Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies
Collection

2020

Investigating Middle School Teachers' Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms

Jilleane Archie
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Jilleane Beard-Archie

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Brenda Kennedy, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Alia Sheety, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Bonita Wilcox, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2020

Abstract

Investigating Middle School Teachers' Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms

by

Jilleane Beard-Archie

MA, Cambridge College 2007

BS, Mercer University, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Meeting the needs of students with disabilities, while implementing research-based instructional strategies in inclusive settings, presents an array of successes and challenges for both general and special education teachers. The problem at the local study site was that both general and special education teachers faced challenges as they implemented inclusion practices to meet the College and Career Readiness Performance Index, Closing Gaps component improvement targets for students with disabilities. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate general and special education teachers' successes, challenges, and needs as they implemented inclusion practices in middle school classrooms. This study was conducted through the conceptual framework lens of successful inclusion practices: connection with best practices, visionary leadership and administrative support, redefined roles and collaboration, and adult support. Data were gathered over 2 weeks from 3 general education teachers and 3 special education teachers at the study site in 60-minute interviews. The participants expressed successes in their strong instructional practices, teachers' preparation to teach students with disabilities, and strong support from school leaders and staff. The challenges they encountered included limited time to collaborate, lack of positive coteaching relationships, lack of knowledge about the curriculum and students' needs, and the inability to provide discreet interventions. The teachers also expressed needing more coteaching professional development to effectively implement co-teaching that has the greatest impact on student achievement. A professional development series was developed based on the findings of this study to assist the study site administrators and teachers in improving instruction and coteaching relationships.

Investigating Middle School Teachers' Experiences in Inclusive Classrooms

by

Jilleane Beard-Archie

MA, Cambridge College, 2007

BS, Mercer University, 2005

Doctoral Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2020

Dedication

This research and doctoral journey are dedicated to my beautiful daughters, Jayla, and Janay Archie. Everything I do in life, including this, is for you two. This doctoral journey is one of the most challenging experiences I have faced in my life, and I hope I have shown you that despite any challenges you may encounter, you must persevere. I would like to thank my husband, Durell Archie, for supporting me in all my endeavors in life and for always encouraging me to finish this great task. I could not have done this without you. I thank all three of you for your unconditional love, support, and encouragement. Thank you for believing in me. To my parents, Clarence, and Judi Beard, thank you so much for always pushing me. The drive I have today is because of you. I hope I have made you proud. To my brother and sister, Clarence and Chinquka Beard, thank you both for your encouragement and for being my sideline cheerleaders. To my friends, Traci Cooper, Melany Moore, and Shaquena Henry, thank you so much for being there to listen and encourage me. It is finally time to celebrate, as you promised! I am so blessed to have so many encouraging and loving people in my life. I am grateful for you all. Thank you, and I love you all!

Last but not least, I dedicate this study and journey to Jesus. I do all things so that He will get the glory. This doctorate is a true testimony that I can do things through Christ Jesus, who strengthens me. My favorite Scripture Jeramiah 29:11 "'For I Know The Plans I Have For You' Declares the Lord, 'Plans to Prosper You and Not to Harm You, Plans to Give You Hope and a Future," kept me going throughout this process. I could not have done it without Him. Thank you, Lord.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Since 1975, when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was authorized, U.S. lawmakers and advocates in education have worked to ensure students with disabilities are provided with the same quality education as their peers without disabilities. Although U.S. schools have made advancements in students with disabilities gaining access to the general curriculum through inclusion, there remain significant achievement gaps between students with disabilities and students without disabilities on the national, state, and local levels. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2015), fewer than half of all states are meeting federally mandated targets in special education. Many states, such as the state of Georgia, worked to close the achievement gaps between students with disabilities and meet the federally mandated targets.

To ensure the success of all students, including students with disabilities, the state of Georgia redesigned their school improvement and accountability system called the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) in 2018 by adding a new component called Closing Gaps (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a). Closing Gaps is a component of CCRPI that assesses college and career readiness for all the state's public-school students, including students in subgroups who historically have not performed well on standardized tests: economically disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English Learners. The Closing Gap Component of CCRPI is "a new target structure in which improvement or maintenance of high achievement levels is expected of all schools and all subgroups. The goal of this new target structure is to incentivize continuous, sustainable improvement" (Georgia Department of Education,

2018a, p. 1). The Georgia Department of Education (2018a) set annual Closing Gap

improvement targets for each district and each school within a district based on the

district's or school's starting point; both must show improvement for students with

disabilities. CCRPI improvement targets are defined by the Georgia Department of

Education (2018a) as 3% of the gap between a baseline and 100%. Each year, schools

will be expected to meet the improvement target based on the prior year's performance.

The improvement target is an expected gain and not an absolute number; thus, it allows

schools to start fresh each year and encourages schools to continue to focus on

improvement. Improvement targets have been calculated using 2017 data as the baseline

for academic achievement rates in English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and

Social Studies (Georgia, Department of Education, 2018, p. 1)

     To meet the CCRPI Closing Gaps target, special education teachers and general

education teachers at the study site worked collaboratively. They shared the responsibility

of meeting the educational needs of students with special needs. The study site was a

middle school in a large district in northeast Georgia with a population of approximately

900 students in which students with disabilities made up 16.5% of the student population

(Georgia Department of Education, 2018b). Various inclusion practices were

implemented at the study site. The most common practice implemented at the study site

was the co-teaching model of One Teach, One Assist, in which the general education

teacher facilitated the lessons, and the special education teacher or teacher's assistant

supported the general education teacher during lessons by answering questions and

assisting students who need additional help. Both general education teachers and special

education teachers at the study site worked to overcome daily classroom challenges to meet the needs of their students. Research on the challenges that teachers face in the classroom and the successes teachers and students experience could assist the study site in reaching the established target of the CCRPI Closing Gaps component.

The Local Problem

The problem at the local study site was that both special education and general education teachers faced challenges as they implemented research-based inclusion practices to meet the CCRPI Closing Gaps improvement targets for students with disabilities. One general education teacher made the following statement:

> The concern I have with teaching inclusion at my school is when student behavior problems or learning issues consistently cause disruptions in class. I don't feel like our special education department works with the general education teachers so that these problems can be appropriately handled (personal communication, December 13, 2018).

A special education teacher expressed the following concerns:

> My concern is that some of the general education teachers in my school do not want me to teach lessons in their classrooms or do not want to meet with me to plan. They just want me to come to their classrooms and help all the struggling students or students with behavior problems complete their work by the end of class. I have a master's degree in Special Education, and they use me as a para. It's very frustrating (personal communication, December 12, 2018).

These statements from a general education teacher and a special education teacher provide evidence that there is a problem that teachers face challenges as they try to implement inclusion practices at the study site.

While student achievement cannot be attributed to teacher instruction alone, the challenges shared by the teachers may be related to the students with disabilities' inability to meet Georgia Department of Education's CCRPI Closing Gaps improvement targets. Although the study site exceeded their improvement target score of 12.88 with a score of 14.55 in Mathematics during the 2017-2018 school year, the study site did not make progress. Consequently, it did not meet the improvement targets in the areas of English Language Arts, Science, or Social Studies for students with disabilities (see Table 1). In the area of English Language Arts, the study site's improvement target was 11.86; the school earned a score of 8.77. The Science improvement target was 17.10; the school earned a score of 4.35. The Social Studies improvement target was 14.69; the school earned a score of 8.70. The CCRPI Closing Gaps Mathematics score was an area of success for the study site. However, the CCRPI Closing Gaps in English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies provide evidence that the students were not making adequate improvements in the content areas, which may be a result of teachers' inability to implement research-based inclusion practices effectively. Researching both the successes and challenges teachers experience while teaching students with disabilities at the study site can assist teachers and administrators in meeting the improvement targets of the CCRPI Closing Gap component in all areas (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a).

Table 1

2018 Improvement Target Data for Students With Disabilities

Subject	Score	Target	
English Language Arts	8.77	11.86	Subgroup did not make progress and did not meet improvement target
Mathematics	14.55	12.88	Subgroup met improvement target
Science	4.35	17.10	Subgroup did not make progress and did not meet improvement target
Social Studies	8.70	14.69	Subgroup did not make progress and did not meet improvement target

Note. Adapted from http://ccrpi.gadoe.org/2018/Views/Shared/_Layout.html. Copyright (2018a) by the Georgia Department of Education.

More evidence of the problem was found in the study site state's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores. NAEP is a congressionally mandated assessment taken by fourth-grade and eighth-grade students in the United States every two years to measure trends in academic achievement (United States Department of Education, 2018). Students with disabilities in Georgia were not achieving at the proficient level in mathematics or reading. Georgia's average score for all eighth-grade students in mathematics in 2017 was 281, which is Proficient (See Table 2 below). The average score for students with disabilities in eighth grade in 2017 was 251, which is Basic, and the average score for students without disabilities on the NAEP mathematics was 285. The state's NAEP reading scores showed similar results. The average score for all eighth-grade students in the NAEP Reading was 266, which is Proficient. The average score for eighth-grade students with disabilities in the NAEP Reading was 233, which is

Basic. Students without disabilities scored an average of 270 on the NAEP Reading,

which is Proficient.

Table 2

2017 Students' Average NAEP Scores by Subgroup

Subject	Student characteristic	Average score	Average achievement level
Reading	Students with disabilities	233	Basic (0-243)
	Students without disabilities	270	Proficient (244-281)
	All students	266	Proficient (244-281)
Math	Students with disabilities	251	Basic (0-262)
	Students without disabilities	285	Proficient (263- 299)
	All students	281	Proficient (263-299)

Note. Adapted from https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/math_2017/states/scores?grade=4 and https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_2017/states/scores?grade=4 Copyright (2018) by National Assessment of Educational Progress.

The Georgia Department of Education (2018b) acknowledged that there was a problem in

the state with students with disabilities not achieving at the same level as students without

disabilities on the NAEP with its 2018 press release about its plans to close the

achievement gap. The press release stated:

> Improving outcomes and opportunities and removing barriers for students with
>
> disabilities is a top priority in Georgia. GaDOE is:
>
> - Identifying universal screeners for literacy and numeracy, to act as an
>   early warning system and help identify and support the academic needs of
>   all students, specifically students with disabilities.

- Providing co-teaching training focused on literacy and numeracy instruction and supporting students with disabilities and English Learners at the classroom level.

- Providing Universal Design for Learning training to ensure students with disabilities have access to high-quality, personalized literacy and numeracy instruction.

- Collaborating with other state agencies to create a seamless plan to coordinate early, literacy-focused interventions for young children with disabilities (Georgia Department of Education, 2018b, p. 1).

The Georgia NAEP scores may be indicators that the inclusion practices that were being implemented were not meeting the needs of students with disabilities. According to NAEP (2018), "the data can be used to compare and understand the performance of demographic groups within states, nationally, between states … over time. Educators, policymakers, and elected officials use these results as input to improve education" (p. 1). The Georgia NAEP scores were indicators that teachers may not have been meeting the needs of students with disabilities due to the daily challenges they face within inclusive settings.

The challenges of successfully implementing inclusion practices are not unique to the study site. Many schools, both nationally and internationally, have faced challenges with inclusion practices. In a recent study in the Netherlands on teachers' reflections of the challenges of co-teaching in an inclusive setting, by Fluijt, Bakker, and Struyf (2016), found that special education teachers and general education teachers often have different

visions of what a successful education entails for students with disabilities. Having different views of successful educational inclusion presents a challenge for special education and general education teachers. Morgan (2016) conducted a study in a suburban elementary school in Vermont on the practices of effective collaboration and co-teaching and found that effective collaboration could increase learning for students with and without Individual Education Plans (IEP) in inclusive schools. Robinson (2017) conducted another study in a Georgia middle school about the concerns of general and special education teachers working collaboratively in the inclusive classroom. Robinson (2017) found that teachers who taught in inclusive settings at the Georgia middle school identified the following challenges: no or little ongoing training that included co-teaching models, collaboration, and classroom management strategies, the need for common planning periods and guidelines for teacher selected to teach inclusion classes, and administrative involvement. The literature discussed above clearly indicated that there were challenges in teaching in inclusive settings. The challenges that teachers faced while implementing inclusive practices were highlighted by evidence in the study site's CCRPI Closing Gap scores, the state NAEP scores, teacher concerns, and in the literature.

Rationale

I chose to investigate how general and special education teachers experience implementing inclusive practices to provide critical data to the teachers and administrators to impact student instruction and student achievement positively. Understanding the successes and the challenges experienced by teachers in inclusive settings at the study site provided guidance on how to improve the educational

experiences of all students, but especially the students with identified special needs. The data found from this study may also assist school leaders in reaching the state of Georgia's CCRPI Closing Gaps improvement target. I was specifically interested in the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers while they were using inclusive instructional practices. The findings of this study were used to develop a project that may assist the study site administrators and teachers in improving the implementation of research-based inclusion practices. Other schools facing similar issues may be able to use this study to meet student needs as well. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to gather data from general education and special education teachers at the study site so that recommendations and best practices could be introduced to the school administrators and teachers.

Definition of Terms

Having a clear understanding of the terms connected to a research study is vital to comprehend all aspects of the study. Key terms relevant to this study on the challenges and successes of teachers who teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings are defined below.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): ESSA is a federal mandate that was developed to ensure a fair and quality education for all students, including students with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2015). It is the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESSA, 2015) and replaces the No Child Left Behind Act.

General Education Classroom: A general education classroom is defined in this study as a classroom that contains students with mixed abilities and has a teacher with a general education certification.

General Education Teacher: A general education teacher will be defined according to Georgia's Professional Standards Commission Requirements (2017), which states a teacher must have a "baccalaureate degree from an institution accredited by a regional accrediting association with at least 40 semester hours (SH) in general education course work distributed over such fields as English, history, social studies, mathematics, fine arts, languages, science, philosophy, and psychology [and] a minimum of 18 SH of professional teacher education course work in such areas as learning process, tests, and measurement, educational philosophy, psychology, social foundations, methods of teaching…" (p. 1). Teachers who meet these requirements, according to Georgia's Professional Standards Commission, will be called a general education teacher for this study.

Inclusion: Forlin, Earle, Loreman and Sharama (2011) define inclusion as "the education of all students covering the spectrum of diversity takes place in adequately supported regular classrooms in the educational context that would be attended if the form of diversity were not present, normally the neighborhood school"(p. 50).

Inclusive classroom: An inclusive classroom is a classroom in which there is a diverse mixture of students without disabilities, and students with disabilities. Students in the classroom may have a variety of needs, opportunities, and difficulties (Duarte Santos,

Sardinha, & Reis, 2016). The terms inclusive classroom and inclusive settings may be used interchangeably throughout this study.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): An IEP is a legal written document that outlines an individualized educational program for a student with disabilities. It is created by a team that includes educators, parents, and in some instances, the child to ensure success in a traditional school setting. An IEP includes goals and accommodations to ensure that students with disabilities are successful in school while being educated in the least restrictive environment (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA): IDEA is a law guaranteeing services to children with disabilities. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide education services and related services to individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): LRE is a part of IDEA which states that the maximum degree suitable, children with disabilities are to be educated with their non-disabled peers and special classes; separate schooling, or removing children with disabilities from the regular educational setting should only occur when a student's disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplemental aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (United States Department of Education, 2004).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): NCLB is a law that was enacted in 2001 under Title I-Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged. The purpose of NCLB was to ensure a high-quality education for all students in the United States regardless of their race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, or

disabilities. To ensure that all students receive an equal and quality education, NCLB holds schools, local education agencies, and states accountable for all student learning (NCLB, 2002).

Professional Development: Professional Development is "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Leaning Forward, 2016, p. 1).

Special Education (SPED) teacher: A SPED teacher will be defined according to Georgia's Professional Standards Commission Education and Support Categories and Requirements. Special education teachers are required to have a major in special education or a minimum of 30 credit hours in special education from an accredited institution of learning. Course work may include diagnostic-prescriptive type instruction, curriculum-based assessment and instruction, remediation activities, and instruction individuals who are educable mentally disabled or who exhibit behavior disorders (Georgia Department of Education, 2018a). An educator who meets all of the requirements as defined by the school system will be called a special education teacher for this study.

Students with Special Needs: Students with special needs are students who are serviced at any time during the school year by a Special Education program in which students are educated and assessed based on decisions defined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) (NCLB, 2002). The term students with special needs is used interchangeably with the term students with disabilities or students with an IEP in this study.

Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the current research, as it examined the successes, challenges, and needs of general and special education teachers in grades six, seven and eight who were using research-based inclusion practices at the study site. Because of teachers' concerns at the study site, the study site's CCRPI Closing Gap scores (See Table 1), and the state NAEP scores for students with disabilities (see Table 2) there was reason to believe that the current inclusion practices were not meeting the learning needs of students with disabilities at the study site. This study examined general and special education teachers' successes, challenges, and needs while they were teaching in inclusive classrooms, which affect their ability to have the greatest impact on student learning. This study is important to the study site teachers and administrators, and middle schools throughout the country because it contains information about the challenges teachers face and ways to support them, and in turn, possibly positively impact student learning. The data from this study was used to develop a project designed to decrease the challenges teachers face implementing the current inclusive practices, which may ultimately increase student achievement.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study examined the instructional successes, challenges, and needs of general education and special education teachers at a middle school as they implement research-based inclusion practices. The teachers' concerns at the study site, the fact that students did not meet the CCRPI Closing Gap improvement target in Language Arts, Science or Social Studies (see Table 1) and the achievement gap as

reflected in 2017 NAEP test scores (see Table 2) in reading and mathematics are the reason for this study.

The following research questions guided this study:

Question 1: What successes do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that have the greatest impact on student learning?

Question 2: What challenges do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that affect their ability to have the greatest impact on student learning?

Question 3: What support do teachers need to effectively implement co-teaching that has the greatest impact on student achievement?

Review of the Literature

The literature review was conducted using The Walden University Library, my local public library, and Walden University coursework textbooks. The Walden University Online libraries provided access to various research databases, including *ProQuest*, *Sage* online journals, *Education Resource Information Center (ERIC)*, *Academic Search Premier*, and Walden University dissertations. The following search terms were used: inclusion, teachers, inclusive education, professional development, inclusion practices, leadership, mainstreaming, mentoring, teacher support, qualitative method research design, teacher attitudes, teacher preparation, co-teaching, students with disabilities, students with special needs, collaboration between general education and special education teachers, and challenges of inclusion. References were also drawn from the references sections of other researchers and researched for related information. I

began the review of the literature by discussing the Villa and Thousand's Five Systems Approach (2003) as the conceptual framework. Following the conceptual framework, I provided a review of literature that will give a brief history of inclusion in the United States, the effects of No Child Left Behind, IDEA, and Every Student Succeeds on inclusion and inclusive practices.

Conceptual Framework

I used the components of successful inclusion practices defined by Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach (2003). Villa and Thousand (2003) interviewed 20 nationally recognized leaders in the inclusive education field to develop best practices for implementing successful inclusion programs. These practices were used as the conceptual framework for this study. Also, Villa and Thousand have conducted several studies and authored several books and articles on issues related to inclusive education, organizational change strategies, differentiated instruction, universal design, co-teaching and collaborative teaming, and culturally proficient special education and are considered experts in the field of inclusive education. Using Villa and Thousand's Five Systems Approach (2003) brought forth a systematical view and understanding of the challenges and successes of special education and general education teachers while they were teaching in inclusive settings due to the framework's organizational structure. This structure includes five systems-level best practices: connection with best practices, visionary leadership and administrative support, redefined roles and collaboration, and adult support (Villa & Thousand, 2003). With the rise of students with special needs spending more of their day in a regular education setting, educators are shifting their

philosophies from one of exclusion to one of inclusion and Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach (2003) may help guide educators through a successful transition (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach (2003) has been used by education systems around the country as a conceptual framework in implementing inclusionary practices. Using this framework allowed me to build upon an accepted and well-developed approach during my research. The framework's five components are explained more in the next sections.

Connection with Best Practices

Implementing major changes within an educational organization can be a challenge for any school or system. However, according to Villa and Thousand (2003), schools that are already working to meet the diverse needs of all students may have an easier transition due to the best practices that are already in place. New inclusive practices should be presented to all stakeholders as an extension of current best practices for all students, rather than new separate practices that only apply to students with disabilities. Making the connection between current best practices and new inclusion practices "will help members of the school community understand that inclusion is not an add-on, but a natural extension of promising research-based education practices that positively affect the teaching and learning of all students." (Villa & Thousand, 2003, p.22).

Visionary Leadership and Administrative Support

The level of adequate leadership and support impacts the challenges and success teachers experience as they implement inclusive practices. Goddard, Goddard, Eun Sook

and Miller (2015) found that teachers impacted student learning positively when they had strong administrative support. In the Goddard, Goddard, Eun Sook and Miller's study (2015), teachers were specifically asked about the type of support and resources that were provided by their administrators. The findings of the study showed that strong instructional leadership support could create an environment in which teachers' work fosters positive student learning outcomes. General and special education teachers can be provided with four types of supports by administrators: personal and emotional; informational; instrumental, and appraisal (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Teachers' willingness to implement inclusive practices and change initiatives starts with a visionary leader who encourages teachers using a proactive approach (Crosland & Dunlap, 2012). Leadership and support from administrators can help teachers overcome challenges and engage in success while teaching students in an inclusive setting. The visionary leadership and support from administrators can also help teachers redefine their roles within an inclusive setting.

Redefined Roles

According to Villa and Thousand (2016), for inclusion to be successful, school personnel have to change their mindset about the current roles of special education and general education teachers.

For school personnel to meet diverse student needs, they must stop thinking and acting in isolated ways: 'These are my students, and those are your students.' They must relinquish traditional roles, drop distinct professional labels, and redistribute their job functions across the system. To facilitate this role

redefinition, some schools have developed a single job description for all professional educators that clearly articulates as expected job functions collaboration and shared responsibility for educating all of a community's children and youth. (Villa & Thousand, 2016, p. 20)

Special education teachers should not only be viewed as a support for students with special needs but as an integral part of the classroom. General education teachers have to collaborate with their special education teachers. The collaboration has to be inclusive where roles within the classroom are shared rather than delegated (Angelides, 2012; Goddard et al., 2015).

Collaboration

General education teachers and special education teachers must work collaboratively to enhance the educational experience and learning outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Mullholland & O'Connor, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015). According to Costley (2013), many public-school teachers have "little or no formal training on the specific needs of special education students. What training they had was in their undergraduate pre-service teacher courses, and they had little opportunities to apply modifications and accommodations to real children in real public schools" (p. 6). Based on the proceeding statement, it is vital to the success of students that special education and special education teachers work collaboratively.

Adult Support

It is well understood by both general education and special education teachers that each student has unique needs, and some students may need more assistance than others.

Therefore, both general education and special education teachers must work collaboratively to learn when and how to help each student (Goddard et al., 2015; Villa & Thousand, 2003). Special education teachers should be used in the classroom as a member of the teaching team rather than a teacher for particular students in the classroom.

Additional adult support may be offered to students with disabilities in the form of a teacher's aide. Teachers' aides, also known as teachers' assistants, paraprofessionals, instructional assistants, or paraeducators, assist students with disabilities in achieving their academic and social goals listed in the students' Individualized Education Programs (IEP; Mallet, 2017). Teachers' aides can support students one-to-one, in a small group or in an inclusive classroom where they work with multiple students. Collaboration between special education teachers, general education teachers, and paraprofessionals is vital to the academic success of students with disabilities (Stockall, 2014).

Co-Teaching Models

There are various models of co-teaching that are used in inclusive classrooms. The methods teachers choose to utilize may change from day to day based on the classroom setting, students, content, and lesson being taught. According to Goldstein (2015), four co-teaching models have been proven effective in inclusive settings. These models are parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and one teach, one assist. A description of each model of co-teaching is given in the next paragraph.

- Parallel teaching is a model of co-teaching in which two teachers are teaching the same content at the same time in one classroom. This model is used when there is

a need to decrease the student-teacher ratio. It allows teachers to identify student needs better and students to feel more comfortable amongst their peers (Co-Teaching Connection, 2015).

