unique aspects of the lesson content, such as sharing a narrative, an article, or supplementary information, with the rest of the students to pique their interest and
broaden their comprehension. After a designated period, both groups will merge to collectively delve deeper into the core aspects of the lesson topic that are essential for all students to grasp.

**Model 5: Station Teaching, Multiple Groups**

Figure 3.5 illustrates Model 5.

![Figure 3.5](image)

Figure 3.5. Station teaching, multiple groups.

The multiple student arrangements and adaptable groupings within this model empower teachers to customize the content, methods, and outcomes of instruction and learning activities. In this approach, both teachers have the flexibility to either move around the classroom, providing guidance and assistance—clarifying information, reviewing instructions, explaining essential concepts, evaluating student progress, and more—or choose to stay in specific areas to conduct concise lessons with small groups. These groups can rotate between teachers or independent learning stations. When integrated with other models, this approach significantly enriches and tailors each student’s learning journey. Table 3.1 shows a co-teaching if/then quick reference.
### Table 3.1

**Co-Teaching If/Then Quick Reference**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If</th>
<th>Then</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If one teacher reports they feel workloads are uneven</td>
<td>Revisit the co-teaching of year checklist and reflection documents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate conversation around division of labor, hear both parties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and develop a timeline of next steps to carry out agreed upon tasks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Beginning of the year co-teaching checklist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Beginning of the year co-teaching reflection</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If one or both teachers report their priorities around use of time is not aligned</td>
<td>Encourage development of an agenda for planned times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teacher are finding their personalities unaligned.</td>
<td>Offer to facilitate a mediated conversation but ensure staff that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>partnership changes will stay committed for the time being to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>encourage working through the challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide weekly or more often space for conversation, focusing on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an agenda and only forward planning items, not focusing on past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conflict.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-teachers are struggling to plan together.</td>
<td>Ensure teachers have shared planning time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize stipend time if currently prep time is not enough.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organize direct planning using Google tools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attend planning meetings to facilitate and stay agenda focused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One co-teacher has been observed to have taken a passive or assistant role.</td>
<td>Speak with that teacher individually</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitate a joint planning meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide passive teacher with instructional support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide access to observe a model lesson of another partnership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggested Reading


REFERENCES


Fink, L. D. (2013). *Creating significant learning experiences*. Wiley


APPENDIX

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Teacher Interview Questions

- Describe your current co-teaching situation. (This varies slightly depending on whether the question is directed at a special or general education teacher.
  Special Education teacher: Describe your current teaching situation? What is your co-teaching caseload like?
  General Education teacher: Describe how co-teaching looks in your class currently? Tell me how it is going currently for you?
- How would you describe your level of current administration support in your relationship with co-teaching?
  ○ Can you give me some examples of what has worked well in your co-teaching support relationship?
  ○ Why do you think that worked well?
- Generally speaking, tell me about a time when you felt most successful in co-teaching.
- Generally speaking, tell me about a time when your leadership team helped you feel supported as a co-teacher.
  ○ Describe a time your leadership team helped you feel success in co-teaching?
- Generally speaking, tell me about a time when you felt you needed more or different support. Why did you feel that way? What could have improved that?
- Tell me if and what were the ways in which your pre-service teaching helped you feel equipped in your role as a co-teacher.
- Do you feel that students are impacted as a result of your confidence with co-teaching? If so, can you explain how?
- Tell me about a time when you felt particularly a lack of confidence in the co-teaching process. Do you think it impacted your students?
Administrator Interview Questions

- Describe how co-teaching looks in classrooms in your school currently.
- How would you describe the supports provided to your teaching staff implementing co-teaching?
  - Can you tell me about what is working well in your school related to co-teaching?
- Generally speaking, tell me about a time when you felt most successful in supporting co-teaching.
- Is there a particular model of co-teaching that you value and would like to see in place in your school?
- Where would you like to provide more support? Tell me why you think that area needs more support.
- Tell me if and what were the ways in which your administrator preparation helped you feel equipped in your role as a supporter of co-teaching.
- Can you tell me how you feel that students are impacted as a result of support provided to teachers engaged in co-teaching?