COLLECTIVE EFFICACY OF ELEMENTARY CO-TEACHERS

By

DONNA MULLANEY

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Teacher Leadership

written under the direction of

________________________

Dr. Judith Harrison, Chair

________________________

Dr. Angela O’Donnell, Committee

________________________

Dr. Antoinette Adams, Committee

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 2021
COLLECTIVE EFFICACY OF ELEMENTARY CO-TEACHERS

ABSTRACT

Co-teaching is defined as special education and general education teachers working together to support all students in an inclusive classroom. The goal of co-teaching is to provide all students with the opportunity to participate and learn in a class that is challenging and provides opportunities for success. Many districts embraced co-teaching with the hope that teachers would expand the scope of their teaching, and students may feel more connected to their peers. Literature reports on the benefits of co-teachers such as shared expertise and improved student outcomes; however, for co-teaching to be successful, structures to foster collective efficacy are required. This study explores how elementary general and special education teachers constructed collective efficacy beliefs that shaped their experiences. To gain insight into this phenomenon, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of six general education and five special education elementary teachers in an urban school district in Northern New Jersey. The Social Cognitive Theory was the theoretical lens used in this study. To cultivate collective efficacy, the results of this study revealed the need to create opportunities for meaningful collaborative practices to discuss roles and responsibilities, time to co-plan, and professional learning. Furthermore, this study found mutual trust and respect are essential components to support collective efficacy. This qualitative study is significant to the field of education, particularly to school organizations seeking ways to support and foster the collective efficacy of co-teachers.

*Keywords*: co-teaching, collective efficacy, collaborative teaching, inclusion
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Obtaining my doctorate has been a life-long dream, and it fills me with gratitude that I was able to complete such a momentous accomplishment. First, I would like to thank my professors in my graduate program at Rutgers. You broadened my perspectives by pushing me to do what I thought was impossible and supported me throughout the process. To my dissertation committee members, Dr. Angela O'Donnell and Dr. Antoinette Adams, you both have been a source of encouragement, and I thank you for your incredible expertise and feedback. A special thank you to Dr. Judith Harrison, my dissertation advisor, your feedback, encouragement, and guidance are greatly appreciated.

To my cohort team, I learned so much from our conversations in class, and your humor helped make this an enjoyable experience. A special thank you to my colleague and friend Joan, who started this journey with me. We did it! Your support and encouragement helped make this journey possible.

To my best friend Marie, I appreciate your support, encouraging words, and confidence in my ability to accomplish this goal. You never once doubted my ability and daily emails helped keep my sanity!

To my husband, there are no words to truly express my gratitude for your encouragement and support throughout these last four years. You made me feel like I could actually become "Dr. Blonde," as you lovingly referred to me. Thank you for always being my biggest champion.

A special thank you to my daughters, Taryn and Kelly, whose love and belief in me made me want to push forward. I am so proud of you both, and I hope you are proud of me.
COLLECTIVE EFFICACY OF ELEMENTARY CO-TEACHERS

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother and father, who instilled a strong work ethic in me. You managed to work hard, never complained, and still gave so much to others. Your down-to-earth approach to life taught me never to take myself too seriously. Your example is one of the main reasons I was able to accomplish this goal.

To my grandchildren: Amelia, Brennan, Nora, and my grandson Baby Boy Beardsley. Never think it is too late to chase a dream. Always set your goals high and believe all things are possible! I have faith each of you will achieve wonderful things in life. I love you all.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .......................................................................................................................... iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..................................................................................................... iv
DEDICATION ......................................................................................................................... v
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................... x
LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................................................................. xi
CHAPTER 1 .......................................................................................................................... 1
Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1
   Problem Statement .......................................................................................................... 2
   Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 3
   Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 4
   Definitions ....................................................................................................................... 5
CHAPTER 2 .......................................................................................................................... 6
Literature Review ................................................................................................................. 6
   Historical Perspective ................................................................................................... 6
   Co-teaching Framework ................................................................................................. 9
   Key Understandings of Co-Teaching ........................................................................... 10
   Collaboration and Planning ......................................................................................... 13
   Professional Development ............................................................................................ 17
   Roles and Responsibilities ............................................................................................ 18
      Models of Co-Teaching ............................................................................................... 19
   Trust .............................................................................................................................. 22
   Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy ......................................................................... 23
   Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................. 25
   Summary ....................................................................................................................... 28
CHAPTER 3 .......................................................................................................................... 30
Methodology ....................................................................................................................... 30
   Research Questions ....................................................................................................... 30
   Research Design ........................................................................................................... 31
   Research Setting .......................................................................................................... 31
COLLECTIVE EFFICACY OF ELEMENTARY CO-TEACHERS

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Co-teacher Teams and Experience.................................................................42
Table 2: Differences in Special Education and General Education Co-teachers...............46
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The Co-Teaching Agency and Efficacy Model………………………………27
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 set forth specific requirements to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with a free and appropriate public education that meets their needs. Additionally, the passage of Public Law 94-142 (IDEA) requires students with disabilities to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and have access to the general education curriculum. In recent years, the number of students with disabilities served by public schools has steadily increased to a national average of 13% of the student population. In New Jersey, special needs students account for approximately 17% of the public-school population (NCES, 2017). As this population has grown, so have the legislative and societal pressures that demand an inclusive approach to serving these students' educational needs.

The co-teaching model has become a way to ensure federal requirements are met and while providing students with a fair, equitable, and inclusive education. Inclusive practices, such as co-teaching, provides opportunities for students with disabilities to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms. The IDEA amendments push for inclusion initially focused on providing access for students with disabilities to be with their non-disabled peers for social reasons. In contrast, now accountability assessment measures place increased pressures to ensure all students have access to the general education curriculum (Zigmond, 2003). Co-teaching supports inclusive practices by pairing a special education teacher with a general education teacher to support all students in meeting high standards' expectations as measured by accountability-based assessments such as the New Jersey Student Learning
Assessments. Many districts embraced co-teaching with the hope that teachers would expand the scope of their teaching, and students may feel more connected to their peers.

However, co-teaching is not always successful and can cause contention and frustration among teachers who are not provided the support and resources to be successful (Friend & Cook, 2017). Effective implementation in how districts assign teachers to work in teams can contribute to the success or failure of these new partnerships. School districts have used various approaches and models for assigning these co-teaching partnerships. Some co-teachers have a choice in their assignments, participate in relevant professional development experiences and work closely together to plan and implement instruction. Whereas other co-teaching pairs are assigned based on availability or convenience, receive minimal professional development, and may not have structured time to plan lessons together. Without consideration of differences in philosophies, beliefs, and teaching styles, co-teaching partnerships may be unsuccessful and detrimental to student achievement (Deppler, 2012)

**Problem Statement**

Plainview is an urban public school district in Northern New Jersey that serves students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade. The total student population is 9,508, and the percentage of students with disabilities is 14.7% (New Jersey School Performance Report, 2018). As this population has grown, the legislative and societal pressures that demand an inclusive approach to serving special education students' educational needs in the "least restrictive environment" have also increased (United States Office of Special Education, 2004). Plainview school district enacted co-teaching to ensure these federal requirements are adhered to while providing teachers and students a viable option for overcoming a culture of isolation in schools.
In the last five years, co-taught classrooms in Plainview's elementary schools have grown substantially. Currently, 19 elementary classrooms have co-teaching partnerships. As a district supervisor, I am responsible for observing and evaluating co-teachers and I began to notice a breakdown in some co-teaching partnerships during classroom visits. Often, when I visited classrooms, the general education teacher would lead whole group instruction. In contrast, the special education teacher either sat on the sidelines or worked on some task while waiting for small group instruction to begin. During post-conference meetings, teachers would often verbalize resentment, frustration, and dissatisfaction with being "thrown" into co-teaching without any support or training. Special education teachers expressed uncertainty about their roles and responsibilities, while the general education teachers expressed resentment in planning most lessons. As I began to delve deeper into co-teaching dynamics, I realized that many teachers lacked the supports needed to thrive; the overarching concerns centered on the ambiguity of the roles and responsibilities and lack of support.

**Significance of the Study**

To support co-teaching practices in my district, unraveling the complexities of co-teaching and identifying factors that impede progress are required. It is critical to study effective co-teaching models and uncover the root causes of ineffective models. It is equally important to examine the perceptions and feelings of the teachers who are in the 'trenches' and shed light on supportive structures needed to make co-teaching live up to its potential. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore factors that contribute to the success, or lack thereof, of elementary, co-taught partnerships and to determine the relationship between teachers' perceptions of co-teaching in connection to self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Self-efficacy is used to study motivation, behavior, and how much effort will be applied to task-based
perceptions. This theory indicates that the perception of one's ability influences the way one approaches a task, goal, or undertaking. These beliefs are more powerful than actual abilities and strongly influence motivation and actions (Bandura, 1977). Likewise, collective efficacy is derived from the social cognitive theory. It is defined as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (Bandura, 1997, p.477). Although some research on co-teaching is available, very few have considered the construct of collective efficacy in these partnerships. Even fewer delve into the link between teacher's self-efficacy and the collective efficacy of the partnerships. Therefore, this qualitative study aimed to explore the connection between collective efficacy beliefs and the underpinning supports needed to foster collective agency among co-teachers. Results here provide information on co-teachers' perceptions, experiences, and beliefs to understand the dynamics required for successful co-teaching partnerships. This qualitative study is significant to the field of education, particularly to school organizations seeking ways to support and improve inclusive practices.

**Research Questions**

The current study examined the experiences and perceptions of elementary co-teachers through the lens of collective efficacy to determine factors that may lead to successful outcomes. The research questions, which guided the study include:

1. How do special education and general education elementary teachers experience their co-teaching partnerships? How do these experiences affect self-efficacy?

2. How do special education and general education elementary teachers view each other's role in a co-teaching classroom, and how do these perceptions affect the collective efficacy of these partnerships?
3. What conditions are required to support the collective efficacy of co-teaching partnerships?

**Definitions**

Listed below are key terms are defined, which will be referenced throughout this study.

*Collective Efficacy:* Refers to the belief of a group that they possess the wherewithal to impact student learning positively. Members of a group with a high degree of collective efficacy have confidence that they can successfully execute a course of action (Bandura, 1997).

*Co-Teaching:* Co-teaching is the practice of pairing teachers together in a classroom to share the responsibilities of planning, instructing, and assessing students. In a co-teaching setting, the teachers are considered equally responsible and accountable for the classroom. Co-teaching is often implemented with general and special education teachers paired together as part of an initiative to create a more inclusive classroom (Stein, 2016).

*Differentiation:* Differentiation is a combination of careful progress monitoring and adapting instruction in response. It is an approach to instruction in which teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs of students to maximize the learning opportunity for each student in a classroom (Deunk et al., 2018).

*Inclusion:* This instructional model submits that unless limited by disability, all students, despite their learning ability, should spend as much time as possible or the entire school day, as in the case of full inclusion, in the general education classroom with their non-disabled peers (Cook and Friend, 2005).

*Self-Efficacy:* Refers to an individual’s belief in their capacity to execute behaviors necessary to produce specific performance attainments (Bandura, 1997).
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The following review of the literature provides a context for the development of research questions by examining what is currently known about elementary co-teaching practices of special education and general education teachers. First, this section will provide a historical perspective of co-teaching. Secondly, the benefits of co-teaching, as documented in the literature, will be addressed. Next, the areas of collaboration, planning time, and support for these new structures will be explored. Finally, the subject matter of this study, teachers' perceptions of co-teaching, will be examined through the lens of individual and collective efficacy.

Historical Perspective

To have a complete understanding of the road that leads to co-teaching, we must consider the historical framework of special education over the last several decades and the steps made towards inclusivity. Prior to diving into the most recent reforms in special education, I will briefly recap the struggles that brought us to our current status.

The fight for equity for students with special needs started close to the turn of the 20th century when compulsory public education began. Special education classes were a place for "misfits" and students who could not keep up with their peers. People who suffered the most from inequalities, such as those with disabilities, had little influence on educational policy (Cuban & Tyack, 1997). As the Civil Rights Movement surged in the 1950s, the fight for equal rights and non-discriminatory laws was at the forefront of our Nation. In 1954, Brown vs. the Board of Education established school segregation denies students an equal educational opportunity. The inequalities outlined in the Brown v. Board of Education shed light on the unequal treatment of students with disabilities. They helped pave the way for the 1975 federal
lack requiring free and appropriate education for all children with disabilities. Before 1975, there was very little reform in special education. President Ford signed into law Public Law 94-142, which required all schools receiving federal funding to provide for disabled students by providing them with fair and equal access to education. To contrast this somewhat slow but steady progress, A Nation at Risk fueled a sense of urgency to the state of education.

In 1983, A Nation at Risk spurred local and federal agencies to redirect their focus on improving student academic achievement (Gardner, 1983). Many initiatives since the publication of A Nation at Risk focused on students considered "at risk." It would seem logical children with disabilities would be a priority for any reform efforts directed at "at-risk" students. Unfortunately, this was not always the case. For example, the release of A Nation at Risk also triggered the standards-based teacher education movement. Although standards typically referred to working with diverse students, references to students with disabilities were rarely noted. Despite the rhetoric of A Nation at Risk, a significant turning point came about for special education with new federal legislation.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 provided children with disabilities the same opportunity for education as those who did not have a disability (United States Office of Special Education, 2004). In 1997, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) supported the inclusivity of special needs students and provided access to the general education curriculum and assessments. General education and special education teachers were encouraged to work collaboratively for the benefit of all students. This can be seen as the foundation for co-taught, inclusive classroom practices. The Committee Report that accompanied the new law to Congress explained the legislators' intent:
inclusion is a philosophy of acceptance and flexibility. These victories for special education coincided with the standards reform movement of the late 1980s.

The Clinton administration's Goals 2000 gave states federal money to write their own academic standards. In Goals 2000, Congress emphasized, all students were entitled to participate in a broad and challenging curriculum (Cuban & Tyack, 1997). States applying for funds were required to submit a plan describing how all students, including students with disabilities, would increase their educational achievement and meet the goals of the curriculum and standards. Children with disabilities were able to participate in standards-based education, with an expectation of achieving high standards. Although the standards reform movement called for more challenging instructional approaches, teachers often lacked the belief that habitually low-performing students could really achieve the standards (Fuhrman, 2003).

Additionally, many of the state academic standards were vague (Ravitch, 2016). The measuring of these high standards became a focus of the Bush administration. The passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) raised the bar for special education students in the general education setting through assessment mandates.

Assessment of students with disabilities is a complex issue in education policy. Historically, students with disabilities were not assessed along with their peers. Schools, like all organizations, value what they measure. One can argue that educational institutions did not value students with disabilities because there were no accountability measures in place. In 2001, President Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind Act. The law redefined the federal role in K-12 education with the lofty goal of closing the achievement gap between disadvantaged, disabled, and minority students and their peers. Schools were now accountable for assessment gains of all sub-groups, including special education students. NCLB required all schools to test
students in grades three through eight annually and once in high school in reading and math. Scores were required to be disaggregated by subgroups, such as disability status, to ensure every group's progress was monitored and not hidden in the overall average. Schools that failed to meet Annual Year Progress (AYP) would have a series of corrective actions placed on them (Ravitch, 2016). Special education students and their academic progress were no longer swept under the table; schools were now held accountable.

Together, NCLB and IDEA requirements sought to combine individualized instruction and school accountability for students with disabilities. The academic performance of special education students was now a shared responsibility for general and special education teachers. The focus on the accountability of students with disabilities elevated them in the consciousness of schools, districts, and the state. The alignment of both federal laws had the potential to provide inclusive, powerful opportunities for children with disabilities. However, NCLB caused many parents and activists to protest against excessive testing, and the sanctions were not effective (Ravitch, 2016).

Much has been learned over the last few decades, and progress has been made. A Nation at Risk, Goals 2000, IDEA, and NCLB all tinkered with improving equitable opportunities for students with special needs. This history of modern reform reveals challenges that require a continued shared commitment towards inclusivity. Policymakers and educational institutions must continue to create a paradigm shift in tackling inclusive practices in order to make significant steps in the right direction.

**Co-teaching Framework**

Addressing the needs of students in the least restrictive environment has been an essential part of special education for many years. These historical trends have significantly shifted for
students with disabilities from being isolated from their peers to receiving services within the least restrictive environment (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015). Co-teaching offers a much more expansive opportunity for inclusive practices (Friend et al., 2010) by which instruction is provided to students with disabilities by both the general education and a special education teacher to a heterogeneous class within a general education setting.