- Station teaching is another successful form of co-teaching in an inclusive setting. Station teaching involves the teachers dividing up the content into different stations around the classroom. The students rotate around each of the stations during a class period or over a series of days. Each teacher teaches different lessons at each of the stations (Co-Teaching Connection, 2015).

- Another successful form of co-teaching is Alternative teaching. During Alternative teaching, the majority of the students are engaged in a full classroom lesson with one teacher, and the second teacher pulls a small group to an area of the classroom to work. The second teacher may be teaching the same lesson while providing support or working on remedial skills with the students (Co-Teaching Connection, 2015).

- The last successful model of inclusive teaching is One Teaches, One Assist. During this model, one teacher delivers the information to the class as a whole, and the other teacher focuses on keeping the students on task, answering questions, and helping individual students who may need assistance during the lesson (Co-Teaching Connection, 2015). General and special education teachers have a variety of methods to choose from as they are teaching in inclusive settings.

Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach (2003) can be applied to teachers'

successes, challenges, and needs as they implement research-based practices while

teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings. Looking at this study through

the lens of Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach allowed for a deeper

understanding of teachers' experiences while implementing inclusion practices at the

study site.

Historical Information on Inclusion in the United States

The inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education curriculum is

not an idea that is new to education in the United States. Students with disabilities and

their parents have struggled to gain an equal and quality education for years (Burke &

Sandman, 2015). Before 1975, students with disabilities were often barred from attending

public schools due to their disability alone (Weintraub, Abeson, & Zettel, 1977). Federal

mandates such as Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), later renamed

the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), least restrictive environment

(LRE), free appropriate public education (FAPE) and individual education programs

(IEPs) have been enacted to ensure that students with disabilities are not discriminated

against based on their disability in public schools (Harkins, 2012). After the passing of

EAHCA, the mainstreaming model was used in schools across the country to educate

both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. In the mainstreaming

model, students with disabilities are placed in the general education classroom for at least

a part of their school day. According to Harkins (2012), in a mainstreaming school,

students with disabilities were separated from their non-disabled peers by being placed in

self-contained classrooms, special education instructional programs, and alternative education settings or institutions. Mainstreaming was a success for some students with mild disabilities but failed others, particularly those with moderate to severe disabilities. Due to the lack of success with mainstreaming, the Department of Education proposed the idea to require that all educators, both general education and special education, have the shared responsibility to serve students with disabilities. The hope was that the borders between general and special education would become more flexible. Due to the challenges of lack of training, professional development, collaboration, and teacher resistance, this idea failed students as well.

Much of the debate on how to ensure that students with disabilities receive a fair quality education occurred during the mid-1980 and 1990s. Parents and teachers of students with disabilities argued that students with disabilities should be served in an inclusive environment with their non-disabled peers, thus developing the initial idea of inclusion (Burke & Sandman, 2015). Forlin et al. state that "the philosophy of educating children has gradually focused more on providing equal educational opportunities from a rights-based perspective, which has led to inclusive education continuing to be promoted and implemented to varying degrees in most regions over the past three decades" (2011, p. 50). Inclusion involves meeting the needs of all students in a diversified classroom. The purpose of inclusion is to provide students with disabilities with appropriate services that will allow them to be successful in their education. McLeskey, Rosenberg, and Westling (2017) describe inclusion as educating all learners to include " those who are at risk for difficulty in school, students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds,

and students identified as gifted and talented" (p. 8). Understanding that inclusion is not supposed to make a teacher's job harder, but inclusion is supposed to help students with disabilities be successful, may lead to positive perceptions and attitudes about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings. According to Meidl and Sulentic Dowell (2018), "inclusion promotes effective instruction for all learners through universal design for learning (UDL), modifications, accommodations, and differentiated instruction" (p.182). Inclusion is student-centered and allows all students to have a free and appropriate education.

The debate over inclusion continues today. However, a new mandate has been put in place to ensure a fair and quality education for all students. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was established in 2015 to ensure free and quality education for all students, including students with disabilities.

Every Student Succeeds, IDEA and Inclusion

Due to the unequal treatment of students with disabilities in education in the past, laws have been established to secure a free and quality education for students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (2004) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)(2015) was established to ensure a fair and quality education for all students, including students with disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2015). On December 10, 2015, President Barack Obama signed ESSA, which reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESSA, 2015). ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), which had been in effect since 2002. Both IDEA (2004) and ESSA (2015) work together to ensure that every child in the

American education system receives the same quality education that will prepare them for their future career and college, despite the child's background, race, gender or disability. IDEA (2004) and ESSA (2015) legally demand that schools meet the educational needs of all students. Schools in the United States can no longer deny a child a free and quality education based on race, gender, background, or disability.

Under IDEA (2004) and ESSA (2015), teachers are legally obligated to provide their students with disabilities with an equal and quality education. In 2015, ESSA was enacted as a means to ensure that all children in the United States receive an equal and fair education that will prepare them for college or their future careers, including students with disabilities. Section 1001 of ESSA's Title I Statement of Purpose says, "The purpose of this title is to provide all children significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps" (2015). ESSA encourages schools and states to diminish achievement gaps between students with and without disabilities. Through the ESSA mandate, the minority students receive the same quality of education as the majority of students. ESSA specifically names students with disabilities as one of the subgroups that are studied in schools to ensure that schools are educating all of their students fairly and equally. The mandates of ESSA drive schools to work hard to provide all students, including students with disabilities, with the best education possible. Students with disabilities are the minority in schools in the US, but legally they are entitled to the same quality education as their peers. This project study investigated the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers while they were

implementing inclusion practices as they strived to meet the mandates of ESSA and specifically, the sub-group of students with disabilities.

IDEA (2004) works in conjunction with ESSA (2015) to provide support services for students with disabilities that allow them access to the general education curriculum (United States Department of Education, 2015). Unlike ESSA, which was established to guarantee that all students receive an equal and fair education that will prepare them for college and a career, IDEA was established specifically for students with disabilities (ESSA, 2015; USDOE, 2004). IDEA mandates that all students with disabilities are to have a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (USDOE, 2004). This means that students with disabilities are required to receive an education that is fitting to their disability, where they spend as much time as possible in a regular education classroom with their nondisabled peers. This inclusive classroom support service is called inclusion. Through inclusion, students with disabilities are educated in the regular education classroom as much as possible, where their educational needs are met through accommodations and modifications to the regular education curriculum through an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan. Inclusion provides services to students with disabilities in the general education setting and helps schools meet the mandates set forth by IDEA and ESSA. Because schools across the US have moved toward inclusive settings, teachers must be prepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms through a sound knowledge base and development of appropriate attitudes and perceptions.

Attitudes about Inclusion

The attitude that classroom teachers have about inclusion plays an important role in not only their teaching ability but also in the academic achievement and behavior of their students with special needs, influences classroom dynamics and students' interaction with their classmates (McKim, & Velez, 2016; Monsen, Ewing, & Kowa, 2014; Robinson, 2017;). Teachers must develop positive attitudes about diversity and inclusion before entering the classroom. A positive attitude and perception of inclusion will lead to positive outcomes. Several studies have shown that teachers have a positive attitude about the idea of inclusion (Abdreheman, 2017; Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013; Kumar & Bala, 2014). The findings from more studies indicate that teacher attitudes towards inclusion increased when they felt there were external supports in place (Monsen et al., 2014; Qi, Wang, & Ha, 2016). Adequate support in the classroom can increase teachers' positive attitude s in their inclusive classrooms. Teachers' positive attitudes about inclusive settings are established through preparation and education in addition to classroom support.

One way to ensure that teachers develop positive attitudes is to educate and prepare them to teach students with disabilities. Educating teachers on how to teach students with disabilities may lead them to have a positive attitude about inclusion. Kurniawati, de Boer, Minnaert, and Mangunsong (2017) conducted a quantitative study to examine the effects of a teacher training program on general education teachers' attitudes and knowledge about students with disabilities and about teaching strategies to teach students with disabilities in a general education setting successfully. The finding of

Kurniawati et al. 's 2017 study indicated significant positive effects of the training program on the teacher's attitudes, knowledge about students with disabilities, and about teaching strategies to help students with disabilities learn in a general education setting. The study also indicated that regular education teachers agreed that they felt more confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities when they were given adequate training. The findings of a study conducted by McCray and McHatton (2011) on elementary and secondary general education teachers reveal concerns about teachers' lack of confidence teaching in an inclusive classroom and feelings of low self-efficacy in working with special education students when adequate supports are not in place. Nel, Engelbrecht, Nel, and Tlale (2014) conducted a similar study where they found that when general education teachers believe that they are not adequately trained or skilled to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive setting, don't feel that they can collaborate with special education teachers and refer students with disabilities to special education teachers. Considering the findings of the Kurniawati et al. (2017), Nel et al. (2014) and McCray and McHatton (2011), teachers need to receive adequate training and support in teaching students with disabilities to teach in inclusive settings successfully. If teachers understand how to teach students with disabilities and are supported in an inclusive classroom, then they will have a positive attitude toward teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings.

The manner in which teachers are prepared to teach in an inclusive setting plays a role in their attitudes about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Kim conducted a study about the matter in which pre-service teachers are prepared to teach

students with disabilities in 2010. Kim's (2010) study focused on teacher preparation programs that combined general education and special education curricula and teacher education programs that did not combine general education and special education curricula. The results of the study indicated that pre-service teachers from the combined teacher preparation programs had significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion than pre-service teachers from separate teacher education programs. Taking the studies Kim (2010) and Kurniawati et al. (2017) into consideration, it is clear that teachers need to receive a combination of general education and special education curriculum as well as a foundational understanding of inclusion and its purpose in education to develop positive attitudes towards inclusion.

Implications of ESSA, IDEA, and Inclusion on Teachers

It is important for teachers to develop positive attitudes about inclusion because due to the mandates of ESSA (2015) and IDEA (2004) students with disabilities are spending more time in the general education classroom thus creating a greater demand than general education teachers understand how to meet the needs of a wide variety of students. Since 2004, the number of students with disabilities has decreased. During the 2012-2013 school year, 6.4 million students ages 3–21 received special education services (about 13 % of all public school students), which is a decrease from 6.5 million students during the 2003-2004 school year (Kena et al., 2015). However, the amount of time students with disabilities are spending in general education classrooms is increasing (Kena et al., 2015). During the 1990-1991 school year, only 33% of students with disabilities spent 80% of their school day in general education classrooms. This number

increased during the 2009-2010 school year to 60% of students with disabilities, spending more than 80% of their school day in general education classes (Aud et al., 2012). According to Kena et al. (2015), about 95% of students with disabilities during the 2012–2013 school year were enrolled in regular schools. With these growing numbers, it is evident that inclusion has become a common practice in public schools in the United States. As a result of the increasing number of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, teachers must be prepared for a job where they will be the primary teacher of a student with special needs.

Because students with disabilities are being educated in the general education classroom for most of their day, it is up to the general education teacher to not only know and understand students with disabilities' specific disabilities but to also know the educational strategies that will help students with disabilities succeed in the general education setting (Abdreheman, 2017). Moreover, general education teachers must also be able to manage an inclusive classroom (Abdreheman, 2017). ESSA mandates that all teachers are highly effective in grades K-12 (United States Department of Education, 2015). Local education agencies are required to make sure that all teachers are highly effective in the areas that they teach. IDEA (2004) also requires that students with disabilities receive instruction from a highly effective teacher. Inclusive teaching requires that general education teachers have a solid foundation in educating a wide array of students. Due to the growing numbers of students with disabilities spending more of their school day in the general education classrooms, teachers need more training and education on how to diversify their lessons and classroom management to meet the needs

of all students. General education teachers who teach students in inclusive settings understand the need for effective professional development as well. Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) report in their findings on trends and challenges of professional development in the United States that teaching students with special needs was ranked as one of the highest priorities for professional development at 13.7% among teachers across varied levels and contexts. In that same study, 17% of elementary school teachers ranked teaching students with special needs a priority. Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson (2010) found that only 42% of teachers reported having access to professional development that focused on teaching students with special needs, and only one-third of teachers in the United States agreed that their schools provided some support for teaching students with special needs. For the project portion of my study, I developed materials based on what teachers indicated is a success, challenge, and need while they implemented inclusive teaching practices.

The demand for teachers who are knowledgeable and understand how to teach and manage an inclusive classroom has trickled down to the colleges and universities (Abdreheman, 2017). Many colleges and universities across the United States have recognized the growing demand for teacher preparedness for a diverse classroom, so they have made changes to their general education teacher programs, which now include more special education and inclusion courses (Forlin et al., 2011). Various philosophies have emerged in colleges and universities on how to best prepare pre-service teachers to teach in inclusive settings. Some colleges and universities require pre-service teachers to take a certain number of special education courses that are separate from the general education

course pre-service teachers are required to take. Other institutions have combined the general education curriculum with a special education curriculum. In the combined curriculum, pre-service teachers are taught about inclusion and inclusionary practices in their general education courses. Also, some of these combined teacher preparation programs have begun to provide dual certification for their pre-service teachers (Kim, 2010). Colleges, universities, professors, and administrators understand the demands that are placed on teachers to be knowledgeable in general education and special education and are working to prepare future teachers to be successful in the classroom. Due to IDEA, NCLB and ESSA, teaching in inclusive classrooms is no longer an option for teachers; it is now a part of their job description. Schools must prepare educators not just to be general education teachers, but to be inclusion teachers. In order to meet the demands of inclusive schools, school systems must make teachers aware that inclusion is likely to occur in their classrooms.

Inclusion Teachers

Being equipped to teach students with special needs is an expectation of all 21st-century teachers, no matter their background. The European Agency for Development in Special Education Needs (2014) states that there are "four core values" that inclusion teachers must possess to teach students with special needs successfully. The first core value is the teachers must "value learner diversity." Teachers must understand that learner diversity is an asset to education. Students and teachers learn from each other through the diverse experience each learner brings to the classroom. The second core value is that teachers must support all learners. The expectations of the inclusive teacher

should be that all students will and can learn, but while also understanding that students may not learn in the same way or at the same pace. The third core value is teachers need to work with others. Collaborating with team members is an essential skill that all teachers should possess. Collaboration between parents and families and other educators is essential to the development of IEPs and 504 plans and co-teaching (Duarte Santos et al., 2016). Collaboration also offers teachers who teach in inclusive settings a support system. The final core value is that teachers of inclusion should participate in continuous personal, professional development. The profession of teaching consists of lifelong learning, and teachers should be reflective practitioners. Education, along with student needs, is constantly changing, so teachers should stay abreast of the current best practices in education.

Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) found that four skills are needed to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings successfully. The first of these skills include a knowledge base of their role and responsibilities in the special education process and the characteristics of students with special needs. The second skill is teachers need to know how to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms. Thirdly, teachers must have effective classroom management that promotes active student engagement and minimizes disruptions. Knowing how to collaborate with special education teachers effectively is the final skill teachers need to teach with disabilities in inclusive settings successfully. Understanding the four core values of the European Agency for Development in Special Education Needs (2014) and the suggested teaching skills of Allday, Neilsen-Gatti, and Hudson (2013) provide the

foundation of teaching in inclusive settings. As teachers work collaboratively to teach students in inclusive settings, they may face additional challenges. These challenges are discussed in the next section.

Challenges of Teaching in Inclusive Settings

The fact that an inclusive classroom is very different from a general education classroom in the classroom environment, arrangement, and delivery of instruction can be another challenge for teachers. According to Forlin (2010), general education teachers have traditionally been taught to teach students who do not have any disabilities. However, a major shift in education has occurred within the last 15 years. Schools have moved away from the separation of general education and special education. Teachers are now expected to teach a group of diverse students. A student's native language, disability, religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status all have to be considered during the planning and delivery of instruction. Due to this higher demand on teachers, many have reported feelings of unpreparedness for inclusive education as challenges in education (Forlin, 2010). Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) found little evidence that general education teachers who taught in inclusive settings received adequate training and information to teach students with special needs successfully and that many general education teachers lack confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Worrell (2008) explained that general education teachers must be knowledgeable about their students' learning needs to be successful by making the statement that

A general educator cannot be expected to be successful at teaching in an inclusive

classroom without a solid foundation of knowledge about the students'

disabilities, educational needs, accommodations, modifications, and the laws that

affect both the children with disabilities and the teacher. (p.45)

Lack of confidence and unpreparedness to teach students with special needs is a

challenge faced by teachers in inclusive settings.

Teaching in inclusive settings can present an array of challenges for regular

education teachers. Roiha (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study on teachers' views of

differentiation of content in inclusive classrooms and found that teachers faced many

challenges in inclusively diverse classrooms that include lack of time and resources,

materials, physical classroom setting, class size, lack of knowledge of pupils,

unsuccessful cooperation with other school staff members and the lack of practical

differentiation teaching methods. These challenges can all have an impact on student

learning and achievement.

A common challenge in education is the size of the class. Class size can be a

challenge to teachers because it is determined by policy, and teachers often do not have

control over how many students are in their classes. A review of literature conducted by

Zyngier (2014) showed that smaller classes had a strong positive impact on student

achievement and narrowed achievement gaps. There have been many studies that have

found that smaller class sizes can impact student learning (Mathis, 2016; Baker, Farrie, &

Sciarra, 2016; Schanzenbach, 2014). Based on his 2016 study on the effectiveness of

class size reduction, Mathis (2016) recommends that class sizes should be between 15-18

students. However, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the

average size classroom is 21.6 in primary schools, 25.5 in middle schools, and 24.2 in

high schools. Larger class sizes can be challenging for inclusion teachers because they

are not able to spend one-on-one time with individual students who may need extra

support.

Implementing and following students' Individual Education Plans (IEP) or 504

plans is another challenge faced by teachers in the classroom. Knowing how to

implement and follow a student's IEP or 504 plan is one of the most important skills

needed to successfully teach students with disabilities (Royster, Reglin, & Losike-

Sedimo, 2014). IEPs and 504 plans are unique and individualized, so managing them may

be difficult for a teacher who has no prior training or experience with them.

Behavior management is another very important aspect of teaching students with

special needs. Teachers need to know how to manage the behavior of students with

special needs effectively. Also, teachers teaching in inclusive settings should know and

understand the social development of students in their classrooms (Royster et al., 2014).

Differentiation must constantly occur in an inclusive classroom for students to be

successful. Teachers who teach in inclusive settings have much required of them. The

challenge of knowing how to teach each student of various needs can be overwhelming

without the proper support and knowledge.

Implications

I investigated the challenges, successes, and needs of general education and

special education teachers who implement inclusive practices while teaching students in

sixth through eighth grade. The findings were used to develop a project designed to

address the identified challenges and needs of teachers and to increase their successes to improve student achievement. Students with disabilities are spending more of their school day in regular education classrooms (Aud et al., 2012); therefore, it is imperative that both general education and special education teachers feel adequately prepared and supported as they teach in inclusive settings (Royster et al., 2014). Additional implications of this study could be improved collaboration between special education and regular education teachers at the study site. The project addresses the needs of both general and special education teachers.

Summary

The problem at the local study site was that both special education and general education teachers face challenges as they implement research-based inclusion practices to meet the educational needs of students with documented disabilities. The concerns of special education and general education teachers, the study site not meeting the CCRPI Closing Gap target in Language Arts, Science or Social Studies (see Table 1), and the achievement gap as reflected in 2017 NAEP test scores (see Table 2) in reading and mathematics were the reason for this study. This study examined the challenges and successes of teachers at the study site as the general education and special education teachers of students in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade implement instructional inclusion practices. A project was developed based on the findings of this study that may help teachers at the study site effectively teach students with special needs and implement the study site's desired inclusion model. This study used the components of successful inclusion practices defined by Villa and Thousand (2003) as the conceptual framework.

Having the lens of successful inclusion practices allowed me to gain an understanding of what teachers need to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings while implementing inclusion practices effectively.

Section 2 outlines the methodology for the study to include justification of the selected qualitative research design. The criteria for selecting participants and an explanation of the number of participants in the study are also discussed in Section 2. The next section also includes a thorough explanation of data collection and analysis methods. This explanation includes how and when data was generated, gathered, and recorded, the system for keeping track of data and data collection instruments that were used to investigate the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers as they implement inclusion practices at the study site.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This qualitative case study investigated the instructional successes, challenges, and needs of middle school general education and special education teachers as they implemented research-based inclusion practices. Qualitative studies answer questions of the what, why, and how of a phenomenon and present genuine real-life situations that involve a problem or conflict that is to be investigated (Creswell, 2012). In this case study, the problem was that both special education and general education teachers face challenges as they implement research-based inclusion practices to meet the educational needs of students with disabilities. Being able to teach students with disabilities successfully is a skill that 21st Century teachers need to be successful in the classroom. Through this case study, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of the teachers' daily challenges, successes, and needs when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings while implementing research-based strategies.

Justification for using a Case Study

Because case studies focus on individuals' perceptions and opinions and focus on single issues which can be conducted through interviews, a case study was the best fit to study the successes, challenges, and needs of both special education and general education teachers. At the same time, they implemented research-based inclusion practices at the study site. Furthermore, the goal of a case study researcher is to "provide a richly detailed description of the situation, to capture the full complexity and uniqueness of the case information" (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010, p. 270). A

case study was the best fit because this study was conducted at one middle school where the current unique problem exists. The parameters or unique situation of this research was the fact that it investigated middle school teachers at one school. A case study was selected as the inquiry for this study because there was a unique problem of both general education and special education teachers having concerns regarding the challenges they face teaching in inclusive classrooms. Rich descriptions of the expressions of teachers were needed to understand the problem fully.

Studies have been conducted on the challenges teachers face while implementing inclusion practices using qualitative methods (Angelides, 2012; Fluijt et al., 2016; Mullholland & O'Connor, 2016). However, the researcher was specifically interested in specific successes and challenges of teachers at the study site, so a case study was conducted to collect data from the study site. The data collected from a qualitative case study helped answer the research questions thoroughly and provided detailed descriptions of teachers' challenges, successes, and needs while teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings while using research-based inclusion practices.

In addition to a case study methodology, other qualitative methods were considered for this study. One kind of qualitative inquiry that was considered but not selected for the inquiry for this study is grounded theory. Grounded theory researchers seek to gather research to develop a theory that is grounded in data (Wertz, n.d.). These studies often involve gathering data over long periods (Lodico et al., 2010). I was not seeking to develop a theory about teachers who teach in inclusive settings, so a grounded theory investigation did not work for this research. Another type of research that was

considered for this study was ethnography research. Ethnography research centers on observational data to study cultural behaviors and involves fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and observations. The purpose of ethnography is to devise a description of cultures and societies. Because I was not focusing on a particular cultural group, an ethnography study did not fit my study. Phenomenological research was also considered for the study. "A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012). Because I was not seeking to understand a phenomenon that has been experienced by several individuals, and my study was based on a local problem that impacted a specific school, phenomenological research did not work for this study. Grounded theory, ethnography, and phenomenological studies were all deemed unfit for this study. The best qualitative inquiry for this study was a case study.

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to identify participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is the process of selecting participants based on certain criteria (Palinkas et al., 2015). Participants for this study were certified general education and special education teachers who have taught for at least one year at the study site in an inclusive classroom in any grade from sixth through eighth grade. General education and special education teachers who have taught at least one year in inclusive classrooms had the knowledge required to assist the researcher in understanding their experiences implementing the co-teaching inclusion model at the site.

Justification for Selection Size

All 31 teachers who taught sixth, seventh, or eighth grade students in inclusive settings at the study site were invited to participate in the study. My goal as a researcher was to have eight to ten of the general education and special education teachers at the study site participate in this study. More specifically, I hoped to have at least three to four special education teachers participate, and five to six general education teachers participate in this study. Patton (2015) suggests that researchers focus on the research question(s), the purpose of the study, the time frame of the study, and the resources available when selecting participants. Because the purpose of this study was to investigate the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers while they are implementing inclusive education at the study site, inviting representation of both groups of the teachers who fit into this category to participate is justifiable.

