2022

Collaborative Practices Between General Education and Special Education Teachers in Middle School Inclusion Classrooms

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Walden University
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Abstract

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by

Wanda Ray Washington

MA, Grand Canyon University, 2011

BS, University of Georgia, 2007

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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December 2021

Abstract

To improve the learning of students with disabilities, the collaboration between general education and special education teachers in middle school inclusion classrooms needs to be increased. This basic qualitative study aimed to explore general education and special education teachers' coteaching relationships in inclusion classrooms. Pratt's achieving symbiosis theory was used to frame the study. The research question investigated the difficulties middle school general education and special education teachers encountered that prevented them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in the inclusion classroom. A basic qualitative study was used to gain insight from certified, middle school coteachers in inclusion classrooms who taught in an inclusion classroom for at least one period per day, and consented to participate in the study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with five general education and five special education teachers. Thematic coding was used to identify categories and themes by revealing common threads of collaborative practices when serving students with disabilities. Four themes emerged: (a) lack of equality in the classroom for the special educator (viewed as an assistant), (b) coplanning time needed for effective coteaching, (c) importance of relationships in coteaching, and (d) not enough administrative involvement. The results may be used to inform leaders of the importance of collaborative relationships between coteachers, as well as the need to improve coteaching relationships. School and district leaders could use the results to inform changes that could improve coteaching. Creating highly effective cotaught classrooms can increase the learning of students with disabilities while they are benefiting from being served in an inclusion setting.

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Dedication

This doctoral study is dedicated to my husband, children, church members, and in memory of my “daddy,” who all were extremely supportive and understanding throughout this journey. My daddy always said, “Your attitude determines your altitude.” I have come this far because of the positive words of encouragement that my family has given me. The challenges have been innumerable throughout this process, and there were times when I questioned whether this goal was reachable. I am the woman of God that God desired me to become because of the words of encouragement and support that I have received from my family and friends.

Acknowledgments

My acknowledgments are to God, who is the head of my life, and my husband, who believed in me when I struggled to believe in myself. Special acknowledgments to my family, especially my children, who cheered me on when “mom” needed your words of encouragement the most. Dr. Toledo, Dr. Elroy, Ms. Patrice Ayala, Mrs. Toni Capers, and Ms. Whitney Hinnant, thank you for your help throughout the process. Finally, thank you to Dr. Schroll, Dr. Hoffman, and Dr. Mohammed for providing your leadership and support throughout this journey of me becoming a scholarly doctoral member of Walden University.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Collaborative teaching or coteaching is a common instructional element in inclusion classrooms (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). School leaders expect general education and special education teachers to work together in a common educational space to teach students with and without disabilities. Collaboration is the heart of inclusion, and it is critical that teachers continually improve collaborative strategies to serve the needs of students with disabilities (SWD) effectively (Florian, 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore general education and special education teachers' coteaching relationships in inclusion classrooms regarding adequate planning time, parity, and interpersonal differences, and to provide recommendations with the purpose of helping teachers to develop, obtain, and maintain effective inclusion classrooms.

Collaboration is effective when inclusion coteachers work together to achieve common goals (Pratt, 2014). The symbiosis theory is satisfied when inclusion teachers work together to create an effective collaborative classroom in which they are building an effective relationship with each other and their students (McWhirter et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014). The theory has three stages: initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment (Pratt, 2014). The first stage is the initiation that describes the expectation of teachers (Pratt, 2014). The second stage is the symbiosis stage that seeks to build relationships between inclusion teachers (McWhirter et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014). The third stage is the fulfillment stage in which inclusion teachers have parity in the classroom (Pratt, 2014). The current study focused on the impact these three stages have on collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal differences among inclusion teachers.

The study may positively affect social change by extending the literature on collaboration through the insights of general education and special education teachers on how to improve the collaboration between coteachers. Also, colleges and universities may use the results to suggest to leaders the importance of providing collaborative training to all teachers. The study results may also encourage middle school leaders to create teaching programs for all coteachers in inclusion classrooms.

Pratt's (2014) conceptual framework of achieving symbiosis theory and critical research used to support the problem, purpose, research questions, significance of the study, and rationale for improving the collaboration between coteachers in inclusion classrooms are described in this chapter. Also, the collaborative difficulties teachers encounter in inclusion classrooms, as well as the conceptual framework, are discussed in this chapter. This was a critical study because the push to place SWDs in inclusion classrooms continues to increase; however, schools are expecting coteachers to collaborate to meet the needs of their diverse learners (Peery, 2017). Improving the collaboration between general education and special education teachers may enable teachers to meet the needs of SWDs in inclusion classrooms. Teachers work with students who have diverse learning needs (Mader, 2017). According to Mader (2017), general education teachers take an average of two credit classes that are pertinent for teaching SWDs during their teacher preparation studies. On the other hand, special education teachers receive all of their training/instruction in their teacher preparation program to learn how to work with students with special needs in an educational setting.

There is a gap in practice among general education and special education teachers collaborating in the classroom when teaching SWDs.

Background

Millions of students in the United States receive special education services (Kirby, 2016). According to Kirby (2016), "it is essential to examine the current and past legislation to determine the effectiveness of special education in its current form" in meeting the needs of SWDs (p.178). In the late 1960s, a movement was started by parents so that SWDs would have full access to the general curriculum and would not experience separation from their peers (Yell, 2011). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142) reiterates students' rights to receive free and appropriate education (Kirby, 2016). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has been revised several times since being signed into law in 1975 (Dragoo & Library of Congress, 2018). In 1990, IDEA Amendments (IDEA P.L. 101-467) required schools to provide SWDs the opportunity to be served in general education classrooms whenever possible (Al Hazmzi & Ahmad, 2018). In 2015, the implementation of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced No Child Left Behind Act to benefit SWDs (Darrow, 2016). ESSA is a national law that holds public schools accountable for students learning and ensuring their achievement chances are equal. ESSA also ensures that students with special needs are provided equal opportunity. All students have the right to public education, including SWDs.

Mainstreaming efforts have focused on bringing SWDs who were being served in separate classrooms back into general education classes (Friend, 2016). The presumption

has been that SWDs will be able to find success once mainstreamed, but without the help of specialized assistance within the regular education classes, many students continue to struggle (Peery, 2017). According to Friend (2016), SWDs can achieve success when they receive instruction from coteachers who combine their expert training to meet the needs of their diverse learners.

Inclusion replaced mainstreaming for students with special needs. Inclusion continues to be the wave of the current reform, and in its ideal form is the closest to effective coteaching (Koh & Shin, 2017; Peery, 2017). SWDs are in an inclusion classroom and receiving support from special education teachers (Peery, 2017). Inclusion has become a universal expectation, and teachers now work together for the benefit of all students (Friend, 2016). The term *coteaching* was developed to denote the relationship that the general education teacher and the specialist must have so that all students perform well (Peery, 2017).

Coteaching is an instructional model that meets the requirements mandated for inclusion and assessment of SWDs by bringing together the expertise of the general education and special education teachers to collaborate (Friend, 2016). According to Baines et al. (2015), coteachers must work collaboratively to be effective in inclusion classrooms. General education and special education teachers must combine their expertise to meet the challenges and create effective inclusion practices (Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). The challenges that now arise are geared toward general education and special education teachers finding the planning time to work and create the most effective inclusion practices. According to Pratt et al. (2017), teachers face “establishing

co-planning routines" (p. 2). Coteachers do not usually schedule common planning time to work together and plan lessons (Friend, 2016). Another challenge for coteachers is the instructional approach in which general education teachers may focus on the performance-oriented approach to learning and special education teachers may focus on the mastery-oriented approach (King-Sears & Strogilos, 2020).

The current study provided data on difficulties coteachers are experiencing collaborating in inclusion classrooms. I also examined teachers' insight regarding the barriers related to planning lessons, parity between coteachers, and their interpersonal differences. Pratt et al. (2017) also mentioned that "special education teachers often act as assistants, creating an imbalance in use of expertise and skills" (p. 11). The lack of parity in inclusion classroom prevents special education teachers from demonstrating their knowledge. The results of the current study may reveal the difficulties teachers are experiencing and which strategies are necessary for creating the most effective inclusion classrooms.

The achieving symbiosis theory describes how coteachers work together effectively to teach SWDs in inclusion classrooms (Pratt, 2014). The instructional approach that schools are using to ensure that teachers are meeting students' needs warranted further review (Pratt et al., 2017). The three stages of achieving symbiosis (initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment) were used to investigate the impact they have on collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal differences among general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The current study was necessary

because coteachers need to be able to work together to meet their students' needs effectively.