Federal policies such as NCLB and IDEIA and state mandates, such as the New Jersey Student Learning Assessments (NJSLA), helped to propel co-teaching as a popular instructional approach for ensuring that students have access to the general curriculum and mainstream environment while still receiving specialized instruction to meet their needs (Friend et al., 2010). Friend et al. (2010) define co-teaching as pairing a general education teacher and a special education teacher to provide instruction cooperatively within the general education setting to a heterogeneous group of students that includes students with and without disabilities. In a true co-teaching model, the special education teacher and the general education teacher work together to plan instruction, make accommodations, implement instructional strategies, and monitor and assess student learning (Murawski, 2010). Hang, and Rabren (2009) define co-teaching to include four components: (a) two certified educators, usually one general education teacher and one special education teacher; (b) instruction delivery by both teachers; (c) a heterogeneous group of students (i.e., students with disabilities and students without disabilities); and (d) a single classroom where students with disabilities are taught with their peers without disabilities.

**Key Understandings of Co-Teaching**

Co-teaching can be a rewarding professional experience for both the general education teacher and the special education teacher. This inclusive model can bring the strengths of two teachers together, with different expertise, to improve student outcomes (Cook & Friend, 2017).
Given the right conditions, working with a co-teacher can be meaningful and positive, contributing to a teacher's professional growth and sense of self-efficacy (Krammer et al., 2018). Teachers involved in co-teaching relationships state that this relationship resulted in increased professional satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth, personal support, and collaboration (Murawski, 2010).

Student achievement can be another benefit of co-teaching. Studies also show that students' academic, social, and behavioral outcomes improved when placed in a co-teaching classroom (Friend & Cook, 2013; Hang and Rabren, 2009). Several findings validate co-teaching as a useful practice in increasing instructional options for all students and reducing stigma for students with disabilities (Murawski, 2006; Oh-Young, 2015). Hang and Rabren (2009) surveyed both teachers' and students' views of co-teaching and the efficacy of this method of teaching. Forty-five co-teachers and 58 students with disabilities, all of whom were new to co-taught classrooms during the 2004 through 2005 school year, participated in the current study. The results revealed students with disabilities in co-taught classes significantly increased in achievement on standardized tests from the year before co-teaching. Their achievement was not significantly different from the overall achievement of their grade-level peers.

Similarly, Rivera et al. (2014) used a mixed-methods design to assess the psychosocial outcomes of 56 students with disabilities. Students rated items such as “How my classes challenge me” from “1” (very unhappy) to “5” (very happy), and items such as “I feel like a real part of my school.” The data revealed higher student-reported levels of school belonging, school satisfaction, and self-efficacy for new experiences. However, several limitations need to be considered in both studies. First, both studies only surveyed special education students. One could argue that perceptions of general students who participate in co-taught classrooms should
also be considered. Secondly, as it pertains to student outcomes, a notable lack of discussion is missing from the research. Additionally, to increase validity, a pre-survey could be used to measure changes in perceptions, allowing for comparative analysis throughout the school year.

Although there are studies highlighting the benefits of co-teaching for teachers and students (Cook et al., 2017), others report students with disabilities may not receive specialized instruction within the co-taught setting. For example, McDuffie et al. (2009) observed that students with disabilities interacted with teachers less often in their co-taught classrooms than in non-co-taught classrooms. It is important to note studies that measure the effect sizes of co-teaching as a useful model are sparse. In a seminal study on co-teaching, Murawski and Swanson (2001) conducted a quantitative analysis of 89 databased articles on the effectiveness of co-teaching. Effectiveness was determined by the use of a meta-analytic procedure, which provides a summary of findings across the entire body of research and the results of individualized studies converted to an effect size. The scores were then aggregated to yield an overall estimate of effect size. Researchers reported only six studies were identified that provided sufficient quantitative information. Effect sizes for the individual studies varied considerably (0.08 to 0.95), suggesting at best the effectiveness of co-teaching is moderately successful. Due to the limited scope of reliable and measurable data, Murawski and Swanson (2001) cautioned that additional research is needed to confirm co-teaching is a useful model for students with disabilities. Despite gaps in quantitative measures, significant research has been reported the substantiate co-teaching as an effective practice in qualitative studies, specifically the impact of collaborative processes on co-teaching (Cramer et al., 2010; Weilbacher & Tilford, 2015).
Collaboration and Planning

Friend and Cook (2017) reiterated the need for collaboration within the co-teaching partnership. They define collaboration as follows: "Interpersonal collaboration is a style of direct interaction between at least two equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work towards a common goal" (p. 7). Co-teaching requires effective collaboration and necessitates sharing responsibility, accountability, and shared goals (Karten & Murawski, 2020). Collaborative practices provide opportunities for teachers to strengthen their partnerships, which may lead to positive perceptions of the co-teaching experience (Hang & Rabren, 2009). Research points to teamwork, receptiveness, creativity, and social skills as prerequisites for collaboration (Lawrence-Brown et al., 2006; Hang & Rabren, 2009). Not only can co-teaching promote collaboration, but it also can increase the ability to differentiate instruction (Karten & Murawski, 2020).

Research indicates that cultivating a culture of collaboration enables teachers to build on their experiences and pedagogy (Nelson et al., 2008). However, collaboration requires a framework that can support the development of a shared vision. Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) point out teachers must be aware of roadblocks that can slow down collaborative processes, and teachers who feel overwhelmed by the demands of teaching and mistrust reform initiatives may want to work in isolation. The norms of privacy and isolation can also thwart collaboration and make it difficult to plan with peers.

Although research has shown positive outcomes for teachers, do students also reap the benefits from collaborative co-teaching partnerships? Van Gardener et al. (2012) conducted a meta-analysis to ascertain research conducted the specific impact of collaboration on academic, social, or behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms. Of the 19
studies, seven showed both social and academic gains, four had mixed results, five studies were non-supportive for the collaborative method, and three studies reported no conclusion regarding the effectiveness of collaboration. The results indicate that while some collaborative co-teaching models produce gains, much still needs to be investigated to confirm co-teaching as a successful model for student outcomes. Although Van Gardener et al. (2012) provided information on student outcomes, it is not clear what components co-teachers use to overcome commonly faced challenges in collaboration or the consistency of the collaborative processes cited in the studies.

The collaborative nature of co-teaching has the potential to improve both teacher and student outcomes; cultivating a culture of collaboration enables teachers to build on their experiences and pedagogy (Nelson et al., 2008). However, collaboration requires a framework that can support the development of a shared vision (Nelson et al., 2008). Cook and Friend (2017) list defining characteristics of successful collaboration as 1) being voluntary; 2) requiring parity among participants; 3) based on mutual goals; 4) depending on shared responsibility for participation and decision making; 5) consisting of individuals who share their resources, and 6) consisting of individuals who share accountability for outcomes. Therein lies the challenge of collaboration in co-taught classrooms, which is finding time to co-plan for this shared responsibility.

Several researchers assert the importance of co-planning time between special education and general education teachers and state a true partnership will occur when both teachers take on equal responsibilities (Karten & Murawski, 2020; Strogilos et al., 2016). Additionally, when co-teachers do not have enough time to plan, the special education teacher might only take on the role of an instructional aide. Bouck (2007), who argues special education teachers are more likely to share an equal role in instruction when common planning time is provided to both
teachers, also supports this claim. Although the lack of co-planning time is a complaint of inclusion teachers, there is little research on what co-teachers do during their assigned planning periods or how much planning time is adequate (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). Isherwood et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the challenges of the newly implemented co-teaching model. This case study took place in a high-achieving suburban school district cited by the state for compliance issues for ensuring the least restrictive environment for the special education students. This study included 15 co-teacher partnerships and 4 principals. Through interviews, observations, and reviewing documents over a one-year period, the findings noted several problems that needed to be considered when structuring co-teaching teams. The difficulties included (1) master schedules to include common planning time, (2) time to plan effectively, (3) time of day in which co-teaching takes place, and (4) classroom composition concerning the ratio of special education students to general education students.

According to Lawrence-Brown et al. (2006), teachers who received less common planning time viewed themselves as less effective. Ideally, co-teaching teams would have the opportunity to meet at least three times a week to co-plan. While this seems like a sensible solution, the dynamics of school scheduling can sometimes be complicated.

Similarly, Austin (2001) surveyed one hundred thirty-nine kindergarten through twelfth-grade teachers in a large Northern New Jersey District to determine factors that undermine co-teaching effectiveness. Most teachers surveyed stated additional planning time was needed to collaborate. Murawski and Lochner (2011) draw attention to the importance of co-planning collaboratively:

Often the special educator enters the room and asks, "So, what are we doing today?"

Because special educators are usually not expected to be the content experts, this can
often put them at a disadvantage, as they spend the class time catching up, figuring out the instruction, and later remediating when students are not able to access the instruction as originally presented (p.175).

According to Murawski and Lochner (2011), the purpose of co-planning is to have proactive input from special education teachers to tap into their expertise in modifying instruction to ensure more students can be successful in learning the curriculum. While these studies highlight the importance of collaboration and co-planning, they do not provide insights into the ways that schools have overcome the obstacles of providing opportunities to co-plan. Collaboration and flexibility were common threads that strengthened partnerships and allow for productive co-teaching experiences.

Co-teaching can be a strong form of teacher collaboration with multiple opportunities to support each other's profession (Murawski, 2010). However, the proper supports must be in place to provide these partnerships with the resources needed to navigate these new roles. Co-teaching requires shared accountability, clear communication, and mutual respect to be successful. Lawrence-Brown et al. (2006) conducted a study of an urban district that implemented a highly successful collaborative, inclusive structure. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with school administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and therapists most closely involved with inclusion. This study focused solely on issues related to co-teaching and the factors needed for co-teaching to be successful. The research reported four essential elements that supported productive co-teaching partnerships: (1) strong communication between teachers, (2) flexibility in co-teaching practices, (3) respect between co-teachers, and (4) organization of instruction. It should be noted that even within the study, teachers struggled to reach these goals. However, through reflective practices and ongoing
support, they were able to move forward. Additionally, administrators play a crucial role in enabling teachers to be productive in their roles (Cook, 2017). Although much of the research points to the importance of administrative support, little attention is paid to the level of expertise or understanding that the administrator has of co-teaching. It would be challenging to support co-teaching structures if only a basic understanding of what components are needed within that support system is in place.

Teams that are able to create a positive classroom climate based on respect and equal responsibility are more likely to perceive co-teaching as a positive experience (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013). Co-teachers must consistently communicate about what occurs in the classroom. This will reinforce their roles as equals and develop collaborative practices. Teachers who have developed a working relationship are more likely to share classroom responsibilities leading to a more positive perception of co-teaching (Cook, 2017; Conderman et al., 2009).

**Professional Development**

Professional development is a critical part of providing the skills and capacity for co-teaching. It is important for educators to feel they have the expertise to be successful, or they may doubt their capacity to be effective (Cook, 2017). Brendle et al. (2017) conducted a study of two co-taught elementary classrooms using interviews and classroom observations to gain insight into perceptions of co-teaching. They found teachers who did not consistently work on co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing might doubt their abilities in co-teaching. Most teachers indicated they had inadequate knowledge of co-teaching strategies and felt unprepared for the co-teaching roles. All teachers stressed the need for professional development in strategies to work collaboratively in their partnerships effectively. Based on the evidence, even though teachers strived to work in an amicable manner, each of the co-teachers worked
independently in planning, instruction, and assessing. In addition, the teachers reported the belief that the general education teacher holds a large part of the responsibility for classroom instruction. In contrast, the special education teacher functions in a support role, indicating a lack of a true cohesive partnership as defined by the co-teach research for effective implementation (Friend et al., 2010).

Similarly, Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) surveyed 129 teachers to measure confidence, interest, and co-teaching attitudes. The results found teachers who had frequent opportunities to learn about co-teaching were more confident in their abilities to co-teach and demonstrated more positive attitudes towards and greater confidence with co-teaching than those who received less training. These findings suggest the lack of knowledge in co-teaching practices inhibits the ability to co-teach effectively.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

Co-teachers must have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in order to receive support from their partners. Bouck (2007) investigated teachers’ roles and responsibilities in two co-taught 8th-grade history classes in an urban district in Michigan. The teachers in the study all had less than four years of teaching experience. Through classroom observations and interviews, the researcher found both co-teachers must be open to sharing instruction with a large group and individual students. Additionally, conversations between co-teaching partners were beneficial to addressing concerns with roles, providing instruction, and handling classroom management. The findings concluded teachers must embrace difficult conversations about grading students, classroom management, student participation, and accommodations prior to embarking on the relationship.
Murawski (2010) reported that mutually satisfying co-teaching relationships emerge when teachers focus on the technical aspects of co-teaching; in other words, establishing roles and responsibilities prior to engaging in the co-teaching relationship. Co-teaching calls for teachers to blend fundamental beliefs about the roles students and teachers will play in the classroom. Teachers must decide who will take on responsibilities for specific lessons and agree upon discipline procedures to ensure that consistent behavioral objectives are met (Krammer et al., 2018; Murawski, 2010). Krammer et al. (2018) examined attributes necessary for effective team teaching. The study focused on differences between self-selected teacher teams and teams arranged by the school administration. The study's purpose was to determine if teachers working in self-selected teacher teams show more positive attitudes, shared responsibility, job satisfaction, and collective self-efficacy expectations than teachers who worked in assigned teams. Surveys of 321 language arts revealed self-selected teaching teams had significantly more positive ratings with enjoyment with the co-teaching process. These results support the assumption that self-selection of the partner teams may be helpful for ensuring compatible teaching teams but does not necessarily lead to a higher quality of collaborative teaching. To understand how roles can vary in a co-taught class, it is necessary to understand the various co-teaching models.

Models of Co-Teaching

There can be misconceptions regarding the roles and expectations of two teachers in an inclusion classroom. It is, therefore, useful to explore the variety of co-teaching models that are available. Scruggs et al. (2007) state the most frequently used co-teaching model is the one teaches, one assists model. Through their research, they found the general education teacher was primarily responsible for leading class instruction. In contrast, the special education teacher
monitored seatwork and circulated within the class to provide individual assistance. Cook and Friend (2017) detail various methods co-teachers can use to determine both teachers' roles and responsibilities. The five models of collaborative co-teaching are as follows: (1) the one teach, one assist model, (2) the station teaching model, (3) the parallel teaching model, (4) the alternative teaching model, and (5) the team-teaching model.

**One Teach, One Assist.** The one teach, one assist model consists of one teacher having the primary instructional responsibility of the classroom, while the second teacher gathers observational data on students and assists students who may need extra support (Fenty et al., 2011). The observational data gathered provides information on students' academic, social, and behavioral skills (Sileo, 2011). The one teach, one assist model provides students with disabilities access to the general curriculum; it also offers instructional support for those students without disabilities who require assistance.

**Station Teaching.** This model of co-teaching involves dividing the students into instructional groups. Typical groups are divided into three stations or groups. Each co-teacher works at a station to deliver instructional content while working with a small group of students. While each teacher is working with a group of their own, there will be one group working on an independent activity. Students will have the opportunity to work at each station throughout the instructional block. In this model, the stations should not build on one another but rather be non-sequential (Sileo, 2011). This model provides opportunities for all students to receive instruction within a small group setting. It also allows for increased teacher and student interactions with general education as well as the special education teacher (Fenty et al., 2011).

**Parallel Teaching.** This model requires both teachers to provide the same instructional content to two groups of students. In the parallel co-teaching model, both teachers teach at the
same time. A significant amount of planning may be required to make sure that both groups of students are provided with the same instruction in the same timeframe (Embury & Kroeger, 2012). Parallel teaching increases the likelihood of participation. It also allows for intensive work with a small group of students (Friend, 2017).

**Alternative Teaching.** This model consists of one teacher providing a group of students with instruction on the main lesson, while the other teacher is providing either remediation or an extension of the lesson to push beyond what is expected. The grouping for this co-teaching structure should change according to the needs of the student (Sileo, 2011). Friend and Burrello (2005) note that it is essential to understand the group of students receiving this support is not the same every time, or even the same ability level, so as not to single out specific students who are performing at the lowest levels.

**Team Teaching.** Team teaching requires both teachers to teach the same lesson together and presenting the material together, demonstrating while the other teacher is speaking, role-playing, and answering student questions as they arise (Sileo, 2011). Co-teachers using this model share responsibility for planning, teaching, and assessing the progress of all students in the class.

According to Cook and McDuffie (2020), teachers must decide which co-teaching model will be the most appropriate. If teachers decide to use the team-teaching model, which utilizes whole group instruction, both teachers must feel confident in practice. However, if the whole group was selected, but one teacher does not feel confident, the teachers may rely on one-teach and one-assist. Cook and McDuffie also point out the importance of determining student needs when selecting a model for co-teaching. If only some students benefit from the lesson being taught, station or alternative teaching should be implemented. It is important to note scholars...
have consistently concluded that the one-teach, one-assist co-teaching model represents the majority of co-taught classrooms in our country, which may be one reason for disappointing student outcomes associated with co-teaching (Mastropieri et al. 2005).