The justification for the selection size was based upon Creswell's (2012) recommendation that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic being investigated. After sending out three separate emails to all the teachers at the study, six teachers that included three special education and three special education teachers participated in the study. In qualitative research, there is not a relationship between the number of participants and the strength of the research design (Galvin, 2015), so having six general education teachers and special education teachers currently teaching students in inclusive settings at the study site participate in this study was effective in answering the research questions for this study.

Gaining Access to Participants

Before seeking to gain access to participants, I had to first meet all the requirements of Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB reviewed my application to ensure that my study was ethical and would do no harm to the participants. Part of Walden's IRB application includes permission from the study site to conduct the study. After gaining the principal's consent, I submitted the Collaborative Instructional Training Initiative and the Research Request – Packet to the study site's school board.

The Research Request Packet that I was required to complete and submit included the following information: an electronic copy and a hard-copy of my completed and committee approved research prospectus; a copy of IRB approval #04-05-19-007123 from Walden University and a copy of my research questions. After the study site's school board reviewed my Research Request Packet, I was granted permission to conduct my study at the school. I then notified the school principal, who is the gatekeeper at the study site, that I was beginning my study. According to Creswell (2012), some discussions may occur between the gatekeeper and the researcher. These discussions may include timing, access, rules, and how the results may be used.

I invited 31 participants to include four special education teachers and 27 general education teachers to participate in the study via email (Appendix B). I requested delivery receipts to ensure that I had the correct email addresses. Six participants (three special education teachers and three general education teachers) responded to me via email stating that they wanted to participate. I sent two additional emails to the teachers who did not respond at the study site in hopes of getting more participation. However, none of

the other 25 teachers at the study site responded. After receiving responses from the emails, I scheduled interview dates and times. All six interviews were conducted and recorded using *FreeConfrenceCall.com*.

Methods for Establishing a Research-Participant Working Relationship

An important aspect of successful research is a positive research-participant working relationship. To develop and sustain a positive relationship, a profound level of trust must be established and maintained throughout the entirety of the study between the participants and the researcher. To develop a high level of trust from the participants, I tried to make the participants feel at ease through conversations in which I explained their role in the study. Also, trust establishing tools came in various forms, such as a consent form, assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, and informal behaviors. To also help establish a positive working relationship with the participants, I was personable during all interviews and conversations. I talked with participants in a friendly and cordial manner. I only used language that the participants understood and explained if they asked for clarification, so they did not feel intimidated. My goal was to make the participants as comfortable as possible so that they would be able to answer the interview questions as freely and as truthfully as possible.

Measures to Protect Participants

The participants were well informed as to why the research was being conducted and how the research was to be used, and all participants received the study information in a written format along with a verbal explanation. They also received a consent form that informed them of their rights as participants. Following the procedures of Walden

University's IRB, all participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and confidential. Before, during, and after the research, participants were well-informed about the purpose of the research, the benefits, and risks of the study and how the research was to be used. All data collected during the interviews were only accessed by my doctoral committee and me to protect participants' confidentiality. No actual names were used so that the participants cannot be identified. Each participant was given the name "General Education Teacher" or "Special Education Teacher" and a number. For example, a special education teacher was given the name "Special Education Teacher #1". To ensure the participants' anonymity, I did not collect any demographic data. With a sample size of this size, demographic data such as participants' years of experience or gender could make them identifiable by individuals who are familiar with the study site. The data is being locked in a file cabinet and password-protected computer and will be kept for five years as required by Walden's data policy. After five years, the data will be shredded and discarded.

Data Collection

After permission from Walden University's IRB and the school system and informed consent from the participants were received, the data collection phase began. The data collection phase involved collecting rich descriptive information from teachers at the study site about the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers as they implement inclusion practices during semi-structured interviews. Interviewing allowed teachers to voice their thoughts and perceptions. Data was collected during 60-minute individual interviews facilitated with semi-structured questions. Each participant was interviewed

once using a semi-structured interview protocol, which allowed for consistency in the questions asked and kept the interviews focused on the research questions while still allowing enough flexibility for the participants to add any valid information they deemed necessary. Each interview was recorded using *FreeConferenceCall.Com* and transcribed using *Temi.com*. All participants were made aware that the interview was going to be recorded. After each interview, the interview data was transcribed within 48 hours. The participants were allowed to conduct a transcript review, which allowed them to make changes or provide clarity to their responses to all the interview questions. It also helped to ensure that the findings of the study are authentic and reliable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Interview Protocol

During each interview, I used an interview protocol (Appendix C) to guide my research. The guidelines for interviewing were developed (Creswell, 2012), and I followed those guidelines when compiling the interview questions and establishing an interview protocol (Appendix C). The interview protocol ensured that all interview questions would be open-ended, arranged in sequential order, non-biased, and followed by probes when needed. Turner (2010) suggested using an interview protocol that allows the researcher room for flexibility in the way questions are worded based on the participants' individual experiences and responses to questions.

Description of the Role of the Researcher

I had no affiliation with the study site. I did not know the teachers I interviewed personally or professionally. Not having an established relationship with the teachers was

both beneficial and detrimental to the data collection process. Not having an established relationship with the participants allowed the participants to be open and honest with me because they knew that I was truly concerned about the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers who were implementing inclusive practices. Not having an established relationship was detrimental to the data collection process in that it was difficult to get participants to participate. Transcript reviews and faculty guidance helped me not to interject my own bias into the findings of the study.

Data Analysis

I used qualitative data analysis procedures to explore the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers while they implement research-based inclusion practices. Creswell (2012) suggested developing a method in which interview transcripts are coded and categorized into themes to help me analyze the qualitative data. I transcribed each interview using *Temi.com*, an online computer-based transcription application. The transcripts from the interviews were emailed to the participants for review. The participants were given one week to read, review, and provide any corrections or clarification they felt was needed. The participants did not provide any clarifications, revisions, or corrections to the transcripts.

After I read, reviewed, and reflected upon each interview transcript, I then "categorized, synthesized, searched for patterns and interpreted" the data as suggested by Glesne (2011, p. 147). I coded teachers' interview answers to create a list of themes that related to each research question. I highlighted data that had the same themes in the same color and grouped the same colors in a chart using Microsoft Word. The chart was

divided into three sections. Each of the sections had the header "Research Question 1",

"Research Question 2," and "Research Question 3" and included data that related to each

header. Using the chart allowed me to move the data around using cutting and pasting

features. In reviewing the chart, I looked for reoccurring themes as they related to my

research questions and Villa and Thousand's conceptual framework described in the

Review of the Literature.

Discrepant Cases

According to Creswell (2012), discrepant cases are cases in which there may be

contradictions or no support for the other data that is gathered. There were no discrepant

cases during this study. All of the participants in the study had similar answers to the

interview questions.

Credibility

Credibility refers to how truthful participant views are interpreted and represented

by the researcher. A qualitative study is considered credible if the participants from

different groups describe the same experience (Cope, 2014). For this reason, multiple

participants who represented two groups, special education teachers, and general

education teachers were interviewed to achieve credibility in this study. According to

Cope (2014), this involves utilizing different data sources within the same method. To

support credibility when reporting a qualitative study, the researcher should demonstrate

engagement, methods of observation, and audit trails. Because both special education and

general education teachers were used as data sources in the study, different perspectives

were able to be compared, as Cope (2014) suggests. The two data sources led to an

analysis of the data about the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers as they implement instructional strategies to teach students in inclusive settings and helped prove the credibility of this study.

Limitations

Leedy and Ormrod (2013) describe limitations as potential weaknesses that could affect the outcome of research and are outside of the control of the researcher. According to that definition, the sample size would be a limitation because only six teachers (three general education teachers and three special education teachers) participated in the study. Although Creswell (2012) recommends that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic being investigated, my goal was to have eight to ten of the teachers at the study site participate in this study. More specifically, I hoped to have at least three to four special education teachers participate, and five to six general education teachers participate in this study. I think many teachers did not choose to participate in the study due to my limited access as a researcher. Because I do not live or work near the study site, I was unable to speak with participants in person.

Data Analysis Results

This section includes a narrative summary and the interpretation of the data regarding the study's research questions on the successes, challenges, and support needs of teachers who teach in inclusive settings while implementing research-based practices. A table and summary for each research question are included as well. The research questions are as follows:

Question 1: What successes do teachers experience while implementing inclusion

practices at the study site that have the greatest impact on student learning?

Question 2: What challenges do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that affect their ability to have the greatest impact on student learning?

Question 3: What support do teachers need to effectively implement co-teaching that has the greatest impact on student achievement?

Each participant was given the name "Gen Ed Teacher" or "Sp Ed Teacher" and a number to protect participants' confidentiality. For example, a special education teacher would be given the name "Sp Ed Teacher #1".

Research Question 1 (Successes)

The findings of this study indicate that teachers at the study site felt that they experienced success in their strong instructional practices, their preparation to work with students with disabilities, and the strong support they receive from their administration and other support staff at their school. All the teachers stated they were prepared to teach students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom due to their educational background or their teaching experience. The participants shared that they were able to build relationships with students and meet individual student needs through co-teaching. Also, they felt that small group instruction, varied teaching strategies, and the willingness to go above and beyond for students were all instructional practices that had the most significant impact on student achievement. Both general education and special education teachers at the study site expressed that their school leadership and support staff were supportive. The teachers shared that their administrators provided them with items they

asked for and allowed them to try new things to co-teach successfully. Support staff at the

school, including the school counselors and school nurse, supported teachers by

answering questions, meeting with them, and giving ideas on how to teach students with

disabilities in inclusive settings.

The responses that participants gave to Interview Questions 6, 9, 12, and 13

directly relate to Research Question 1. These Interview Questions can be found in the

Interview Protocol (Appendix C). A summary of participants' responses to the interview

questions directly relating to Research Question 1 is provided in Table 3.

Table 3

Research Question 1 (Success) and Interview Summaries

Question 1: What successes do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that have the greatest impact on student learning?

Participant	Interview Q6: Preparation to teach in inclusive services	Interview Q9: Impactful Practices	Interview Q12: Ways Co-teaching has been supported	Interview Q13: Successful aspects of co-teaching
Gen Ed Teacher 1	Bachelor's in education and 20 years of teaching experience. Taking Sped courses on own time.	Student collaboration, small group instruction	By principals, counselor, and nurse providing information and answering questions	Students are spending more time in the gen ed classroom
Gen Ed Teacher 2	Experience and training in inclusion throughout teaching career	Small group instruction	Given anything they have asked to support student learning	Students' needs are being met through differentiated instruction

Table 3

Research Question 1 (Success) and Interview Summaries

Question 1: What successes do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that have the greatest impact on student learning?

Participant	Interview Q6: Preparation to teach in inclusive services	Interview Q9: Impactful Practices	Interview Q12: Ways Co-teaching has been supported	Interview Q13: Successful aspects of co-teaching
Gen Ed Teacher 3	Taught in inclusive settings entire career of 25 years	Progress monitoring	Administrators give support when asked and give permission to try new things with students	All students are treated the same in class so you cannot see the difference between students' various needs
Sp Ed Teacher 1	Had various trainings in career and is an expert in the school. Certified in Sped for Pre-K-12	Both teachers holding students accountable	By Administrators	Stronger relationships between students and teachers have developed
Sp Ed Teacher 2	Bachelors in Sped and attended trainings about inclusion	Collaborative small groups	Program specialist supports by providing information and ideas	There are more opportunities for student teacher relationship building and one on one or small group instruction
Sp Ed Teacher 3	Master's in special education and highly qualified	Teachers going above and beyond, providing feedback to students, and giving extra time to students	Counselors and Administrators meet with Sped teachers weekly to talk about students and answer questions	Can work with students to meet their individual needs in the gen ed classroom

Research Question 2 (Challenges)

The participants expressed they experience the following challenges at their school while implementing inclusion practices: not having enough time for collaboration, the lack of positive co-teaching relationships, teachers' lack of knowledge of the curriculum and how to address students' unique learning needs and teachers' inability to provide students with disabilities with discrete interventions. The participants shared that collaboration was a challenge due to the lack of time and scheduling conflicts. They also shared that due to scheduling constraints, there was no formal time where they sat down and collaborated. The teachers stated it was a challenge for them to provide students with discrete interventions. They shared that other students noticed the special education teacher working with students, and the students with IEPs became embarrassed when the special education teacher tried to help them in the co-teaching setting. Another challenge noted by all the participants was their co-teachers' lack of knowledge. The general education teachers expressed that special education teachers were not strongly familiar with the curriculum, so the special education teachers do not teach any lessons in the general education classroom. The special education teachers shared that the general education teachers do not feel comfortable with them teaching all students the curriculum and that they do not always feel welcomed in the general education teachers' classrooms.

The answers that the participants gave to Interview Questions 7, 10, and 14 directly relate to Research Question 2 (Challenges). A summary of the participants' responses to the interview questions directly relating to Research Question 2 is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Question 2 (Challenges) and Interview Summaries

Question 2: What challenges do teachers experience while implementing inclusion practices at the study site that affect their ability to have the greatest impact on student learning? (Challenges)

Participants	Interview Q7: How Co-teachers collaborate	Interview Q10: Co-teaching practices that have the least impact	Interview Q14: Co-teaching barriers or challenges
Gen Ed Teacher 1	Informally due to schedule conflicts and there is no set time	When a Sped teacher works with students everyone notices	Both teachers not knowing the curriculum, collaboration time and the co-teacher rarely co-teaches lessons
Gen Ed Teacher 2	During free time Scheduling makes it difficult	Singling students out to provide them with services	Co-teacher not knowing the curriculum
Gen Ed Teacher 3	Rarely and difficult due to schedule	Inconsistent Sped services and not knowing what services students should have	Difference in teaching philosophies and lack of communication
Sp Ed Teacher 1	Collaborations vary due to scheduling, and there is not much time	Not being able to provide students with services in all subject areas	Not feeling welcome in the gen ed classroom and gen ed teachers not understanding how students learn
Sp Ed Teacher 2	Some can collaborate every other week but need a common time with teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate	Working with students in the classroom and other students notice that student's struggles	Anonymity. Working with students and trying make sure other students don't know and Co-teacher who is doesn't understand students learning style or needs
Sp Ed Teacher 3	Collaborate when there is time and wish there was a set time to do it	Pulling students out or coming into the classroom to help them can embarrass them	Gen Ed teachers not feeling comfortable allowing me to co-teach with them

Research Question 3 (Needs)

The participants in the study reported that they need ongoing professional development, more common collaborative planning time, stronger co-teaching relationships, co-teaching roles redefined, and additional adult support to effectively implement impactful co-teaching. All of the general education and special education teachers expressed that some form of professional development was a need to impact student achievement at their school positively. The participating teachers voiced the need for their school to redefine the co-teaching roles of both general education and special education teachers so that both teachers are viewed equally in educating students with disabilities. Participants mentioned the need for additional adult support in social studies and science classes, and to help general education teachers understand how to provide appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. The teachers also shared that there is a need to establish positive relationships between co-teachers. The responses that the participants gave to Interview Questions 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 relate to Research Question 3 (Needs). A summary of each participant's response to the interview questions directly relating to Research Question 3 is provided in Table 5.

Table 5

Research Question 3 (Needs) and Interview Summaries

Question 3: What support do teachers need to effectively implement co-teaching that has the greatest impact on student achievement? (Needs)				
Participants	Interview Q15, 16: How should teaching roles be redefined?	Interview Q17: Recommended changes to the current co-teaching model	Interview Q18: Additional adult support needed for students	Interview Q19: Additional Support for teachers
Gen Ed Teacher 1	Both teachers should have the same level of responsibility for student learning and co-teachers need to trust each other	Have the same relationship with co-teachers as other department/grade level colleagues	Have enough adult support; adults just need to work more collaboratively	More training and accountability
Gen Ed Teacher 2	Sp Ed teacher taking more responsibility in learning about the subjects in which they are co-teaching	Not as many students with IEP in one class	Don't need additional adult support. Too many adults will confuse the students.	Professional development with co-teachers based on individual needs All teachers should not have the training if they are doing well
Gen Ed Teacher 3	No need to redefine the roles Everyone is working to meet student needs. Better co-teaching relationships needed	Make sure the current co-teach model meet student needs and change it as needed Teachers attitudes towards co-teaching needs to be changed too	Co-teacher to take the time to explain students IEP accommodations and goals to gen ed teacher	Professional development on student accommodations and needs and how to work together to meet student needs
Sp Ed Teacher 1	Both teachers would be content experts and both teachers would be	Place co-teachers in content areas in which they are most comfortable and match	Have Sped teachers and paraprofessionals, don't need more, just need training	Common planning with co-teachers, effective ongoing

Table 5

Research Question 3 (Needs) and Interview Summaries

Question 3: What support do teachers need to effectively implement co-teaching that has the greatest impact on student achievement? (Needs)

Participants	Interview Q15, 16: How should teaching roles be redefined?	Interview Q17: Recommended changes to the current co-teaching model	Interview Q18: Additional adult support needed for students	Interview Q19: Additional Support for teachers
	instructional practice experts	personalities as much as possible	and work together better	professional learning that shows teachers how to implement what has been presented
Sp Ed Teacher 2	Gen ed teachers need to feel comfortable trusting the Sped teachers and allow them to show another perspective of the lesson to students	More co-teaching training accountability for the Gen ed teachers to follow the model by allowing the co-teacher to teach a lesson and incorporate the skills that they have in the classroom	Have great adult support in math and reading classes but need support in science and social studies classes	Training to explain different student accommodations and trust-building or bonding between co-teachers
Sp Ed Teacher 3	Gen ed teachers need to be more accountable for knowing about in special education and Sped teachers need to know more about the curriculum	Teachers planning more with Sped Teachers to ensure the lessons and homework are appropriate for students	Need more experts in dealing with students unique learning and emotional needs	Collaboration and ongoing training

Themes

While investigating the successes, challenges, and needs of teachers who teach in inclusive settings while implementing research-based practices, I discovered eight themes from the data analysis. The themes related to the successes teacher experience while teaching in inclusive settings were Strong Instructional Practices, Teachers Well Prepared to Teach Students with Disabilities and Strong Support from Administration and Support Staff. The themes related to the challenges teachers experienced while co-teaching were Limited Time for Collaboration, Lack of Positive Co-teaching Relationships, Teachers' Lack of Knowledge of the Curriculum, and Students' Unique Learning Needs and Inability to Provide Discreet Interventions. The last theme related to the needs of teachers as they teach in inclusive settings was the Need for More Professional Development.

These eight themes directly related to my research questions and the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework outlined the successful inclusion practices defined by Villa and Thousand's Five System Approach (2003). Using this framework brought forth a systematical view and understanding of the challenges and successes of special education and general education teachers while they were teaching in inclusive settings due to the framework's organizational structure. This structure included five system-level best practices: connection with best practices, visionary leadership and administrative support, redefined roles and collaboration, and adult support (Villa & Thousand, 2003).

Themes Related to Research Question 1 (Successes)

Three themes related to the successes teachers experience while teaching in inclusive settings. The findings of this study indicate that teachers at the study site felt that they experienced success in their strong instructional practices, preparation to teach

students with disabilities in inclusive settings, and the support they receive from their administration and other support staff in their building. The themes related to Research Question 1 that emerged during the analysis are discussed in detail below.

Theme 1: Strong Instructional Practices. Most of the participants noted some level of success in the instructional practices at the study site. The teachers stated that small group instruction, varied teaching strategies, notating student work with meaningful comments, allowing students extra time to complete assignments, and the willingness to go above and beyond for students were all instructional practices that had the greatest impact on student achievement. Special Education Teacher #3 stated,

> The teachers that take the time to reteach information to students really make an impact on all students' learning. I think that all the teachers that go above and beyond by notating students' work with corrections and giving them extra time to fix work. Specific corrective criticism really has had a positive impact on student achievement.

General Education Teacher #2 had a similar explanation about successful instructional practices. The teacher shared,

> I think our small group instruction is successful for all students. I divide them into small groups, and the kids work according to their level. I use my data to make groups. So I like to put like minds together, and work with them because I know what they are struggling with versus, mixing a high with the low because what I found is the kids that are low, they shut down because the high students kind of dominate and they feel intimidated.

Other teachers reported that they felt that the instructional practices of both general education and special education teachers were an area of success for their school.

According to Villa and Thousand (2003), educators must be aware of and continue to implement best practices to impact student achievement positively. If new methods need to be implemented, school leaders should make sure that teachers keep successful best practices and simply add practices that will enhance their areas in need of improvement. At the study site, the best practices of small group instruction, varied teaching strategies, notating student work with meaningful comments, allowing students extra time to complete assignments, and the willingness to go above and beyond for students should all be continued.

Theme 2: Teachers Well Prepared to Teach Students with Disabilities. All six participants shared they felt prepared to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings due to the experience they had teaching students with disabilities during their teaching careers. The teachers shared that they had some professional learning about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Special Education Teacher #2 said, "My Bachelor's is in special education, and I'm fully certified in all aspects of special education to include adaptive education from pre k through 12th."
Special Education Teacher 3 stated

> I have a Sociology background and have my Master's in special education, mild
> to moderate. I am considered highly qualified in Special Education, and I am also
> certified in high school science, social studies, and language arts. I also have a lot

of experience working with students with various needs and abilities. I think I am

ready for any student who comes my way.

The general education teachers at the study site also feel prepared to work with students

with disabilities in inclusive settings. General Education Teacher 1 shared that she always

tries to prepare herself for students with unique needs. She stated

One of the things that I'm doing right now on my own, not provided through the

school or the district, is taking a class on students in the inclusion classroom

because, as a general education teacher, when we take special education classes,

it's during our bachelor's degree. It's been 20 years since I was pursuing my

bachelor's. So, I feel like we as teachers need a refresher or more information

because things change all the time. I'm taking a class because I have students who

are diagnosed with autism, and I wanted to make more of a connection to see

what I can do to help them.

General Education Teacher 3 stated

I feel prepared now. When I first started teaching, I thought I was prepared, but I

learned that you can't learn everything from a textbook. Each child is different,

and some of the students I have taught were not in any of my books. My years of

experience taught me that. Now I know how to reach most of my students.

Experience helped to prepare me the most.

Bitsadaze and Japaridze (2016) found that teachers' job performances were strongly

related to their feelings of preparedness and confidence to do their jobs. If teachers felt

confident in their ability to teach students, then teachers were less likely to experience

burnout from teaching. For inclusive education to work, educators must become effective and efficient (Villa & Thousand, 2003). The teachers at the study site feelings of preparedness enable them to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Theme 3: Strong Support from Administration and Support Staff. Both general education and special education teachers at the study site expressed feeling supportive by their leadership and support staff. This is an area of success. When asked about the level of support teachers receive, General Education Teacher 2 responded by saying, "Anything that I've asked for that we've needed, we've been given. When I asked to do out of the box type things, generally permission is granted as long as it's not going to harm the student. They are pretty much open to suggestions. This occurs all over the school with both gen ed and special ed teachers."

General Education Teacher 1 also expressed feeling supported by additional staff in the building. The teacher stated,

> I feel like we do have good support as far as with our principals, counselor, school nurse, and paraprofessionals. If I have a question about how I can better help in a certain area of reading, the special education teachers are always willing to answer questions. If the admin team cannot answer my questions, they will find someone who will or tell me that they are working on it. Sometimes it takes time for them to get back with me, but they are normally pretty good about following up.

Special Education Teacher 3 stated, "My administrators are very supportive. Anytime I have asked for certain materials for my students, they have been willing to try to get

those things I needed. They are also always willing to listen and make themselves available. I really do feel supported by them."

The level of adequate leadership and support impacts the challenges and success teachers experience as they implement inclusive practices. Villa and Thousand (2003) state that support from an administrator is vital in producing positive student outcomes. Because teachers who participated in this study have given positive feedback in this area, it has been concluded that Visionary Leadership and Administrative Support is an area of success for the study site.

Table 6 is a visual display of Research Question 1 themes concerning the conceptual framework based on Villa and Thousands' Five System Approach (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Table 6 also includes a brief response from each participant related to the themes. The participants' responses shown in Table 6 provide evidence of how I came to the conclusions and interpretations of the study for successes teachers experienced while teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings at the study site. In the following section, each theme for Research Question 1 is supported by complete direct quotes from the participants within depth explanations and analysis.