Problem Statement

In today's educational climate, collaboration, inclusion, and coteaching are the standard practices (Florian, 2017). The problem is that general education and special education teachers show a lack of symbiotic relationships in the inclusion classroom because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016). Lack of adequate planning time makes it challenging to develop a coteaching relationship. According to Strogilos et al. (2016), coteachers often plan lessons separately rather than collaboratively and spend time revamping instruction to accommodate the SWDs while in the classroom. Therefore, inequality is seen in the classroom and is attributed to the special education teacher not being familiar with the content material (Pratt, 2014). The inequality is noticeable in the way special education teachers often act as assistants to the general education teacher, creating a lack of parity in the classroom (Bešić et al., 2017; Pratt, 2014; Yada & Savolainen, 2017).

Furthermore, addressing the tension among teachers because of the lack of parity reflected in their interpersonal differences toward the inclusion of SWDs provided details of practices (Fluijt et al., 2016; McWhirter et al., 2016). Florian (2017) suggested that collaboration is a vital part of inclusion, and coteachers must know how to work together to meet the needs of students in the inclusion classrooms effectively. The problem I addressed was general education and special education teachers have a lack of symbiotic

relationships when collaborating in inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences (see Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016).

Paugach and Peck (2016) stated that teachers' preservice training does not require teachers to plan instruction together for teaching students with special needs. Teachers may not know how to work together in the planning process if they are not given practical guidelines. Nevertheless, in inclusion classrooms, general education and special education teachers are responsible for teaching these students. Collaboration is a vital part of inclusion; meeting students' needs requires teachers to work together (Florian, 2017). However, coteachers continue to have difficulties collaborating. Exploring collaborative relationships that teachers are having in an inclusion environment can extend the literature on how to improve planning, parity, and interpersonal differences (McWhirter et al., 2016; Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018). General education and special education teachers struggle when it comes to working together because each wants to be the expert instead of collaborating (Friend, 2016). The impact coteachers have with collaboration in creating an effective inclusion classroom can be the determining factor in whether the three stages of achieving symbiosis theory have been achieved.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms. I used data gathered from interviews to identify emerging themes related to the impact that the three stages of achieving symbiosis theory (initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment)

have on teachers' collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal differences in inclusion classrooms. The results of this basic qualitative study may reveal the experiences of general education and special education teachers and may provide recommendations on collaborative strategies currently used in the classrooms. Also, participants were asked for their insight regarding their suggestions to improve the collaboration between coteachers. I will use the results to present researched-based ways to improve the collaboration between coteachers. The results may also inform education leaders of the importance of collaborative strategies that are effective in solving problems between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Research Question

The following research question was used to guide this study was to explore and understand the relationships between co-teachers in inclusion classrooms. What difficulties do middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms?

Conceptual Framework

I explored methods used by coteachers to identify common themes concerning Pratt's (2014) three stages of achieving symbiosis theory. According to Pratt's achieving symbiosis theory, all elements of symbiosis (collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal difference) need to be met before the cotaught inclusion classroom can function at its optimum level (McWhirter et al., 2016). In the current study, the problem was that general education and special education teachers show a lack of a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of

parity, and interpersonal differences. Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) suggested that "before working on collaboration and communication skills, educators need to embrace the mindset that inclusion is an issue of both equity and social justice" (p. 31). It is important to gain an understanding of the problems that coteachers are encountering when teaching in inclusion classrooms (Boardman et al., 2016). Exploring these collaborative methods may improve the communication between coteachers to create productive inclusion classrooms. Achieving symbiosis among general education and special education teachers is necessary to collaborate effectively. Effective collaboration between teachers is essential in meeting the needs of students in an inclusion classroom (Koh & Shin, 2017).

The achieving symbiosis theory has three stages (initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment) that are necessary for creating most effective inclusion classrooms (Pratt, 2014). The first stage is the initiation stage, which explains the expectations of coteaching. In this first stage of the planning process, two teachers come together to teach in the same classroom. The second stage is the symbiosis spin; teachers seek to build relationships with one another by sharing their interpersonal differences as they relate to SWDs' needs (McWhirter et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014). Teachers can gain insight into the comparability for teaching in the same classroom setting. Finally, the third stage is fulfillment; teachers have parity within the classroom. Coteachers can gain equality by collaborating and working together to achieve common goals (Kelly, 2018).

Achieving symbiosis theory was used to study how teachers work together to build working relationships. The relationship built between teachers helps them create

parity in the classroom so that the strategies and methods they use will enhance the teaching of SWDs (Fluijt et al., 2016). The research question allowed me to investigate the difficulties middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms. Throughout the interview process, the investigation of collaborating difficulties teachers have helped me identify methods coteachers use in their classroom. The investigative process included analyzing the data and categorizing themes for the recommendation of practices to improve the collaboration between coteachers. More details of the conceptual framework are presented in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

The basic qualitative study was designed to explore the coteaching relationships of five general education and five special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The investigation focused on the lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences between the inclusion teachers. I examined the problems using Pratt's (2014) three stages of group development for building effective teaching relationships. Initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment were used to address the interaction teachers have in inclusion classrooms. The research question addressed the difficulties coteachers have as related to the three stages and ways to improve collaboration between coteachers. Teachers were allowed to offer their insights on practices that are pertinent to create effectively cotaught inclusion classrooms. According to Babbie (2017), the choice of a basic qualitative design allowed participants to offer facts that are relevant to real-life experiences that they encounter in the classroom.

Qualitative studies include different designs in the field of education. I used a basic qualitative design to gain an understanding of the relationships general education and special education teachers have in their inclusion classrooms, and to gain insight into how teachers' collaboration can be improved to have effective inclusion classrooms. Pratt (2014) used a semistructured interview protocol with participant questions in her study. I asked teachers questions relating to the practices that they use in the classroom. The questioning process included probing questions that relate to adequate planning time, parity in the classroom, and teachers' interpersonal differences about the needs of SWDs served in inclusion classrooms. Teachers were able to elaborate by offering suggestions on practices that need improvement to create more effective cotaught inclusion classrooms.

I used themes from the interviews to determine common ideas (see Richards & Hemphill, 2018). The data obtained from the general education and special education teachers provided information that may extend the literature on what collaborative strategies teachers use in inclusion classrooms. The results from exploring the connection between the different categories assisted in identifying themes that may impact social change. The findings may provide collaborative strategies that are effective in solving collaboration problems between general and special teachers in inclusion classrooms

Definitions

The following terms were used operationally in this study:

Achieving symbiosis: A theory that describes how coteachers should work together to create effective teaching relationships within cotaught inclusion classrooms (Pratt, 2014).

Coteaching: An instructional approach that comprises a general education teacher and a special education teacher working collectively in the same classroom sharing responsibilities for the goal of teaching all students (Lochner et al., 2019).

Inclusion class: A classroom setting that has at least two teachers and can deliver strong and creative lessons that meet the behavioral and academic needs of SWDs (Friend, 2016; Wexler et al., 2015).

Least restrictive environment: Part of a law that mandates SWDs to receive their education in the general education classroom setting to the maximum extent applicable with their peers (Brock, 2018).

Teachers' collaboration: Structural models used by coteachers that include common planning time, professional learning communities, critical friend groups, and the activity of working with someone to make something (Emmons & Zager, 2017; Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015).

Assumptions

There were several assumptions in this study. One assumption was general education and special education teachers would provide honest answers about what takes place in their inclusion classrooms. Another assumption was that both teachers should take equal responsibility for meeting the needs of all SWDs in the inclusion setting. Findings from the study may promote an understanding of the collaborative relationships

between general education and special education teachers and how to improve collaboration to have effectively cotaught inclusion classrooms.

Scope and Delimitations

The basic qualitative study took place at one middle school for Grades 6 through 8 in the Southeast United States. Invitations to participate in the study were sent to five general education and five special education teachers who teach in inclusion classrooms. The middle school was the research site because the inclusion setting is a common placement for SWDs and requires two teachers: a general education and special education teacher. Elementary classrooms were not selected because some elementary students are pulled out of the inclusion classrooms to receive direct instruction services. The achieving symbiosis theory was used in the study to gain an understanding of the collaborative relationships between general education and special education teachers. Understanding the problems such as lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences may help school districts in the United States establish collaborative strategies that meet students' needs.

The results of the study may not meet transferability requirements to apply to other school districts because the study took place in one school in north Georgia. Transferability is the process of providing a thick and rich description that allows the reader to conclude whether the results are transferable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). However, the potential transferability of the results of the study may not be possible because of the small number of participants.