**Trust**

There are many components necessary for co-teaching to be successful. Building trust is essential when working with others due to the increased interdependence. This is especially true in co-teaching. According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003), “Trust is an individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open” (p. 189). After working together, if a person displays (a) benevolence, (b) reliability, (c) honesty, (d), openness, and (e) competence, then another party may feel confident enough to risk vulnerability with that person by extending trust (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003).

Trust is a requirement for collaborative partnerships. Bessette (2008) states, “The development of a trusting relationship over the life of a co-teaching partnership may be the most critical of all” (p. 1394). When trust develops, co-teaching can become a rewarding and meaningful endeavor with a focus on improving learning. Co-teaching depends strongly on the respect co-teachers build for each other while having strong communication skills, demonstrating flexibility, and being open to each other’s ideas (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2018). Trust also allows groups and their members to be vulnerable and increase collective efficacy (Macmillan, Meyer, & Northfield, 2010). Without trust, efforts to build strong co-teaching relationships may fail.
Self-Efficacy and Collective Efficacy

The correlation between self-efficacy and collaborative teaching may be another factor that affects co-teaching partnerships. Bandura (1994) states, "The creation of learning environments conducive to the development of cognitive skills rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers" (p. 240). This correlation points to the idea that teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy are better skilled in addressing their students' academic needs and provide positive learning experiences to improve student achievement. Additionally, teachers who possess high levels of self-efficacy tend to be open to trying new methods and improving their pedagogy. They are also less likely to experience burnout, support pupils' autonomy to a greater extent, and are more attentive to struggling students (Brouwers & Tomic, 2003; Henson, 2001). Similarly, teachers with high self-efficacy show greater passion for teaching and are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

According to Bandura (1997), the more a person believes he or she has the capability of accomplishing a task, the more likely that person is to attempt the task and accomplish it. If self-efficacy is an important factor in the development of cognitive skills, can self-efficacy be nourished in co-teaching classrooms? Several studies assert collaboration strengthens self-efficacy and promotes positive perceptions of co-teaching (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Rivera, McMahon, & Keys; 2014). Hang and Rabren (2009) highlight the importance of recognizing the efficacy of both teachers and students. Similarly, Krammer et al. (2018) consider the efficacy of both the general education and special education teachers and each teacher's philosophy, mindset, behavior, and individual self-efficacy as a collective entity and the power of the team to produce effects through collective action.
To measure efficacy, Schwab et al. (2015) administered surveys to determine characteristics associated with co-teaching and found the level of communication skills and external resources to be most influential to collective self-efficacy. Surprisingly, experienced teachers showed lower ratings of efficacy than less experienced teachers did. The "newness" of co-teaching is mentioned as a possible cause, whereas experienced teachers may not have received university training on co-teaching. Similarly, Austin (2001) used surveys to determine teacher perceptions of co-teaching. However, unlike Krammer et al. (2018), he also included semi-structured interviews with experienced and new teachers. The results showed that both new and experienced teachers felt co-teaching was effective and worthwhile. While there may be many variables that may contribute to the different findings, one could argue researchers may be able to gain deeper insights by incorporating qualitative measures into their research (Creswell, 2016).

Ross and Bruce (2007) report teachers with high efficacy persist when faced with student low student performance and expend greater effort. This is particularly true for lower ability students or students who have discipline problems. The study concluded that high-efficacy teachers have positive attitudes toward low achieving students, build friendly relationships with them, and set higher academic standards for this group than low-efficacy teachers. We do not know the extent that this would be true for co-teaching. However, it would seem plausible since low-performing students and students with disabilities are often classified as special education students in co-taught classrooms. More research in this area would be needed to confirm if this holds true for all co-taught classrooms.
Theoretical Framework

The current study was framed in the social cognitive theory as developed by Albert Bandura (1977). The social cognitive theory states human functioning is explained by the way behavior, cognition, and other personal factors interact with environmental events. This interaction is known as triadic reciprocal causation (Bandura, 1986). The social cognitive theory argues inner and external forces do not drive people exclusively. The social cognitive theory is centered on the belief that interaction between the world and the person interpreting it shapes behavior and knowledge.

Social cognitive theory not only examines whether individuals believe they are capable of a task but also examines the outcomes expectancy; that is, the likely consequences of performing a specific task at an optimum level (Tshannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Bandura (1986) states, “among the mechanisms of personal agency; none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives” (p. 1176).

Self-efficacy is grounded in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory and is used to study motivation, behavior, and how much effort will be applied to task-based perceptions. This theory indicates that the perception of one's own ability influences the way one approaches any task, goal, or undertaking (Bandura, 1977). These beliefs are more powerful than actual abilities and strongly influence motivation and actions (Tschannedn-Moran & Johnson, 2011). Viewing co-teaching through this lens provides a way to explore the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their ability to be successful based on experiences, practices, and the outcomes of their beliefs. Whereas collective efficacy refers to the perception(s) of teachers in a school, as a whole, to organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students (Goddard & Goddard, 2001).
When team members hold positive beliefs about the team's capabilities, there is greater creativity and productivity (Kim & Shin, 2015). When educators believe in their collective ability to influence student outcomes, there are significantly higher levels of academic achievement (Bandura, 1993). Bandura named this pattern in human behavior "collective efficacy," which he defined as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (Bandura, 1997, p. 477). The idea of collective efficacy in educational settings has been tested and refined, with researchers finding that collective efficacy can strengthen teachers' confidence in their teams and improve student achievement (Goddard et al., 2004).

Rachel Eells (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on collective efficacy in education and found that the beliefs teachers hold about the ability of the school as a whole are "strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations" (p. 110). Similarly, John Hattie positioned collective efficacy at the top of the list of factors that influence student achievement (Hattie, 2016). Hattie’s research, better known as Visible Learning, is a culmination of nearly 30 years synthesizing more than 1,500 meta-analyses comprising more than 90,000 studies involving over 300 million students around the world. According to his Visible Learning research, collective teacher efficacy is more than three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than socioeconomic status. It is more than twice the effect of prior achievement and more than triples the effect of the home environment and parental involvement. It is also greater than three times more predictive of student achievement than student motivation and concentration, persistence, and engagement.

The Co-Teaching Agency and Efficacy Model (Figure 1) illustrates the connection between self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and social cognitive theory. Through this conceptual
framework, the self-efficacy of the special education teacher and the self-efficacy of the general education teacher determines "collective efficacy." Collective efficacy is not the sum of each co-teacher's self-efficacy beliefs. Instead, collective efficacy results from teachers' interactions, experiences, and perceptions from working together. It is what occurs when co-teachers remark that they cannot achieve individually what they can now achieve by working together (Goddard et al., 2000).

**Figure 1**

*The Co-Teaching Agency and Efficacy Model*

Collective efficacy considers each teacher's capabilities, beliefs, confidence, and individual self-efficacy as a collective entity to achieve a task. Similarly, collective agency
occurs through shared beliefs in the power to produce effects by collective action (Goddard et al., 2000). Agency and efficacy are two intertwined constructs in the social cognitive theory and are critical to the success, or lack thereof, in inclusion settings. Bandura (1995) explains that the most effective way of developing a strong sense of self-efficacy is through mastery experiences. Successfully completing a task strengthens our sense of self-efficacy. However, failing to complete a challenge adequately can undermine and weaken self-efficacy.

Summary

This literature review provided background on federal laws related to special education and detailed legislation that pathed the way for more inclusive practices. Next, a brief synopsis of the historical and political influence of co-teaching was provided. The literature then provided a key overview of the essential elements of co-teaching and the structures that support co-teaching practices. The theoretical framework of social cognitive theory was defined and then correlated to self-efficacy and collective efficacy in order to be understood as an organizational construct to improve student outcomes.

As schools gravitate towards co-teaching, the literature suggests an urgent need for further investigation of the structures and conditions that support effective co-teaching practices. Much of the research of literature points to co-teaching as an important model for supporting inclusive schooling (Dieker, 2001; Murawski, 2006; Zigmond, 2003). Given the right conditions, working with a co-teacher can be a meaningful and positive experience by contributing to a teacher’s professional growth and sense of self-efficacy. Studies show academic and social outcomes for students can be improved when placed in a co-teaching classroom (Hang and Rabren, 2009; Rivera et al., 2014).
Despite the ample studies on co-teaching, many theoretical and conceptual gaps pervade the research. Some studies fail to provide a clearly defined rationale to guide the study (Rivera et al. 2014), while others fail to include data from both the general education and special education participants (Hang & Raben, 2009; Rivera et al., 2014). Because co-teaching has expanded, it has become vulnerable to varying interpretations, and additional research is warranted to gauge the value of this practice. Research in the areas of qualitative research synthesis could help bring the voices of teachers and students into the domain of public discourse and further address the complexities of co-teaching and strengthen co-teaching practices.
CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The central premise of this case study is to obtain an understanding of the perceptions of elementary co-teachers in the Plainview school district. A case study can be described as exploring a bounded system, such as individuals separately or in a group, to understand a situation deeply (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Yin (2014), a case study allows for understanding complex social experiences, such as small group interactions and organizational procedures, within a real-world context. Quantitative designs would be less effective in examining the depth of teachers' perceptions because they cannot truly capture the detailed descriptions of teachers’ narratives. This qualitative research design will allow for an in-depth analysis of the perspectives of elementary co-teachers.

Research Questions:

The self-efficacy framework informs the research questions since self-efficacy focuses on perceptions of skills to perform a task (Bandura, 1997). Examining teachers' self-efficacy levels is essential to understand because perceptions of self-efficacy influence performance (Bedir, 2015). The following research questions to guide the study:

1. How do special education and general education elementary teachers experience their co-teaching partnerships? How do these experiences affect their self-efficacy?
2. How do special education and general education elementary teachers view each other's role in a co-teaching classroom, and how do these perceptions affect the collective efficacy of these partnerships?
3. What conditions are required to support the collective efficacy of co-teaching partnerships?
Research Design

A qualitative case study design was utilized to explore the perceptions of elementary teachers regarding their co-teaching experiences. The current study’s rationale provides insight into the relationship between special education and general education elementary teachers' experiences with co-teaching and examines the connection between self-efficacy and collective efficacy among co-teachers. A case study design was used to understand situations and complex phenomena in a particular setting (Yin, 2014). A qualitative case study was used to explore co-teachers' perceptions of co-teaching and to identify conditions influencing these experiences. This included examining perspectives on the benefits and challenges of the co-teaching model and the supports required to foster successful partnerships. This study sought to determine the underlying role of self-efficacy and collective efficacy in relation to co-teacher partnerships.

Research Setting

The Plainview Public School District is a comprehensive community public school district that serves students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in Northern New Jersey. Plainview district is one of 31 former Abbott districts statewide, which are now referred to as Schools Development Authority (SDA) Districts based on the state's requirement to cover all costs for school building and renovation projects in SDA Districts.

As of the 2018-19 school years, the district's 13 schools had an enrollment of 9,444 students and 629 classroom teachers, and a student-teacher ratio of 16:1. Plainview has a total of nine elementary schools, of which eight schools have co-teaching classrooms. Of the 9,444 students enrolled at Plainview School District, 74% are Hispanic, 24% Black, 0% White, 0% Asian, and 2% of some other race. Additionally, 69.9% of the student population is classified as
economically disadvantaged, and 14.9% of the student population receives Special Education services (New Jersey School Performance Report, 2019).

**Research Participants**

The target population consisted of special and general elementary teachers who taught in co-teaching classrooms in the Plainview school district. Target populations have characteristics that represent the population being studied (Gall et al., 2015). The teachers were selected by using purposive sampling from the population. Purposeful sampling ensures participants were able to respond knowledgeably about co-teaching at the elementary school level. Purposeful sampling also decreases the likelihood that participants lack the knowledge needed to answer the survey questions (Gall et al., 2015). Teachers selected met the following criteria: (1) currently a general education or special education teacher, (2) instructed students in kindergarten; first, second, third, fourth, or fifth grades; and (3) currently in a co-taught class.

To obtain the necessary depth of inquiry of the research, eleven participants were selected for this study. The participants provided the researcher the opportunity to explore perspectives on co-teaching practices in-depth, through purposeful sampling, to reach saturation of responses (Creswell and Cresswell, 2018). By interviewing both special and general education teachers in different grades, the researcher was able to adequately account for alternative perspectives and collect evidence from multiple points of view, as recommended by Yin (2014). A brief Google survey was sent to all elementary co-teachers (Appendix A), asking information about how long they have co-taught, which grade they teach, and whether they are special education or general education teachers. The last question on the survey briefly explained the research and asked if they would be willing to participate. Participants were provided the option of checking "yes" or "not at this time." If participants selected yes, they were required to provide their email
addresses. The purpose of this survey was to prescreen participants to ensure they meet the criteria.

**Data Collection**

Several methods were employed to ensure adequate validity and reliability of the data to answer the research questions. For the purpose of this study, interviews and field notes were the primary sources of data. Using interviews and field notes provided the researcher the opportunity to explore co-teachers' perspectives. The primary purpose of an interview was to find out what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton 2015, p. 426). As Patton states:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask questions about those things. The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. (p. 426)

Observations can also be used in conjunction with interviews to document analysis and substantiate findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, at the time of the current study, observational data was not available due to the national pandemic requiring social distance protocols.

Prior to beginning the interview process, the interview disclosure statement was read to each participant, explaining the purpose of the research and informing participants they may skip any questions they felt uncomfortable answering. The researcher developed an interview protocol with the goal of collecting data on each research question (see Appendix A). Questions pertaining to co-teacher’s individual experiences addressed research question one. The next set
of questions focused on perceptions teachers had of their partner’s roles and responsibilities, which helped answer research question two. Lastly, the conditions needed to support collective efficacy were explored to help answer research question three. A semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was utilized to ask each participant the same questions, using the exact wording to minimize variation (Patton, 2007). The researcher asked three categories of questioning, as detailed by Patton: (a) background questions, (b) experience behavior questions, and (c) opinion belief questions. Each interview began with a background question pertaining to the respondents' teaching background and experience with co-teaching. Next, experience behavior questions addressed areas the participant enjoys about co-teaching and the challenges they have encountered. Consistent with Patton's guidelines, the researcher asked follow-up questions such as beliefs on the effectiveness of co-teaching in improving student outcomes.

Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask predetermined questions as a general guide and follow-up with clarifying questions as appropriate (Patton, 2007). The semi-structured approach was selected, rather than a structured approach, in order to have the flexibility to ask participants to elaborate on issues they bring up in response to the predetermined questions. As documented by Patton, semi-structured interview techniques guide the conversation but do not limit it. Interviews provide the researcher with the opportunity to see the world from another person's perspective (Gall et al., 2015). The semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to be free to explore beyond the questions and guide the conversation spontaneously, focusing on particular predetermined subjects (Gall et al., 2015). This interview style also permitted the researcher to respond to participants' stories as they emerged during the interview (Merriam, 2001). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend jotting down notes while
audio recording the interview in case the equipment fails. A copy of the interview questions was kept with the researcher, and notes were made next to the questions.

The data collected during the interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder from which the data was transcribed verbatim using Rev.com. Audio recordings preserved the data and allowed the interviewer to focus on the questions (O'Leary, 2017). After each interview, the transcriptions were reviewed several times by listening to each audio file and checking the transcripts for accuracy. Once the transcripts were reviewed, they were uploaded to Dedoose to look for codes and employ descriptive analysis.

Audio-recorded interviews assisted in providing participants' verbatim responses; however, they were unable to capture individuals' expressions and attitudes when describing their experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). Field notes helped add additional insights to the phenomenon under study and conveyed details about the participants by providing credibility to the narrative account (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Patton, 2002). Taking field notes increased the researcher's ability to make more meaningful data-analysis with a broader understanding of what the participants are feeling when saying a particular statement while providing a rich context for analysis (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002).

The researcher jotted down notes during the interviews, which helped provide analytic insights during the data collection. Field notes were analyzed along with interview recordings, and the researcher used personal reflections and descriptions to make sense of them (Patton, 2002). However, the field notes were removed when the interview transcripts were shared with the participants for verification purposes.
Data Analysis

According to Merriam and Tiswell (2016), triangulating data can be a valuable method to increase the credibility of the findings. Triangulation of data occurs by comparing and crosschecking multiple sources of data. Patton (2015) explains, "Triangulation, in whatever form, increases credibility and quality by countering the concern that a study's findings are simply an artifact of a single method, a single source, or a single investigator's blinders" (p.674). For example, you can supplement what you learn during a participant interview with document reviews or observations, thus reducing the effects of the participant's potential biases or misinformation (Maxwell, 1996).