Table 6

Themes, Conceptual Framework and Participants' Responses Regarding Research 1 (Successes)

Theme	Framework	Participant Response
Strong Instructional Practices	Connection with Best Practices	"I think our most beneficial practice is not only grouping students with special needs together but grouping them with everybody." (Gen Ed Teacher #1) "Our small group instruction is successful for all students..." (Gen Ed Teacher #2)

Theme	Framework	Participant Response
Teachers Well-Prepared to Teach Students with Disabilities	Connection with Best Practices	"If our students have fallen below a certain level, we review their scores weekly to make sure all of our students are successful." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "The way the students see the two teachers interact together." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "Specific corrective criticism really has had a positive impact on student achievement" (Sp Ed Teacher #3) "I am prepared. I try to be." (Gen Ed Teacher #1) "I'm prepared to teach all students. They give me the most challenging students" (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "Experience helped to prepare me the most." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "I feel confident to teach my students." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "I feel very prepared." (Sp Ed Teacher #2) "I think I am ready for any student who comes my way." (Sp Ed Teacher #3)
Support from School Leaders and Staff	Visionary Leadership	"We do have good support as far as with our principals, counselor, school nurse, and paraprofessionals." (Gen Ed Teacher #1) "Anything that I've asked for that we've needed, we've been given." (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "Anytime I ask for help, I'm always given it. People are always able to offer advice or strategies." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "I feel supported by my administrators to do what I need to do for these kids." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "Our program specialist…comes in once a month or if we call her in-between times. She always makes time to come in and give us any support that we need". (Sp Ed Teacher #2) "My administrators are very supportive." (Sp Ed Teacher #3)

Themes Related to Research Question 2 (Challenges)

There were four themes related to the challenges teachers experience while teaching in inclusive settings. The findings of this study show that teachers at the study site experienced challenges in being able to collaborate due to not having enough time, developing positive co-teaching relationships, teachers' knowledge of the curriculum and

students' unique learning needs, and providing students with disabilities with discreet interventions. The themes related to Research Question 2 that emerged during the analysis are discussed in detail below.

Theme 4: Limited Time for Collaboration. All six participants shared that collaboration was a challenge due to the lack of time and scheduling conflicts with their co-teachers. One teacher had a common planning time with their co-teacher, but the other teachers did not. However, the participants also stated that they did collaborate with their co-teachers. Still, they had to do so in creatively quick manners, such as in passing in the hallway, via email, via phone before or after school, or via text or on the weekend. They also shared that there was no formal time in which they sat down and collaborated consistently with their co-teaching partner.

Many of the participants felt that there was not enough time to collaborate effectively. General Education Teacher #1 explained,

We don't really have a set time where we lesson plan together, to be honest… The challenge that we face as a co-teaching team is we just don't have time. We need more time to work with the special education teacher. It all goes back again to the time, and when do we have the time to plan and sit down and discuss students? There isn't enough time.

General Education Teacher #3 expressed similar feelings saying,

We'll try to collaborate at least once a week. We have to squeeze it in. They [special education teachers] give us information. They tell us what we can do to serve our students better to help them be successful. But if it's supposed to be

once a week, um, I can't say personally that I've met with, the special ed teacher

one on one, but in some form once a week they're giving us the information that's

going to better help them [the students]. We all give them [special education

teachers] additional information if we felt like our students need more help, or we

feel like they're lacking in different areas. We can submit those, and they're going

to look into it a little bit more.

Special Education Teacher #3 stated,

My team [special education teachers and general education teachers] does have a

collaborative planning time, but it doesn't always work out that way. We also

have different tasks to get done during our planning time. Obviously, there are

frequent emails between us...We try to get together on or as much as we can to

modify classwork, test, and quizzes and, try to get with the regular ed teachers as

much as possible. But I do wish we actually had the time to sit and meet and

discuss the kids, the lessons, and the students' progress.

General Education Teacher #3 added that the collaboration between teachers at the

proposed study site occurs through email because there is not a common co-planning

time. General Education Teacher #3 stated,

Generally, it is via email and in passing at times because our planning times are

not the same. My inclusion teacher and I have met on the weekends at Starbucks

and my home so that we could try to get things together. But that is rare, and

because of the way the scheduling is, it very difficult to collaborate.

Effective collaboration is a major piece in a successful inclusive classroom. General education teachers and special education teachers must work collaboratively to enhance the educational experience and learning outcomes of students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Mullholland & O'Connor, 2016; Goddard et al., 2015). Villa and Thousand (2003) stated that scheduling time for teachers to collaborate is among the top five vital components needed for teachers to collaborate effectively.

Theme 5: Lack of Positive Co-teaching Relationships. The participants in the study expressed the need to establish stronger co-teaching relationships. Being able to trust each other with teaching students with the academic content and sharing the responsibility of students' learning and instruction has been difficult for teachers at the study site. Also, the general education teachers expressed that they were not comfortable allowing the special education teachers to teach in their classroom due to the special education teachers' lack of knowledge in the content area. Special Education Teacher #3 explained,

> We need to make the Gen ed teachers feel a little bit more comfortable about releasing some of that authority in the room to actually allow the co-teacher to teach… make it, so the Gen ed teacher feels comfortable in releasing some of that authority and realizing that the sped teachers are there to just show another perspective of the lesson, not necessarily take over the classroom. And if I could come up with a magic way to get them all to understand that, I think I would have fulfilled my calling. Because that's one of the biggest issues that we have.

Special Education Teacher #1 explained, "Some Gen ed teachers still aren't comfortable with allowing another teacher to teach in their classroom. So we don't always feel welcome in the classroom."

General Education Teacher #2 provided an example of what successes can happen when co-teachers have positive relationships. "There have been some successful relationships with teachers who co-teach at our school. These teachers knew each other outside of school and had a positive relationship."

Special Education Teacher #1 also described a successful co-teaching pair at the study site with the following statement,

> We've had a lot of success in our eighth-grade math class, where there are two male teachers in that room. They actually were awarded for having the most growth on *iReady* scores, which is one of our test scores that we use to get our children ready for the Milestones, which is the end, of course, an end of grade test. So it can work, and those two gentlemen have proven that it can work. They were placed together, but they also knew each other outside of the school. So it worked out really well for the two of them.

> When discussing co-teaching relationships, both the general education and special education teachers shared that feeling comfortable in the classroom, and the school was important. General Education Teacher #2 stated the following:

> I would advise any administrator just to make sure that your teachers just feel welcome within the school. In every classroom in the school, especially if they are a traveling teacher like a sped teacher or para. I just feel like if they feel like they're

welcome and wanted it, then they'll do whatever they have to do to take care of all students, whether they are general ed students or special education students. No teacher wants to go into an environment that's not warm and welcome. I hear that all the time from our sped teachers. They don't feel welcome in every classroom.

Participants in the study expressed that teachers' relationships with their co-teachers was a challenge for their school. According to Villa and Thousand (2016), for inclusion to be successful, school personnel must change their outlook on the roles of special education and general education teachers. General education and special education teachers should view each other as collaborative peers. The collaboration has to be inclusive where roles within the classroom are shared rather than delegated (Angelides, 2012; Goddard et al., 2015). If the roles within the schools become redefined, then relationships between teachers could improve.

Theme 6: Lack of Knowledge of the Curriculum and Students' Unique Learning Needs. All three of the general education teachers shared concerns about their special education co-teacher not being very knowledgeable in the content area in which they are providing student services. This concern limited which co-teaching model that could be used during instruction. The co-teaching model that was most commonly used was one-teach, one assist due to the general education teachers' feelings that the special education teachers were not very knowledgeable in their respective content areas. General Education Teacher #2 shared,

My co-teacher, in particular, is not very strong in math. I have to correct him a lot. So he's very quiet in class, especially when it comes to certain content and

standards. He's more active with the warmups until he takes the small group to work with them. But he usually watches me and takes notes. So it puts more work on the gen ed teacher because if I know that my co-teachers are weak in certain content, like certain skills or standards, then I'm not going expect my co-teacher to do the instructing.

General Education Teacher #1 stated, "I don't think she really knows the content. I've tried to explain it to her, but I think she gets offended sometimes. So I just explain things to the class, and hope she was listening."

A difference in teaching philosophies was noted as a co-teaching relationship concern about a special education teacher. General Education Teacher #3 stated the following:

We have different teaching philosophies. She is very by the book, and it's very difficult for her to see beyond that and to understand that everything that we learned in school and the textbook does not necessarily apply in every classroom. We have to make the best of the situation. Her lack of experience and our different teaching philosophies make it hard for us to get on the same page.

Special Education Teacher #2 shared that general education teachers do not always understand students with disabilities. Special Education Teacher #2 stated,

We [special education teachers] understand how our students learn. We may not know everything about the content we are providing student services, but we know about student learning. Gen ed teachers seem to forget that not all students learn the same way at the same pace. That is why we are there. I always feel like

education preparation programs teach special education teachers how to teach and teach general education teachers what to teach. And I think those two need to be married so that each gets both.

Special Education Teacher #1 shared,

I think that teachers need to realize and be aware that a student can be twice exceptional. They have to understand that you can have a student with a disability who is also gifted. Also, there's not a one size fits all for teaching students with disabilities. To think all students learn the same is not okay. It is all of our responsibility to make sure that every student gets what he or she needs. This comes by establishing a safe culture in the classroom in which all students feel safe to participate in class. That's a big thing in the inclusive classroom. I think that gen ed teachers don't get this. It is a shared responsibility.

Both general education and special education teachers expressed that lack of knowledge in content areas and in understanding students' individual needs was a challenge at their school. General education and special education teachers both understand that each student has unique needs, and some students may need more assistance than others. Therefore, both general education and special education teachers must work collaboratively to learn when and how to help each student (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Collaborative planning allows teachers to share their content knowledge and knowledge about students in an efficient manner. The concern that special education teachers are not familiar with the content in which they are teaching students and that general education teachers do not understand the various needs of the

student they teach could be resolved by collaborative planning in which both the content and needs of students are discussed. Also, differentiated professional development may be needed to assist special education and general education teachers in learning more about content and student needs.

Theme 7: Inability to Provide Discreet Interventions. Being able to provide students with discreet interventions was an inclusion practice that teachers at the study site felt was a challenge for teachers at their school. Teachers expressed that when students with disabilities were singled out, placed in small groups, or taken out of the classroom to provide them with intervention or individualized instruction, it negatively impacted student achievement because the students were embarrassed. General Education Teacher #1 said

> Everyone can see. It's not as discrete when they leave the classroom. It might not bother the students all the time, but sometimes it bothers me that everyone can see them leaving the classroom. The students sometimes are taken out of the room, and they don't really want to go, so they don't perform like they normally would in the general education setting.

General Education Teacher #2 explained further saying,

> Sometimes the students don't like it when they [special education teachers] have to pull them out to work one on one or if someone has to come in and work directly with that student. I feel like some of the students feel like the spotlight is on them, and they shut down. A lot of the students I've had in the past are capable of doing the grade-level work, but when the sped teacher or para comes into the

room to assist the student, the students seem to kind of back away or become shy

or withdrawn. I can see a difference in the students' body language when it

occurs.

Providing students with disabilities with services discreetly within and outside the

inclusive classroom seems to be a challenge at the study site.

Special education teachers should be viewed as both a support for students with

special needs and as an integral part of the classroom. According to Villa and Thousand

(2016), for inclusion to be successful, school personnel have to change their mindset

about the current roles of special education and general education teachers.

For school personnel to meet diverse student needs, they must stop thinking and

acting in isolated ways: 'These are my students, and those are your students.'

They must relinquish traditional roles, drop distinct professional labels, and

redistribute their job functions across the system. To facilitate this role

redefinition, some schools have developed a single job description for all

professional educators that clearly articulates as expected job functions

collaboration and shared responsibility for educating all of a community's

children and youth. (Villa & Thousand, 2016, p. 20)

If teachers begin to view special educators in this role, the students will view them in this

way as well. When the special education teacher is in the classroom teaching and being

treated as a classroom teacher, the students will not view him or her as a teacher for only

students with disabilities.

Table 7 includes information relating to Research Question 2. It consists of the themes that connect to the study's conceptual framework based on Villa and Thousands' Five System Approach. Table 7 also has a brief response from each participant in relation to the themes to provide evidence of how I came to the conclusions and interpretations of the study for challenges teachers experienced while teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings at the study site.

Table 7

Themes, Conceptual Framework and Participants' Responses Regarding Research Question 2 (Challenges)

Theme	Framework	Participant response
Limited Time for Collaboration	Collaboration	"We don't really have a set time where we lesson plan together." (Gen Ed Teacher 1) "Because of the way the scheduling is, it is very difficult to collaborate." (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "We'll try to collaborate at least once a week. We have to squeeze it in." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "With the schedule, where is the time to collaborate? It's really hard." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "Common planning time with co-teachers and paraprofessionals…is something we need." (Sp Ed Teacher #2) "I do wish we actually had the time to sit and meet." (Sp Ed Teacher #3)
Co-Teacher Relationships	Redefining Roles	"There have been some successful relationships with teachers who co-teach at our school." (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "I hear that all the time from our sped teachers, they don't feel welcome in every classroom." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "Those two gentlemen have proven that it can work. They were placed together, but they also knew each other outside of the school." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "We don't always feel welcome in the classroom." (Sp Ed Teacher #2)

Theme	Framework	Participant response
		"We need to make the Gen ed teachers feel a little bit more comfortable about releasing some of that authority in the room." (Sp Ed Teacher #3)
Lack of Knowledge	Collaboration	"I don't think she [the Sp Ed Teacher] really knows the content." (Gen Ed Teacher #1) "It puts more work on the Gen Ed teacher because if I know that my co-teachers are weak in certain content…, I'm not going to expect my co-teacher to do the instructing" (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "It's very difficult for her [co-teacher] to see beyond that and to understand that everything that we learned in school and the textbook does not necessarily apply in every classroom." (Gen Ed Teacher #3) "I think that gen ed teachers don't get this. It is a shared responsibility." (Sp Ed Teacher #1) "Gen ed teachers seem to forget that not all students learn the same way at the same pace." (Sp Ed Teacher #2)
Inability to Provide Discreet Interventions	Redefining Roles	"It's not as discrete when they leave the classroom." (Gen Ed Teacher #1) "I feel like some of the students feel like the spotlight is on them, and they shut down." (Gen Ed Teacher #2) "We [Sp Ed Teachers] try to work with all the kids, but after a while, they [the students] figure out who we are there for." (Sp Ed Teacher #2) "I know some students are embarrassed, especially at this age, when I come in the classroom or pull them out…" (Sp Ed Teacher #3)

Themes Related to Research Question 3 (Needs)

One theme related to the needs of teachers emerged during this study on teachers' experiences while teaching in inclusive settings. The findings of this study indicate that teachers at the study site felt that they needed professional development to teach students

with disabilities effectively. More specifically, teachers expressed the need for

professional development in co-teaching methods and establishing relationships among

co-teachers. The theme of the need for professional development is discussed below.

Theme 8: The Need for Professional Development. All participants expressed

the need for some professional development in co-teaching methods and felt that their co-

teacher should have professional development as well. Although the school district

provided all teachers with professional development on inclusion, the participants

expressed that co-teaching teams do not receive professional development as

collaborative co-teaching teams and the depth of the professional development that

special education teachers receive on co-teaching and inclusion is more in-depth than the

co-teaching professional development that is given to general education teachers.

Special Education Teacher # 2 shared,

> All teachers need more training from the very beginning on what co-teaching
>
> really is and, if necessary, something being put in writing for the Gen ed teachers
>
> that would encourage them a little more to follow the co-teaching model. And
>
> also to allow that second teacher in the room to teach a lesson and incorporate the
>
> skills that they have in the classroom.

General Education Teacher #2 stated,

> I've had professional development on co-teaching a few times since I've been
>
> teaching, but I haven't had it recently. I have never done it with a fellow co-
>
> teacher. So I don't know if they got the same information or training I got. They

have always been separate. I know the sped teachers get a lot of training, though. They have been called to go to training a lot and a lot more this year in particular. General Education Teacher #1 added more information about teachers in the school needing more professional development by stating,

> We [general education teachers] honestly have no idea what training our special education teachers and paraprofessionals have received or what even their degree is or what even their responsibilities are or what they're not supposed to be doing while they are in our classroom. We've never been giving guidance. So if we had more guidance and we knew what their training was and what they could do, that'd be awesome. If we knew that, then our co-teaching would work a lot better.

General Education Teacher # 2 also stated,

> More effective professional learning is needed. Probably some ongoing professional learning with help implementing the skills learned. Also, in most professional learnings that I've been to over the years, people tell you, but no one is ever able to show you. So if someone could come in and show, like show us in the classroom with real students, I think that would be beneficial.

General Education Teacher # 3 shared,

> I would love to have a better relationship with my co-teacher, as I do with my general education team of teachers. So if all of us had that same collaborative relationship, it would be excellent. If I could do things differently at our school, as an administrator, I would provide training on that.

Special Education Teacher #1 stated, "I think a great thing would be that if at the beginning of the school year, the sped teachers were allowed to give a mini class or professional learning to explain some of the accommodations students receive."

According to Villa and Thousand (2003), visionary leaders understand that professional development is vital to the success of implementing changes in a school. Successful transformation requires that all teachers understand and buy into the inclusive vision. In addition, professional development should be provided to educators and everyone involved in the change. In addition to professional development, Villa and Thousand recommend that the leadership provide "additional common planning time and fiscal, human, technological, and organizational resources to motivate experimentation with new practices and the collaborative development and communication of a well-formulated plan of action for transforming the culture and practice of a school." (Villa & Thousand, 2003). The need for professional development at the study site should be fulfilled by the leadership.

Table 8 includes the theme of the need for professional development and shows it connects to the study's conceptual framework based on Villa and Thousands' Five System Approach to Research Question 3. In addition, Table 8 includes a brief response from each participant concerning the theme to provide evidence of how I came to the conclusions and interpretations of the study for the needs teachers have while teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings at the study site.

Table 8

Themes, Conceptual Framework and Participants' Responses Regarding Research Question 3(Needs)

Theme	Framework	Participant response
The Need for Professional Development	Visionary Leadership and Connection with Best Practices	"If we had more guidance and we knew what their training was and what they could do, that'd be awesome. If we knew that, then our co-teaching would work a lot better." (Gen Ed Teacher #1)
		"I've had professional development on Co-teaching a few times since I've been teaching, but I haven't had it recently. I have never done it with a fellow co-teacher." (Gen Ed Teacher #2)
		"If I could do things differently at our school, as an administrator, I would provide training on that [Collaborative Relationships]." (Gen Ed Teacher #3)
		"I think a great thing would be that if at the beginning of the school year, the Sped teachers were allowed to give a mini class or pl to explain some of the accommodations students receive." (Sp Ed Teacher #1).
		"All teachers need more training from the very beginning on what co-teaching really is" (Sp Ed Teacher #2)
		"More effective professional learning is needed." (Gen Ed Teacher #2)

Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the instructional successes, challenges, and needs of middle school general education and special education teachers as they implemented research-based inclusion practices. The problem at the local study site was that both special education and general education teachers face challenges as they implement research-based inclusion practices to meet the educational needs of students with documented disabilities. The concerns of special education and general education teachers, the study site not meeting the CCRPI Closing Gap target in Language Arts, Science or Social Studies (see Table 1), and the achievement gap as reflected in 2017 NAEP test scores (see Table 2) in reading and mathematics are the

reason for this study. The findings of this study indicate that teachers at the study site felt that they experienced success in their strong instructional practices, their preparation to work with students with disabilities, and the strong support they receive from their administration and other support staff at their school. The findings of this study also show that teachers at the study site experienced challenges in being able to collaborate due to not having enough time, developing positive co-teaching relationships, teachers' knowledge of the curriculum and students' unique learning needs, and providing students with disabilities with discreet interventions. Lastly, the findings of this study indicate that teachers at the study site felt that they needed professional development to teach students with disabilities effectively.

Conclusion

In this section, I described the research design, procedures for selecting participants, the procedures of data collection, and analysis. In the next section, a description of a recommended project will be given. It will include the objectives and justification of the project. There will also be an evaluation plan for the project in the next section. Also, a literature review on professional development will be given. Lastly, a summary of social change implications will be presented.

Section 3: The Project

The problem of this study was that both special education and general education teachers faced challenges as they implemented research-based inclusion practices to meet the College and Career Readiness Performance Index (CCRPI) Closing Gaps improvement targets for students with disabilities. Research on the challenges teachers face in the classroom, and the successes teachers and students experience showed that a professional development project could assist the study site in reaching the established target of the CCRPI Closing Gaps component. This section will include a description and goals of the project, the rationale of the project, and a review of literature that supports the project. In addition, this section includes an evaluation plan for the project and project implications.

The project will be a professional development series. I selected a professional development series for the project format due to the findings of this study, which showed that teachers felt they needed effective professional development to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. I developed a three-day professional development series entitled *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* (Appendix A). The professional development series focuses on helping teachers improve inclusion in their school and will take place in August during the summer break of the 2019/2020 school year. All general education and special education teachers who will be involved in the co-teaching at the study site will be invited to participate, as this professional development will be voluntary. According to Royster et al. (2014), professional development is needed for both general education teachers and special

education teachers to master effective instructional and interpersonal skills while teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. Although this professional development series is voluntary, both new teachers and veteran teachers will be encouraged to attend. Professional development will help close the skill gaps between the new teachers and veteran teachers (Evers, Van der Heijden, & Kreijns, 2016). Also, the school administrators and counselors will be invited to attend as well, as they also play a vital role in the success of implementing co-teaching models, and they will be able to collaborate with the co-teaching teacher teams.

The *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* professional development will be facilitated over three days. Day 1 and Day 2 will be held on consecutive days in August of 2020 prior to the start of the school year. Day 3 will take place a month after Day 2 in September 2020 so that the participants will have an opportunity to apply what they learned in their classrooms and share their challenges and successes with their professional development peers. Each day will start at 7:30 AM, end at 2:30 PM will include two 10-minute breaks in the morning and an hour lunch break. Day 1 will focus on developing an effective instructional team. Day 2's focus will be on motivating students through co-teaching. Finally, Day 3 will involve teachers implementing what they have learned in their classrooms and receiving peer feedback.

Rationale

A professional development series was selected for this project based on the data analysis in which teachers at the study site indicated that they needed more effective professional development to implement research-based inclusion practices to meet the

CCRPI Closing Gaps improvement targets for students with disabilities and improve student learning. Teachers at the middle school shared that they specifically wanted professional development that included both general education teachers and special education teachers.

This project will allow teachers and school administrators the opportunity to strengthen their knowledge of effective co-teaching methods and their co-teaching relationships. Both co-teaching methods and co-teaching relationships were areas of needs, as indicated in the findings of this study. This professional development will provide the educators and administrators time to collaborate, reflect on their current inclusion practices, implement practices they have learned, and provide feedback. Basye (2018) stated that professional development should be engaging, focus on the needs and specific roles of the learners, and provide the opportunity for progress monitoring the implementation. The goal of this professional development series is to provide general education and special education teachers and school administrators with strategies to improve their current co-teaching practices and, in turn, positively impact the learning of both students with disabilities and regular education students.

Review of the Literature

Section 1 includes a review of literature that begins by discussing the Villa and Thousand's Five Systems Approach (2003) as the conceptual framework and is followed by a brief history of inclusion in the United States, the effects of No Child Left Behind, IDEA and Every Student Succeeds on inclusion, and inclusive practices. It also includes information on teachers' attitudes about inclusion, inclusion teachers, and the challenges

of teaching in inclusive settings. This second literature review includes an explanation of effective professional development, design elements for effective professional development, professional development and inclusion, and the importance of professional development in establishing effective co-teaching teams.

I used the Walden University Online libraries to access various research databases, including ProQuest, Sage online journals, Education Resource Information Center (ERIC), Academic Search Premier, and Walden University dissertations. I searched for the following terms: effective professional development, a brief description of professional development in education, co-teaching impacts on student achievement, establishing co-teaching relationships. I also gathered references from the references sections of other researchers and researched for related information.