Limitations

All studies have possible weaknesses that researchers cannot control (Boardman et al., 2016). There were some limitations in the current study. The study took place at one school in the Southeast United States in a district that has students with diverse learning abilities. I am a special education teacher; therefore, I may have inadvertently imparted some biases and interpretations based on my personal experiences. Although the focus was on obtaining the purest information from the participants in an objective manner, my deep interest and passion for this study topic may have influenced the interpretations and descriptions.

I took steps to avoid possible bias by addressing the potential limitation of the study. Biases in research studies are possible if the researcher creates interview questions that inadvertently lead the participants to answer the questions according to what the researcher wants to achieve in the study (Thomas, 2017). The efforts may cause issues with the credibility of the study results (Thomas, 2017). I took notes of possible bias to identify problems that may have skewed the results of the study. I worked hard to maintain focus on the participants' responses throughout the research process.

Significance

The results of this study could help bridge the gap in comprehending the collaboration experiences of general education and special education teachers in middle school inclusion classrooms. This study may contribute to addressing a situation that is present in the public school system: a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences between general education and special education teachers. The

results of this study may impact social change by providing insight into how coteachers collaborate in inclusion classrooms, what takes place during their lesson planning time and instructional time in class, and their overall interpersonal feeling toward inclusion. The study may positively impact social change by providing collaborative strategies that are effective in solving collaboration problems between coteachers in inclusion classrooms. Improving the collaboration between inclusion teachers may help coteachers work together in one classroom and may improve teachers' chances of achieving symbiosis. There needs to be ongoing studies on this subject to expand its potential for identifying collaborative strategies that are applicable in a variety of settings.

Summary

SWDs in inclusion classrooms continue to increase in school systems, and coteachers are struggling to effectively collaborate in cotaught inclusion classrooms. The study of the collaboration between coteachers was introduced in this chapter. The research question was stated, and detailed information about the conceptual framework was offered as it related to coteachers creating collaboration necessary for achieving symbiosis. The common requirements in today's classrooms were addressed, including collaboration and the need for coteachers to collaborate to create an effective inclusion classroom (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Pratt, 2014). The current study focused on teachers' experiences with collaboration and how to improve the collaboration among coteachers in inclusion classrooms. In Chapter 2, I review recent studies on collaborative strategies that may be effective in solving collaboration problems between teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In school systems today, the collaboration between general education and special education teachers is vital for meeting the diverse needs of students. The problem is general education and special education teachers show a lack of symbiotic relationships in inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms.

According to Florian (2017), collaboration is the heart of inclusion. Teachers in inclusion classrooms who continually improve their collaborative relationships can achieve symbiosis (Pratt, 2014). Achieving symbiosis is how teachers collaboratively work together to achieve common goals. In this chapter, current studies related to collaborative practices coteachers use in their classroom are reviewed, along with combined strategies necessary for improving the relationship between coteachers. Additionally, the terms *inclusion* and *coteaching* are expanded upon and described in this chapter to clarify how the terms relate to the collaboration between coteachers. Finally, I address the three stages of Pratt's (2014) achieving symbiosis theory related to teachers having effective inclusion classrooms.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted numerous search attempts in various databases such as SAGE, ProQuest, EBSCO, and ERIC to identify peer-reviewed articles written in the last 5 years. These databases were used to find scholarly and seminal articles related to general

education and special education teachers' collaborative practices in inclusion classrooms, along with addressing collaborative practices that are necessary for improving collaboration between coteachers. The search terms included *co-taught, coteaching, inclusion, inclusion classroom, general education teachers, special-education teachers, least restrictive environment, collaborative practices, teacher collaboration, achieving symbiosis, Initiation, Symbiosis Spin, Fulfillment, lack of parity, lack of adequate planning,* and *interpersonal differences*. I explored general and special education teachers' lack of symbiotic relationships when collaborating in inclusion classrooms by examining Pratt's (2014) three stages of achieving symbiosis theory and how it relates to the current study. The literature review included studies of teachers' points of view using journal articles published between 2016 and 2020 with the terms achieving symbiosis, coteaching, inclusion classroom, least restrictive environment, and teacher collaboration. Additional sources searched were the Walden University Academic guide, the Walden University Education Research Page, and the Boolean Operators guide that offered concise instructions on finding the different sources of research.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and teachers' interpersonal differences can affect coteachers' collaborative relationships (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016). Pratt's (2014) theory of achieving symbiosis was used to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion

classrooms. The framework includes three stages of achieving symbiosis: initiation that explains the coteacher's expectation, symbiosis spin that occurs when teachers seek to build a relationship with one another, and fulfillment that occurs when teachers gain parity in the classroom (Kelly, 2018; Pratt, 2014).

In the past decade, the United States has experienced an increase in SWDs placed in inclusion classrooms (McWhirter et al., 2016). The placement has caused U.S. teachers to "experience diverse student characteristics and greater complexity of student learning needs" (McWhirter et al., 2016, p. 1). With this move, there has been a growing need to call attention to the collaborative relationships coteachers have that affects them in meeting the varied needs of SWDs in inclusion classrooms (McWhirter et al., 2016). Collaboration is an integral part of inclusion; however, inclusion teachers are still having difficulties creating effective collaborative relationships in inclusion classrooms. Teachers are developing classroom practices with the implementation of ESSA. By state law, the Georgia Department of Education (2015, 2016) requires special education services for all SWDs. Subsequently, problems affecting the collaboration between coteachers in inclusion classrooms include a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences that prevent students from receiving services (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016). Mora-Ruano et al. (2019) proposed that the collaboration between coteachers is essential in the inclusion classroom; teachers must meet the needs of all of their students.

Achieving Symbiosis Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was the achieving symbiosis theory. Achieving symbiosis theory describes how coteachers should work together to create effective teaching relationships within cotaught inclusion classrooms (Pratt, 2014). For teachers to be effective in inclusion classrooms, they must cooperatively work together to develop real relationships (Weiss et al., 2017). The collaboration between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms is to instruct students with diverse abilities ensuring that they achieve their goals in school (Florian, 2017).

Pratt's (2014) three stages of achieving symbiosis are initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment. The first stage is the initiation stage, which describes the teacher's expectation. Two teachers cooperatively work together to teach their students in inclusion classrooms. They are responsible for creating and designing lessons that meet their students' behavioral and academic needs (Friend, 2016). According to Friend and Cook (2007), coplanning enables teachers to design lessons that meet their diverse learning needs. Common planning time between the two teachers and teacher collaboration are integral when teaching SWDs (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). Building the relationship between teachers enables them to create an effective inclusion classroom, thereby achieving symbiosis.

The second stage is the symbiosis spin that allows teachers to build effective relationships. Real relationships are established when teachers cooperatively work together (Weiss et al., 2017). They must be willing to share their interpersonal differences as they relate to their needs and the students' needs (Weiss et al., 2017). Buli-Holmberg

and Jeyaprathaban (2016) suggested that building relationships between inclusion teachers creates parity in the classroom. Parity between the teachers empowers them to share the responsibility within the classroom (van Velzen et al., 2019). For example, special education teachers may be encouraged to play a more active role in lesson planning and instructional delivery when they feel like they are equal partners in the classroom. The symbiosis spin assists teachers in building effective inclusion classrooms while feeling a sense of purpose in the relationship.

The third and final stage is the fulfillment stage that addresses the interaction teachers have in inclusion classrooms. Morgan (2016) suggested that the direct interaction between two teachers who share in the decision-making process will help them achieve common goals. Coteachers can gain equality by collaborating and working together with the general education teacher to achieve common goals (Kelly, 2018). The model of teaching has progressed since the 1970s; coteaching encompasses two teachers in the same classroom providing instruction that focuses on meeting the diverse needs of students (Chandler-Olcott, 2017; Rytivaara et al., 2019). The one-teach and one-assist model of teaching is not always effective in meeting the needs of SWDs. In creating an effective inclusion classroom, teachers must be willing to switch their usual role of teaching to meet students' needs. For example, the special education teacher can provide interventions and strategies that may simplify the lesson. Fulfillment is possible when teachers collaboratively work together to achieve a common goal. Pratt's (2014) three stages of symbiosis theory are necessary for creating an effective inclusion classroom.

Coteaching Collaborative Practices

Collaborative practices such as respect among coteachers demonstrate a higher success rate of SWDs in the inclusion classrooms before the teaching year begins (Weiss et al., 2017). Friend and Cook (2007) suggested that the relationship between coteachers is described as a professional marriage that includes coplanning of lessons designed to meet diverse learners' needs. Coteachers work together to build relationships and to implement flexible coteaching practices that support their diverse learners' needs and create a sense of shared work in the classroom (Sailor, 2017). Coteaching collaboration is a teaching model that includes planning time, professional learning communities, and critical working groups (Emmons & Zager, 2017). In some cases, switching roles during instruction shows that teachers are open to sharing in the teaching process (Rytivaara et al., 2019). Coteachers who work in inclusion classrooms are instructors of an inclusive process who work to meet all students' needs (Shin et al., 2016). Effective inclusion classrooms consist of coteachers collaboratively working together to meet the needs of their students (Friend, 2016). Effective collaboration between coteachers is vital in effective inclusion classrooms.