The core component of qualitative data analysis is grouping evidence and labeling ideas, reflecting increasing broader perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). During the data analysis, I used Creswell's seven-step process for data analysis of qualitative research: (1) preparing for analysis, (2) reading and reflecting on the data, (3) coding the data, (4) using the coding process to establish themes, (5) representing the themes, (6) interpreting the findings, and (7) validating the accuracy of the findings. Based on the literature in the field of co-teaching, I anticipated potential codes such as the following: support, planning time, collaboration, administrative support, professional development, and roles and responsibilities. Additionally, each transcript was read several times to look for emergent themes.

When all of the interviews were coded, Dedoose was used to create a chart with the frequency of each code. This allowed the researcher to prioritize the codes. Analyzing the frequency chart helped to identify patterns in which themes emerged. The themes helped to provide a cohesive synthesis to the findings. Merriam (2001) states the goal of data analysis is to make sense of data to answer your research questions. To further elaborate on the findings, an
outline was created by turning the research questions into headings. Evidence from my data was used to create subheadings that related to each research question.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure qualitative reliability, several methods were utilized, as per Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) recommendations. Firstly, the researcher cross-validated sources during the interviews to ensure data collection methods were rigorous and systematic and to establish validity and reliability during analysis (Gall et al., 2015). Peer debriefing was used to receive feedback on the work, so the researcher was not interpreting the results alone. Secondly, detailed descriptions were provided to ensure there was enough detail to legitimize the findings. The next method of validation was member checking. To validate the research, the researcher conducted member checks after the interviews were transcribed to ensure the accuracy of the findings. In this way, the researcher maintained transparency and checked the accuracy of what was recorded. Lastly, multiple data sources were used to triangulate the findings into a coherent narrative. Through a careful examination of field notes, transcripts, and looking at codes, the researcher was able to reference back to the data to look for consistencies and inconsistencies across data sources. A limitations section was also created to acknowledge any shortcomings in the data collection or interpretations.

The Role of the Researcher

Since researchers are the primary "measuring instrument" in conducting a descriptive qualitative study of this magnitude, it is important to recognize one's own experiences, roles, and potential bias in the data collection (Gall et al., 2015). This helps to clarify their etic perspective and help reduce bias.
My personal experience as a supervisor in the Plainview school district shaped my perspective. I supervised both special education and general education teachers for the last eight years. I recognized that some participants might have felt uncomfortable discussing the challenges of co-teaching or were obligated to participate. I reassured participants confidentiality would be maintained. Additionally, during the interviews, participants were reminded they had the option of skipping any questions they feel comfortable answering. Since I collected data on teachers who were partners in the co-teaching model, they were reminded that any information shared would not be disclosed to their co-teaching partners and not used for evaluation purposes.

Additionally, as a supervisor, I acknowledge that I might have some pre-conceived perceptions of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of this model. Often, "qualitative researchers try to acknowledge and take into account their own biases as a method of dealing with them" (Bogdan & Bilden, 2006, p.38). Therefore, I was careful not to allow personal experiences to cloud my interpretation of the data. Additionally, Bogdan and Biklen (2006) state:

No matter how much you try, you cannot divorce your research from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe, and what you value. Being a clean slate is neither possible nor desirable. The goal is to become more reflective and conscious of how "who you are" may shape and enrich what you do, not to eliminate it. (p.38)

The research of the participants was filtered through my own work with teachers and their efforts to instruct both the general education and special education students. I constructed my own reality of what possibilities and obstacles could occur prior to attempting such a task. While it is not possible to be completely bias-free, it was essential to maintain researcher neutrality throughout the study (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002).
Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, I was mindful of ethical considerations and took every possible measure to protect the rights of all participants. Prior to recruiting participants and collecting data, all mandatory ethical considerations required by Rutgers University Institutional Review Board were reviewed and implemented. Some of the considerations included providing participants information on the purpose of the study, using pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, sharing the transcript with each participant to ensure accuracy, and keeping all the data in a password-protected electronic folder. Additionally, participants were given the option of revoking their consent to participate in the study if they feel uncomfortable with any part of the study.

Summary

Co-teaching can be a powerful means to promote collaborative practices and increase student achievement. The purpose was to examine perceptions and beliefs of co-teachers through the lens of collective efficacy to identify the ways to strengthen efficacy beliefs. This research project was positioned to add to the body of literature on co-teaching practices. Data gathered from this qualitative case study will help to aid in the understanding of co-teaching practices with the goal of supporting teachers who are trying to keep afloat on what sometimes can be described as stormy seas of co-teaching. When provided necessary supports, co-teaching partnerships may be more likely to succeed and less likely to experience frustration. Co-teaching practices must continue to be refined as we look towards the future. Although moving into uncharted territory can cause uncertainty, this new direction may also improve student outcomes, especially those with special needs.
Because co-teaching has expanded, it has become vulnerable to varying interpretations, and additional research is warranted to gauge the value of this practice. Future qualitative research could help bring the voices of teachers and students into the domain of public discourse and further address co-teaching complexities.


CHAPTER 4

Findings

In the current study, I explored the phenomenon of co-teaching partnerships through the lens of collective efficacy. The findings highlight the importance of structures needed to support collective efficacy in the framework of co-teaching. The major themes that emerged from my findings were: (1) Perceptions of Value, (2) Parity with Roles and Responsibilities, (3) Collaboration and Communication, and (4) Mutual Respect and Trust. In the sections that follow, I provide a context for the findings, detail the lived experiences of co-teachers in the Plainview school district, and delve into each of the four themes that emerged from my findings.

To explore the experiences and perceptions of the teachers who participated, the following three sets of research questions were answered:

1. How do special education and general education elementary teachers experience their role in co-teaching? How do these experiences affect self-efficacy?
2. How do special education and general education elementary teachers view each other's role in a co-teaching classroom, and how do these perceptions affect the collective efficacy of these partnerships?
3. What conditions are required to support the collective efficacy of co-teaching partnerships?

Context for Findings

Seven years ago, Plainview School district was evaluated by the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC) to determine compliance issues with programs. During the evaluation process, it was determined that the district did not provide enough co-
teaching classrooms to provide students with disabilities access to the least restrictive environment. The following year the district began to create several more co-teaching classrooms. Teachers were not familiar with co-teaching and were often placed in classrooms during the end of the summer. Some received training on co-teaching, and others did not. In the last six years, co-teaching has become a mainstay of both elementary and secondary schools. Since this time, co-teaching has lost its “newness” and has been given little thought or attention as far as monitoring and supporting the quality of this model. Given this context, the researcher sought to uncover the variables that impact co-teaching in the district.

Co-Teaching Experience

Participants were eleven elementary teachers. The five special education teachers in the current study have a (SE) code next to their names, and six general education teachers have a (GE) next to their names. The characteristics of each co-teaching team are provided in Table 1, including years of experience, years spent co-teaching, and total years with the current co-teacher reported. One participant, Tara, participated in this study; however, her co-teacher transferred out just before the interview process. All general education teachers had twenty or more years of teaching experience; four special education teachers had five years or less teaching experience. One special education teacher, Brennan (SE), had 17 years’ experience teaching. Additionally, all co-teachers had five or fewer years of co-teaching experience. Colleen, Carol, and Tara have all spent the last four years with the same co-teachers. The remaining eight teachers reported this was their first year working with their current co-teacher.
Table 1

*Co-teacher Teams and Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Years teaching experience</th>
<th>Years co-teaching experience</th>
<th>Years with current co-teacher</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Colleen</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Joan</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Brennan</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grandview</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ashley</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Grandview</td>
<td>K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maureen</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Moore</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Valarie</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gianna</td>
<td>SE</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Collins</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tara</td>
<td>GE</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Moore</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Specialty is the certification each teacher holds. GE refers to general education certification and SE refers to special education certification.

**Research Question 1**

One major theme emerged from the data that answered the first research question: How do special education and general education elementary teachers experience their role in co-teaching? How do these experiences affect self-efficacy?
Theme 1: Perceptions of Value

The theme of Perceptions of Value emerged when teachers discussed ways in which both the general education and special education teachers viewed themselves as contributing to the expertise and knowledge within the partnership. Three subthemes emerged that contributed to the theme of Perceptions of Value: (a) teaching experience, (b) specialized expertise, and (c) views on effectiveness, as contributing to efficacy as detailed in the sections that follow.

Teaching Experience

When teachers were asked to describe their experiences in the co-teaching partnership, all five general education teachers pointed to years of teaching experience as an asset. One example can be seen with veteran teacher Maureen (GE), who co-taught with Marie, a novice special education teacher. Maureen stated, "I bring a lot of experience to the game as this is her (Marie) first year in this school. I have a lot of experience in teaching, and a lot of experience in the district, so I'm able to help her in that sense too." Maureen viewed herself in a position to help her co-teacher. This 'helping' stance indicated she viewed herself as knowledgeable and supportive. Maureen also perceived herself as a mentor to her co-teacher by providing a repertoire of best practices, which supported when Maureen notes the following, “It’s really hard being a new teacher in a new school and I feel like I have helped Marie with sorting through all the requirements needed for teaching first grade.” In this example, the construct of self-efficacy refers to Maureen’s belief in her capabilities, and through this mentorship role, Maureen viewed her experience as a valuable asset to the partnership. Likewise, Tara (GE), who co-taught with Lawrence for four years, prior to him leaving the district, reported that her first co-teaching provided her inexperienced partner with a structure in which to hone in on his teaching skills while providing feedback and support. Tara reported that by the end of the first year she
"watched him blossom." Tara continued to reflect back on her first year working with Lawrence in this statement, “He was brand new to teaching, but I supported him any way I could. He struggled at first, but I had many, many years’ experience so I could offer him some suggestions of different strategies to try out.” Throughout the interviews, nine participants agreed pairing an experienced and novice teacher was an important factor in co-teaching supporting partnerships. They felt strong mentors helped alleviate some of the stress and uncertainty with teaching and provided a framework to support co-teaching.

Specialized Expertise

All co-teachers considered themselves as having specialized skills in some area. Some of the older general education teachers relied on younger special education teachers to assist them with the challenges of using technology. When referring to her co-teacher Lawrence (SE), Tara (GE) pointed out, "He was extremely gifted with technology, and I tapped into that…I am from a different generation." Likewise, Valarie (GE) stated her co-teacher Gianna (SE) would handle inputting all the class data on the computer in this statement “Gianna is quick on the computer, really quick, so she handles putting in all the grades. It would take me twice as long to do what she does. Her computer skills are a big help.”

All five special education teachers referred to their specialized training as being a valuable asset to the team. Carol (SE), who co-taught with Colleen (GE) for the past four years, is a younger, less experienced special education teacher who expressed the belief that she is not only capable but also contributed to her co-teachers understanding of special education students when she stated the following:

I have definitely given her (Colleen) a lot of insight on how to deal with certain children, certain little quirks they have, or what strategies work best for them. Like children with
autism, not too loud, not too overstimulating, all of those little quirks. I think she had prior knowledge of students with disabilities, but I have somewhat just helped her understand how to approach it.

Carol (SE) perceived herself as being able to provide strategies to her co-teacher in the area of special education. In her co-teaching relationship, Carol increased awareness of students' diverse academic needs and shared techniques to help special education students with her co-teacher Colleen (GE). Although Carol is not a veteran teacher, she viewed her specialized training in servicing students with special needs as a valuable asset. Likewise, her co-teacher Colleen (GE) considered herself a "guru" in literacy and took the lead with planning lessons and teaching reading and writing. Colleen viewed her co-teaching relationship as highly effective when she expressed the following "I feel I am actually better with her (Carol) in the classroom. I think by working together, we have both become stronger teachers." Colleen and Carol's expertise strengthened the partnership, one through specialized training and one through years’ experience teaching. All special education teachers expressed the benefit of gaining insights into subjects, such as literacy, that they may not have in-depth knowledge of, while they helped the general education teachers learn tools for instructing students with learning or behavioral difficulties. Table 2 summarizes the overall perceived benefits that contribute to the self-efficacy of special education and general education teachers in a co-taught classroom as reported in this study.
Table 2

*Differences in Special Education and General Education Co-Teachers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Special Education Teachers</th>
<th>General Education Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expert in differentiated instruction</td>
<td>Expert in subject area content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plans for modifications and accommodations</td>
<td>Takes lead on lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attends to behavioral problems</td>
<td>Mentor to novice teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More skilled in technology</td>
<td>More experience with curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead in Child Study Meetings</td>
<td>Lead in creating assessments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Views of Effectiveness*

Gianna (SE), who is new to the school and new to working with her co-teacher Valarie, felt overwhelmed with a large number of special education students in her class and had concerns as to how effective she was this year. She stated, "In previous years, I feel like I did a better job because it was within compliance, the students were a better fit for inclusion." She expressed concerns that several students in her class had severe behavioral or academic disabilities, which would be better suited for a resource room setting is the following statement: "This is the first year that I am out of compliance. I have ten students with IEPs. I have been mentioning this since the beginning of the school year. Out of those ten students, the reality is three of them should be actual inclusion students and the rest need to be self-contained for behaviors and academics."

When referring to the many disruptive behavioral problems her students exhibited, Gianna expressed her frustration, "I have constantly reached out (to administrators). Therefore, again, that is out of my hands. I've said what I need to say, but I can't really do much about it." It
appears that this feeling of hopelessness and lack of support contributed to her negative perceptions of inclusion when she refers to it as "a dumping ground." It was clear that Gianna felt overwhelmed with the lack of administrative support and the placement of students who may have been better served in another setting than inclusion.

Although Gianna questioned the effectiveness of co-teaching, ten of eleven teachers mentioned having another teacher in the classroom as an asset because it helped reduce the workload, provided opportunities for differentiation, and time for more effective instruction. When asked if she felt effective as a co-teacher, Anna (GE), who co-taught with Ashley, responded, "I do because I am doing half the work. I am not responsible for the math. I am not responsible for all that planning, all that science stuff. I can really focus on Language Arts, so I kind of stay strong all day." Anna expressed how grateful she was for having her co-teacher Ashley in her class for the extra support, which freed up time to work with students. Ashley stated, “Having Anna in the room allows me the time to meet with students who may be struggling with a concept. Not just special education students, but any student.” Ashley and Anna both stated they felt more effective when it came to supporting students. Likewise, Tara (GE) also pointed to the benefit of having two teachers in the classroom "It works because the students, they collectively are getting it from two different perspectives, two different styles, and they're getting the best of both worlds, and that's why it works." Tara (GE) pointed out students benefitted from collective efforts and a shared belief they could make a difference together. Although Anna and Tara are veteran general education teachers, they perceived themselves as more effective by sharing the workload and exposing students to different teaching styles. Ashley (SE) also felt she had more opportunities to differentiate instruction when co-teaching with her partner Anna (GE).
All special education teachers, with the exception of Gianna, stated they felt effective because they can focus on their area of expertise without handling all classroom responsibilities. Colleen (GE) mentioned she could teach more effectively because her co-teacher Carol “alleviates some of that stress that I had to do when I was by myself.” Six general education and four special education teachers pointed to having an extra person in the classroom freed up time to focus on instruction and more time for small group intervention.

Research Question 2

The findings pointed to the theme of Parity with Roles and Responsibilities, which answered the question: How do special education and general education elementary teachers view each other’s role in a co-teaching classroom, and how do these perceptions affect the collective efficacy of these partnerships?

Theme 2: Parity with Roles and Responsibilities

The theme of Parity with Roles and Responsibilities emerged when teachers discussed ways in which both the general education and special education teachers viewed their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Four subthemes emerged that contributed to the theme: (a) defined roles, (b) shared responsibilities, (c) models of co-teaching, and (d) being flexible.

Defined Roles

Last year Gianna (SE) switched schools and was placed in a second-grade co-teaching classroom with Valarie. She reported stepping into the new school, not knowing any familiar faces, and being told she would be assigned to co-teach. Her co-teacher, Valarie, was a veteran teacher who has taught in the same school for several years. Gianna seemed to get along well with Valarie, but sometimes she felt the roles were not clearly communicated, as noted with her comment, "Another challenge is sometimes I feel like an assistant in the classroom, not always,
but sometimes. She (Valarie) will ask me if I mind grading papers or making copies. That's really not my role." In expanding on her response, Gianna stated, "I mean, I don't mind helping out, but we really need to establish a system of who is doing what in the classroom." Gianna's responses reflect the perception of how a lack of clarity on roles can shift the balance of power in a co-taught classroom.

Valarie (GE) voiced frustration when referring to her co-teacher Gianna (SE) in the following example, "And the other teacher (Gianna) pulled a small group, used my materials, sometimes we'd do completely different tasks." In this statement, Valarie refers to doing "completely different tasks." Her comments point to a lack of misunderstanding with roles. Valarie (GE) elaborated on her response by stating, "I thought I am doing my thing, and she is supporting the students that need extra support by pulling them to the back to modify lessons."