Professional Development in Education

Professional Development is a key component of any school improvement process. Because colleges and universities are unable to provide teachers with an extensive range of experiences teachers need to become effective educators, schools must provide continuous professional development for educators (Costley, 2013). Professional development is any formalized or informal process of learning to improve student learning (Desimone & Pak, 2017). Professional development has also been called staff development, teacher in-service, and professional learning. For the sake of this paper, the terms professional development and professional learning are used interchangeably.

Since the development of formalized professional development in the 1980s due to the high demands for education reforms, the purpose of professional development has

remained to be the improvement of teaching practices and to increase student learning. Professional development is a tactic that school districts use as assurance that teachers will continue to grow and improve their performance level throughout their careers and improve student learning. DiPaola and Wagner (2018) stated the goal of professional development is to build the capacity of teachers to help students learn. Many researchers have found that effective professional development improves teaching practices and, in turn, increases student learning (Patton, Parker & Tannehil, 2015; and Desimone & Pak, 2017). Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner (2017) defined effective professional development as "structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. 7). The improvement of student learning is the overall goal of and purpose of professional development. This section of the review of the literature will focus on research-based methods of effective professional development.

Effective teacher professional development improves teaching practices and increases student learning. However, ineffective professional development is occurring in school systems, and a change is needed. Patton et al. (2015) stated that teacher professional development has often been and continues to be a one size fits all model through informational presentations at one time workshops, which leaves no time for teachers to apply the given information within their classrooms, and hence the professional development is ineffective. Implications from Patton et al.'s 2015 review of professional development literature indicate that professional development must be well planned and implemented to reap the benefits. In another review of literature, Desimone

and Pak (2017) found that one-time workshops presented lecture style with the discussion of abstract ideas in professional development have proven to be ineffective, and there has been a shift in professional development. Schools and systems are now moving away from ineffective professional development and towards more effective professional development.

Understanding the methods of effective professional development will help schools improve teaching practices and student learning. Various other authors claimed that effective professional development occurs when there is collective face to face rigorous participation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013; McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler & Lundeber, 2013; Desimone & Pak, 2017); the professional development is connected to the curriculum, research-based practices, and school and district goals; and when the professional development is continuous with follow-up activities such as coaching and feedback (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The implementation of an effective professional development project will allow teachers at the study site to improve their craft and increase student achievement.

Design Elements for Effective Professional Development

Effective professional development starts with design elements. The design of professional development can vastly affect teachers' learning experience. Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardener (2017) have established research-based design elements of effective professional development. These design elements include content focused, active learning, collaboration in job-embedded context, and models and modeling of effective practice. A brief overview of each element follows.

Content Focused and Job-Embedded. Professional development that focuses on the content that teachers teach and students learn has proven to be effective. Effective professional development centers around content-specific curricula in content areas such as language arts, mathematics, science, or social studies (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardener, 2017). Content-focused professional development is also job-embedded so that teachers learn strategies that they can apply to the content they teach. Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) defined job-embedded professional development as "teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning" (p.118). Content-focused, job-embedded professional development is vital in addressing the needs of teachers who teach in inclusive and diverse settings because it allows teachers the opportunity to become familiarized with new curriculum and their students, analyze their students' work or study a specific component of instruction practices or student learning (Johnson & Fargo, 2014). Effective professional development should be content focused and job-embedded so that teachers can benefit from professional development and impact student learning.

Active Learning. Addressing how teachers learn is just as important as addressing what teachers learn during professional development. Teachers' professional development should be centered around active learning. According to Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardener (2017), active learning is "moving away from traditional learning models that are generic and lecture-based toward models that engage teachers directly in the practices they are learning and, preferably, are connected to teachers' classrooms and

students" (p.80). Active learning encourages educators to study authentic student work and participate in interactive activities that offer job-embedded, highly context-based professional learning (Hirsh, 2019). When developing professional development sessions, developers should remember that all teachers bring their teaching and learning experiences, and those experiences are great sources of learning. Also, teachers should be given the opportunity to choose their professional development based on their interests and needs. Active learning tasks for educators include analyzing student work, observing teacher experts, or peer observations (Fischer et al., 2016). Reflection and inquiry should also be included in the professional development sessions to engage teachers in active learning (Patton et al., 2015). Providing opportunities for teachers to participate in active learning will increase teachers' ownership of their learning and subsequently increase the professional development's effectiveness.

Collaboration. Collaboration is an important aspect of effective professional development. The importance of collaboration is especially important to remember when developing professional development sessions for schools with co-teaching communities since schools have steadily increased their efforts to create collaborative teaching communities and cultures (National Commission on Teaching and America's Workforce, 2016). Koellner and Jacobs (2015) recommended that teachers be provided with opportunities to collaborate with their peers to improve their knowledge, teaching methods and practices, and student learning. Collaboration can come in various forms to include a one-on-one collaboration partnership or a small group collaboration to school-wide collaboration sessions or collaboration with stakeholders. During a professional

development session, teachers may collaborate by working with their colleagues to problem-solve, review student work and data, plan lessons, and reflect together (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardener, 2017). These collaborative professional development approaches are effective in promoting school change that is on-going and long-lasting (Johnson & Fargo, 2014).

Use of Models and Modeling. Providing educators with models or modeling teaching practices are essential to effective professional development. Teachers are learners, and they need the opportunities to see the curriculum and instructional models they are being taught in action. Modeling includes viewing videos or written cases of teaching, lesson demonstrations, a written unit or lesson plans, peer observations, and analysis of samples of student assessments and work (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardener, 2017). Modeling and using models can determine the effectiveness of professional development. In 2016, Kleickmann, Trobst, Jonen, Vehmeyer, and Moller (2016). conducted a study comparing a group of teachers who had professional development and no supportive modeling to a group of teachers who received the same professional development and had supportive modeling. The findings showed that the teachers who did not receive any modeling had lower student achievement than the teachers who had that same professional development and received supportive modeling. Without using models or modeling, professional development cannot be effective.

Professional Development and the Inclusive Classroom

In today's schools, there is a need for effective inclusive classroom teachers. Still, schools are struggling to provide teachers with the needed professional development to

teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings effectively. Roose, Vantieghem, Vanderlinde, and Van Avermaet (2019) define inclusive classrooms as "classrooms that cater to the needs of all students for whom equal educational opportunities are needed" (p. 140). Schools have moved away from the total separation of students with disabilities from their non-disabled peers to the inclusive classroom. Teachers are now expected to teach a group of diverse students in an inclusive classroom. This shift in teaching pedagogy is pushing teachers and schools to adapt their teaching practices to include groups of students with diverse academic abilities, interests, experiences, and motivations (Abdreheman, 2017). A student's native language, disability, religion, race, gender, ethnicity, and class all have to be considered during the planning and delivery of instruction. According to Zhang, Wang, Stegall, Losinki, & Katsiyannis (2018), training or preparing teachers to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms while providing them with high-quality instruction is very challenging for many schools. Jenkins and Yoshimura (2010) found little evidence that general education teachers who taught in inclusive settings received adequate training and information to teach students with special needs successfully and that many general education teachers lack confidence in their ability to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The lack of confidence and unpreparedness of general education teachers to teach students with special needs could be alleviated through adequate professional development.

Professional development has become a key component of educational inclusion reform. Professional development can be used to alleviate teachers' low feelings of self-efficacy amongst general education teachers who teach in inclusive settings. Professional

development has helped ease the transition from teachers feeling unprepared to teach in

an inclusion classroom to teachers successfully teaching in inclusion classrooms (Zee &

Koomen, 2016). Worrell (2008) explained that general education teachers must be

knowledgeable about their students' learning needs to be successful. Worrell stated,

> A general educator cannot be expected to be successful at teaching in an inclusive
>
> classroom without a solid foundation of knowledge about the students'
>
> disabilities, educational needs, accommodations, modifications, and the laws that
>
> affect both the children with disabilities and the teacher. (p.45)

Having teachers understand each student's educational needs can be achieved by

providing the teachers with professional development. Through professional

development, general education teachers can successfully teach students with special

needs in inclusive settings.

There are many topics of professional development that general education

teachers need to teach students with special needs successfully. Implementing and

following students' Individual Education Plans (IEP) or 504 plans is one of the most

important skills needed to teach students with disabilities successfully (Gavish, 2017).

IEPs and 504 plans are unique and individualized, so managing them may be difficult for

a teacher who has no prior training or experience with them. Behavior management is

another very important aspect of teaching students with special needs. Teachers need to

know how to manage the behavior of students with special needs effectively. Also,

teachers teaching in inclusive settings should know and understand the social

development of students in their classrooms (Royster et al., 2014). Differentiation must

constantly occur in an inclusive classroom for students to be successful. Teachers who teach in inclusive settings have much required of them, and therefore, professional development is so important.

Professional Development and Co-Teaching Relationships

To have a successful inclusion program, establishing positive co-teaching relationships between special education and general education teachers is critical. The positive relationship between co-teachers can strengthen each co-teacher's instructional practices and impact student learning (Masterson, 2015). Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) conducted a study to discover whether co-teaching influenced students with disabilities, and their findings revealed that co-teaching has a positive effect on all students and specifically in students with disabilities' level of engagement. Because co-teaching can impact student learning, teachers need to develop and maintain positive co-teaching relationships. Strong positive co-teaching relationships do not happen by chance. Positive co-teaching relationships require planning, open communication, shared decision making, shared responsibility, collaboration, and effort from both teachers (Hulin, 2018; Jurkowski & Müller, 2018). Positive co-teaching relationships can be developed through effective professional development.

Effective professional development on co-teaching can help teachers create positive co-teaching relationships and positively impact student learning. An effective job-embedded content-based professional development program that provides both general education and special education teachers the opportunity to interact and collaborate can empower growth in teacher efficacy and lead to a positive impact on

teacher behavior and student achievement (Nilsson, 2015). Professional development is vital to co-teaching because research has revealed that special education teachers and general education teachers have different attitudes and understandings towards inclusion, teaching, and learning. Pool Maag and Moser Opitz (2014) conducted a study in which they found that special education teachers had higher self-efficacy and were more knowledgeable about teaching students in inclusive settings than general education teachers. Special education and general education teachers feel that conflicts between co-teachers are due to these differences in understanding and attitudes about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings (Duarte Santos et al., 2016). Because of this, co-teachers may be unable to develop positive co-teaching relationships without effective professional development.

Just as important as it is to have professional development sessions on co-teaching, the content in which co-teaching professional development is given should also be considered. According to Nichols and Sheffield (2014), professional development on co-teaching should be provided to both general education and special education teachers at the same time to make sure that all teachers have the same understanding of co-teaching and to help establish or maintain an inclusive school culture. The co-teaching professional development sessions should include instructional strategies that are needed to support students with disabilities in all content areas, active learning strategies, and classroom management that promotes positive behavior. Special education teachers may need additional training in the content areas in which they serve students, and general education teachers may need additional professional development on differentiated

planning and instruction to meet the needs of all students. Making sure that both general education and special education teachers learning needs are met during professional development will ensure that stronger co-teaching relationships are established and maintained.

Positive co-teaching relationships are strongly dependent on the preparation of both teachers. The success of co-teaching relies heavily on the co-teaching relationship and is contingent on the knowledge, skills, and effort of both general education and special education teachers (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015). If co-teachers do not have an opportunity to learn together and develop a positive co-teaching relationship, then students will not benefit from the intended purpose of a co-teaching environment. The purpose of co-teaching is to have two expert teachers in the classroom to ensure that all students succeed. However, when co-teachers do not truly understand the purpose of co-teaching, the special education teacher is used as a teachers' aid instead of an equal instructional expert (Petrick, 2015). With effective professional development, both general education and special education teachers can establish positive co-teaching relationships and impact student achievement.

Evaluating Professional Development

The goal of evaluating professional development is to see the impact of professional development on teacher instruction and student learning. According to Earley and Porritt (2014), schools most commonly use evaluation forms based on teachers' feelings, attitudes, and opinions to evaluate professional development. Although these forms can provide school leaders with valuable information about the teachers'

feelings, attitudes and opinions, the impact of the professional development on instruction and student learning is not evident (McChesney & Aldridge, 2018). Soebari and Aldridge (2016) suggest that schools use additional information in the evaluation of professional development to include: classroom observations, interviews, and student assessment data. Classroom observations, interviews, and student assessment data, in addition to teachers' feelings, attitudes, and opinions can provide schools with a more holistic picture of the impact of the professional development. Although classroom observations, interviews, and student assessment data can provide the school with an evaluation of the effectiveness of professional development, using this method can be difficult for many school systems to implement due to the cost and the extensive amount of time. For the sake of practicality, McChesney and Aldridge (2018) recommended that school systems use "practical wisdom…seeking 'adherence to proven research methods, whenever and wherever possible [while] knowing that very often, due to circumstances, we must use whatever data we can get" (p. 318). The evaluation of professional development should be practical while providing school systems with the data that is accurate and relevant in a realistic time frame with low costs.

Due to the factors discussed above, the evaluation questionnaires that have been proven to evaluate professional development effectively should be used by schools. The use of research-based questionnaires are cost and time effective and manageable (McChensey and Aldridge, 2018). I used the Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide (Haslam, 2010) to develop my own evaluation questionnaire. More

information on how my project evaluation questionnaire will be used is described in the project evaluation section.

Project Description

The project for my doctoral study is a three-day professional development series titled *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* in which I will provide general education and special education teachers who teach in inclusive settings in grades sixth through eighth with the opportunity to learn more about co-teaching relationships and the inclusive classroom. The principal and assistant principals will also be invited to attend the professional development sessions. *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* will focus on three topics: 1. Building positive co-teaching relationships; 2. Models of co-teaching and collaborating as co-teaching teams; 3. Self-reflection to build effective co-teaching teams.

Resources

In order to implement this project successfully, a few resources will be needed. The first and most important required resource is administrative support to gain permission to use the facility for the professional development workshops. I will need a location in the school that is convenient and comfortable for all participants. The location should have tables in which participants can sit in pairs and groups, wi-fi, and a SmartBoard or Promethean Board. I will use my computer and Microsoft *PowerPoint* to display the presentation to teachers. I will also provide the teachers with an agenda, copies of all printed materials, sticky notes, highlighters, and chart paper. Participants will be asked to bring writing utensils, snacks, and a note pad.

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Potential barriers to this professional development could be that teachers may not want to attend because the first two days of the three days are in August during their summer break. A way to overcome the potential barrier of lack of attendance by teachers could be to ask the school administrators to offer the teachers a voucher to reclaim some of their time during the school year. For example, teachers could be given a stamp card in which they would be allowed to leave 30 minutes early for ten times during the school year. Also, the first two days of the professional development will occur during summer break so that no substitutes will be needed. Substitutes will be needed for the third day because it will take place during the school year. This may cost the school or the school district some money. If the school system cannot afford to pay for substitutes, the last day could be broken into two to three days after school or done on early release days when students leave the school an hour early one day a week so that teachers can participate in professional learning.

Implementation Proposal

I will work with the school administrators to determine the best dates and location for the professional development. I will also need the school administrators to provide me with a list of all the teachers whom I should invite to participate so I can prepare the materials. I will provide each participant with a three-day agenda that includes an hourly schedule and the goals/objectives of the professional development. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the planned agenda for each day.

The *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* professional development will be held in August of 2020 before the start of the school year, over three days. Each day will start at 7:30 AM, end at 2:30 PM will include two 10-minute breaks in the morning and an hour lunch break. Day 1 and Day 2 will be consecutive, and Day 3 will take place a month later so that the participants will have an opportunity to apply what they learned in their classrooms and share their challenges and successes with their professional development peers. Each day I will provide teachers with fruit, donuts, coffee, tea, and water. Each day will also start with a motivational video and end with an exit ticket and a motivational quote. Specific details about each day's activity can be found in Appendix A. Day 1's focus will be on developing positive co-teaching team relationships. The day will begin with a welcome, a review of the agenda and learning objectives, and an icebreaker. The agenda will also include a sharing activity in which participants will be allowed to share experiences as a co-teacher. A breakdown of Day 1 is as follows:

Workshop #1-What is Co-teaching? and Why Does it Matter? -60 Minutes

Materials: Chart paper, markers, tape,

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help participants understand co-teaching methods and how co-teaching can improve learning outcomes for all students.

Workshop #2-Co-Teaching Relationships -155 Minutes

Materials: Timer, note cards, pens

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help participants begin to establish positive co-teaching relationships. Co-teachers will have the opportunity to get to know each other better.

Workshop #3-5 Strategies of Effective Co-Teaching- 75 Minutes

Materials: Notecards, pens

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to provide teachers with effective co-teaching strategies that will help them be effective and productive co-teaching teams.

Day 2's focus will be on co-teaching models and collaborative planning. It will begin by reviewing the learning objectives and what was learned the day prior. Before lunch, a brief overview will be given about co-teaching models to include videos and a short mock lesson, in which co-teaching pairs will model the six co-teaching models for the group. After lunch, teachers will present their co-teaching model and mock lessons to the group. Teachers will plan when and how they will implement what they learned. The day will end with a motivational quote and a reflective exit ticket. A breakdown of Day 2's workshops is as follows:

Workshop #4-The 6 Co-Teaching Models- 180 Minutes

Materials: Laptops, markers, pens, chart paper, tape

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to help participants learn how to decide the best way to structure their teaching model based on student needs and abilities for a lesson.

Workshop #5-Collaborative Planning -95 Minutes

Materials: Teachers will need access to their curriculum and pacing guides, pens,

paper, laptops, lesson plan books

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to provide co-teaching teams the time to plan a lesson or unit that they will implement in their classroom.

Finally, Day 3 will take place after the school year has started and will focus on self-reflection. Teachers will be able to implement what they have learned during the professional development in their classrooms, receive peer feedback, and ask for assistance for any problems they may have encountered as co-teaching teams. Day 3 will start with a review of Day 1 and Day 2 and an inspirational quote. Teachers will share the successes and challenges they encountered while trying to implement the co-teaching practices they learned. They will be able to receive feedback and suggestions from their peers. They will also complete a co-teaching evaluation tool that they will use to develop SMART goals to help facilitate growth in their co-teaching relationships and practices. In addition, I will review the learning objectives and ask the participants to complete a questionnaire and evaluation. The workshops for Day 3 are as follows:

Workshop #6-Co-Teaching Reflective Evaluation Tool- 165 Minutes

Materials: Co-Teaching Reflective Evaluation Tool, pens

Goal: The goal of this workshop is to introduce participants to a Co-teaching evaluation tool and process that they can implement and utilize in their classrooms.

Workshop #7-Co-teaching SMART Goal Plans -75 Minutes

Materials: SMART Goal Worksheets, pens

Goal: The goal of this workshop is for teachers to develop a common SMART

goal with their co-teaching partner that will improve their co-teaching practices

and relationships.

The overall goal of all seven workshops is to improve co-teaching relationships at the

study site and positively impact teaching and learning.

Responsibilities of the Participants

My role during the professional development is to serve as the facilitator. I will

work with the administrators and teachers to plan, implement, and evaluate the

effectiveness of the professional development. I will also be able to provide the

participants with information on the topics presented and make myself available for

questions from the participants. If I do not know an answer, I will research to find the

answer for the participants.

The participants in the professional development will be asked to show up each

day on time with a positive attitude. They will be asked to use their time wisely,

collaborate with their co-teaching partner or team, and to be open to suggestions from the

facilitator or their peers. Finally, they will be asked to implement what they learned

during Day 1 and Day 2 in their classroom for at least 10 school days and then be

prepared to share the success and challenges they experienced during those 10 days with

the group.

<div align="center">

Project Evaluation Plan

</div>

The evaluation of professional development is just as important as the

professional development plan itself. This is because it determines the success of a

particular intervention or program and identifies areas that need improvement (Pal, 2014). The project's evaluation was created to determine whether the professional development goals were obtained and whether the project was effective in assisting general education and special education teachers at the study site to develop positive co-teaching relationships and impact teaching and learning.

Project Goals and Impact on Stakeholders

The goal of this project was to have an impact on the co-teaching relationships and improve teaching and learning at the study site. More specifically, I hoped to

a. Provide teachers with the tools they need to develop positive co-teaching relationships.

b. Build teachers' knowledge of co-teaching models and collaborative planning.

c. Provide teachers with a self-reflective tool in which they can use to evaluate their professional growth as co-teachers.

If this professional development is successful, then all stakeholders will benefit from the knowledge that the teachers gain. These stakeholders include parents, teachers, and administrators.

Evaluation and Justification

This project evaluation will have both summative and formative components. At the end of each professional development session, each participant will be given a formative assessment that will be in the form of an anonymous exit ticket in which participants will share what they learned and evaluate the professional development session. The three questions that participants will be asked daily will be as follows:

Day 1:

1. As a result of today's session, what will you do differently in the future?

2. Of all the things presented in today's session, what was the most valuable learning experience?

Day 2:

1. What were the best aspects of this professional development session?

2. For future sessions, what topics would be the most helpful in performing your job?

Day 3:

1. How have your co-teaching relationships changed?

2. How did this professional development series compare to your expectations?

Getting an answer to these questions will help me understand if the teachers learned the information, what they plan to do with the information they learned, and if relationships are beginning to develop. Having participants complete daily formative assessments will allow me to be able to make improvements to future presentations.

On the last day of the professional development sessions, the participants will be asked to complete an evaluation questionnaire. This evaluation questionnaire is based on the recommendations of Haslam's (2010) *Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide* and consists of eight multiple-choice questions. Haslam (2010) recommends that the questions address whether the participants understood the purpose of the professional development, how useful participants thought the professional development was, the extent to which professional development met the participants' needs, how closely the

professional development aligns with the school's or district's improvement priorities, the participants' perceptions of support and encouragement to apply their new knowledge and skills, the likelihood of the participants applying their skills and knowledge in the classroom and how the professional development compares to other professional development in which participants have participated. I will use this method because I want to know what the participants thought about the professional development as a whole. It will also allow the participants to reflect upon their learning without being singled out. They will be able to be open and honest.

Project Implications

My project study has the potential to affect social change. As an educator, I believe that teachers can positively impact social change. Teachers work directly with the future of our society, children and their parents. Teachers can bring about change in the lives of students and their family and their communities (Bourn, 2015). The purpose of this project is to impact the co-teaching relationships at the study site positively and, in turn, improve teaching and learning at the study site. Should we achieve this goal, teachers will begin to have a positive view of inclusion and co-teaching. Teachers' pedagogical approaches impact not only their classrooms and schools but also society (Bourn, 2015). If teachers begin to shift their thinking about inclusive education from that of political mandates to that of success for all students, then their shift in thinking will help to change society's thoughts about individuals with disabilities.

During my research, I discovered that many teachers feel passionate about inclusion and advocate for students with disabilities; however, just as many teachers

prefer to teach in their classroom alone, without a co-teacher. My project will hopefully

impact teachers to understand that co-teaching truly benefits all children and can be an

avenue for social change. Pantic and Florian (2015) state,

> Teacher competence as agents of inclusion and social justice involves working
>
> collaboratively with other agents and thinking systematically about the ways of
>
> transforming practices, schools, and systems. Supportive relationships and
>
> knowing students are considered particularly important when teaching students
>
> from diverse backgrounds… Teachers committed to social justice and inclusion
>
> must be capable of building appropriate professional relations with pupils and
>
> other actors in order to respond adequately to students' diverse needs. (p.1)

When teachers begin to truly understand the powerful impact inclusion has on student

learning and achievement, hopefully, they will be more open to co-teaching. My project

serves to be an avenue to help teachers gain the knowledge they need to embrace

inclusion, co-teaching, and social change.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the instructional successes, challenges, and needs of middle school general education and special education teachers as they implemented research-based inclusion practices. The project that was developed as a result of this study was a professional development that includes information to help improve teachers' co-teaching relationships and impact teaching and learning. In this section, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of the project and recommended alternative approaches. I will also discuss what I have learned about being a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I will also discuss recommendations for future research and practice.