Specific Needs of Inclusion Classrooms

Researchers suggested that inclusion classrooms are problematic for several reasons (Cook & Cook, 2016). SWDs need instruction in its simplest form and small group settings to enhance their chances of concentration. Another reason is the "concern about directing educational resources and instructional time toward SWDs" and not

providing proper instruction for other students in the same classroom (Yuh & Choi, 2017). Teachers need to work together to overcome difficulties in inclusion classrooms.

SWDs have diverse needs that require instruction directed at their individual needs. However, coteachers who cooperatively work together and plan lessons, including differentiation strategies, increase their chances of meeting students' needs (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). Overcoming the challenges of the inclusion classroom is possible when teachers cooperatively work together (Bottge et al., 2018).

In the current study, Pratt's (2014) achieving symbiosis theory addressed the problem that general education and special education teachers have collaborating in inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. Each of Pratt's achieving symbiosis stages addressed the relationships coteachers have in inclusion classrooms. The initiation stage describes the teacher's expectations. It relates to the coplanning process in which the two teachers plan and design lessons to meet the students' needs. The next stage is the symbiosis spin, which allows teachers to build effective relationships. Teachers build relationships by discussing their interpersonal differences and gain insight into each other's instructional practice. They also establish compatibility while teaching in the same classroom. Lastly, fulfillment addresses the interaction teachers have in the classroom. Coteachers create parity when they collaboratively work together to achieve common goals (Kelly, 2018). Teachers gain a sense of equality in the classroom when they collaboratively use strategies and methods to enhance their instructional practices.

The achieving the symbiosis theory grounded this study by addressing the relationships between middle school general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The problem is coteachers lack symbiotic relationships because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' relationships in inclusion classrooms. Five general education and five special education teachers were asked individual interview questions. I used these questions to collect data regarding evidence of achieving symbiosis among these teachers. Achieving symbiosis theory describes how teachers should effectively work together to create successful relationships. This data collection process helped me apply the theory to describe how general education and special education teachers work together. This theory addressed the relationships between these teachers related to the lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and teachers' interpersonal differences. Data were gathered from interviews to identify themes related to the impact of the three stages of achieving symbiosis theory (initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment) on teachers' collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal difference in inclusion classrooms.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Collaboration Difficulties

Collaboration has become a fundamental part of the educational system as schools move toward inclusion (Morgan, 2016). According to Morgan (2016), collaborative practices are methods that general education and special education teachers use to teach students in inclusion classrooms. The direct interaction between two teachers who share

in the decision-making process to achieve common goals is a form of interpersonal collaboration (Morgan, 2016). The essential elements of collaboration are: "(a) parity, (b) mutual goals, (c) shared responsibility in decision making, (d) shared resources and accountability, and (e) valuing personal opinions and expertise" (Morgan, 2016, p. 43). Collaboration is effective when teachers are held accountable by administrators who require norms with constructive use of time (Khairuddin et al., 2016).

There are many practices of collaboration; schools do not use one approach to limit teaching practices. However, teachers continue to have difficulties with collaborating. Parity is possible for both teachers in an inclusion classroom when they know their roles (Pratt et al., 2017). Parity is inequality between the general education and special education teachers; one teacher is superior to the other teacher (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Coplanning is a collaborative approach that enables teachers to establish a successful teaching relationship. Pratt (2014) suggested that "in achieving a successful relationship, parity is an important component of co-teaching" (p. 1). In the classroom, the two teachers have specified roles in the teaching process instead of one constantly teaching and the other constantly assisting (Cook & Cook, 2016). Chandler-Olcott (2017) noted that the one teach/one assist approach is commonly practiced in the inclusion classroom; the general education teacher instructs the class, and the special education teacher answers students' questions while moving around offering support and expounding on the general education teacher's previous instructions.

However, there are times when the special education teacher can provide explicit help to students with reading disabilities by offering supportive literacy strategies. More

supportive inclusion classrooms include the coteaching practice where both teachers collaboratively work together (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). Chandler-Olcott (2017) noted that classrooms could avoid pitfalls and create parity between them when teachers rotate their roles in the teaching process. Parity is possible when both teachers collaboratively plan the lessons with daily activities and follow guidelines about who will instruct which part of the lesson (Pratt et al., 2017). The practice between the two teachers demonstrates that both teachers can model the writing processes and meet diverse learners' needs.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (2017) reiterated Chandler-Olcott's claim that general education teachers are traditionally oversees teaching the class with whole-class instruction. "The special education teacher in a subordinate role, providing support for the classroom routines" by assisting students who raise their hands for extra support (p. 285). Special education teachers should play an essential role in the classroom by offering a different prospect or another way of presenting the content material of a particular lesson (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). However, co-teachers continually express that the partnership is not equal (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017). Effective coteaching is possible when both teachers are willing to collaborate to increase their chances of becoming equal partners in the classroom (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

Mutual goal setting is another element of collaboration. There are reasons for setting mutual goals between general education and special teachers to achieve long- and short-term goals. The reason for setting mutual goals is for unit plans, bi-weekly plans, and daily plans (Pratt et al., 2017). For example, short term goals may consist of planning weekly lesson plans adjusted according to students' performance and needs (Pratt et al.,

2017). Co-teachers have different educational training; the general education teachers receive certification in a specific subject and grade-level content area (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Conversely, special education teachers receive certification in specialized content related to accommodations and modifications to certify that Individual Education Plan (IEP) and differentiation of instruction are taught (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). The two certifications allow teachers to integrate their skills and knowledge to collaboratively meet the students' diverse learning needs (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

An effective collaborative partnership consists of teachers having the one-on-one face to face meetings to ensure that they are on the same page and have common objectives to achieve their goals for teaching in inclusion classrooms (Pratt et al., 2017). According to Pratt et al. (2017), teachers must agree on what role each will play in the goal-setting process by using their expert training. The inclusion classroom has six instructional approaches that can differ from school to school and classroom-to-classroom to ensure an effective means of meeting the diverse needs of SWDs. They are one teach/one observe; one teach/one drift; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching (Friend, 2016). The mutual goal setting and the combining of their expert training can enhance teachers' chances of achieving their goals.

Strogilos and Avramidis (2016) suggested classrooms that have two teachers have better opportunities to achieve success when teaching special needs students, the general education curriculum. Studies also proposed that inclusion classrooms have an encouraging effect on behaviors with the additional teacher present (Biggs et al., 2017;

Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). SWDs who have behavior problems need structured instructional classrooms that are conducive to learn and behavioral interventions that address their behavioral needs (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). The teachers must have mutually determined goals that include what they are attempting to achieve, the role that each teacher will have, and the instructional model they will use to achieve those goals (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Teachers who cooperatively work together increase their chance of success.

General education and special education teachers design and deliver instructions that are focused on students' individual needs (Friend, 2016). Teachers must observe and monitor students' progress and determine if they can move forward with the learning process or if re-teaching is appropriate for meeting the students' needs (Turner, Rafferty, Sullivan, & Blake, 2017). These teachers must mutually set goals to combine both of their skills and knowledge to provide SWDs with accommodations and modifications that are necessary for meeting students' academic and behavioral needs (Brendle et al., 2017; Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Friend, 2016; Strogilos et al., 2016). Teachers' cooperatively working together increases their chances of an effective inclusion classroom.

Shared responsibility in the decision-making process is another component of collaboration. There are inclusion teachers who use an instructional technique that is common in inclusion classrooms (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). According to Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016), collaboration demands "an important amount of faith between partners and a flexible approach in lesson planning and implementation

of instructional strategies" (p. 121). For example, teachers use this strategy to teach students who struggle with the writing processes and solving mathematical equations. Teacher collaboration is also used in inclusion classrooms when teachers cooperatively work together in determining who will work with students in small groups and who will conference with individual students to evaluate progress (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). The collaborative decision-making process needs careful planning with "teachers' roles and responsibilities," specifically planned out lessons with an end goal in mind (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016, p. 121). Co-teachers sharing the classroom responsibilities enable them to collaboratively work together as a team.