On the other hand, while Gianna and Valarie expressed uncertainty about their roles, Marie (SE) and her co-teacher Maureen discussed their roles at the beginning of the year. Marie reports the following “We discussed who would primarily be teaching each subject and who would write the lesson plans. For example, I am responsible for science and math, and she will teach reading and writing. We will discuss what each one is doing and implement it together.”

**Shared Responsibilities**

Nine teachers divided the workload by taking the lead in a specific subject. The two remaining special education teachers reported they would take the lead occasionally; however, they primarily supported small groups. General education teachers all took the lead in teaching reading and writing, while three special education teachers taught math and science. Seven teachers indicated that they were able to become stronger in their content since they were not responsible for planning and teaching all the subjects. When asked if she felt co-teaching was an
effective model, Valarie (GE) replied, "I do think it is effective because some teachers have better strengths than others."

Co-teachers Colleen (GE) and Carol (SE) reported they both teach to their strengths, which ultimately benefits students. Carol (SE) voiced the following sentiment:

"So I just feel like that right combination is there, the kids are getting a double whammy. They are getting a strong math teacher, and they are getting a strong language arts teacher." Likewise, Colleen (GE) shared the following sentiment about her co-teacher Carol (SE), "We are stronger together than by ourselves. For example, I will grade the assignments, and she will enter them into the system. Last year we decided to rearrange our entire level library. We both worked after school to level all the books and organize and color code the baskets." Carol noted as she and Colleen grew to know each other, they felt more comfortable and shared roles more freely, which strengthened the partnership. Colleen stated that after the first year of working together, they began to feel more like true partners. Now in her fourth year working with Carol, Colleen pointed out how they not only share responsibilities but also share expenses when purchasing supplies for the classroom in this statement:

I feel that it is very 50/50 for both of us. For example, even in the summertime for (classroom) materials, we had to get baskets for all of the books. So she said, "I'll go on this half of the town and go to these Dollar Trees, you go to these Dollar Trees," so we would text each other, "I have ten baskets," We divide the money that we spent. So, for example, if there is the stuff that we need from Amazon, Carol will say, "Okay, I'm going to buy this stuff from Amazon. It came out to fifty dollars." And I go, "Okay, I'll Venmo you twenty-five dollars."

In this example, allocating resources for the purpose of co-teaching was a shared responsibility. Both teachers took on the task of looking for the needed supplies and contributing to the overall
cost. This example provided a snapshot of how shared responsibilities developed over the four years of co-teaching together.

Colleen (GE) expressed that in her second year of working with Carol (SE), they were able to navigate shared responsibilities better. Colleen (GE) stated the following when she referred to sharing roles.

Well, we have definitely evolved since our first year. During our first year, we were not as interactive, but during the second year, while one of us is teaching, the other will color code or write on the board to help with visual learners. I feel like we both have the same role – we just seem to know what we are doing.

In the quote above, Colleen commented on building on an established partnership to work out confusion with roles in order to have a better understanding of expectations and responsibilities.

One consistent finding in all interviews was perceptions of what the other co-teacher, be it special education or general education, should be doing in the classroom. Gianna's (SE) statement, "they (GE teachers) really don't understand what I am doing' implies a perceived lack of knowledge on the general education teacher's part and as a barrier to productive teamwork. Interestingly, all general education teachers viewed themselves as taking on a larger role in instruction and planning. For example, Anna (GE) co-taught with different special education teachers over the last three years and voiced the following concerns about her experiences, "I've had an experience where I've felt like all the work was on me. I did the lesson plans. I gathered the materials. I differentiated. I taught the mini-lessons. I did everything." In this statement, Anna felt all the responsibilities were placed on her when she stated, "I did everything."

Gianna (SE) also discussed the need for Valarie (GE) to have a shared understanding that not all students will be working at grade level, and it is Gianna’s responsibility to "group
students so that each student can feel some sense of success in learning the material and they may not be on grade level." Gianna's (SE) comment points to her need to differentiate instruction to make it more assessable to students with special needs. When Valarie (GE) mentioned, "sometimes we would do completely different tasks," this may be a point of contention and conflict since both teachers do not have a clear understanding of each other's role within the structure of co-teaching. Without a clear understanding of why Gianna modified a lesson, Valarie views it as a "completely different task."

**Models of Co-teaching**

Teachers also discussed parity in terms of which co-teaching model they used in the classroom. All eleven co-teachers primarily used the one-teach, one-assist model. Marie mentioned how she and her co-teacher Maureen agreed to try parallel teaching, which entails both teachers teaching at the same time to different groups of students in the following statement:

> We usually do the One Teach and One Assist model, but we both agreed to try out the Parallel model. She (Maureen) is very loud and I could not concentrate when she was teaching at the same time. It just did not work for me. We sat down and agreed that it was not the best model for us to use together. We agreed to switch back, and now we share roles as the lead teacher.

Marie (SE) and Maureen (GE) were able to agree on a model that worked for both teachers while still providing parity.

When asked which model Gianna and her partner Valarie use for co-teaching, Gianna stated the following
We go back and forth with the models, and it depends on the lesson. For example, my co-teacher loves writing and reading, and she will teach those subjects. And, at times, I will teach science and social studies. So, sometimes we do break it into the One Teach, One Assist, and then there are times that we're both teaching at the same time and splitting groups and working with our own groups. It kind of depends on the lesson on how it is working, and we see the kids' levels.

While Gianna seems to understand the various models of co-teaching and makes reference to using two models, her co-teacher Valarie responded differently. When Valarie was asked if she was familiar with the different models of co-teaching, she replied she was not familiar with the various models.

Unlike the other special education teachers, Brennan has 17 years’ special education teaching experience, although this is his first year of co-teaching. When Brennan was asked which model he and his co-teacher Joan (GE) use, he stated the following:

Many of the times, I have led the lesson, whether it was an ELA or math. I taught the lesson to the whole group. Then one time, we broke down into smaller groups, she (Joan) would go and work with a group of students, and I would work with another group. Then we both switch groups. Sometimes I just sit back and go to those students that I know struggle a little bit. If I see, they do not understand something; I will go to them first, just to make sure that they understand what they need to do. There have been times where we both have been in the front of the classroom teaching together. However, it kind of got very distracting to our students. We did that at the beginning of the year and realized that that wasn't such a great thing for the students.
Brennan does not make reference to specific models of co-teaching but does point to different roles and responsibilities he and his co-teacher tried out. Much like Marie’s experiences with Maureen, Brennan and Joan found some models worked better than others did.

**Being Flexible**

Tara and her partner were in their fourth year of co-teaching, and she described her overall experience as one that "developed over time." When asked about roles and responsibilities, she reflected on her first year of co-teaching in the following statement:

"When you are in a co-teaching position, you kind of have to lose what you're so familiar with doing, what's so routine for you. There is no, I am in control, and you are my assistant. You have to make sure you abandon that concept immediately."

Based on Tara's experiences, it appears that parity with roles and responsibilities required being flexible and abandoning what you are used to doing.

Joan (GE) also mentioned the importance of being flexible when working with a co-teacher when she stated, “You can’t be rigid; that just won’t work. You need to bend a little and come to a mutual agreement about the ways things will work in the classroom.” Ashley (SE) discussed being flexible in terms of “picking and choosing your battles.” Ashley remarked how she and her co-teacher Anna approach trying new ideas in the classroom in the following statement:

My co-teacher will sometimes say, "Sure, you want to try that? Sure. Let's go with it and see how it works. If it doesn't work, done, it doesn't work." And I feel like I'm the same way too. I am just saying we're both very flexible with each other's ideas and we are open to each other’s ideas we have a “Let's take this on and see how this works” approach.
Ashley’s co-teacher Anna commented that she does not always agree with Ashley’s ideas, but she is open to “letting her try things out.”

Research Question 3

The two themes of (1) Collaboration and Communication and (2) Mutual Respect and Trust answered the question: What conditions are required to support the collective efficacy of co-teaching partnerships?

Theme 3: Communication and Collaboration

The theme of Communication and Collaboration was evident when teachers were asked to describe ways they collaborate with their co-teachers. The following subthemes emerged during the interviews (a) co-planning, (b) time to collaborate, and (c) collaborative professional development.

Co-planning

When asked to explain ways they co-planned, co-teachers mentioned planning outside school and “on the fly.” Special education teachers expressed concerns regarding the timely submission of plans from the general education teacher. Whereas, the general education teachers were concerned with handling most of the responsibilities of planning.

Outside School. Participants reported that the success of their collaboration hinged upon the team’s capacity to co-plan within the framework of co-teaching. While all teachers stated that co-planning was essential to a cohesive partnership, some teachers perceived that they lacked the time needed for instructional planning. General education teachers, in particular, felt that co-planning was needed. Colleen (GE) mentioned that it was a big challenge to find time to co-plan with her co-teacher Carol (SE) during the school day and stated, "We end up talking on the weekends or at night." Colleen (GE) elaborated on ways in which she and her co-teacher co-
planned outside school hours. "We do a lot of texting, a lot of just calling each other on the phone…it will be 10 p.m., and I'll call her up, and I'll be like, "Oh, I have an idea." So it's a lot of talking on the phone, a lot of texting." When Carol was asked to describe ways she co-planned with Colleen, she replied, “We're just always sending each other ideas over the phone. Sometimes we sit together during planning periods and we plan while looking at on the computer together.”

**On the Fly.** Likewise, when Joan (GE) was asked how she and her co-teacher Brennan (SE) co-planned, she mentioned conversations they had during instruction. "The whole time we collaborate. We collaborate during the day and we collaborate during class." Similarly, Anna (GE) reported there is no specific time for co-planning with her co-teacher Ashley in the following statement:

> There is no real specific, "Let's sit down and plan," like you would have to if the teacher were not in the classroom with you. It is just throughout the whole day. Throwing out ideas such as "What do you think about this? or "What if we do that?" We are together all day, so it is just constant.

Colleen (GE) mentioned co-planning that is spontaneous and in the moment. Likewise, Anna (GE) and Joan (GE) viewed co-planning in terms of sharing or refining ideas spontaneously. Interestingly only one teacher, Valarie, mentioned a designated time for co-planning with her grade-level team; however, her co-teacher Gianna did not participate in the meetings. Gianna preferred to use that time to get unfinished work completed. In the current study, none of the co-teachers had a designated time to work on various components of effective inclusion practices.
Similarly, Joan (GE) reported a good portion of the planning is done in the classroom when she stated, “We talk about what we a going to do…if we see students struggling, we will plan it in for next week.”

**Lesson Plans.** Due to the lack of reported structured planning time, all co-teachers wrote their lesson plans in isolation and then shared the plans with their partner on the weekend. Three out of the five special education teachers expressed concerns regarding the late submission of lesson plans by the general education teacher during the weekend. Three special education teachers reported insufficient time to review the plans, offer suggestions, and plan for differentiation when plans were submitted on the weekends. Gianna (SE) expressed her frustration with the late submission of lesson plans from her co-teacher Valarie (GE) in the following statement:

If they (administrators) tell us, "Your plans are due Friday, and you have an extension till Monday," I do not want to have to modify them on Monday. I want them done by Friday, if not, possibly earlier, so that way I can review things. However, many times, they (GE plans) are being posted Sunday, 8 pm, 9 pm, or even 10 pm. I told them, "I have no problem picking up some lesson plans, but you guys need to help me out and try to put them early." Did it happen? No.

Since Gianna does not have an active role in developing the lesson plans, she relies on the general education teacher to submit plans in which she (Gianna) can allocate resources for differentiation and intervention. When Gianna received plans on Sunday night, she expressed concerns about the lack of time needed to modify plans.
Brennan (SE), who co-teaches with Joan (GE), also expressed concerns regarding misconceptions general education teachers may have regarding the time needed to adapt the plan for students with special needs when he stated the following:

However, I just think that another thing when it comes to special education, those (GE) teachers think that SPED teachers do simple modifications, and there is really nothing to it. Now, we modify the plans, but then we have to find work on the kids' level. So, you have to kind of post lessons in time for the teacher to be able to go through and see what we are doing.

Brennan (SE) and his co-teacher Joan (GE) had very little dedicated time to co-plan throughout the week. When Joan sent him lesson plans, usually during the weekend, he has little time to find resources to differentiate instruction. Co-planning, as reported in these circumstances seemed to happen spontaneously or independent of each other.

**Responsibility for Planning.** Valarie (GE) pointed to concerns about Gianna's (SE) role in their co-teaching partnership and wanted the special education teacher to share responsibilities with lesson planning. Valarie (GE) stressed the need to share the workload in this quote, "I wish she (Gianna) would work with me a little better. She doesn’t stay after school or come to grade-level planning meetings, so most of the work is on me." All teachers mentioned planning in terms of spontaneous planning opportunities or separate lesson planning, which was later shared with the special education teacher. While all teachers stated that co-planning was essential to a cohesive partnership, all teachers perceived they lacked the time needed for effective instructional planning.

Eight co-teachers reported the general education teacher primarily completed planning. The special education teacher used the plans to differentiate lessons. When teachers were asked
how often they sit down to co-plan, all of the teachers indicated they rarely co-plan collaboratively. Two of the teachers, Colleen (GE) and Carol (SE), had a divided approach to planning where the GE teacher would plan for some subjects and the SE teacher would plan for other subject areas. The division of responsibilities was reported to lessen the workload; however, real collaborative planning did not take place between both co-teachers. Likewise, Tara (GE) expressed how she structures planning, "I pretty much do all the planning, and then I will email it to him (SE teacher). If he has any questions, he lets me know."

**Time to Collaborate**

General education teachers, in particular, felt that more collaboration was needed. Valarie (GE) mentioned that it was a big challenge to find time to collaborate with Gianna (SE). For example, Valarie pointed to the limited time to collaborate during the school day and stated, "We end up talking on the weekends or at night." Similarly, Gianna (SE) mentioned the district should set aside time to collaborate. Her sentiments were captured in the following statement:

Have teachers come together early before school starts or before the end of the school year. I feel this would be very beneficial because co-teachers would have the opportunity to do some background information, collaboratively work together, plan lessons, maybe meet during the summer and be ready to go ahead with what their plan is when school starts.

In this statement, Gianna pointed to the importance of collaborating before working together to prepare for the school year. She mentioned the chance to "do some background information."

Gianna (SE) expanded on how a lack of collaboration can cause misunderstandings in co-teaching partnerships.
I have been co-teaching for several years, and I think it is really important for the general education teacher to understand that special education students have IEPs that must be followed. Sometimes they really do not understand why I am doing what I am doing to differentiate lessons. I think their expectations of students are sometimes not reasonable. We never get the time to discuss individual students’ needs.

In this quote, Gianna expresses misconceptions the general education teacher may have about special education students’ needs. Gianna also points out there is not scheduled time to collaborate.

Lack of collaboration can also lead to another negative issue brought forth during the interviews, such as labeling the students as "my students" and "your students." In the case of Gianna (SE) and Valarie (GE), co-teaching became difficult due to a lack of time to collaborate. In the following excerpt Valarie referenced a special education teacher she worked with two years ago, "She would support students who weren't her assigned students, even just for things like completing work. She always tried to get her students to do the right thing and encouraged them to work." In this statement, Valarie mentioned "her students" and "assigned students" which points to an unclear perception of what co-teaching encompasses.

Collaboration was also reported through impromptu exchanges. Nine teachers mentioned the idea of being able to "bounce ideas" off each other. When referencing an essential aspect of co-teaching, Marie (SE) mentioned having open lines of communication, "you want constructive criticism and feedback…it's always good to bounce ideas off the other." Likewise, her co-teacher Maureen (GE) shared the same views as Marie when she stated, “It can be isolating because you're in your classroom with your kids and I enjoy having that other person there …someone to bounce ideas off of and come up with different ideas of how to approach a different topic."
notion of bouncing ideas off each other implied a level of informal collaboration. Maureen noted teaching as being "isolating," and the value in having another person to "share ideas." Likewise, Tara (GE) elaborated on ways she and her co-teacher "bounce ideas off each other" on things such as how the room is set up and which (learning) centers are in place. These examples demonstrate ways in which co-teachers viewed "bouncing of ideas" as working collaboratively in the decision-making process.

**Collaborative Professional Learning**

**Figuring it Out.** As noted above, structured opportunities to collaborate, specifically around co-teaching, were not in place for any of the participants. Teachers reported a lack of professional development was needed to work as a team. All eleven participants indicated they received very little collaborative professional development with their co-teacher and had to "figure it out" on their own. Brennan had many years of teaching in a special education class, but this was his first full year working as a co-teacher with Joan (GE). Brennan struggled to find some direction during his first year of co-teaching. When asked if he received any training in co-teaching, he expressed the following:

I did not receive any training. So you kind of question yourself. Am I effective? Am I making a difference? I was observed, and it went well, but you still question yourself when you are doing something new. I read a few things and follow a few people on Twitter who are co-teachers. I try to read different materials about how different people have done co-teaching. My wife was an inclusion teacher some years back, so I picked her brain before walking into the role of a co-teacher to see exactly which route I should go.
In this statement, Brennan questioned his effectiveness as a co-teacher and revealed ways in which he tried to improve his understanding. When asked if she received any professional development on co-teaching Brennan’s co-teacher Joan (GE) replied “Years ago I did. Years ago, we had something here. I don't remember what, but we did have something years ago.”