Project Strengths and Limitations

My professional development project may strengthen the co-teaching relationships and practices of elementary, middle, and high school teachers. Professional development has proven to be effective in improving teachers' instructional practices (Zhang, et al., 2018). This professional development project will provide teachers with a foundation of co-teaching and help to establish a culture of positive co-teaching relationships within the school or system in which it is being presented. It also will afford teachers with the opportunity to collaborate as co-teaching teams. Finally, it provides teachers with the chance to reflect on how they currently are operating as co-teachers and create and work towards SMART goals.

A limitation of this project is that it was created specifically for one school. The professional development was developed as a result of the findings of a study from one middle school. It is geared towards the needs and goals of a particular middle school. Another limitation of the project is that it is only for three days. Three days may not be enough time to ensure that all teachers feel comfortable with their co-teaching relationships and collaboration. Building relationships and trust among co-workers takes time.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are alternative approaches that can be used to address the limitations of the project and address the problem at the study site. One alternative approach is that an evaluation of the current inclusive co-teaching practices could be done. The evaluation could include other schools in the same school district as the study site. The current inclusion practices from the schools could be evaluated and compared. The findings from the evaluation could be used to see which inclusive practices are working at various schools and which practices are not working. The data could be used to change the current inclusive practices that are being used to improve teaching and learning for all students. Another alternative method is to conduct a quantitative study using a survey. I believe that more teachers would have participated in the study if all they were asked to do was conduct an anonymous electronic survey. Teachers are very busy, and a survey would not take as much time as an in-depth interview.

The problem in this study was that both special education and general education teachers faced challenges as they implemented research-based inclusion practices to meet

the educational needs of students with disabilities. An alternative definition of the problem could be that teachers at the study site are faced with the challenge of establishing positive co-teaching relationships as they teach students with diverse learning needs. I believe that co-teaching relationships are a challenge at the study site due to the evidence that I discovered during the study. A solution to this problem could be for the district to provide principals with professional development on how to pair teachers with co-teachers in ways that will have the greatest impact on student achievement.

Another alternative definition of the problem could be that teachers at the study site do not feel they have enough time to collaborate with their co-teachers to impact student achievement adequately positively. An alternative solution to this problem could be to provide co-teachers with a common planning period at least once a week. Many school districts dismiss students one hour early once a week so that teachers can participate in collaboration and professional development. These school districts have extended the school day the other four days of the week to make up for the hour of instruction they lose during their early release days. Having an early release day would provide teachers at the study site with an additional hour during their duty day to collaborate without having students present.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

The area in which I feel that I gained the most knowledge was in the realm of special education. During my 13 years as a classroom teacher, I was a general education

teacher, but I have always been a general education inclusion teacher. I have had experience teaching students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. However, my knowledge of special education was just on the surface. Through this doctoral study process, I have learned about the history of the struggle for an impartial and quality education for students with disabilities. I was also able to become more knowledgeable about the laws that have been mandated to ensure that students with disabilities receive a fair and appropriate education without discrimination. Even after the enactments of the laws created to protect students with disabilities, current research proves that students with disabilities still face many challenges outside their disability in the classroom. The challenges include having a teacher(s) who may not understand their disability, how they learn, or feel confident enough to try different methods to teach them. Finding out this information has made me a better educator, practitioner, and advocate for students with disabilities.

I also have been able to gain insight into the daily challenges and successes that special education teachers experience. This process has opened my eyes to the importance of having positive relationships with co-workers. Without a positive relationship, it is very difficult for any team to achieve their common goals. I learned a great deal about how self-efficacy, a positive locus of control, and effective professional development can positively affect relationships and impact teaching and learning. I learned patience, commitment, and perseverance are all required to be a true doctoral scholar. I faced many challenges throughout this process and was able to overcome them all. In addition, I learned that a true scholar has be open to constructive criticism and

critique to grow. Scholastic growth comes also comes through academic inquiry. One must be willing to take the time to research to gain more knowledge.

Practitioner

As an educational practitioner, I am currently using and will continue to use what I learned about teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings in my daily practices. I will work to help educators in my network understand how their professional relationships impact students and the importance of continuous professional development. Although I do not teach students anymore in a classroom setting, I feel that I have the ability to impact them by sharing my knowledge with their teachers positively. As a school counselor, I work closely with both teachers and administrators in my building and can have in-depth conversations to impact student achievement positively.

Project Development

Having to create a project based on the findings from my study helped me understand the project development process. This process reminded me of designing a unit plan for students in an inclusive classroom after reviewing the class data. I had to look at the data and make decisions about what type of project would best benefit the teachers at the study site. I also had to make sure that the information I provided them with was both accurate, engaging, and met their professional development needs. The project development was also similar to designing a unit plan because I had to remember to include both formative and summative assessments to see if the professional development was beneficial to the participants.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Advocating for students with disabilities is not only important to education, but it is also important to improving the future of society. Students with disabilities have just as many gifts and talents as their non-learning-disabled peers. If students with disabilities are not given fair opportunities in school to learn, they may not be able to grow and give their gifts and talents back to society. Educators play an important role in making an impact on people and their communities (Bourn, 2015). As an educator, I feel that I can positively impact the students, parents, administrators, and community around me. This study made me gain more passion for helping ensure that students with disabilities are successful and to help educators realize the importance of their work with all students.

I have learned that although there has been a great deal of change in the area of education, we still have more work to do. Understanding and celebrating the unique gifts and talents of each child is crucial in education. However, being able actually to meet the diverse needs of individual students remains to be a challenge for many educators. I believe that the more conversations we have on this topic, the more educators will be able to over this challenge.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The potential impact of social changes for this project study will be to positively impact the co-teaching relationships between general education and special education teachers at the study site. The research that I conducted during the study showed that the co-teaching relationships between general education and special education were a challenge for both special education and general education teachers as they worked to

implement research-based inclusive practices. As a result, students in inclusive settings are not receiving the highest level of instruction possible. This project can help both general education and special education teachers not only understand the importance of establishing positive co-teaching relationships, but it can help the teachers learn how to go about establishing those relationships.

Future research for this project could be on the outcome of this project. Whether or not teachers choose to utilize the co-teaching strategies that are introduced during the project should be investigated as well as the outcome of their decisions on student learning. More specifically, future research on this topic could investigate whether co-teaching relationships are strengthened by effective professional development and how those co-teaching relationships established through professional development impact teaching and learning in inclusive settings.

References

Abdreheman, S. (2017). Instructors' willingness to provide instructional accommodations

for students with disabilities in selected universities of Ethiopia. *International

Journal of Inclusive Education.* 22(6), 671-682.

Allday, R. A., Neilsen-Gatti, S., & Hudson, T. M. (2013). Preparation for inclusion in

teacher education pre-service curricula. *Teacher Education and Special

Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for

Exceptional Children*, *36*(4), 298-311.

Angelides, P. (2012). Forms of leadership that promote inclusive education in Cypriot

Schools. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 40*(1), 21-36.

Aud, S., Hussar, W., Johnson, F., Kena, G., Roth, E., Manning, E., & Zhang, J. (2012).

The condition of education 2012 (NCES 2012-045). *United States Department of

Education, National Center for Education Statistics.* Washington, DC.

http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch

Barker, B., Farrier, D., & Sciarra, D. (2016). Mind the gap: 20 years of progress and

retrenchment. *Policy Information Center*. Retrieved from

www.ets.org/research/pic

Basye, D. (2018). Personalized vs. differentiated vs. individualized learning.

International Society for Technology in Education. Retrieved from

htttp://www.iste.org/explore/articleDetail?articleid=124

Bhatnagar, N., & Das, A. (2014). Attitudes of secondary school teachers towards

inclusive education in New Delhi, India. *Journal of Research in Special*

Educational Needs, *14*(4), 255-263.

Bitsadze, M. & Japaridze, M. (2016). Locus of control in Georgia teachers and its relation to teacher burnout. *Problems of Management in the 21ˢᵗ Century,* 11 (1), 8-15.

Bourn, D. (2015). Teachers as agents of change. *International Journal of Development Education & Global Learnin*g, 7 (3), 63-77.

Boyle, C., Topping, K., & Jindal-Snape, D. (2013). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion in high schools. *Teachers and Teaching*, *19*(5), 527-542.

Burke, M., & Sandman, L. (2015). In the voices of parents: suggestions for the next IDEA reauthorization. *Research And Practice For Persons With Severe Disabilities*, *40*(1), 71-85.

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum*, *41*(1), 89-91. doi:10.1188/14.ONF.89-91

Costley, K. (2013). Ongoing professional development: The prerequisite for and continuation of successful inclusion meeting the academic needs of special students in public schools. *Online Submission*. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED541075.pdf

Co-Teaching Connection. (2015). Co-teaching models that work in an inclusion setting. *Pearson*. Retrieved from http://www.marilynfriend.com/approaches.htm

Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research (4ᵗʰ ed.). *Upper Saddle River*, NJ: Pearson Education.

Crosland, K., & Dunlap, G. (2012). Effective strategies for the inclusion of children with autism in general education classrooms. *Behavior Modification, 36*(3),251-269.

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M., & Gardner, M. (2017). Effective teacher professional development. *Learning Policy Institute*. Retrieved from https://www.yu.edu/sites/default/files/inline-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf

Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R., Andree, A., Richardson, N., & Orphanos, S. (2009). Professional learning in the learning profession: A status report on teacher development in the United States and abroad. *National Staff Development Council.* Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237327162_Professional_Learning_in_t he_Learning_Profession_A_Status_Report_on_Teacher_Development_in_the_Un ited_States_and_Abroad

Desimone, L. M., & Pak, K. (2017). Instructional coaching as high-quality professional development. *Theory Into Practice, 56*(1), 3-12. https://doi-org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1080/00405841.2016.1241947

DiPaola, M., & Wagner, C. A. (2018). *Improving instruction through supervision, evaluation, and professional development*. Information Age Publishing.

Duarte Santos, G. Sardinha, S., & Reis, S. (2016). Relationships in inclusive classrooms. *Jorsen*. Retrieved from http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1471-3802.12238/full#footer-article-info

Earley, P. & Porritt, V. (2014). Evaluating the impact of professional development: the need for a student-focused approach. *Professional Development in Education,* 40 (1), 112-129

Education Weekly. (2011, October). *Co-teaching is a marriage* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_pnxst7dkLk

European Agency for Development in Special Education Needs. (2014). Profile of inclusive teachers. Retrieved from https://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/Teacher-Education-for-Inclusion/profile

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), S.1177, 114th Cong. (2015). Retrieved from http://edworkforce.house.gov/uploadedfiles/every_student_succeeds_act_-_conference_report.pdf

Fischer, C., Fishman, B., Levy, A., Eisenkraft, A., Dede, C., Lawrenz, F., Jia, Y., Kook, J., Frumin, K., & McCoy, A. (2016). When do students in low-SES schools perform better-than-expected on a high stakes test? Analyzing school, teacher, teaching, and professional development characteristics. *Urban Education, 0*(0), 1-35.

Fluijt, D., Bakker, C., & Struyf, E. (2016). Team-reflection: The missing link in co-teaching teams. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 31*(2), 187–201. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2015.1125690

Forlin, C., Earle, C., Loreman, T., & Sharama, U. (2011). The sentiments, attitudes, and

concerns about inclusive education revised (SACIE-r) scale for measuring

pre-service teachers' perceptions about inclusion. *Exceptionality Education*

International. 21 (3), 50-65.

Forlin, C. (2010). *Teacher education for inclusion: Changing paradigms and*

innovative approaches. New York: Routledge.

Galvin, R. (2015). How many interviews are enough? Do qualitative interviews in

building energy consumption research produce reliable knowledge?. *The Journal*

of Building Engineering, 1(3), 2-12.

Gavish, B. (2017). Four profiles of inclusive supportive teachers: Perceptions of their

status and role in implementing inclusion of students with special needs in general

classrooms. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 61, 37-46.

Georgia Department of Education (2018 a). 2018 College and Career Ready Performance

Index. Retrieved from http://ccrpi.gadoe.org/2018/Views/Shared/_Layout.html

Georgia Department of Education. (2018 b). 2017 NAEP scores: Georgia students show

improvement in eighth-grade reading and math. Retrieved from:

http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and-

Policy/communications/Pages/PressReleaseDetails.aspx?PressView=default&pid

=603

Glesne, C. (2011). Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction, 4th edition.

Pearson

Goddard, R., Goddard, Y., Eun Sook, K., & Miller, R. (2015). A theoretical and

empirical analysis of the roles of instructional leadership, teacher collaboration,

and collective efficacy beliefs in support of student learning. *American Journal of*

Education, *121*(4), 501-530.

Goldstein, S. (2015). Co-teaching models that work in an inclusive setting. *Pearson*

Education. Retrieved from: http://www.pearsoned.com

Harkins, S. (2012). Mainstreaming, the regular education initiative, and

inclusion as lived experience, 1974-2004: a practitioner's view. *Inquiry in*

Education, 3(1). Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.nl.edu/ie/vol3/iss1/4.

Haslam, Bruce. (2010). Teacher Professional Development Evaluation Guide. Retrieved

from https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/teacher-

professional-development-evaluation-guide.pdf.

Hirsh, S. (2019). *4 cornerstones of professional learning: Fundamental principles pave*

the way for educators' actions. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Honigseld, A., & Dove, M. (2019). *Preparing teachers for co-teaching and*

collaboration. Retrieved from

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781119421702.ch26

Hulin, C. L. (2018). The impact of responsive partnership strategies on the satisfaction

of co-teaching relationships in early childhood classrooms. Retrieved from

https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5692&context=gradsc

hool_theses

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

Jenkins, A., & Yoshimura, J. (2010). Not another in-service! Meeting the special

education professional development needs of elementary general educators.

Teaching Exceptional Children, 42(5), 36-43. ISSN:0040-0699

Johnson, C., & Fargo, J. (2014). A study of the impact of transformative professional

development on Hispanic student performance on state mandated assessments of

science in elementary school. *Journal of Elementary Science Teacher Education,*

25(7), 845–859.

Jurkowski, S., & Müller, B. (2018). Co-teaching in inclusive classes: The development of

multi-professional cooperation in teaching dyads. *Teaching and Teacher*

Education, 75, 224-231.

Kena, G., Musu-Gillette, L., Robinson, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Zhang, J., & Dunlop

Velez, E. (2015). The condition of education 2015 (NCES 2015-144). *United*

States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics,

Washington, DC. Retrieved February 2017 from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch.

Kim, J. (2010). Influence of teacher preparation programmes on preservice

teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*.

15 (3), 355-377.

Kleickmann, T., Trobst, S., Jonen, A., Vehmeyer, J., & Moller, K. (2016). The effects of

expert scaffolding in elementary science professional development on teachers'

beliefs and motivations, instructional practices, and student achievement. *Journal*

*of Educational Psycholog*y, 108(1) 21–42.

Koellner, K., & Jacobs, J. (2015). Distinguishing models of professional development: The case of an adaptive model's impact on teachers' knowledge, instruction, and student achievement. *Journal of Teacher Education, 66*(1), 51-67.

Kumar, D., & Bala, K. (2014). Attitude of resource teacher towards inclusion of students with special educational need in the regular classroom. *Asian Journal of Psychology & Education*, *47*(1-2).

Kurniawati, F., de Boer, A., Minnaert, G., & Mangunsong, F. (2017). Evaluating the effect of a teacher training programme on the primary teachers' attitudes, knowledge and teaching strategies regarding special educational needs. *Educational Psychology,* 37(2).

Leaning Forward. (2016). Standards for professional learning. Retrieved from http://learningforward.org/standards/#.V0wZlZF97IU

Leedy, P. & Ormrod, J. (2013). Practical research: Planning and design, 10th edition. *Pearson*.

Lodico, M., Spaulding, D., & Voegtle, K. (2010). *Methods in Educational Research: From Theory To Practice, 2nd Edition*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. http://search.proquest.com/docview/304768105?accountid=14872.(304768105).

Mallet, M. (2017). Exploring the value of trust between teams of special education teachers and paraprofessionals. Retrieved from https://media.proquest.com/media/pq/classic/doc/431309645

Masterson, M. L. (2015). Small steps with big rewards: Connecting with Coteachers. *YC: Young Children*, 70(5), 28.

Mathis, W. (2016). How effective is class size reduction? National Education Policy

    Center. https://nepc.info/newsletter/2016/06/class-size

McChesney, K. & Aldridge, J. (2018). The relationships between school climate and

    adolescent mental health and wellbeing: A systematic literature review.

    International Journal of Educational Research, 88(2), 21-29.

McCray, E. D., & McHatton, P. A. (2011). "Less afraid to have them in my classroom":

    understanding pre-service general educators' perceptions about inclusion. *Teacher*

    Education Quarterly, 38, 135-155.

McConnell, T., Parker, J., Eberhardt, J., Koehler, M., & Lundeberg, M.

    (2013). Virtual professional learning communities: Teachers' perceptions of

    virtual versus face-to-face professional development. *Journal of Science*

    Education and Technology, 22(3), 267-277. DOI: 10.1007/s10956-012-9391-y

McKim, A. J., & Velez, J. J. (2016). An evaluation of the self-efficacy theory in

    agricultural education. *Journal of Agricultural Education,* 57(1), 73-90.

McLeskey, J. L., Rosenberg, M. S., & Westling, D. L. (2017). *Inclusion: Effective*

    Practices for All Students. USA: Pearson.

Meidl, T. D, & Sulentic Dowell, M. (2018). *Handbook of Research on Service-*

    Learning Initiatives in Teacher Education Programs. USA: IGI Global.

Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and*

    Implementation (4th ed). Jossey-Bass.

Monsen, J., Ewing, D., & Kwoka, M. (2014). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion,

    perceived adequacy of support and classroom learning environment. *Learning*

Environments Research, 17(1), 113-126. doi:10.1007/s10984-013-9144-8

Morgan, J. L. (2016). Reshaping the role of a special educator into a collaborative

learning specialist. *International Journal Of Whole Schooling*, 12(1), 40-60.

Mullholland, M., & O'Connor, U. (2016). Collaborative classroom practice for inclusion:

perspectives of classroom teachers and learning support/resource teachers.

International Journal of Inclusive Education. Retrieved from http://www-

tandfonlinecom.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/doi/full/10.1080/13603116.2016.1145266

?src=recsys

Murawski, W. (2012). *Ten tips for using co-planning time more efficiently*. Teaching

Exceptional Children. 44(4), 8-15.

Murawski, W. & Dieker, L. (2004). *Tips and strategies for co-teaching at the*

Secondary Level. Retrieved from

http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.453.3368&

ep=rep1&type=pdf

Musiowsky-Borneman, T. (2016). *Co-teaching: it's a marriage.* Retrieved from

https://inservice.ascd.org/co-teaching-its-a-marriage/

National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). The condition of education: child and

youth with disabilities. Retrieved from

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

National Commission on Teaching and America's Workforce. (2016). What matters now:

a new compact for teaching and learning. Arlington, VA: National Commission

on Teaching and America's Future. Retrieved from: https://nctaf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/NCTAF_What-Matters-Now_The-Evidence-Base_hyperlinked.pdf

Nel, M., Engelbrecht, P., Nel, N., & Tlale, D. (2014). South African teachers' views of collaboration within an inclusive education system. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. 18(9), 903-917.

New Jersey Department of Education. (2015*). Effective instructional strategies: co-teaching and consultation [PowerPoint Slides].* Retrieved from https://www.nj.gov/education/specialed/idea/lre/year1trainings/5/Eff ectiveInstStratCoTeachandConsult.pdf

Nichols, S., & Sheffield, A. N. (2014). Is there an elephant in the room? Considerations that administrators tend to forget when facilitating inclusive practices among general and special education teachers. *National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal,* 27(1/2), 31-44.

Nilsson, I. (2015). Understanding global education-A case study of the global high schools in Denmark. Lund University Libraries. Retrieved from http://lup.lub.lu.se/student-papers/record/5469540

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. (2002). Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115, Stat. 1425

Pal, L. A. 2014. *Beyond Policy Analysis: Public Issue Management in Turbulent Times*. Toronto: Nelson.

Palinkas, L., Horwitz, S., Green, C., Wisdom, J., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015).

Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method

implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5),

533–544. http://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

Pantić, N. & Florian, L. (2015). Developing teachers as agents of inclusion and social

justice. *Education Inquir*y, 6:3, DOI: 10.3402/edui.v6.27311

Patton, K., Parker, M., & Tannehill, D. (2015). Helping teachers help themselves:

professional development that makes a difference. *National Association of

Secondary School Principals,* 99(1), 26-42. Retrieved from https://search-

proquest-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1675203922?accountid=14872

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (4th ed.). Newbury

Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Petrick, D. (2015). An investigation into co-teacher relationship collaboration factors:

Co-teachers' perceptions. *Psychology*, 3(21), 111-121.

Pool, M., & Moser, O. (2014). Inclusive education: Results from an exploratory study.

Empirische Sonderpädagogik. 2, 133-149.

Qi, J., Wang, L., & Ha, A. (2016). Perceptions of Hong Kong physical education teachers

on the inclusion of students with disabilities. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*.

37:1, 86-102.

Robinson, Garletta. (2017). Perceptions and attitudes of general and special education

teachers toward collaborative teach. *Psychology*. Retrieved from

https://search.proquest.com/openview/ea781560267082d98ded9052f14590ff/

Roiha, A. (2014). Teachers' views on differentiation in content and language integrated

learning (CLIL): Perceptions, practices and challenges. *Language and Education*,

28:1, 1-18, DOI: 10.1080/09500782.2012.748061

Roose, I., Vantieghem, W., Vanderlinde, R., & Van Avermaet, P. (2019). Beliefs as

filters for comparing inclusive classroom situations. Connecting teachers' beliefs

about teaching diverse learners to their noticing of inclusive classroom

characteristics in videoclips. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 56, 140-151

Royster, O., Reglin, G., & Losike-Sedimo, N. (2014). Inclusion professional

development models and regular middle school educators. *Journal of At-Risk

Issues*, 18(1).

Schanzenbach, D. (2014). Does class size matter? *National Education Policy Center*.

https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/does-class-size-matter

Shaffer, L., & Thomas-Brown, K. (2015). Enhancing Teacher Competency through Co-

Teaching and Embedded Professional Development. Journal of Education and

Training Studies, 3(3), 117-125. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.11114/jets.v3i3.685

Soebari T. & Aldridge, J. (2016). Investigating the differential effectiveness of a teacher

professional development programme for rural and urban classrooms in

Indonesia. *Teacher Development*, 20(5), 701-722, DOI:

10.1080/13664530.2016.1185031

St. Cloud State University Teacher Quality Enhancement Center. (2018). *What is co-

teaching?*. Retrieved from https://www.stcloudstate.edu/soe/coteaching/

Stockall, N. S. (2014). When an aide really becomes an aid: providing professional

development for special education paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional*

Children. 46(6), 197–205. doi:10.1177/0040059914537202

Strogilos, V., & Avramidis, E. (2016). Teaching Experiences of Students with Special

Educational Needs in Co-Taught and Non-Co-Taught Classes. *Journal of*

Research In Special Educational Needs, 16(1), 24-33.

Sweigart, C. & Landrum, T. (2015). The impact of the number of adults on instruction:

Implications for co-teaching. *Preventing School Failure*, 59(1), 22-29.

Texas Education Agency. (2018*). Co-teaching- a how to guide for co-teaching in Texas.*

Retrieved from

https://projects.esc20.net/upload/shared/20984_CoTeaching_Updated_508.pdf

Thousand, J., Villa, R., & Nevin, A. (2013). Differentiating instruction: collaborative

planning and teaching for universally designed learning. Curricula Books

Turner, D. (2010). Qualitative interview design: a practical guide for novice

investigators. T*he Qualitative Report*, 15 (3), 754-760.

United States Department of Education. (2004). Building the legacy: IDEA 2004.

Retrieved from http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home.

United States Department of Education. (2015). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Retrieved from http://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

United States Department of Education. (2018). National Assessment of Educational

Progress (NAEP); Mathematics and Reading Assessments. Retrieved from

https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2017_highlights/

Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2016). The inclusive education checklist: a self-assessment of

best practices. National Professional Resources, Inc./Dude Publishing.