In a similar study, Bottge et al. (2018) proposed that SWDs improve when general education and special education teachers actively participate in the teaching of math computation in inclusion classrooms. This article reiterates the challenges that SWDs continue to have in school Bottge et al. (2018) suggested, the importance of inclusion teachers cooperatively working together by conferencing with individual students and working with small groups. Teachers must be willing to share the responsibilities and trust one another judgment in the decision-making process for meeting the needs of their students.

Shared resources and accountability are other elements of inclusion. Collaborative planning documents, such as Google Docs, are shared resources for both general education and special education teachers to use when in-person planning of lessons is not possible (Morgan, 2016). Morgan (2016) proclaimed that "these are all of our students, and we are both responsible for teaching everyone,' especially in a coteaching

environment" (p. 53). Researchers suggest that accountability and support are necessary from both the general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms to provide SWDs flexible and creative practices that meet their diverse learning needs (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Together with the teachers' lessons design and plan the curriculum, students' abilities and disabilities can be assessed (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016).

O'Kee ffe and Medina (2016) discussed nine instructional strategies that teachers can use in middle school inclusion classrooms to teach "diversity and adolescence" and SWDs "while supporting both typical and atypical learners" (p. 73). O'Kee ffe and Medina (2016) stated, "Culturally and linguistically diverse exceptional (CLDE) middle school students" with challenging disabilities receive instruction in this setting that is usually "geared toward White peers" (p. 72). The report from the 2010 United States Census noted that "Hispanic or Latino populations have increased by 43% since 2000" (O'Keeffe & Medina, 2016, p. 73). The study also noted that this influx of diversity in schools needs quality instruction with targeted lessons, including strategies that are focused on meeting the diverse needs of SWDs (Newmann & Thompson, 1987; O'Kee ffe & Medina, 2016).

The nine strategies are "visual aids, group accommodations, modifications, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, instructional scaffolding, social skills instructions, active applied learning and alternative assessments" (O'Kee ffe & Medina, 2016, p. 75). O'Kee ffe and Medina (2016) considered strategies that can be used in the inclusion classroom to overcome the challenges that CLDE SWDs encounter in school. SWDs who

speak languages other than English need practices and strategies to accommodate them in the inclusion classroom. For example, students who speak English as a second language can benefit from working with peer tutors to learn English (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Yuh & Choi, 2017; Mallory & New, 1994). Inclusion classrooms need this type of support to meet the needs of students.

Finally, valuing opinion and expertise are essential elements of collaboration. A critical part of successful collaboration is "face-to-face and soft skills" that allow inclusion teachers to relate with one another (Morgan, 2016, p. 53). Morgan (2016) recommended that inclusion teachers be able to collaborate and problem-solve to meet the needs of their diverse learners. General education and special education teachers must bring together their expert training to design and create content material that meets the needs of SWDs in inclusion classrooms. Teachers must value one another's expert training and opinion to be effective in inclusion classrooms (Guise et al., 2016). The belief system that teachers create enables them to collaboratively combine their expert training to create strategies and interventions that meet the needs of their students.

According to Guise et al. (2016) the application of strategies and interventions in middle school can assist struggling students in the learning process; however, designing content material to meet their diverse needs of these students is imperative. Cooperative learning is a strategy that teachers use to teach students how to work together in small group settings (Akpan & Beard, 2016). For example, Collaborative Strategic Reading (CSR), which is an instructional practice designed to improve reading comprehension for struggling readers (Capin & Vaughn, 2017). SWDs can benefit from working in smaller

groups to discuss concepts, consider different perspectives, and receive suggestions for solving problems (Farmer et al., 2018). Another strategy that teachers use is the think-pair-share strategy to present questions to students' small groups, allowing students to think about how they will respond, share with a partner, and then share their ideas within their groups or class. These practices, when put in place, can increase teachers' chances of collaboratively meeting the needs of their students.

Cook and Cook (2016) expanded on Wexler's report that struggling students can learn in the appropriate classrooms and receive instructional strategies gearing towards meeting the students' specific needs can learn. To address issue, some schools placed students' in the inclusion classroom to offer access to the general education curriculum (Boardman et al., 2016). However, it is challenging for inclusion teachers to meet the needs of these students. Nevertheless, valuing one another opinion and combining their expert training enhances the chances of meeting the students' needs.

Collaboration has different elements when teaching in inclusion classrooms. The elements are parity, mutual goals, shared responsibility in decision-making, shared resources, accountability, valuing personal opinion, and expertise (Morgan, 2016). The exploring of these methods may enable inclusion teachers to improve their teaching relationships that are necessary for creating the most effective inclusion classrooms.

Coteachers

Coteaching is an instructional model with two co-teachers, a general education teacher, and a special-education teacher who works collectively in the same classroom, sharing responsibilities for teaching all students' including students with special needs

(Strogilos & Avramidis, 2016). Strogilos et al. (2016) established that most co-teachers claim that they meet to plan instruction for their inclusion class; however, they rarely spend the time planning lessons. They spend their time revising instruction to accommodate SWDs, which means co-teachers plan their lessons individually rather than together (Strogilos et al., 2016). Strogilos et al. (2016) study results found variations in the instructional approaches and the means of determining group placement. Strogilos et al. (2016) found that some co-teachers do not co-plan; however, offering co-teachers planning time could encourage co-planning. Nevertheless, effective coteaching has a correlation with effective co-planning between co-teachers for the means of designing lessons that meet the needs of their diverse students (Guise et al., 2016). Co-teachers that work together increase their chances of meeting the needs of their students.

Co-planning of lessons for SWDs is essential, as it allows teachers to create and design lessons that are scaffold to meet the students' individual needs. According to Wilson (2016), the "lack of planning time is an obstacle to effective coteaching" (p. 51). During the planning time, teachers can cooperatively select who will use the checklist during instruction to monitor students' progress. Meanwhile, co-teachers can determine if they need to re-create, revise lesson plans, and group students' that include strategies based on students' readiness (Wilson, 2016). Teachers continue to have difficulties implementing strategies in their inclusion classroom because they are not planning together (Bettini et al., 2017). Teachers who do not plan together demonstrate the misconceptions that co-teachers have on the importance of planning together. Co-teachers have difficulties knowing the appropriate means of grouping their students into

differentiation groups. Meanwhile, co-planning assisted with making an appropriate decision and is an integral part of designing lessons that focus on meeting the needs of their diverse learners.

Students learn from one another by working in small groups. Teachers who are not opened to transitioning from the traditional means of providing instruction hinder their own ability to meet students learning needs. Co-teachers use peer-tutoring as an instructional strategy that allows students to work together when struggle academically. Snodgrass et al. (2016) suggested that SWDs struggling with retaining new instruction because of their short-term memory. In a similar study, Bormanaki, and Khoshhal (2017) determined that students have difficulties adjusting and adapting new information for a substantial period. The study concluded that co-planning is vital to creating and designing lessons that meet the students' individual needs.

Biggs et al. (2017) performed a similar study and followed the academic engagement, communication, and socialization performance of four middle school students that received a portion of their instruction in the inclusion classroom. All students used an "iPad with Proloquo2Go as augmentative and alternative communication" (Biggs et al., 2017, p. 25). The researchers gathered data on the students at different times during the study. The first collection of data was to develop a baseline while students received their normal support from the paraprofessionals, peer partners, and the speech-language pathologists (SLPs). The intervention conditions and data comprised of collaborative planning between the co-teachers and the SLP, paraprofessionals training, and specific directions given to peer partners. The results

revealed that there was a limited interaction from the participants in the study, frequently SWDs that have complex communication needs (CCN) generally interact and request support from the adults rather than other students (Biggs et al., 2017). SWDs tend to interact with the teacher instead of interacting with the students in their group for support. Moreover, the results of the findings will more than likely not be generalized to the general public due to the small population of four students used for this study.

Building Relationships

Chandler-Olcott (2017) suggested that general education and special education teachers have roles in the coteach classroom that are smooth, similar, changeable; it suggests that co-teachers have equal roles in inclusion classrooms. Bešić, et al. (2017) indicated that the first step to inclusion is for co-teachers to be work together and support one another. In a similar study, Blanton et al. (2018) proposed that it is critical to unite absolute fairness in building the relationship between general education and special education teachers to support struggling students with diverse learning abilities. Teachers collaboratively build relationships to increase their chances of creating effective inclusion classrooms.

Moreover, achieving symbiosis theory is satisfied when co-teachers work together to create effective relationships in inclusion classroom (Kelly, 2018). The elements of symbiosis are collaborative planning, parity, and interpersonal difference must function to create effective inclusion classrooms (McWhirter et al., 2016). Parity of roles in inclusion must be specifically described and understood in a building effective coteaching relationship (van Velzen et al., 2019). Building relationships includes

establishing teacher roles in the lessons planning stage for instructional delivery (Hamdan et al., 2016). The parity of roles includes both inclusion teachers actively involved in teaching students (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016).