**Separate Training.** All participants mentioned inconsistent professional development, causing some inequality among team members that left gaps in their skill sets. For example, Ashley (SE) and her co-teacher Anna (GE) reported they were not trained together. Ashley (SE) discussed how she and other special education teachers often were required to attend different trainings than the general education teachers. General education teachers attended their content-specific professional development while special education teachers attended co-teaching trainings or professional development specifically targeted for special education teachers. "We received training together (SE teachers), but sometimes the general education teachers don't necessarily go to it. They go to their content area professional development." In this quote, Ashley pointed to the lack of collaborative training opportunities offered in the district. Ashley shared concerns regarding the general education teacher not receiving co-teaching professional development. However, Ashley did not mention her need to be a part of content-specific training, which may also support co-teaching partnerships. Ashley felt it was important for general education teachers to attend co-teaching training due to a lack of understanding of the model. She expanded on her previous statement, "I feel the general education teachers need more training rather than once a year because it is a different way of teaching compared to what they are used to doing." Ashley (SE) viewed the need for general education teachers to receive professional development on co-teaching; however, Marie, a special education teacher working
with Maureen (GE), also acknowledged her need for training as well. When describing what improvements she would make, she stated:

I would say that I need a lot more training. In college, they teach you a little bit of everything, but when you get into a classroom, it is very different, especially with co-teaching. I think we need a little more consistency; everyone is doing his or her own thing, and I want to make sure I am doing it right.

Marie (SE), much like Ashley (SE), expressed concerns regarding the lack of training she and her co-teacher Maureen received in co-teaching. According to Marie, "This is a new way of teaching, and they (GE teachers) need to know more about differentiation and understand how this is supposed to work with students who have IEPs" In this statement, Marie realized that general education teachers might lack knowledge in differentiated instructional strategies for students with special needs. Both Ashley (SE) and Marie (SE) emphasized the need for general education teachers to be knowledgeable about co-teaching and ways to differentiate. However, unlike Ashley (SE), Marie (SE) also acknowledged her own need to receive training when she previously stated, "I want to make sure I am doing it (co-teaching) right." Overall, teachers were not provided opportunities to learn how to collaborate as a team within the framework of co-teaching. Similar to special education teachers' perceptions, the general education teachers also stressed the need for professional development. Maureen (GE) describes a previous co-teaching experience in which professional development was collaborative in the following statement:

I think we need more training, but training together. In the past, Krista (a previous co-teacher) and I had attended co-teaching workshops, and we went together and practiced different methods and some stuff we found, 'Oh, we do this already.' And some stuff we
never thought of doing. 'Let's try that.' And we got to try it together at the workshop, so we felt confident trying it in front of the students, and it led to success.

In this example, Maureen described the benefits of professional development as being a collaborative process and increasing self-efficacy in her statement, "We felt confident." Through experiential training sessions, such as role-playing, both teachers developed a sense of ownership and increased their collective efficacy.

Teachers who perceived their co-teaching relationship was effective reported that they often spent more time trying to figure out for themselves what co-teaching should entail than they would have needed if professional development was provided. Tara (GE) stated:

Through reading articles and watching videos, I realized that I was doing it (co-teaching) completely wrong. There was no structure for me to follow when I was placed in co-teaching. The principal gave us literature, and I believe someone gave us a safe school video on co-teaching, but that was it. We were figuring it out.

Tara (GE) mentioned she and her co-teacher had to figure out the model on their own. Tara's comment points to how ambiguity with her roles and responsibilities may have been linked to the lack of training provided to co-teaching teams. Valarie (GE) mentioned she had some good experiences with training, but not within her current co-teaching partnership.

Administrator Support. Four participants mentioned training should also be required for administrators who are positioned to provide support to this model. When Marie (SE) was asked how co-teaching could be improved, she mentioned administrative support, and she noted, "I really don't think the principal knows enough about co-teaching to support us. She just thinks we should be able to work it out." In this statement, Marie did not feel confident in her principal's knowledge of co-teaching, which may be one reason resources such as professional
development and collaborative processes are not prioritized. Tara (GE) also voiced frustration with the lack of administrative support and links this to her principal's lack of understanding of co-teaching practices. Similar to Marie, Tara points out, "I don't think administrators get it – they don't understand the whole process. If they did, they wouldn't send us to separate training and would allow us some extra time for planning." Tara's comment suggests a lack of administrative knowledge on co-teaching created a barrier for proper implementation. Both Marie and Tara viewed administrator knowledge on co-teaching as a critical component in setting the tone for the success or failure of inclusive practices. Brennan (SE) suggested that the administration should provide all co-teachers with an opportunity to meet and share their experiences in order to increase their understanding of this model.

**Theme 4: Mutual Respect and Trust**

The theme of Mutual Respect and Trust emerged when teachers discussed ideas around (a) longevity of partnerships, (b) respect for each other, and (c) discovering connections.

**Longevity of Partnerships**

The importance of keeping co-teachers together to build on the relationship each year was evident in comments made by four co-teachers. Gianna is a special education teacher who has had four different co-teachers and recently was switched to a new school. She explained her frustration in the following quote:

The thing that stinks for us inclusion teachers is just that we are thrown around. Okay, so this year, this teacher, and the next year you are going to go to the next teacher, and then the following year you are going to go to the next one. So I had followed my kids for three years previously. I am starting from scratch every single year. We think about the kids, but I'm like, "Do you ever stop and think about the staff?" You want us to build a
good relationship with our co-teacher, but if you throw us in with a new teacher every year, I am not building any relationships.

In Gianna's example, she expressed difficulty in being vulnerable and building a trusting relationship when she knew each year she would be starting over with someone.

Tara (GE) has worked with her current co-teacher for the last four years. While reflecting on her first year, she mentioned it took her the entire first year working with her co-teacher to trust him with lessons. Tara viewed her co-teacher as needing support in taking a lead role in the classroom. She observed lessons in which he made errors in content, which placed her in an uncomfortable situation. She points out, "It was heart-wrenching sometimes to redirect something verbally. If he might have misspelled something or whatever, it was like, "How do I correct this?" Trust was not established initially, and the relationship was still new. She managed to build trust, as captured in the following statement she made to him "How do you want me to redirect something if I see that something is not accurate? Do you want me to do it in front of the kids? Do you want me to do it later? How do you want to do this?" Tara said one of the reasons why she and her co-teacher worked so well together was respecting each other as professionals and keeping the lines of communication open.

Colleen (GE) and Carol (SE) have worked as co-teachers for the last four years. They attribute their strong working relationship to “building on each other each year.” They both expressed the strength of their relationship developed over the years. In the statement below, Colleen highlights how she values the relationship that has been forged over the years:

In the past, there were times where I would just not want to come to work because I was tired or whatever. However, I haven't even been absent this year because I think, "Oh, I
better get to school today because I don't want to leave Carol by herself." So it makes me think, "Oh maybe I better not call out today."

Carol also reflected on how the relationship was strengthened over the years in this statement:

I think after the first year, we kind of got our bearings straight. We were opposites as far as personalities, but it worked for us. She's the loud and crazy person. I'm the quiet, reserved person, but we've kind of inherited some of each other's traits. She helped me get out of my shell, and I helped her with being organized. After the first year, we knew we would be okay. We knew we had to be open and honest with each other. We learned what worked and what didn’t. We were able to just kind of improve it each year, and this year it's been kind of just seamless.

**Respect for Each Other**

Ten of the co-teachers spoke positively about their relationship with one another and the respect they had for each other. Although not necessarily friends, four of the five teams discussed their working relationships as positive and supportive. In her second year of co-teaching, Ashley (SE), a non-tenured teacher working with Anna (GE), stated respect was the most important factor in successful co-teaching. When asked if she felt like she was an equal in the classroom, she replied:

I do not think that it is as important to be equal. I feel like more so, the respect factor is what the most important thing is. If you do not have respect for each other, then the classroom itself is not going to [be] good, the kids are very intuitive, and they can tell. That was part of what I had an issue with in the past. The kids were very intuitive, and they were able to tell that that teacher did not respect me.
Interestingly, in the quote above, Ashley did not equate to being equals in the classroom as important as respecting each other. Later in the interview, Ashley pointed out how she and her co-teacher, Anna, supported each other when planning lessons. Anna, a veteran teacher, stated she may not always agree with Ashley's ideas but is willing to try them out and see how it works. Anna's idea of trust centers on the teacher's willingness to let go of control and trust your partner. Both Ashley and Anna pointed to examples that led to a positive and trusting relationship.

**Connections**

Two of the co-teaching teams mentioned having a connection outside of the school setting was reassuring and laid the groundwork for trust. Tara discovered her son and her current co-teacher were friends. She stated the "saving grace" was discovering the connection, and without this connection, it would have taken much longer to learn to build trust. In this statement, she elaborated on discovering a connection she and her partner had in common:

Our saving grace was that one day my son came in to bring me lunch, and he and my partner recognized each other. "Oh my God, this is your mother?" And he was, "Yeah." He realized that my husband had been his baseball coach. He had been to my house before, and he was like, "Oh my goodness." It deflated his anxiety and his fears, and he realized, “I do know you” We knew each other, and it gave us a level of comfort.

Likewise, Brennan realized he and his co-teacher Joan both grew up in the same neighborhood and knew some of the same people. He said this helped to build respect and trust because they would have frequent conversations about growing up in the same community. This 'connectedness' helped to forge a path for respect and trust. He referred to this connection as "helping the situation."
Collective teacher efficacy is the belief of a group that they have the capability to improve student learning. Teachers who possess a high degree of collective efficacy have confidence in their ability to successfully execute a course of action (Bandura, 1997). There is an interaction between self-efficacy and the collective efficacy of co-teachers, which equates to more than the sum of the two. Separately and together, these two constructs can either hinder or support the successful implementation of co-teaching. As such, findings from the current study, one of the first studies to examine factors that impact the collective efficacy of co-teachers, have the potential to provide knowledge of the structures necessary to ensure successful co-teaching partnerships.

In this chapter, I first begin with an overview of the findings. Second, I discuss findings for each research question in light of the existing literature. Third, I expand on the discussion and consider implications for practice. Finally, I discuss the findings of the current study on future research and acknowledge the limitations of the research.

Overview

Building on the work of other scholars (Cook & Friend, 2017; Hattie, 2016; Kim & Shin, 2015, Nicholas & Sheffield, 2014; Spaulding & Pratt, 2015), the aim was to shed light on the inner workings, perceptions, and attitudes which contribute to collective efficacy. As such, five special education teachers and six general educator teachers were asked probing interview questions about their co-teaching experiences. During the interviews, participants provided data regarding their attitudes and beliefs, which contributed to the viability of their partnerships as they work collectively to support diverse learners within the same classroom setting. These
findings resulted in four overarching themes: (1) Perceptions of Value, (2) Parity with Roles and Responsibilities, (3) Collaboration and Communication (4) Mutual Respect and Trust.

Research Question 1

“How do special education and general education elementary teachers experience their role in co-teaching? How do these experiences affect self-efficacy?” The theme of Perceptions of Value, along with subthemes of (a) teaching experience, (b) specialized expertise, and (c) views on student placement, provided insights to question one and are discussed in the sections that follow.

Theme 1: Perceptions of Value

The theme Perceptions of Value emerged as teachers discussed ways in which they contributed to the partnership, through either experience or specialized expertise. Perceptions of value were also determined through teachers’ beliefs of the value of co-teaching for students with disabilities. Nine out of the eleven co-teachers possessed high levels of self-efficacy in co-teaching. Overall, general education teachers believed years of teaching experience were a valuable asset to the partnership, while special education teachers felt their expertise in supporting students with disabilities was an important contribution to the team. Perceptions on self-efficacy were also influenced by the views teachers held with regards to students placed in co-teaching classrooms; essentially, the beliefs they hold regarding inclusion being a good fit for all students.

Teaching Experience and Specialized Expertise

Results indicated that general education and special education teachers generally had positive views of their own contributions to the co-teaching team. These views were found to be linked to the value each teacher perceived they brought to the partnership. Essentially, new SE
teachers learned the basics of the field from more experienced teachers, and seasoned GE

teachers were exposed to new ideas for differentiation.

Interestingly, all general education teachers had twenty or more years’ experience with
teaching. This contributed to their perceptions of being an 'expert' in their specific subject areas,
most notably literacy. General education teachers perceived themselves to be knowledgeable and
positioned themselves as mentors to the younger and less experienced special education teachers.
As one teacher noted, she watched her novice SE teacher “blossom” under her mentorship. This
perception of mentorship helped veteran teachers view themselves as bringing value to the
partnership by guiding and supporting novice SE teachers, as was the case in four of the co-
teaching teams. Interestingly, a study by Schwab et al. (2015) found experienced teachers
showed lower ratings of efficacy in co-teaching settings and attributed the finding to the
‘newness’ of co-teaching; however, the results from the current study showed the opposite to be
true. It may be the case that mentorship roles increased the self-efficacy of experienced teachers.
Great mentors support novice teachers in becoming strong teachers, which can eventually
strengthen co-teaching relationships and perceptions of efficacy.

Co-teaching literature highlights the importance of cultivating a culture that enables
teachers to build on each other’s expertise to improve pedagogical practices (Cook & Friend,
2017; Karten & Murawski, 2020). While the findings from the current study are encouraging, it
is important to bear in mind with a small sample size caution must be applied. Although
mentorship contributed to the efficacy of general education teachers, co-teaching is rooted in the
premise of two equals in the classroom (Cook & Friend, 2017), and there may be a fine line to be
mindful of when one teacher is considered more knowledgeable and skilled.
One surprising finding was the specialized skills that the novice special education teachers brought to the partnership. Although four out of five special education teachers had five years or less classroom experience, all noted specialized training on differentiation strategies as a valued skillset in the partnership. In the current study, all special education teachers viewed themselves as helping the general education teacher gain an increased awareness of academic and behavioral difficulties and shared strategies to support students who may be having difficulties. The belief of bringing a specialized skill set to the team supported perceptions of self-efficacy. Additionally, two special education teachers were more adept with technology; this was also viewed as a benefit to the team. This finding corroborates the ideas of scholars who point to the benefit of co-teaching, bringing the strengths of two teachers together while providing an opportunity to contribute to professional growth and a sense of self-efficacy (Eells, 2011; Cook and Friend, 2017).

These findings also correlate to the literature, which highlights the benefits of having the special education teacher sharing valuable lessons on differentiating and instructing students with learning or behavioral difficulties with the general education teacher (Murawski, 2010). While co-teachers in the current study were open to sharing their expertise with each other, this should not be left to chance. For example, one special education teacher preferred to work on her own and was less willing to share her specialized understanding of special education with the general education teacher. This most likely limited the general education teachers’ understanding of the needs of special education students and affected self-efficacy. This example contradicts literature that emphasizes the importance of positive interdependence, where teachers share their knowledge and skills to effectively respond to the diverse psychological and educational needs of students as being the “heart” of co-teaching (Villa et al. 2008),
Beliefs on Student Outcomes

Self-efficacy, in the current study, was also linked to beliefs teachers held regarding students with disabilities and their perceptions of student outcomes. Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy refers to the “beliefs in one’s capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required producing given attainments.” Essentially, if teachers believe they are capable of producing positive outcomes for students, self-efficacy is influenced (Protheroe, 2008).

However, what occurs when teachers feel helpless and do not share the belief that inclusion is a good fit for all students? This was the case with two special education teachers who were uncertain if they were truly making a difference and expressed concerns regarding the effectiveness of inclusive settings. One teacher stated she felt the previous year she did a better job supporting students with disabilities because students were “a better fit” for inclusion. She began to doubt her own ability to be effective when she referred to the co-teaching model as being a “dumping ground.” In this instance, the teacher felt hopeless when she stated, “it’s out of my hands.” which can diminish perceptions of self-efficacy.

Findings also revealed not all teachers believed co-teaching was an effective model for students with special needs. Participants not only mentioned concerns on improper student placement in co-taught classes but also pointed to the social and emotional implications for students. When one special education teacher was asked if he thought co-teaching was effective, he expressed concerns regarding special education students not having the opportunity to “shine” when grouped with general education students and questioned whether a resource room setting provided more opportunities for students with disabilities.