Villa, R., & Thousand, J. (2003). Making inclusive education work. *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 19-23.

Villa, R., Thousand, J., & Nevin, A. (2013). *A guide to co-teaching: new lessons and strategies to facilitate student learning (3rd edition).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Wei, R. C., Darling-Hammond, L., & Adamson, F. (2010). Professional development in the united states: trends and challenges. National Staff Development Council. Retrieved from https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/pdf/nsdcstudytechnicalreport2010.pdf?sfvrsn=0

Weintraub, F. J., Abeson, A., & Zettel, J. (1977). The end of this quiet revolution: the education for all handicapped children act of 1975. *Exceptional Children*, *44*(2), 114-128.

Wertz, F. J. (n.d.). Phenomenological research methods psychology: A comparison with grounded theory, discourse analysis, narrative research, and intuitive inquiry. Retrieved July 13, 2018, from http://www.icnap.org/wertz%20- %20paper.pdf

Wisconsin DPI. (2016). *Co-teaching at its best*. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xurgvdq3J8s

Worrell, J. L. (2008). How secondary schools can avoid the seven deadly school "sins" of inclusion. *American Secondary Education*, 36, 43-56.

Zee, M., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2016). Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and Teacher Well-Being: A Synthesis of 40 Years of Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 981–

1015. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315626801

Zhang, D., Wang, Q., Stegall, J., Losinki, M., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). The

    construction and initial validation of the student teachers' efficacy scale for

    teaching students with disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 39(1), 39-

    52.

Zyngier, D. (2014). Class size and academic results, with a focus on children from

    culturally, linguistically and economically disenfranchised communities.

    Retrieved from http://www.classsizematters.org/wp-

    content/uploads/2014/05/EvidenceBase2014Issue1.pdf

Appendix A: The Project

This project is a three-day professional development series entitled *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level.* The project is designed for general education and special education teachers who teach in inclusive settings in grades sixth through eighth. The goal is to provide teachers with the opportunity to learn more about co-teaching relationships and the inclusive classroom. *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* focuses on three topics: 1. Building positive co-teaching relationships; 2. Models of co-teaching and collaborating as co-teaching teams; 3. Self-reflection to build effective co-teaching teams. References for the project are included on the last two slides of the presentation. The presenter should use the directions and slide provided below.

Slide 1
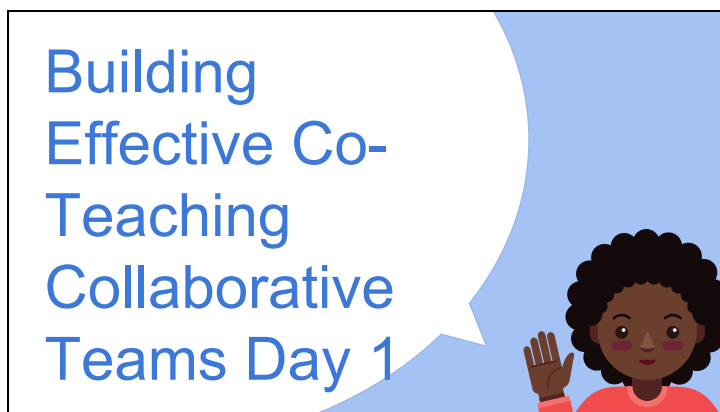
1. Have this slide displayed as participants enter the workshop area.

Slide 2
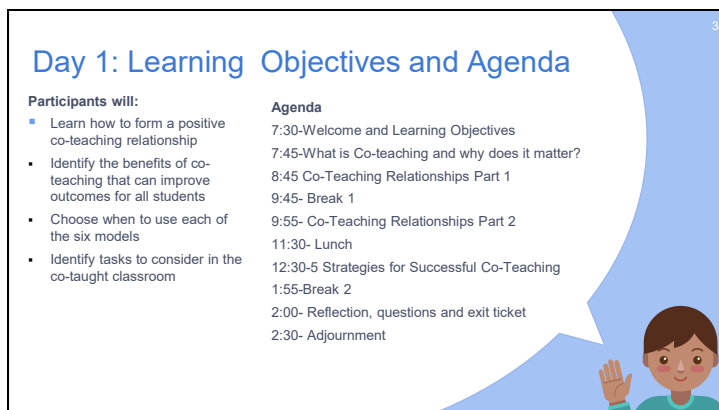
1. Welcome the participants and tell them a little about yourself, including your credentials, and why this professional development was selected for their school.
2. Allow participants to share: 1. Their name, what grade and subject they teach, and what they hope to get out of the workshop. (10 minutes)

Slide 3

1. Review the objects and agenda. (5 minutes)

Slide 4
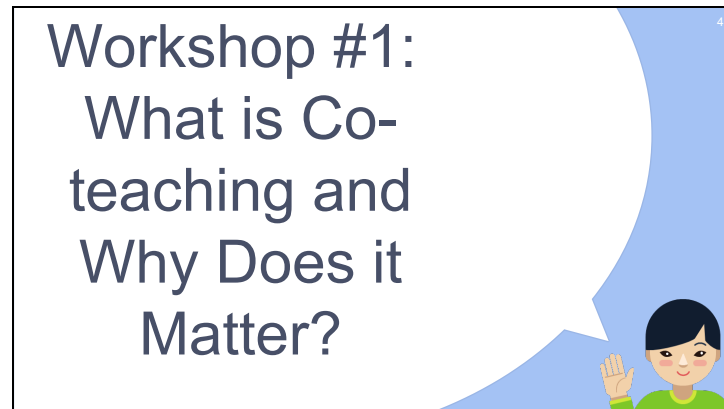
1. Introduce the workshop.

2. Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to help provide them with an understanding of co-teaching methods and how co-teaching can improve learning outcomes for all students.
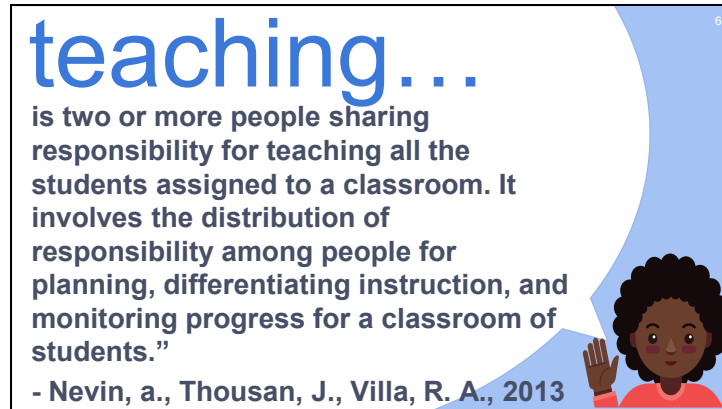
Slide 5
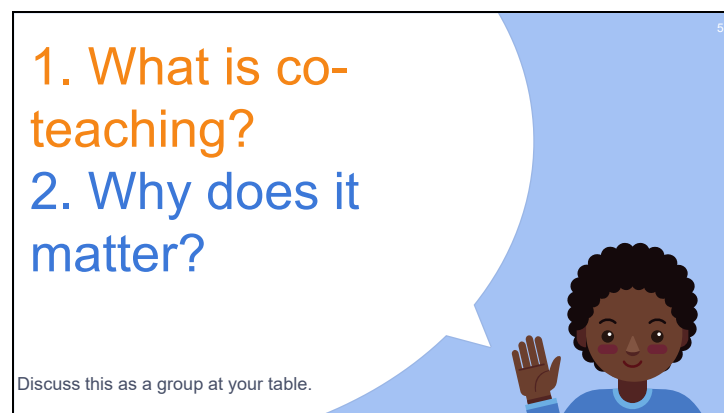
1. Instruct participants to discuss these questions at their table and write their answers on chart paper. (10 Minutes)
2. Have participants hang their charts in various locations around the room.
3. Allow participants to rotate in groups around the room and read and discuss what the other groups wrote. (10 Minutes)
4. Come back together and discuss the answers to the two questions. (10 Minutes)
(30 Minutes total)
Materials: Chart Paper, Markers, Tape

Slide 6

1. Have a volunteer read the slide.
2. Ask: How is the definition of co-teaching here different or similar to the definitions posted around the room.

(5 Minutes)

Slide 7

1. Have a volunteer read the slide.
2. Ask: How is the definition of co-teaching here different or similar to the definitions posted around the room.
(5 Minutes)

Slide 8

Before showing this slide:
1. Have teachers discuss how co-teaching benefits teachers and students. Allow teachers to share their answers. (5 Minutes)
2. Review the slide and have volunteers write some of the words or phrases that teachers in their groups discussed before seeing the slide. (5 Minutes)
3. Celebrate their prior knowledge.
4. Have a brief discussion on the points that were not discussed in the groups before them seeing the slides. (5 Minutes)
(15 Minutes total)

Slide 9

1. Watch the video.
2. Ask the following questions: What co-teaching practices described in the video are currently being implemented in your classroom? Describe any aspect of the video that surprised you about co-teaching.
(5 Minutes)

Slide 10

1. Allow participants to take a 10-minute break.

Slide 11
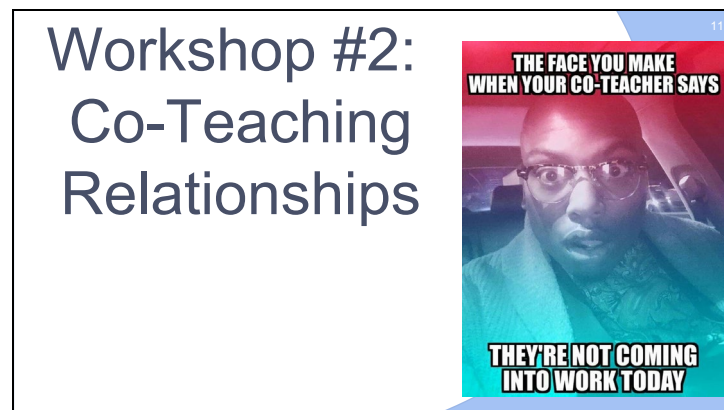
1. Have this quote displayed as teachers return from their break.
2. Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to help them establish positive co-teaching relationships with their current co-teacher.
3. Explain that, like all relationships, co-teaching teaching relationships must be nurtured to grow. (2 minutes)

Slide 12
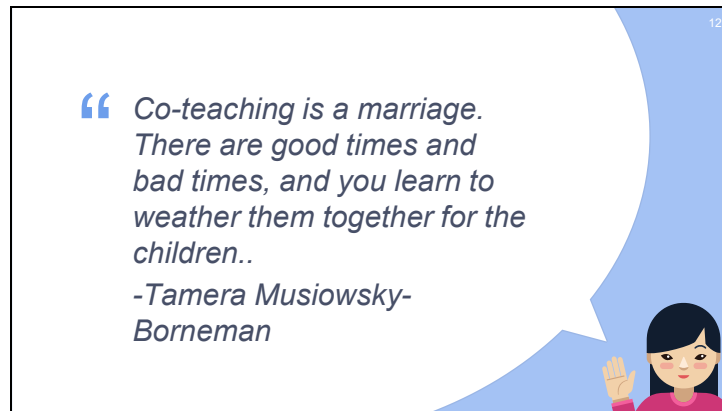
1. Read this quote to the teachers and ask a couple of teachers to share their thoughts on the quote. (3 minutes)
2. Allow groups to create a Venn-diagram comparing co-teaching and marriage. (The goal is to change teachers' perceptions of co-teaching. A difference may be marriage is forever, but a co-teaching relationship may only last one year. A similarity may be that both marriage and co-teaching affect the children who are involved). (20 minutes)
3. Allow groups to share (5 minutes)

(28 Minutes total)

Slide 13
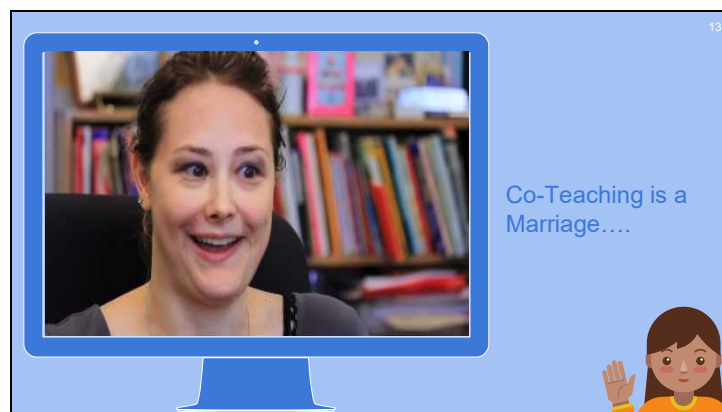
1. Watch the video.
2. Ask the group: Why do you think this co-teaching relationship is realistic or unrealistic? How did this co-teaching pair build their relationship?

(10 Minutes)

Slide 14
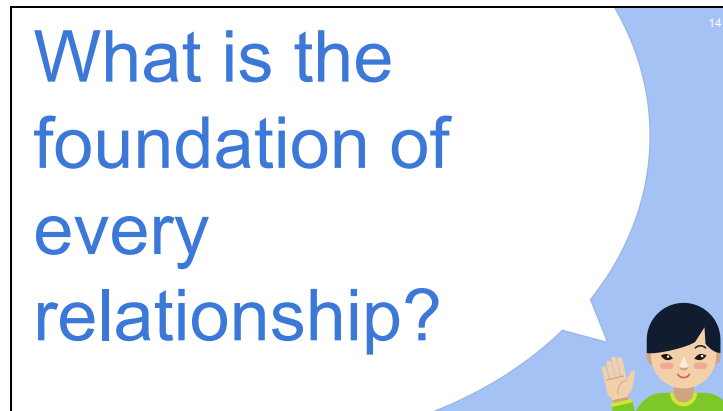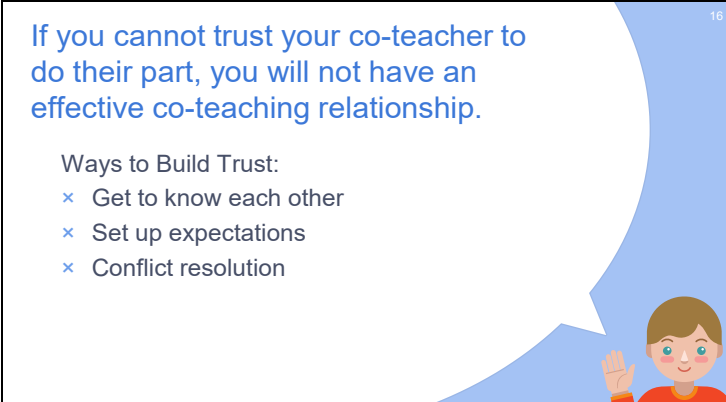
1. Allow for whole group discussion of this question (2 minutes)

Slide 15
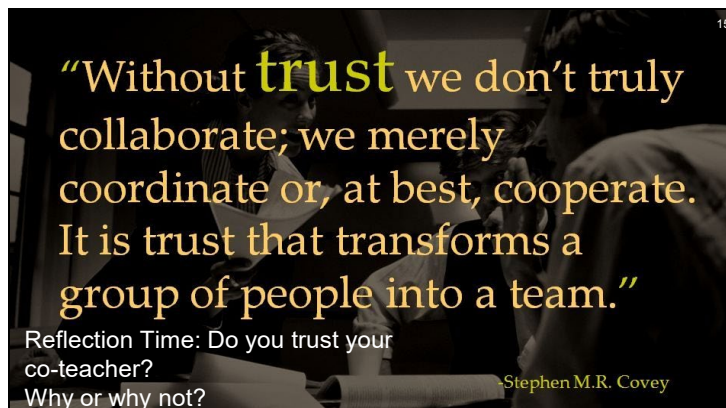
1. Read the quote and allow a few participants to elaborate on the meaning.
2. Allow time for reflection. Do not require the group to share this answer to the question aloud. (2 minutes)

Slide 16
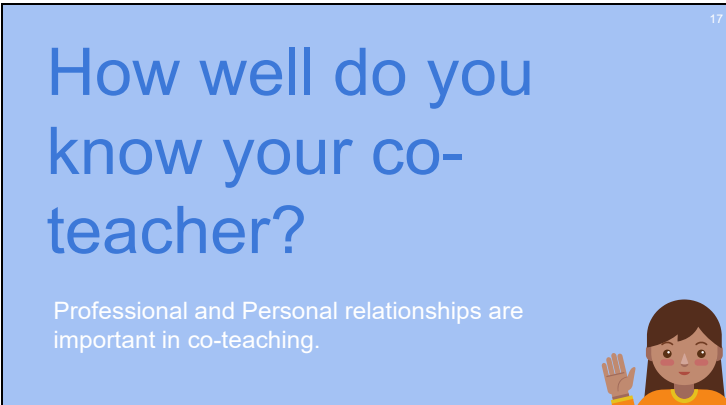
1. Review the slide.
2. Ask the participants if they know other ways to build trust and allow them to share. (5 minutes)

Slide 17

1. Tell participants, "To create a successful co-teaching classroom, it is important to learn about your co-teaching partner. It is essential to get to know each other personally, as well as professionally. In this section, there are questions you can ask your co-teacher to get to know him/her better" (2 minute)

Slide 18

1. Allow participants 7 minutes each to ask each other the questions listed. (15 minutes total including a 1-minute reminder to switch roles)

Slide 19

1. Allow participants 7 minutes each to ask each other the questions listed. (15 minutes total including a 1-minute reminder to switch roles)

Slide 20

1. Have the participants write responses on a notecard individually. Give them about 1-2 minutes.

2. Allow teams to share what they learned about their co-teachers with the group.

3. Ask: What did you learn about your co-teaching partner?
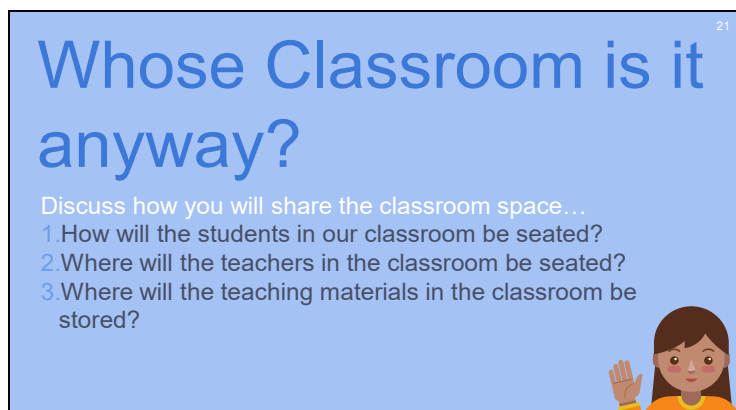
Was there anything that surprised you about their answers?

How did this activity make you feel?

How will learning this information help you work more effectively with your co-teacher? (15 minutes)

Slide 21

1. Tell the group: Just as in a marriage, you learn to share your space, you must learn to share your space in a co-teaching relationship. Teachers need to agree on the arrangement of the classroom, including materials.

2. Discuss with your co-teacher and come up with a mini-plan that addresses the following:

-How will the students in our classroom be seated? (Include information about students with IEPs, 504, etc.. - please do not use identifying information such as student names.) - Where will the teachers in the classroom be seated?

Have them write their plan on their notecard.

Slide 22

1. Review the slide.
2. Ask the participants according to the questions they just answered, what stage is their current classroom arrangement, and how can they move to the collaborative stage?
3. Explain to the teachers, "If special education teachers spend part of their day instructing in general education classrooms and another part of their day in the resource room, it is still useful to have a designated area for them to keep their materials. A desk and chair that are used only by special education teachers provide them with a "base" from which to work and contribute to their position of authority in the inclusion classroom.

Slide 23

1. Share the research with the participants (10 minutes)
2. Ask participants if they have any questions about the material that has been shared thus far.

Slide 24
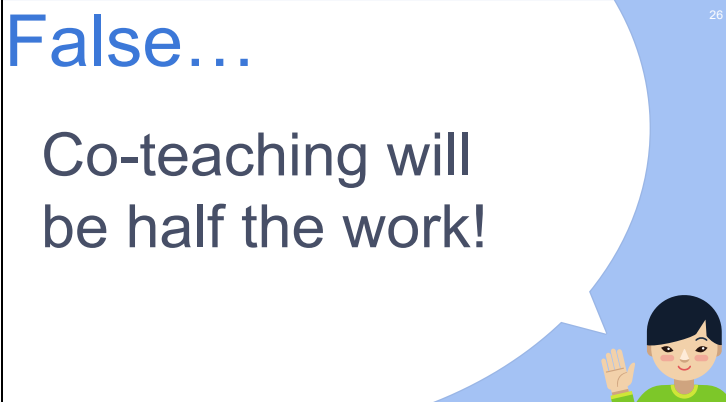
1. Allow participants to take an hour lunch break. Remind them that when they return, they will look at strategies for effective co-teaching.

Slide 25
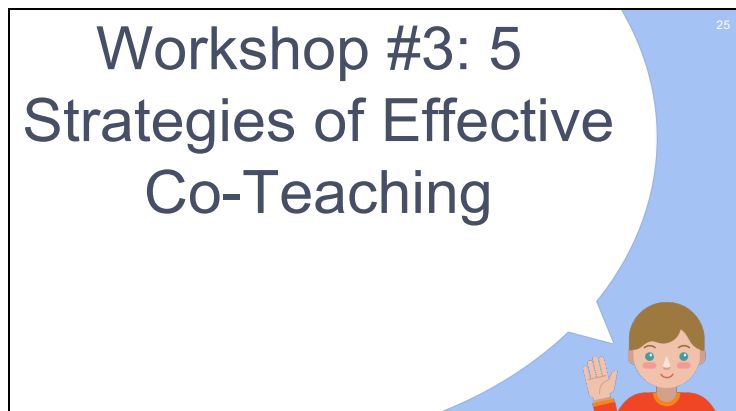
1. Have this slide displayed as teachers return from their lunch.
2. Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to provide effective co-teaching strategies that will help them be effective and productive co-teaching teams. (5 minutes)

Slide 26
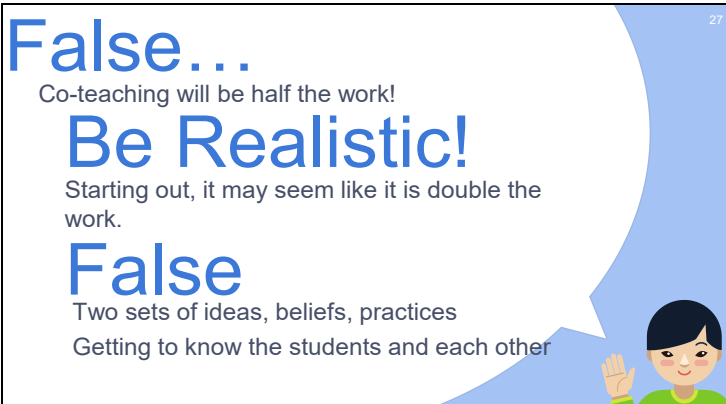
1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss what it means to be realistic, and this would apply to co-teaching. (5 Minutes)

Slide 27

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss what it means to be realistic and how this would apply to co-teaching. (5 Minutes)

Slide 28

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss what it means to be realistic and how this would apply to co-teaching. (5 Minutes)

Slide 29

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss why you cannot "wing" co-teaching (5 Minutes)

Slide 30

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss some ways in which co-teachers can plan even if they do not have collaborative planning time. (5 Minutes)

Slide 31

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss some ways in which co-teachers can plan even if they do not have collaborative planning. (5 Minutes)

Slide 32

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss why it is important to have various methods of co-teaching models in a classroom. (5 Minutes)

Slide 33

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss why it is important to have various methods of co-teaching models in a classroom. (5 Minutes)

Slide 34

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss the importance of daily communication in co-teaching. (5 Minutes)

Slide 35

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss the importance of daily communication in co-teaching. (5 Minutes)

Slide 36

1. Ask participants the true or false question.
2. Have participants show whether they believe their response is true or false by a show of hands.
3. Discuss how teachers could celebrate small successes and why it is important to do so. (5 Minutes)

Slide 37

1. Review the 5 strategies of successful co-teaching. (5 minutes)
2. Ask teachers which one will they focus on in their classrooms this year and why?