Shared responsibility creates parity between inclusion teachers and assists in building teachers' relationships (van Velzen et al., 2019). Teachers divide the responsibilities for lesson planning and grading of assignments, along with the expectation of classroom management expectations (Pratt, 2014). Collaborative planning is an integral part of establishing a relationship between teachers and trusting one another's expert training in designing the lessons helps with building relationships (Kelly, 2018). Both teachers with different expert training have good ideas in making the content material accessible to improve student performance in meeting expectations (Pratt et al., 2017).

The challenge for co-teachers is building the relationship between teachers outside of the classroom (Pesonen et al., 2019). Teachers struggle with building partnerships instead of the actual teaching of students inside the classroom. Teachers can find common ground by using strategies of open communication to resolve their instructional differences in inclusion classrooms (Pesonen et al., 2019). Inclusion teachers that are open to discussing their roles in an inclusion classroom and outside of the classroom increase their chances of achieving symbiosis and meeting the needs of SWDs, while establishing an effective relationship with equal roles in inclusion classrooms.

Collaboration between co-teachers is a vital part of the inclusion process when teaching SWDs. Co-teachers are having difficulties with collaborating as it relates to planning time, parity, and interpersonal differences. It is essential to develop a framework that addresses the relationships that co-teachers have that affect their ability to have successful teaching relationships (Pratt et al., 2017). Ruben et al. (2016) suggested that a useful model of collaboration "involves the efforts to taking the lens of the other redefining relationships between special and general educators" and understanding the importance of planning time is a vital means to meeting the needs of SWDs in the inclusion classrooms (p. 3). Co-teachers must work together to meet the students' needs. I examined the problem the use of Pratt's (2014) three stages of group development for building effective teaching relationships. The three stages are as follows: initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment that addresses the interaction teachers have in inclusion classrooms to form the conceptual framework of achieving symbiosis theory.

Collaborative relationships are possible when teachers address disagreements beforehand between co-teachers. Pesonen et al. (2019) suggested a sense of belonging that involves co-teachers building collegial relationships through three dimensions. The dimensions are teachers' work practices, mutual relationships, and individual characteristics. The teacher's work practices enable teachers to negotiate and share ideas to create feasible coteaching practices that benefit their classrooms (Shin et al., 2016). Mutual relationships, teachers have respected and trust in one another that encourages a sense of belonging. The individual characteristics motivate teachers to have a strong sense of the belonging and overall high level of security in their teaching abilities (Natale

& Lubniewski, 2018; Nislin & Pesonen, 2018). The three dimensions build co-teachers relationships with enabling teachers to grow together as colleagues that respect one another.

Rytivaara et al. (2019) conducted a similar study with a focus on collaborative partnerships "teachers have mutual respect for one another professional knowledge, skills and experiences" that are formed between teachers before teachers can effectively teach in an inclusion classroom. The partnership includes teachers building "a collaborative culture" to share not only their classroom space but knowledge as well (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015, p. 31). The teachers shaped their relationship by working as a team that focused on commitment, engagement, and negotiation. The focus of this study was to view coteaching as a professional learning process, in which teachers co-planned lessons together, and co-taught in classes together. First, the teachers made commitments to teach together, and then they engaged in sharing their professional knowledge about the subject matter. Finally, they negotiated joint coteaching practices that were feasible for their teaching partnerships.

Rytivaara et al. (2019) concluded that in viewing the partnerships between the co-teachers as a learning experience; teachers willingly made commitments to coteach together. Teachers can avoid a "mismatch," which would result in a sure failure if they would discuss their feelings and views about coteaching before committing to that partnership. Getting to know each other beforehand would eliminate the chances of failure (Rytivaara et al., 2019, p. 233). They can willfully engage themselves in sharing their professional expertise of the subject matter when they both have the same

coteaching perspective. The negotiation of developing coteaching practices is necessary to assist teachers in determining what teachers need in class. Teachers work a long time to establish an effective coteaching partnership; it does not develop by meeting in the classroom right before class starts. “Co-teaching is a result of numerous negotiations and a lot of time and effort” (Rytivaara et al., 2019, p. 233). The challenge of coteaching should be on a volunteer basis, and teachers should be free to pick their partners and not forced together (because of scheduling).

Co-teachers have moved beyond the conceptualities of where SWDs receive instruction toward focusing on how they can meet their diverse needs in the inclusion classroom. Coteaching has promised instructional practice for SWDs that learn from two teachers with different educational training who teaches in one classroom (Rytivaara et al., 2019). The most common teaching practice has been the one teaches and one assist model. The general education teacher instructs the class, and the special education teacher moves around the class and answers student’s questions (Shin et al., 2016). This model has been questioned based on SWD’s engagement (Saloviita, 2020). There are times when the special education teacher can provide interventions and strategies that may simplify the lesson. Teachers must be willing to cooperatively switch their teaching roles to meet the students’ needs. Teachers that are open to reverse their teaching roles and collaboratively work together to meet their students’ needs can strengthen relationships.

Moreover, a more inclusive approach is the sharing of teaching responsibilities. Sailor (2017) suggested that co-teachers can enhance the multi-tiered support model of

teaching, the Response to Intervention (RTI). Teachers can combine their educational training to implement flexible practices that focus on meeting students' diverse learning needs (Sailor, 2017). RTI programs could benefit from both teachers' ideas to help struggling students to make progress toward educational milestones in their development. However, inequality is seen in the inclusion classroom because some teachers are not willing to trust one another's judgment in sharing the responsibility that will assist in meeting students' educational needs (Friend, 2016). This is a sign of weaknesses among teachers in resolving their interpersonal differences. Teacher collaboration is essential in meeting the educational needs of students.

Summary and Conclusions

Collaboration is a vital part of inclusion classrooms for empowering inclusion teachers and co-teachers to meet the needs of students. Nevertheless, teachers continue to struggle with collaboration due to the lack of planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. The exploration of collaborative relationships between general education and special education teachers is in detail, a discussion of teachers' views, and consideration of teachers' suggestions on practices that may improve the collaboration between teachers. Nonetheless, it is important to mention what is unknown regarding teachers' collaborative relationships that prevent them from achieving symbiosis.

Teachers need common planning time to develop instruction that is specific for individual students, however, establishing common planning time is challenging for co-teachers (Pratt et al., 2017). Khairuddin et al. (2016) suggest that collaboration is vital between general education and special education teachers that teach SWDs, especially in

schools with limited experience. Co-teachers established communication, but the planning remains limited (Khairuddin et al., 2016). Rytivaara et al. (2019) proposed that it is unknown why co-teachers cannot choose their teaching partners. According to Rytivaara et al. (2019), “coteaching should be voluntary and that teachers should be free to choose their partners” (p. 233). Lochner et al. (2019) suggested that inequality is seen in the inclusion classroom because teachers do not have equal responsibility. Sharing responsibilities and trusting one another decision to meet the student’s diverse learning needs is challenging for teachers (Lochner et al., 2019). Addressing these problems will increase teachers’ chances of collaborating in inclusion classrooms.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms. The lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and teachers' interpersonal differences can affect coteachers' collaborative relationships (Fluijt et al., 2016; Pratt, 2014; Strogilos et al., 2016). Pratt's (2014) theory of achieving symbiosis was used to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The framework includes three stages of achieving symbiosis: initiation that explains the coteacher's expectation, symbiosis spin that occurs when teachers seek to build a relationship with one another, and fulfillment that occurs when teachers gain parity in the classroom (Kelly, 2018; Pratt, 2014).

In Chapter 3, I address the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the details of the methodology. Also, I outline the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. Other sections include the data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. The study was a basic qualitative design. In this study, I explored the difficulties that general education and special education teachers have in inclusion classrooms because of lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. This design

allowed me to explore the current problems teachers are encountering when collaborating, and to obtain insight regarding methods that can improve teachers' collaboration and suggestions on which practices are the most effective in inclusion classrooms.

In social science research, the purpose is to explore the function of members of society and the interpersonal relationships of individuals as a part of society (Bakanay & Cakir, 2016). To better understand the teachers' experiences, I used a basic qualitative design to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested that qualitative research is conducted to obtain information about individuals' experiences. Individuals explain their understanding based on their perspective of the phenomenon (Baeten et al., 2018). Qualitative research supports the exploration of individuals' understanding of their experiences and the value they attach to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The basic qualitative design was appropriate to explore difficulties coteachers are having with collaborating in their inclusion classrooms by asking participants questions during interviews (see Boardman et al., 2016). A basic qualitative design allowed me to obtain information by asking the participants open-ended questions. To understand the phenomenon, it was vital to understand the teachers' relationships in inclusion through a basic design. This design was best for the study because it allowed the explanation to be revealed through individual experiences.