Hang and Rabren (2009) surveyed co-teachers’ perspectives about co-teaching. The survey questions addressed general and special education teachers’ perceptions of their (a)
expectations in the areas of self-confidence and learning more, (b) support for students, and (c) student behavior. All participant groups showed agreement with statements that students with disabilities increased their self-confidence, learned more, had sufficient support, and exhibited better behaviors in co-taught classrooms. While the current study did not examine student data on behavioral and academic outcomes, two special education teachers noted concerns regarding special education students’ being inappropriately placed in settings that may hinder their social and academic growth when referring to co-taught classes as a “dumping group” and students not having the opportunity to ‘shine’ when placed with general education students. While previous studies note the benefits of inclusion for students, it is equally critical to consider the challenges. A study conducted by McDuffie et al. (2009) found students with disabilities interact with teachers less often in their co-taught classroom than in non-co-taught classrooms; similar concerns were found in the current study when special education teachers questioned the suitability of co-teaching for all special education students. Since teacher self-efficacy refers to the belief that one can perform the necessary activities to influence student learning (Donohoo, 2017); we can surmise when students are not successful, teacher self-efficacy can be impacted.

**Summary**

Scholars have noted collective efficacy is critical to the success of the co-teaching partnerships (Donohoo et al., 2018), as educators with high efficacy show greater effort and persistence and a willingness to embrace new approaches to support student learning (Donohoo, 2017). In the current study, all co-teachers reported a belief that they had valuable skills to bring to the partnership, and the majority of teachers perceived students benefited from the strengths of both teachers.
Assigning veteran teachers to novice teachers may be a win-win for both teachers, as was the case with four of the teams. The novice special education teacher receives mentorship during the beginning stages of their career, and the general education teacher benefits from the increased knowledge of ways to support students with special needs. Additionally, in order to continue to foster a culture of inclusion in schools, administrators must look closely at student placement in co-teaching the classes. We know teachers with high efficacy persist and expend more effort when faced with students who are struggling (Ross & Bruce, 2007); however, without consideration to ensuring students are properly placed, teachers may begin to feel overwhelmed and this may diminish self-efficacy beliefs.

**Research Question 2**

“How do special education and general education elementary teachers view each other's role in a co-teaching classroom, and how do these perceptions affect the collective efficacy of these partnerships?” The theme of Parity with Roles and Responsibilities, along with the subthemes of (a) defined roles, (b) shared responsibilities, (c) models of co-teaching, and (d) notion of being flexible, answered the research question and are discussed in the sections that follow. These themes were ubiquitous in teachers’ responses during individual interviews. Teachers were asked to describe their relationship with their co-teachers to explain how roles and responsibilities are defined in their co-teaching classrooms and how roles and responsibilities are shared.

**Theme 2: Parity with Roles and Responsibilities**

The theme of Parity with Roles and Responsibility was evidenced in the ways teachers balanced co-teaching responsibilities and worked jointly to implement the co-teaching model. Parity occurs when co-teachers perceive that their unique contributions and their presence on the
team are valued (Villa et al., 2004). Co-teacher's confidence in each other's abilities is a critical link between collective action and collective efficacy. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature supporting the notion that co-teachers who share a belief that through their skills and unified efforts, they can overcome problems and produce positive results are much more effective (Donohoo et al., 2018).

**Defined Roles**

Each teacher emphasized the importance of defined roles; however, each co-teaching team structured (or did not structure) their roles and responsibilities differently. This is an area expressed by co-teaching teams as a barrier to efficacy; specifically, role ambiguity surfaced as a concern when teachers stated they were not sure what their partner was doing or when teachers were asked to do tasks they considered “not their job.” This was evident when one general education teacher asked the special education teacher to make copies and grade assignments and was uncertain what special education teachers were doing with students during small group instruction. A threat to parity can occur when the general education teachers ask the special education teacher to perform what may be considered menial tasks. Two teachers reported a need to “establish a system of who is doing what”, which indicated a lack of clearly defined roles. In most cases, teachers acknowledged they had an understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as evident in shared teaching responsibilities and supporting students. Findings align with the research of Bouck (2007), who found co-teachers must embrace difficult conversations about their roles and responsibilities and be aware of the tensions and constraints before entering into a co-teaching relationship. Teachers must decide who will take on responsibilities for specific lessons and agree upon classroom procedures, and a true partnership will occur when both teachers take on equal responsibilities (Krammer et al., 2018; Murawski, 2010).
During the interviews, there was a consensus that each co-teacher was viewed as an equal in their partner's eyes. Although some partnerships embraced parity and others were working on strengthening practices. This may be attributed to some newly formed partnerships, whereas other teams have worked together in previous years. Ensuring both teachers have a collective understanding of roles and responsibilities should not be left up to chance. In a previous study that evaluated the roles of co-teachers, Keefe and Moore (2004) determined teachers who have developed a working relationship are more likely to share classroom responsibilities and have a more positive co-teaching perception. Similarly, the current study found nine teachers who were able to develop a “working relationship” by sharing classroom responsibilities. When asked what suggestions they would give others attempting to teach an inclusion class, nine teachers mentioned the need to discuss roles and responsibilities, preferably before starting the partnership. This aligns with the literature citing the importance of establishing clear roles and responsibilities to work effectively as a team and share responsibility for student learning (Murata, 2002; Buckley, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Shared Responsibilities

With respect to shared responsibilities, all teachers interviewed articulated the benefit of having another teacher in the classroom to “reduce the workload” and provide the time needed to focus on their teaching responsibility. Seven teachers shared responsibilities in teaching different subjects. Often the general education teacher would take the lead with teaching literacy, and social studies and the special education teacher would teach math and science. This shared responsibility provided each teacher the opportunity to teach to their strength, which teachers viewed as a benefit to students. One teacher noted, “We are stronger together than by ourselves.”
Having another teacher in the classroom to share the responsibilities of teaching increased self-efficacy by lessening the demands of being responsible for teaching all subject areas.

Friend and Cook (2017) emphasized the importance of shared responsibility, parity among co-teachers, and the need to structure time to co-plan together. Likewise, the literature suggests a true partnership will occur when both teachers take on equal responsibilities (Sileo, 2011), as was the case with eighty percent of the teachers who indicated they shared responsibilities. In the current study, seven teachers took on roles and responsibilities for teaching subjects that felt they had more knowledge in teaching. This helped to create positive interdependence where both teachers view themselves as equally responsible for all students (Villa et al., 2004).

To avoid misconceptions regarding roles and expectations, it is critical for co-teachers to discuss how they can best share their expertise. However, ten teachers mentioned a lack of dedicated time in their schedules to discuss what one teacher referred to as “a system of who’s doing what.” My study supports the findings of Isherwood et al. (2013), who reported a lack of planning time and difficulties with schedules to include common planning time as obstacles to co-teaching. Two participants in the study mentioned decisions on roles and responsibilities should take place prior to the start of school to “work things out” and be “more consistent.” Research supports the idea of providing opportunities for personal conversations, frequent dialogue, shared work, and shared responsibilities to ensure parity among co-teachers (Krammer et al., 2018).

**Models of Co-teaching**

Parity with roles and responsibilities was also established through the various models of co-teaching selected by each team. All eleven teachers viewed the model that they used primarily
as the One Teach, and One Assist model. The One Teach, One Assist model consists of one teacher having the primary instructional responsibility of the classroom, while the second teacher gathers observational data on students and provides assistance to students who may need extra support (Fenty et al., 2011). While accepted in the field of co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 2017; Murawski, 2010), this model may create an unforeseen imbalance of power in the classroom when one teacher is instructing the entire class and the other is working with a small group of students.

Interestingly, although the teachers identified with the One Teach and One Assist model, they also described teaching separate subjects. This was the case with eighty percent of the participants. Many consider the One Teach and One Assist model as the same teacher being responsible for teaching, typically the general education teacher, and the other, typically the special education teacher, being responsible for assisting. However, this was not the case. Co-teachers would take turns teaching a subject area they felt stronger in teaching. For example, the general education teacher would teach literacy, and the special education teachers would assist students. When it came time for math instruction, the roles were reversed; the special education teacher would take the lead while the general education teacher assisted. This model of co-teaching supported perceptions of parity since both teachers took on equal roles at some point during the day. This finding corroborates what scholars cite as the benefit of co-teaching as bringing the strengths of two teachers together to share expertise (Cook & Friend, 2017).

**Flexibility**

An examination of the “Parity with Roles and Responsibilities” theme also revealed that nine of eleven teachers defined their co-teaching experiences favorably, indicating they worked together well, shared ideas, and were flexible. One teacher explained her co-teaching relationship
worked because she relinquished her control and became open to new ways of doing things. Findings here support the findings of Lawrence-Brown et al. (2006), who reported flexibility in co-teaching as a factor needed for successful co-teaching teams. When asked what advice they would give others attempting to co-teach, eight teachers mentioned the need to be flexible. Being flexible was evident in the ways teachers relinquished control in the classroom, tried new ways of teaching, and exchanged ideas and approaches openly, despite differences in knowledge, skills, and experiences. The majority of teachers viewed flexibility as a critical attribute needed for successful co-teaching. This current study supports the findings of Ross and Bruce (2007,) who report a higher level of efficacy as being linked to the ability to accept change and have a willingness to try new approaches.

**Summary**

Parity with Roles and responsibilities in a co-teaching partnership is critical to ensuring both teachers feel valued and have a voice in decision-making. Both teachers are responsible for all students in the classroom and should be included when assigning access to student data and resources. Teams that can create a positive classroom climate based on respect and equal responsibility are more likely to perceive co-teaching as a positive experience (Karten & Murawski, 2020). Co-teachers wanted to be successful; however, structures within the school schedules did not provide time to take stock of their practices in order to refine them. It is important partners discuss roles in the classroom and continuously improve their shared understandings; doing so fosters collective efficacy.

**Research Question 3**

What conditions are required to support the collective efficacy of co-teaching partnerships?” Two themes emerged to answer this research question:
1. The theme of Collaboration and Communication, along with the subthemes of (a) co-planning, (b) time to collaborate; and (c) collaborative professional learning.

2. The theme of Mutual Respect and Trust, along with the subthemes (a) longevity of partnerships, (b) respect for each other, and (c) connections.

Participants were asked questions about ways in which they collaborate, what supports were in place, and suggestions they have for others attempting to work in the co-teaching model.

**Theme 3: Collaboration and Communication**

Communication and collaboration can be seen as the catalyst for successful co-teaching partnerships. Co-teaching is one of the most popular models used to instruct students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Cook & McDuffie-Landrum; 2020), and this model is based on the assumption that a general and special education teachers co-plan, co-instruct, co-assess, and co-manage to provide instruction for students with and without disabilities (Murawski & Lochner, 2011). Throughout the current study, both general education and special education teachers emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication in their understanding of co-teaching.

Within the current study’s parameters, communication and collaboration were defined as a direct interaction between at least two equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making towards a common goal (Friend & Cook, 2017). Overall findings suggest that when co-teachers are not provided opportunities to collaborate to refine and strengthen their practices, collective efficacy beliefs may be impacted. Both special education teachers and general education teachers reported limited opportunities to co-plan, no structured time to collaborate, and limited professional learning opportunities to enable them to deepen their collaborative practices.
Co-Planning

Co-planning is considered an integral part of a successful co-teaching relationship, in which both teachers use their individual expertise to benefit all students; however, findings revealed a lack of dedicated time to plan among teachers. During individual interviews, eighty percent of the teachers articulated concerns about limited opportunities to co-plan. To overcome the lack of opportunities for co-planning, four general education teachers reported they wrote the majority of the lesson plans and sent them to the special education teachers for review. Five general education teachers reported taking on the majority of the responsibilities for planning, with special education teachers modifying the plans for students with special needs. This seemed to create a mentality of "your" students and "my" students. Special education teachers expressed trepidations about the lack of sufficient time to review the plans, offer suggestions, and plan for differentiation when the plans were emailed to them on the weekends. All six general education teachers created plans in isolation, and shared decision-making was limited to informal conversations within the classroom.

The perceptions teachers expressed concerning co-planning appeared to contrast what scholars recommend. Friend and Cook (2017) pointed to shared decision-making as a critical component within the co-teaching partnership, which was not evident in the current study. Although one study conducted by Lawrence-Brown et al. (2006) found teachers who received less common planning time viewed themselves as less effective, only two special education teachers questioned their effectiveness. Perhaps if these two teachers had an opportunity to co-plan with their partners, their perceptions of efficacy would improve. Scholars have noted effective co-planning is the key to successful co-teaching and enables teachers the opportunity to consider the social, academic, and behavioral needs of students while engaging in a decision-
making process (Friend & Cook, 2017; Lawrence-Brown et al., 2006; Murawski, 2010). With opportunities to co-plan, teachers in the current study might have been able to increase collective efficacy and further impact student outcomes.

**Time to Collaborate**

Similar to issues described with co-planning, an examination of the “Collaboration and Communication” theme revealed all teachers lacked dedicated time to collaborate. Although all participants’ responded collaboration was an essential aspect of co-teaching, dedicated time to collaborate was not in place. The depth of discussion was often limited to a few stolen moments in the morning or during lunch. When asked to explain how they collaborated with their co-teacher, responses varied from "on the spot" collaboration, ” bouncing ideas” off each other, and texting after work. This non-structured type of collaboration, while having some value, does not provide the time needed to reflect and refine practices and discuss pedagogical approaches to improve student learning. Collaboration is essential, especially when the partnership is new, as was the case with three co-teaching teams. Additionally, partnerships need time to collaborate to view themselves as equally responsible for the learning of all students as one team referred to "my students" and "your students." Without time to collaborate, the general educator may view co-teaching negatively when the special education teacher is modifying the material so extensively that it begins to look like two separate classes, as was seen with one co-teaching team.

Findings here contradict what scholars denote as essential structures required to effectively co-teach. For example, Johnson (2012) conducted a study to determine the frequency of collaboration time that was needed to significantly influence teachers’ perceptions of collective efficacy and found when teachers collaborated three or more times a week, collective
efficacy perceptions significantly increased. Unfortunately, this was not the case in the current study. Although three teachers mentioned they were willing to meet in the summer prior to co-teaching, however, time was not provided. Dove and Honigsfeld (2018) state, “The synergy that often occurs between people as they collaborate creates a combined effect that often sparks innovative ideas, strategies, and solutions as compared with when an individual plans alone (p.25).” The synergy Dove and Honigsfeld point out is directly linked to collective efficacy. Until districts provide dedicated time for collaboration, teachers will continue to carve out small moments, which may hinder collective efficacy.

**Collaborative Professional Learning**

Co-teaching partnerships require collaborative structures and to develop interdependence and increased self-efficacy. How do we become more collaborative? Professional development is a critical element in providing a clear vision of the roles and responsibilities of participating in an inclusive and collaborative program (Friend, 2017). Communication and collaboration are embedded in the ways schools provide professional development opportunities for co-teachers to develop and refine their practices.

During interviews, teachers were asked to describe collaborative training they received in the district on co-teaching. Surprisingly, nine of the participants mentioned they received no training on co-teaching. The remaining two teachers indicated they received one or two trainings during their co-teaching experience; however, their recollections were vague. One interview with a special education teacher illuminated the degree to which professional development was lacking when he expressed concerns regarding his effectiveness as a co-teacher. He admitted to lacking knowledge of co-teaching and tried to follow co-teachers on Twitter and read up on the practice, but still felt there was much to know. Similarly, another teacher described how she
attended district training on her content area, while her special education co-teacher was required to participate in trainings on special education topics. This breakdown in training provided little common ground for collaboration and communication and increased the divide between teacher knowledge. A lack of professional development may lead teachers to doubt their capacity to be good co-teachers (Villa et al., 2004), as was reported by three special education teachers. According to Murawski (2010), teachers with limited training on what co-teaching should or should not look like tend to have a negative experience with inclusion. In contrast, teachers who receive opportunities to strengthen their understanding of co-teaching show significantly greater confidence in their abilities (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). While teachers in this study generally had positive experiences with co-teaching, only one team exuded confidence in their abilities. Providing collaborative opportunities to grow professionally may strengthen partnerships. My findings mirror previous studies (Lawrence-Brown et al., 2006; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013), which found that teachers require frequent opportunities to collaborate and grow in their knowledge of co-teaching practices in order to feel successful.

Five special education and general education teachers expressed concerns regarding the lack of support they received to implement co-teaching effectively; Specifically, teachers received limited opportunities to work together to refine their pedagogical practices. These supports are intricately connected and work together to promote collective efficacy. Each barrier requires opportunities to engage in systemic professional development, which incorporates collaborative structures needed to build collective efficacy.

**Administrative Support**

When considering conditions needed to support collaboration of co-teaching, administrative support is essential. Administrators have the ability to influence the collective
efficacy of co-teachers by fostering collaborative processes such as co-planning and professional development opportunities. Murawski (2010) affirms administrators must provide time for teachers to plan, share, and collaborate. This can be difficult to do if they lack sufficient knowledge of best practices in co-teaching.