Slide 38

1. Allow co-teaching partners to discuss and write down their co-teaching conflict plan.
2. Have a few pairs share their plan with the group. (20 minutes)

Slide 39

1. Watch the example of successful co-teaching.
2. After watching the video, have participants discuss some takeaways from the video. (10 Minutes)

Slide 40

1. Answer any questions participants may have (5 Minutes)

Slide 41

1. Read the quote and ask participants to reflect on the quote and be prepared to share your thoughts tomorrow.

Slide 42

1. Have teachers answer the questions on a notecard.
   (5 Minutes)

Slide 43

Slide 44

1. Introduce the learning objectives and the agenda of Day 2. (3 minutes)

Slide 45

1. Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to expand their understanding of the 6 co-teaching models. (5 minutes)

Slide 46

1. Review the 6 co-teaching models with teachers.
2. Randomly assign groups of 6 one of the co-teaching models. (20 minutes)

Slide 47

1. Discuss as a group what should be considered when planning a co-teaching lesson. (10 Minutes)

Slide 48

Slide 49

1. Explain the group assignment to the participants.
2. Allow each group time to plan their lesson with the assigned co-teaching method using laptops, chart paper. Remind them that they will also model their co-teaching model for the group.
Have each group present to the larger group. They will have 10 minutes each (70 minutes)

153
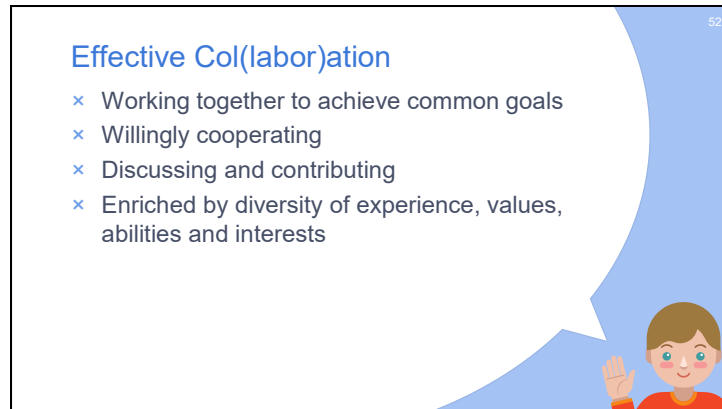
Slide 50

Slide 51

1. Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to expand their understanding of the 6 co-teaching models. (5 minutes)

Slide 52
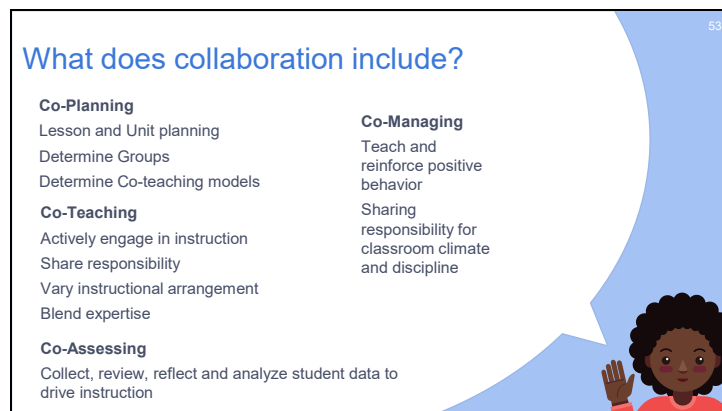
1. Discuss what collaboration means.
2. Have teachers discuss why collaboration is important at their table.
3. Circulate and listen to some of the discussions. (5 minutes)

Slide 53
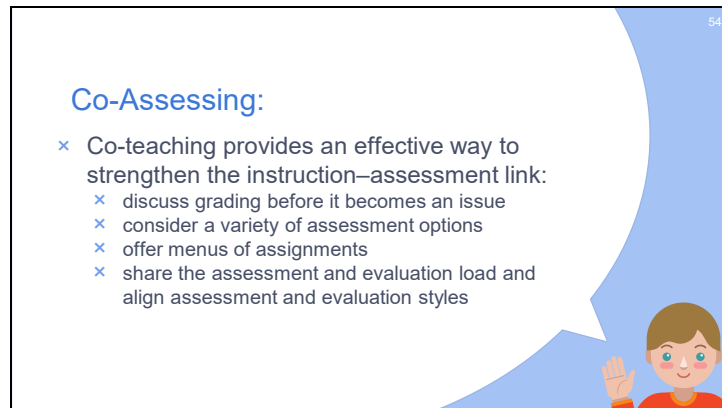
1. Ask participants to discuss what does collaboration include?
2. Allow groups to give one answer.
3. Show this slide and compare their answers with the research-based answers. (5 minutes)

Slide 54
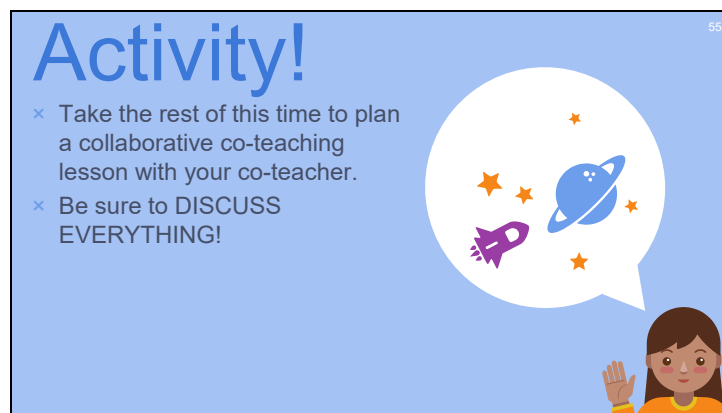
1. Review co-assessing and stress the importance of co-assessing. (5 minutes)

Slide 55

1. Allow teachers to work with their co-teachers to begin planning a collaborative lesson. Remind them that they will do this lesson and bring back information to the group on how it went. (70 minutes)

Slide 56

1. Explain the Bring Back assignment to the participants.

Slide 57

1. Answer any questions participants may have on the topic presented today. (5 minutes)

Slide 58
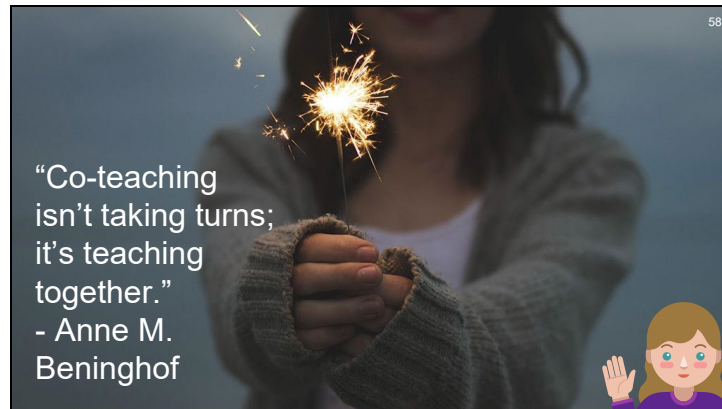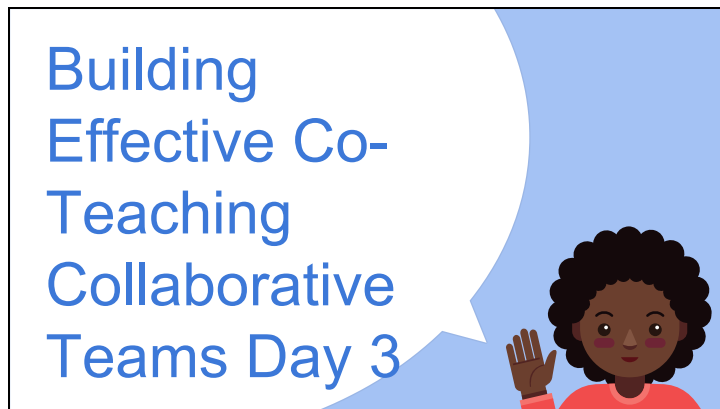
Slide 59
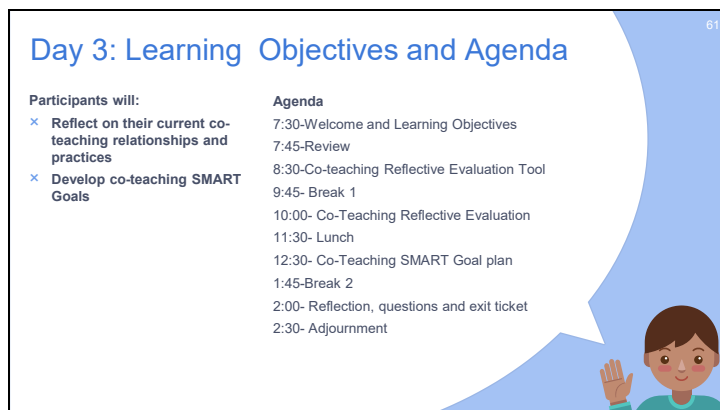
1. Allow participants to answer the questions on a notecard.

Slide 60

Slide 61

1. Introduce the day's objective and agenda.

Slide 62
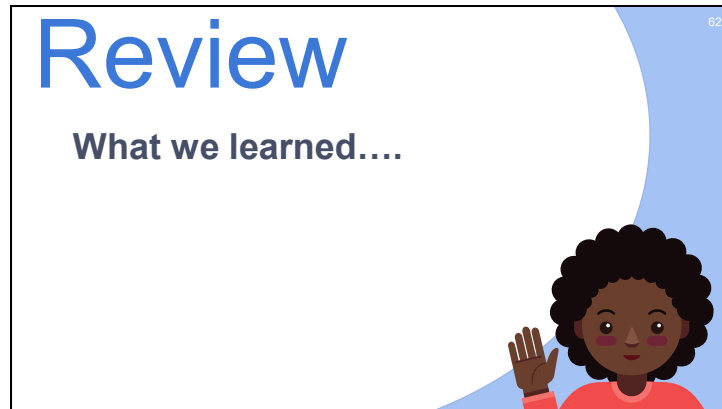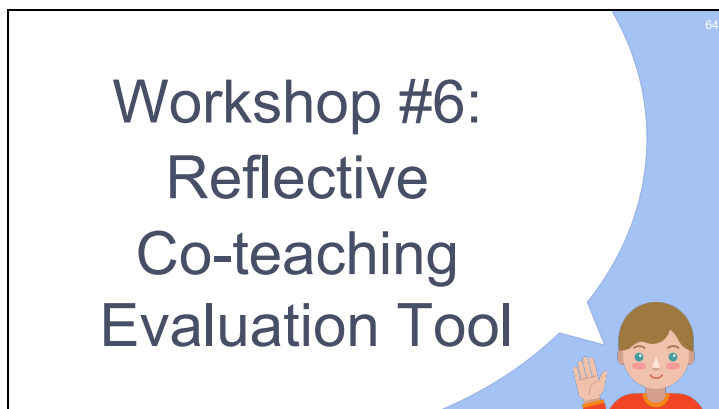
1. Allow teachers to complete a quiz on what was taught in the previous professional development lessons. (10 minutes)
2. Review the answers on the quiz (10 minutes)

Slide 63
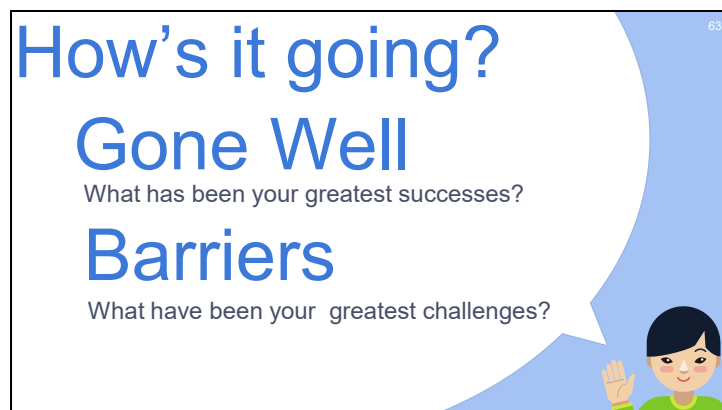
1. Ask teaching teams to discuss with their co-teaching partner how their co-teaching partnerships have been going since the last session.
2. Ask pairs to share.
3. Allow other teams to comment with solutions to some of the barriers that teachers may have experienced (30 minutes)

Slide 64
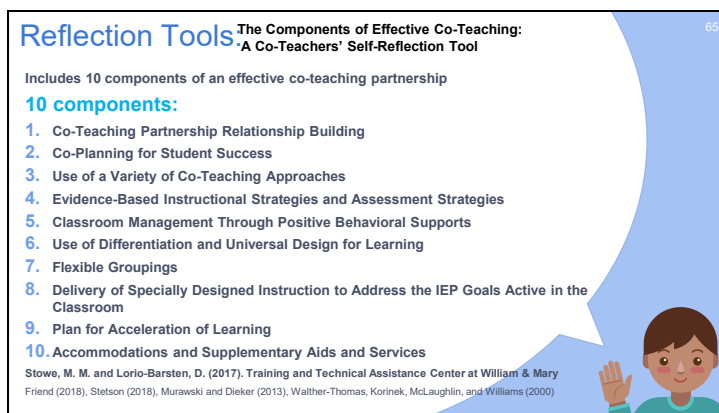
1. Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to expand their understanding of the 6 co-teaching models. (5 minutes)

Slide 65

1. Introduce the Co-teachers' self-reflection tool.
2. Have the teachers look at each section and what they are required to complete.
3. Ask for questions before they begin.
4. Review instructions with teachers. (5 minutes)

Slide 66

1. Allow teachers to reflect on the quote and share their thoughts (5 minutes).
2. Ask them how this quote would apply to the co-teaching reflection tool they are going to be completing.

Slide 67

1. Allow teachers to begin working on sections 1 and 2 of the reflection tool. (70 minutes)

Slide 68

Slide 69

1. Allow teachers to begin working on sections 3 of the reflection tool. (30 minutes)
    2. Allow teachers to discuss as a group about the discoveries they made as a team while completing the co-teaching reflection tool.
    3. Ask teachers: 1. What were their strengths? 2. What were their weaknesses? 3. How will they use the information to impact their teaching and student learning?

Slide 70

Take an
Hour Lunch
Break

70

Slide 71

Workshop #7:
Developing
SMART Goals

71

1: Introduce the workshop: Tell participants the goal of this workshop is to expand their understanding of the 6 co-teaching models. (5 minutes)

Slide 72

1. Review SMART Goal setting with teachers.

Slide 73

1. Tell participants to use the data from their co-teaching evaluation tool to create a SMART Goal. (60 Minutes)
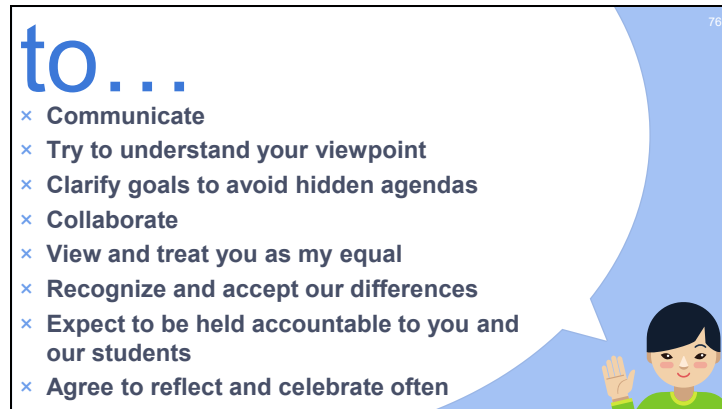
Slide 74

Slide 75
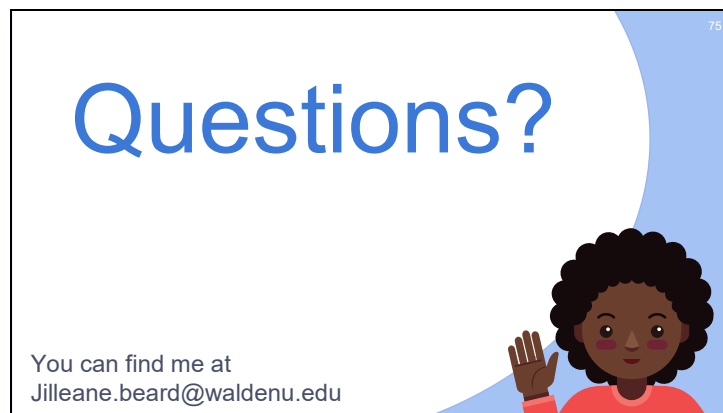
Slide 76
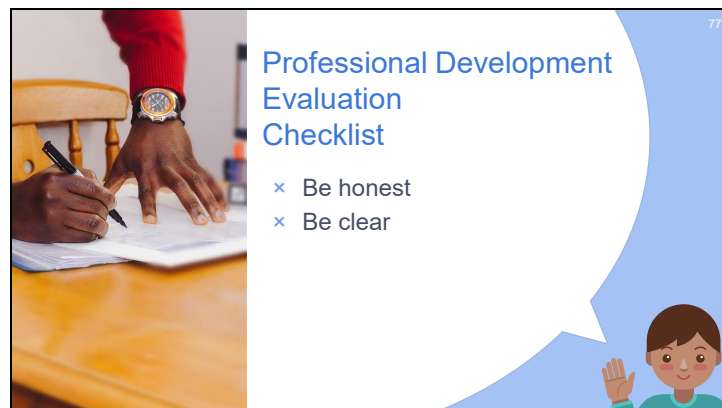
1. Ask teachers if they can agree to the things listed on this slide. Also, ask them to make one of these promises to themselves and their co-teacher verbally (10 minutes).

Slide 77

Slide 78

Slide 79

**Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level
Professional Development Evaluation Questionnaire**

1. The purpose of the professional development was: (Select one.)

    a. To communicate new ideas for me to consider using in my co-teaching classroom.
    b. To provide an opportunity for me to build a positive co-teaching relationship with my co-teacher and positively impact student learning.
    c. To help me understand inclusion.
    d. To help me apply co-teaching practices in my classroom.
    e. Not clear.
    f. Other: _____.

2. Which of the following statements best describes the usefulness of the *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* Professional Development? (Select One).

    a. It was a good start.
    b. It was a good start, but I have a lot of questions.
    c. It was a good start, and I look forward to using new ideas in my co-teaching classroom.
    d. It provided everything I need to use the new ideas in my co-teaching classroom.
    e. I don't think that these ideas will work very well in my co-teaching classroom.
    f. It's too soon to tell.

3. Indicate the extent to which the *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* Professional Development met your professional learning needs. (Select one.)

    a. It addressed my professional learning needs completely.
    b. It addressed some of my professional learning needs.
    c. It did not address my professional learning needs.
    d. This professional development did not help me much because I was already familiar with developing positive co-teaching relationships.

4. To what extent was the *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* Professional Development aligned with your school goals for improving instruction? (Select one.)

    a. The professional development was very closely aligned with goals for instructional improvement.
    b. The professional development was somewhat aligned with the goals for instructional improvement.
    c. The professional development was not aligned with the goals for instructional improvement.
    d. The professional development was inconsistent with the goals for instructional improvement.
    e. I don't know.

5. Which of the following statement best describes the support that you received from your principal to participate in *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* Professional Development*?* (Select One).

    a. The principal strongly encouraged me to participate.
    b. The principal encouraged me to participate.
    c. The principal tried to discourage me from participating.
    d. I did not discuss the professional development with the principal before participating.

6. Which of the following statements best describes the support that you received from your principal to apply what you learned in Day 1 and Day 2 of *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* in your classroom? (Select one.)

    a. The principal has encouraged me to apply what I learned in my co-teaching classroom.
    b. The principal has encouraged me to apply what I learned in my co-teaching classroom and has offered to help.
    c. The principal has not encouraged me to apply what I learned in my classroom.
    d. I have not discussed what I learned with my principal.

7. Which of the following statements best describes the support that you received from your co-teacher to apply what you learned in Day 1 and Day 2 of *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* in your classroom? (Select one.)

    a. My co-teacher has encouraged me to apply what I learned in my co-teaching classroom.
    b. My co-teacher has encouraged me to apply what I learned in my co-teaching classroom and has offered to help.
    c. My co-teacher has not encouraged me to apply what I learned in my classroom.
    d. I have not discussed what I learned with my co-teacher.

8. Which of the following statements best describes how *Building Effective Co-Teaching Collaborative Teams on the Middle School Level* compares with other professional development in which you have participated during the past six months? (Select one.)

    a. This professional development was more useful than other professional development that I have participated in.
    b. This professional development was about the same as other professional development that I have participated in.
    c. This professional development was less useful than other professional development that I have participated in.
    d. I don't have an opinion.
    e. I don't have an opinion because I have not participated in any other professional development in the last six months.

Appendix B: Email Invitation

Hello,

I am Jilleane Beard-Archie, a student at Walden University in the Education department,

pursuing a doctoral degree in Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction.

I would like to commend you on your decision to pursue a career in education. It is not an

easy career path, but the intrinsic rewards are plentiful. Because you are currently a

middle school teacher who teaches an inclusive setting at my study site with at least one

year's experience, I am inviting you to participate in my research study on the successes,

challenges, and needs of teachers while implementing inclusive teaching practices. The

purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the successes, challenges, and needs

of teachers while they are implementing research-based practices.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

• Participate in a confidential, individual interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes.

• Participate in member checks as necessary to ensure accurate interpretation of the

interview.

The results of this study will provide your school with new knowledge about how to

prepare teachers to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings and help fill the

gap in the literature. Please contact me for more information or to volunteer for this study

via e-mail at Jilleane.beard@waldenu.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Jilleane Beard-Archie

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Opening: Welcome, and thank you for choosing to participate in my doctoral study about the successes, challenges, and needs of implementing inclusion practices.

The interview will take about 45-60 minutes, during which you will be asked a series of brief questions that will help me gather information on the topic. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during this interview, we can stop. I would also like to record the interview. All the information recorded will be written down after the interview. As the interview is occurring, I will write down thoughts about the information, and I will share what I wrote after the interview so that you can confirm whether what I have written is correct or not. Please keep in mind; this interview is confidential. Your thoughts and feelings will be greatly appreciated and are taken without judgment. Your experiences are valuable and will contribute to this reach and the field of education. Do you have any questions before we start?

1. What is your official school vision for the current co-teaching model?

2. Please describe the current co-teaching model used at your school.

3. Describe the general education teachers' role in that model.

4. Describe the special education teachers' role in that model.

5. What additional adult support is provided to students in inclusive classrooms at your school?

6. How are you prepared to teach students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms?

7. How do general education teachers and special education teachers collaborate to meet the needs of students with disabilities in an inclusive classroom?

8. Please share your own experience by describing an hour in which you co-teach at your school.

    a. What will a stranger arriving at your classroom see?

    b. How did you prepare with your co-teacher for that class?

9. During your experience at this school, what inclusive practices do you feel have had the greatest impact on student achievement?

    a. Why do you feel that these inclusive practices have had the greatest impact on student achievement?

10. What inclusive practices do you feel have had the least impact on student achievement?

    a. Why do you feel that these inclusive practices have had the least impact on student achievement?

11. How often are those best practices implemented in your classroom?

12. In what ways have you been supported in the current co-teaching model?

13. What have been the most successful aspects of implementing the current co-teaching inclusion model?

14. What barriers or challenges have you faced when implementing the current co-teaching model?

15. If you could redefine the role of the special education teachers within the co-teaching model at your school, how would you redefine it?

16. If you could redefine the role of the general education teacher within the co-teaching model at your school, how would you redefine it?

17. What changes would you recommend to the current co-teaching model?

18. Describe any additional adult support you feel is needed in inclusive classrooms at your school?

19. Describe any additional support you feel teachers need to support them to have the greatest impact on student achievement in their inclusive classrooms.

Closing: I appreciate your taking the time to share your thoughts on teaching students with special needs in inclusive settings. I will email you a written transcription for you to review for accuracy. Please respond within a week on any revisions that may be needed. Thank you again for sharing your thoughts and feelings with me. Have a great day!