Another method I considered was a case study design. A case study is a social construct that provides descriptive details from the perspective of a group of people (Babbie, 2017). Case studies are sometimes used to investigate theories that have already been investigated to add additional information. A case study was not appropriate for the current study because the study had only one data source: interviews. Also, I considered a narrative approach to this study. A narrative design is a collection of stories reported by an individual instead of a group of people (Koenitz et al., 2017). A narrative design involves the interpretation of the individual and not a group of people. A narrative design is was not appropriate for the current study because teachers responded to specific interview questions based on their individual situations and not a collection of people.

I chose to use a basic qualitative design instead of a case study or a narrative study. Basic qualitative research is founded on the individual perspective and experiences (Boardman et al., 2016). I explored the experiences of general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The design fit this study because it allowed each teacher to explain their individual classroom experience based on their perspectives (see Boddy, 2016). The results of the study may improve coteaching collaboration in inclusion classrooms. Also, the study results may encourage middle school leaders to create collaboration programs for general education and special education teachers.

Role of the Researcher

I obtained research study approval from the Institutional Review Board of Walden University on April 8, 2021 (Approval Number 04-09-21-0464401) to research a middle school for Grade 6 through 8 in the Southeast United States. I served as the human

instrument for this study (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Umanailo, 2019) and currently work as a special education teacher at the local participating school in the district selected for the study. I interviewed five general education and five special education coteachers to understand the difficulties teachers encounter and to improve the collaboration between coteachers. Local schools in the county are investigating ways to improve the collaboration between coteachers. Collaboration is a vital part of the inclusion classroom, and coteachers must collaboratively work together to meet the needs of their diverse learners (Florian, 2017; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). There were no guarantees that the data collection would effectively elicit the issues that coteachers are having with collaboration in the inclusion classroom; however, coteachers working together is an essential means of meeting SWDs' educational needs. My role as the researcher was to interview the participants in the study.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The target population for this study was general education and special education teachers who teach in inclusion classrooms in Grades 6 through 8 in a small urban school district in the Southeast United States. Purposeful sampling was used because I wanted to select individuals who teach in inclusion classrooms from a specific site to answer the interview questions (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The participants were required to be certified in the field of study in which they coteach. General education teachers are certified in specific content areas, and special education teachers are certified in the specialized content areas of accommodation and modification (Buli-Holmberg &

Jeyaprathaban, 2016; Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). I requested permission from the participating school district's office to complete the study and asked for teachers who met the selection criteria. The criteria were that teachers must teach in an inclusion classroom for at least one class period per day, and the teachers must agree to take part in the study.

I emailed 40 invitations with an explanation of the study. The general education and special education teachers who met the qualifications and agreed to participate in the study were sent letters of consent. Once the consent forms were received and documented, a specific date was set for the interviewing of each participant. The interview data were collected and transcribed to determine the themes.

I interviewed 10 inclusion classroom teachers (five general and five special education) from a small urban school district in the Southeast United States. The participants answered open-ended interview questions that produced data related to difficulties teachers are encountering in inclusion classrooms with SWDs. The questioning process discontinued once the saturation of data was met and no new themes were revealed (see Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Instrumentation

Interviewing participants was the instrument of choice in this study. Interviews are used in a qualitative study to explore the phenomenon by asking mostly open-ended questions. The current participants responded by adding in-depth detailed information related to collaborative difficulties in inclusion classrooms (see Creswell & Poth, 2016). I used Zoom or telephone to interview five general and five special education teachers to

gain rich insights into collaborative difficulties they encounter in inclusion classrooms. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), “a telephone interview provides the best source of information when the researcher does not have access to individual” (pp. 132–133). I used Zoom or telephone interviews due to the COVID-19 pandemic; however, face-to-face interviews allow the researcher to establish a one-on-one relationship with each participant (Morgan, 2016). The interviews were audio recorded to ensure that I had the participants’ precise words. The questions were related to adequate planning time, parity between teachers, teacher fulfillment, interpersonal differences about coteaching, building relationships (symbiosis spin), and how inclusion teachers can improve the collaboration between coteachers (see Mckenna et al., 2015). I asked open-ended questions so that the participants could offer detailed responses with additional comments (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Pratt, 2014). The participants in the study were willing to answer open-ended questions and were allowed to explain with additional details.

The interview questions were created after an extensive research process. This demanded the investigation of teacher practices in general education and special education settings, including the planning process between general education and special education teachers. Furthermore, I researched how these teachers differentiate learning in their classrooms. Utilizing the information gathered from the literature, I was able to compile a list of questions that demonstrated the gap in the literature regarding collaboration between general education and special education teachers (see Appendix A). I was able to design interview questions to answer my research question. The interview questions were written to prompt participants to provide in-depth data to assist

in answering the research questions: What difficulties do middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms? Improving the collaboration between inclusion teachers may help coteachers work together in one classroom and may improve teachers' chances of achieving symbiosis.

Table 1

Interview Questions and Framework Stage of Symbiosis

Interview question	Framework stage of symbiosis
1. Describe your inclusion setting. What coteaching model is used in your classroom? Describe your role in the model that is used.	First stage (initiation)
2. Describe the process that you and your coteacher go through to plan lessons for your students. How do you plan differentiated lessons for SWDs that struggle with reading compared to those students that are on grade level? How do you plan differentiated lessons for SDWs who struggle with writing compared to those that are on grade level? How do you and your coteacher decide who will teach the different parts of the planned lessons?	Second stage (symbiosis spin)
3. Describe how you and your coteacher demonstrate equality in the classroom. How do you and your coteacher establish class rules and procedures? How do you and your coteacher address students when they break class rules and procedures?	Third stage (fulfillment)
4. Describe what collaborative practices you and your coteacher use for teaching SWDs. How do you and your coteacher decide what are the best interventions to meet the needs of SWDs who are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught? How do you and your coteacher decide what are the best strategies to meet the needs of SWDs who are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught?	Second stage (symbiosis spin) and third stage (fulfillment)
5. Describe how you and your coteacher handle disagreements. How do you and your coteacher resolve disagreements on how to meet the learning behavioral need of SDWs?	Second stage (symbiosis spin) and third stage (fulfillment)
6. What suggestions can you offer that could improve the collaboration between coteachers?	Third stage (fulfillment)

Table 1 displays the interview questions and the appropriate stage of Pratt's (2014) symbiosis theory related to each question. The connection of each interview question and the framework formed a foundation to ground the study related to the

research question. The research question of what difficulties middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms was answered in the data collection process. The data collection, analysis, and interpretation provided a wealth of information on the relationship between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms.

Interview Question 1 included two additional questions: What coteaching model is used in your classroom? Describe your role in the model that is used. Pratt's (2014) first stage connected with these questions. The initiation stage involves the discussion of the coteacher's expectation in the classroom. The two teachers are expected to work together in the same setting cooperatively, and they are responsible for creating and designing lessons to meet the diverse needs of their students (Friend, 2016).

Interview Question 2, included three additional questions: How do you plan differentiated lessons for SWDs who struggle with reading compared to those students who are on grade level? How do you plan differentiated lessons for SWDs who struggle with writing compared to those students who are on grade level? How do you and your coteacher decide who will teach different parts of the planned lessons? Pratt's (2014) second stage connected with these questions. The symbiosis spin occurs when teachers seek to build a relationship with one another. Real relationships consist of parity in the relationship; parity between teachers enables them to share the responsibility in the classroom (Van Velzen et al., 2019).

Interview Question 3 included two additional questions: How do you and your coteacher establish classroom rules and procedures? How do you and your coteacher address students when they break class rules and procedures? Pratt's (2014) third stage connected with these questions. Fulfillment occurs when teachers gain parity in the classroom. In the fulfillment stage, teachers have equality and equal responsibility for teaching the students.

Interview Question 4 included two additional questions: How do you and your coteacher decide what the best interventions are to meet the needs of SWDs who are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught? How do you and your coteacher decide what the best strategies are to meet the needs of SWDs who are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught? Pratt's (2014) second and third stage connected with these questions. The symbiosis spin occurs when teachers build a relationship with one another. Lack of parity is experienced during the symbiosis spin stage. The special education teacher often acts as the general education teacher's assistant (Pratt, 2014). At the stage of fulfillment, teachers gain parity in the classroom. The teachers move beyond inequality, and they are willing to trust one another's judgment to resolve their interpersonal differences by sharing responsibility in the teaching process (Friend, 2016).