Three teachers mentioned the need for principals to receive training on co-teaching. Since teachers in the current study lacked adequate professional development, it is most likely principals have not received training on how to best support co-teaching. One special education teacher expressed the only knowledge she had on co-teaching was a book her principal handed her before being placed in an inclusion classroom. The teacher felt unsupported and left on her own to figure things out. Scholars highlight the need for administrative support as an essential factor to the success of co-teaching teams (Cook & Friend, 2017).

**Summary**

Despite the lack of communication and collaboration, ten out of the eleven teachers stated that their co-teaching experiences were positive, and nine out of eleven teachers said they would like to co-teach again. Several participants specifically stated they would only co-teach again if they could work with their current partners or had a choice in partners. Results indicate that despite the lack of co-planning, communication, and professional development, co-teaching experiences were generally positive due to the extra teacher support in the classroom.

**Theme 4: Mutual Respect and Trust**

In co-taught classrooms, both teachers are placed in positions in which they are dependent upon each other to have successful learning outcomes for all students. Each teacher in the partnership must maintain an understanding of his or her roles and responsibilities as well as their partners and in order for trust to develop. The theme of Mutual Respect and Trust was
evident through the subthemes of (a) longevity of partnerships, (b) respect for each other, and (c) connections.

**Longevity of Partnerships**

Like any partnership, trust does not just happen and takes time to develop. Nine teachers reported trust and mutual respect were important when working with co-teaching. Two teams stated they began to trust and respect their co-teacher after their first year working together and could build on each other’s strength the following year. However, the opposite was true in the case of one teacher who had worked with different co-teachers for the last three years. She argued this was a flawed practice since she had to start all over building the relationship each time she had a new partner, and it took time to get to know one another. When it comes to co-teaching complexities, starting over each year can prevent teachers from developing strong relationships, ultimately weakening trust.

Conversely, teachers who worked with the same teacher for more than one year reported their partnerships were strengthened throughout the year. In her fourth year with the same co-teacher, one teacher expressed, "I feel every year we get stronger." These findings are supported by scholars who suggest co-teachers who develop respect and trust in their partnerships become more productive, and collective efficacy is strengthened (Donohoo, 2017; Villa et al., 2013).

Similarly, one general teacher stated how working with her partner the first year required a lot of work, but they grew to respect each other and trust each other's opinions over their four years together. Bandura (1977) affirmed, "After strong efficacy expectations are developed through repeated success, the negative impact of occasional failures is likely to be reduced (p. 195).” It would seem the “repeated successes” of working together helped to strengthen trust. However, this was not always the case; sometimes the special education teacher will be placed in
a different class the following year, making it difficult to strengthen collective efficacy and build trusting relationships. When it comes to co-teaching complexities, starting over each year can prevent teachers from developing strong relationships, ultimately weakening trust. According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (2003): "Trust is an individual's or group's willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open" (p.189). The results suggest mutual respect and trust strengthened over time; co-teachers who stay in the same partnership had stronger levels of collective efficacy than those who do not.

**Respect for Each Other**

Findings also indicate that respect is a critical factor in co-teaching partnerships. Respecting each other’s professionalism and commitment to students was essential to establishing strong partnerships. Although not necessarily friends, four out of the five teams reported feeling respected and supported. One teacher stated respect was the most important factor in her relationship with her co-teacher and mentioned how students are intuitive and can tell if teachers respect each other or not. The idea of respect was exhibited through teachers’ daily interactions. Teachers who trusted and respected their partners were able to jump in to support their partners when needed. For example, one general education teacher referred to a parent who unexpectedly showed up for a meeting. She made comments to her co-teacher, such as, “don’t worry, I will handle the class while you talk to the parent.” Teachers who respected each other were able to work as a team to support each other. The collective efficacy of partnerships was evidenced in ways in which teachers grew to respect each other over time through shared responsibilities and supporting students. Although scholars point to trust and respect as necessary components for successful co-teaching (Cook and Friend, 2017, Hoy and
Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Villa et al., 2013), research on ways in which trust can be fostered is limited. This is a significant finding of this study, which adds to the research on co-teaching.

**Connections**

An unexpected finding, which helped expedite trust and respect, was having a connection outside of the school setting. Four teachers on this team discovered they grew up in the same neighborhood and knew some of the same people. This realization or "connection" seemed to break down some walls and provided common ground to establish trust. Building on the research of others, the findings from this study confirm the importance of establishing a foundation of mutual respect and trust in co-teaching relationships (Bessette, 2008; Dove & Honigsfeld; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Macmillan et al., 2010). If co-teachers were provided opportunities to build on their relationships and learn about each other prior to working together, the trust might have a stronger foundation in which to grow.

**Conclusion**

Co-teaching has enormous potential to improve the outcomes of both students and teachers (Friend & Cook, 2017; Murawski, 2010; Villa et al., 2008). Fostering the collective efficacy of this model is a timely and critical issue if we are going to support successful outcomes for students. However, findings indicated this might be a complex task if co-teachers were not provided the necessary structures to be successful. Co-teaching requires more than simply placing two teachers in a classroom. In this chapter, the themes of (1) Perceptions of Value, (2) Parity with Roles and Responsibilities, (3) Collaboration and Communication, and (4) Mutual Respect and Trust were detailed and are intricately connected. Individual narratives shed light on the sometimes messy world of co-teaching while also uncovering the rich rewards of
these partnerships. For co-teaching to be most effective, cultivating a culture in which co-teaching is valued and supported is essential.

Findings add to the existing body of research on co-teaching by reaffirming as well as identifying structures required to foster collective efficacy. Collective teacher efficacy is characterized by an attitude that together teachers can make a difference for students (Donohoo, 2017). Despite the limited opportunities to strengthen co-teaching practices, the co-teachers in this study, for the most part, managed to work together with the goal of improving student outcomes.

Overall, results indicated that when co-teachers are not provided opportunities to meet and refine their practices, they may be surviving rather than thriving in their partnerships, and collective efficacy may be diminished. To influence collective efficacy beliefs, educators must be cognizant of factors that shape these beliefs and nurture them (Donohoo, 2017). Results indicated a need to prioritize collaborative structures within schools to allow co-teachers to meet and discuss roles, responsibilities, and co-plan. Additionally, partnerships that stay together tend to strengthen collective efficacy while building trust.

**Implications**

Co-teaching in elementary classrooms is becoming a mainstay in education. According to federal mandates, special education students are required to be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE), which is often general education classrooms. Oftentimes, teachers placed in co-taught classrooms must navigate this new arrangement without any direction. There are several implications from the findings to help support co-teaching. The following sections provide implications for practice, theoretical implications, and implications for future research.
Implications for Practice

**School Level.** Restructuring co-teacher practices that are already in place can be complicated and overwhelming; however, co-teaching will not fully live up to its potential without careful consideration of the supports needed. Schools committed to improving co-teaching practices must cultivate a culture in which collaboration, communication, and trust flourish.

Undoubtedly, this model's success is linked to the ability of schools to prioritize collaborative opportunities for teachers to co-plan and discuss roles and responsibilities. When teaching, there is minimal time to talk to your partner. Brief moments do not provide opportunities to engage in rich conversations about teaching and learning. Administrators can affect collective efficacy by providing dedicated time for productive teacher collaboration, thereby creating a foundation for high levels of trust to develop. Co-teachers must not only have dedicated time in their schedules to meet but they should be provided opportunities to meet with other co-teachers within the school in order to share experiences and problem solve collaboratively. Schools should consider creating a co-teaching professional learning community (PLC) to foster collective efficacy.

Despite the lack of structures in policy implementation, teachers in the current study were committed to working with each other with the goal of improving student outcomes. Participants wanted to co-teach again and to co-teach with their partners. To support collective efficacy, school administrators should create a plan to ensure co-teaching teams are kept together when possible. Co-teaching is a partnership, and consistency will strengthen the relationship and build collective efficacy, positively influencing the students' learning experience (Murawski, 2010).
**District Level Supports.** Studies highlight the importance of collaboration, parity of roles and responsibilities, and administrative support in co-teaching (Murawski et al., 2007). Additionally, research points to the significance of collective efficacy in promoting successful structures, which improve student outcomes (Hattie, 2009). Co-teachers can gain valuable collaboration skills, mutual professional support, and the ability to learn from each other when participating in professional development. The practical implications of the current study emphasize the need for professional development aligned to co-teaching. Ideally, professional development should be planned prior to the beginning of the school year. This would provide teachers with the opportunity to get to know each other and gain a shared understanding of co-teaching practices. Ongoing professional development centered on teamwork, problem-solving, interpersonal skills, and developing a deep understanding of co-teaching should be prioritized in districts implementing this model.

Too often, co-teachers are left to figure things out on their own, which can negatively affect collective efficacy. Fostering collective efficacy among co-teachers should be at the forefront of strategic district plans. Strengthening collective efficacy requires administrative support. School and district leaders play a crucial role in setting the tone for inclusive practices, such as co-teaching and should also receive training in ways to improve and support co-teaching practices. Only then will the promise of co-teaching truly come to fruition.

**Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical framework, which guided this study, was based on the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977) and was viewed through the lens of collective efficacy. Through an exploration of teachers’ beliefs and experiences, perceptions of collective efficacy were uncovered. The Social Cognitive Theory proposes interactions between people are exchanges
that foster understanding based on shared social experiences. Therefore, individuals learn from each other; behaviors are based on observations, which are adopted and become the norm (Bandura 2000). Grounded in social cognitive theory, self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities and is a powerful drive that influences agency (Tschannen-Moran and Johnson 2011). According to Bandura (1997), these beliefs are more powerful than one's abilities and have a direct impact on motivation and actions. Collective efficacy is the belief of a group that they possess the wherewithal to affect student learning (Donohoo, 2017). Members of a group with a high level of collective efficacy have confidence in their ability to execute a course of action (Bandura, 1997).

The theoretical implications align teachers' perceptions of co-teaching to collective efficacy. Specifically, teachers' willingness to work together, share roles and maintain a co-teaching relationship that benefits students. Accordingly, the theoretical implications are that collective efficacy is a motivating condition for most participants. Teachers were grateful for the support and expertise their partner brought to the relationship and perceived they were more effective when paired with a co-teacher. Collective efficacy was also evidenced through frequent references as being “stronger together.”

It is imperative to understand how collective teacher efficacy beliefs are realized through the practices of co-teachers. It is also important to understand the negative effects that occur when teachers do not share a sense of collective efficacy (Donohoo, 2017). The ability to motivate and inspire each other relies on each other’s strengths and the willingness to work together with the shared goal of improving student outcomes.
Recommendations for Future Research

Through the lens of collective efficacy, an in-depth analysis of teachers' perceptions and practices, was completed with eleven co-teachers in four different schools. In presenting in-depth interviews of teacher's perceptions and experiences with co-teaching, I attempted to provide rich details to describe the collective efficacy of co-teachers. In this way, others seeking ways to improve elementary co-teaching practices can utilize the findings to evaluate their current practices or conduct further research.

A replication of this study to include the entire district would provide a larger perspective on co-teaching. Additionally, this research was conducted during the course of one school year; a longitudinal design would be helpful to see how collective efficacy develops and changes over time.

Furthermore, as this study was conducted with elementary grades, the findings may not be applicable to secondary grades. A suggestion for further research is to expand qualitative and quantitative research on the collective efficacy of co-teaching in middle school and high school settings. In most elementary settings, students stay with the same group of students and same teachers for most of the day. Whereas with secondary school schedules, students travel to different subject area teachers throughout the day. It would seem plausible that results may produce different findings.

While results here aligned with previous research on co-teaching partnerships, future research might aim to measure teachers' ability to affect student-learning outcomes to determine if co-teaching is truly a worthwhile practice for all students in heterogeneous classrooms. Do special education students show growth both academically and socially? Likewise, do general
education students show gains? More research is needed to validate co-teaching as an effective model to ensure student needs are truly being met.

Evidence from the current study suggests keeping the same co-teachers together builds collective efficacy and establishes trust. Since only three teachers have worked together for more than three years, it would be worthwhile to explore the data from a larger sample size. This could be conducted through quantitative analysis of surveys provided to teachers each year of the partnership. Measurable data could include the degree of collaboration, parity, trust, and efficacy each teacher reports. A comparative analysis conducted on the first year of implementation and subsequent years of practice may provide valuable data on variables that support or hinder collective efficacy.

As co-teaching has expanded, it has become vulnerable to varying interpretations, and additional research is warranted to gauge the value of this practice. Future research in the areas of qualitative research synthesis could help bring the voices of teachers and students into the domain of public discourse and further address the complexities of co-teaching.

Limitations

This research is not without limitations. According to Merriam (2009), a study’s limitations are the characteristics that might have affected the interpretation of the results. The first limitation is my role as a supervisor in the district in which the study took place. Although I made every effort to avoid bias, I may have inherently introduced my own biases and may have affected the results. However, being a supervisor also provided me with an insider privilege to access this context and gain insight into the research problem. A second potential limitation of this design was the small convenience sample (Walonick, 2010). The teacher participants were chosen based on the researchers' access to them and their classrooms during a small window of
opportunity. Although the interviews of eleven participants provide insight into co-teaching conditions, they represent a very small portion of the co-teaching pairs in the districts. Another limitation is the way in which teachers were selected. The participants were all volunteers who were willing to participate. It could be the case that mainly those teachers who were satisfied or unsatisfied with their partners took part in the interviews. Despite these limitations, detailed analysis and descriptions of teachers’ perceptions and experiences may make the findings transferrable to other settings and contribute beyond the immediate work with co-teachers in this district.

However, co-teaching practices require much more consideration and planning than merely pairing up two teachers. For co-teaching to be successful, strategies for fostering positive working relationships such as professional development, collaboration, co-planning, and creating opportunities to develop trusting relationships must be considered (Isherwood, Barger-Anderson, & Erickson, 2013; Weilbacher & Tilford, 2015). These challenges can seem overwhelming at times; however, the potential of co-teaching warrants a commitment to ensuring success.

In the current study, I not only endeavored to explain, understand and share the experiences of eleven elementary teachers but also to shed light on understanding co-teachers’ perceptions through the lens of collective efficacy. I explored practices and perceptions of elementary co-teachers to examine conditions needed to support collective efficacy. Results indicated parity, communication and collaboration, and mutual respect and trust were the most critical factors required to support collective efficacy. Co-teachers were able to bring their expertise and competencies to their partnerships in ways that create an instructional dynamic greater than can be achieved individually. However, collective efficacy outcomes should not be left up to chance. To influence collective efficacy, school leaders need to be cognizant of the
collaborative practices necessary to support inclusion. Fostering teachers' collective efficacy is critical to achieving the promise of inclusion and providing all students successful outcomes. Efficacy beliefs are powerful because they steer educator's actions in the ways in which teachers respond to challenges, focus their efforts, and determine which course of action they pursue (Donohoo, 2017). Communication and collaboration were the overarching umbrella necessary to ensure parity and foster mutual respect and trust. Structures must be put into place, which provides teachers with the time and resources required to plan and solve problems of practice collaboratively. For co-teaching to be effective, collaborative practices must be prioritized to foster collective efficacy and transform co-teaching into vibrant classrooms for teaching and learning.
REFERENCES


https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep2802_3


https://doi.org/10.1177/07419325890100205


COLLECTIVE EFFICACY OF ELEMENTARY CO-TEACHERS

Commission. Retrieved November 02, 2019, from

https://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html


https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290707300401


APPENDIX

Interview Protocol for Co-teachers

Interviews will be conducted individually with eleven co-teachers. Each interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes and will be audiotaped.

Introduction: Thank you for participating in this research study of co-teaching relationships. The information generated from your participation will assist me in identifying conditions that affect co-teaching relationships. I am conducting this research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctoral degree from Rutgers State University. All information shared will be confidential.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I. General Background

1. Please tell me about your teaching background.
2. Can you describe your overall experience with co-teaching?

II. Perceptions

1. What are some things you enjoy about co-teaching?
2. What are your responsibilities in your co-teaching classroom?
3. What are your partner’s responsibilities?
4. What challenges have you encountered in co-teaching? (Tell me more…)
5. How effective do you feel as a co-teacher?
6. How effective do you feel in your co-teaching partnership? (Explain…)
7. Explain how you and your co-teacher were paired/assigned? (How did you feel…?)
8. What supports are (or are not) in place that affect successful co-teaching?
9. Describe the ways in which you and your co-teacher collaborate about instruction and supporting students.
10. Describe your ideal co-teaching situation.
11. Do you think co-teaching is an effective model? (why or why not)
12. What suggestions would you have for others attempting to work in a co-teaching team?

III. Concluding Questions

1. Is there anything else you would like to tell me regarding your co-teaching experiences?
2. Are there any questions you would like to ask me?