Interview question 5, describe how you and your co-teacher handle disagreements. The question includes another question: how do you and your co-teacher resolve disagreements on how to meet the learning and behavioral needs of SWDs? Pratt's second and third stage connects with the question. The symbiosis spin continues to

be an issue during this stage. Equality is an issue for the special education teacher that is generally attributed to the teachers' not being familiar with the content material (Pratt, et al., 2017). Also, interpersonal differences are a concern because general education typically leads the teaching in the inclusion classroom. The one teach/one assist is commonly used in classrooms (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). Moreover, Pratt's third stage is another connection piece with the questions. Fulfillment is possible when co-teachers cooperatively work together in achieving the same goal.

Interview question 6, what suggestion can you offer that could improve the collaboration between co-teachers? Pratt's third stage, fulfillment, connects with the question. Co-teachers should have equal responsibility for teaching the students in the inclusion classroom. Co-teachers combining their expert training enables the diverse needs of SWDs to be met in the inclusion classroom (Friend, 2016).

Finally, the connection between the interview questions and the framework offered a foundation to the study and answer the research question. The research question, what difficulties do middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms, was answered in the data collection process. The results of the study may determine the difficulties teachers are experiencing and which strategies are necessary for creating the most effective inclusion classrooms.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

An audiovisual component, zoom, or telephone was used to interview five general and five special education teachers to gain rich insights into which collaborative practices

are effective in inclusion classrooms. Once Walden's IRB has approved the research study, I obtained permission from the district office and request a list of teachers that teach in inclusion classrooms from the research site principal. Finally, emails with invitations and consent letters were sent to potential participants containing details of the study.

The interviews were taped on an audiovisual component, zoom, or telephone for approximately 30 to 45 minutes allotted for each interview. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest that "investigators make preliminary counts of data codes and determine how frequently codes appear in the database" (p. 107). I asked teachers' questions about the difficulties that they are encountering with collaboration in their classrooms (i.e., adequate planning time, parity, interpersonal differences). Teachers elaborated on specific practices that may improve the collaboration between co-teachers. The saturation of data collection validated that no new themes are surfacing (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The interviews were audiovisual (zoom), or telephone, audiotape recorded, transcribed, and coded to identify themes of common threads that teachers implement in the classrooms. Member checking was used to ensure creditability that participants' responses are correctly transcribed (Birt et al., 2016). I provided the participants with email contact information for additional questions after the interviews were completed. An estimate of time the interview process took was two to three weeks. Afterwards, a scheduled debriefing time was planned in person or via email to discuss any additional questions, and summaries of the interviews were emailed to the participants once the interviews are transcribed.

Data Analysis Plan

The exploration of social science has different qualitative research designs (Mohajan, 2018). This study's qualitative design is a basic design used to explore the coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The design includes exploring a phenomenon of individuals using interviews to understand (Bakanay & Cakir, 2016). The interviews are the central source for collecting the data.

The data collection consisted of a step-by-step process with a table to list the open codes of each participant's exact words or word phrases to identify concepts. Next, collecting data for the thematic coding began to allow the identification of concepts. Lastly, the continuation of the thematic coding at a greater level to formulate stories or cases. A visual model compared and contrasted the codes narrowing the data into fewer themes. The data was uploaded into a qualitative analysis software Atlas ti to create codes according to the data's themes. The process displayed the connection between the research study and the interview questions related to the research question.

A visual model was used to compare the codes narrowing the data into fewer themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The data was uploaded into a qualitative analysis software Atlas ti to create codes according to the data's themes. The process displayed the connection between the research study and the interview questions related to the research question.

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, creditability, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are components of trustworthiness. Gaining the participant's trust is important in finding answers to the research question. Trustworthiness definition is the main qualitative content exploration phase from the beginning of the study until the reporting of the results (Elo et al., 2014). The interviews are for collecting data (McGrath et al., 2019). The interview process allowed the research the opportunity to explore the experiences of the participants (McGrath et al., 2019). According to McGrath et al. (2019), it is necessary to build a rapport with the participants, allowing them to feel comfortable before and during interviews. Building a rapport with participants is vitally important, allowing them to provide a specific explanation of their experiences as it relates to the study (McGrath et al., 2019). The researcher can build trust with the participants in making them comfortable with answering the interview questions and possibly open to adding in-depth details in their responses. By addressing all components of trustworthiness gave the reader a clear picture of the study.

To make certain of the study's creditability is member checking, comprise of having a systematic review of the transcript. Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggested that credibility determines whether the study results are credible information from the participants and a precise explanation of the participant's views. The process can strengthen the interrelating triangulation, by considering there were different participants interviewed, and their answers to the research question may vary. The goal of the study is to understand the difficulties teachers are having with collaborating in inclusion

classrooms. Meanwhile, the questioning process continued until there were no new themes established that is the saturation of the data (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Another strategy is pro-long engagement; I built trust with the participants to gain in-depth responses to the interview questions—persistent reflections, identifying the elements that assisted in addressing the study's problem. Also, I debriefed the participants through member checking to ensure that the responses were recorded and transcribed as intended. A display for the data gain showed on tables, charts, and graphs. The discrepancies cases were categorized as the participants' thoughts and opinions, and I clarified or resolved the different cases. The discrepant cases aided in refining the data that aligned the categories in selecting the main thematic category (Williams & Moser, 2019). Addressing the credibility component of trustworthiness validates whether the study is trustworthy. The discrepant cases aided in refining the data that aligned the categories in selecting the main thematic category (Williams & Moser, 2019). Addressing the credibility component of trustworthiness validates whether the study is trustworthy.

Transferability is the process of transferring the study results to other settings. The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms because of a lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. The selection base of variation depends upon participants who co-teach in inclusion classrooms, one teacher is a general and the other special education teacher—the researcher aids in the transferability process by collecting pertinent data that answer the

researcher's question. The process takes place "through thick description" that allows the reader to determine whether results are transferable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018, p. 121).

Dependability is the stability of the results over time. A study is dependable if the results are consistent with other research. By repeating the study, the results are the same (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The participants answered questions related to difficulties collaborating in their inclusion classrooms and how collaboration can improve the communication between the co-teachers. I was attentive to how the participants answered the interview questions to ensure that the questions were understood as intended (McGrath et al., 2019). The reflection part of the study determined the conformability; it focuses on objectivity (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I adjusted the questions so that the participants were clear on what the question asks. The goal of the study was to understand the difficulties teachers were having with collaborating in inclusion classrooms, based on the participant's response, not my opinion. The strategy that ensures dependability and confirmability is an audit trail. An independent audit reviewed my notes to confirm consistency. Trustworthiness is important in qualitative studies because the researcher is exploring to find answers to their research questions.

Ethical Procedures

I adhered to the guidelines and recommendations of Walden's IRB, including the protection of potential participants' rights. I contacted the assistant superintended at the district office to gain approval to conduct a research study at one of the local schools after the proposal is approved by the IRB. The letter of consent was forwarded to Walden's IRB once it is approved by the district office. Then, an email was sent to potential

participants that meet the inclusion criteria along with invitations that detail the purpose of the study, the study criteria, and a clause that states their participation is voluntary, they can refuse to participate, and they can opt-out at any time. The participant's information was confidential, and the potential risk for participating is minimal. The teachers' data is housed on a password-protected computer system to safeguard their confidential information. Also, the interview information is locked in a file cabinet throughout the transcription process of the study.

Ethical practices during the study require several steps to certify and alleviate possible concerns. The lack of not discovering any new themes during the interview process confirms that the study meets saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I can stop asking questions because the same themes are consistently repeating in the interviews. Also, member checking reinforces creditability that the participant's responses from the interviews are properly transcribed (Birt et al., 2016). Adhering to all guidelines of the IRB will increase the chances that I will complete the study and decrease the chance of unethical practices. There are some limitations in this study. I am a special education teacher, and therefore, I may inadvertently and unknowingly have imparted some biases and interpretations because of my personal experiences. Although the focus was on obtaining honest responses from the participants in an objective manner, my deep interest and passion for this study may have permeated through the interpretations and descriptions. I will take precautionary measures regarding the participants' responses.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the methods used as it pertained to general education and special education teachers' collaborating difficulties in inclusion classrooms was discussed and why a basic qualitative study was used. Also, how the questions that were used among the participants were compiled. Next, semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of teachers' perceptions about collaboration. The coding process used was to introduced thematic coding. Also, purposeful sampling for selecting specific groups of participants was discussed. The outline of the IRB guidelines and the criteria of possible participants were also addressed. Finally, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures were addressed and handled according to the study's requirements. In chapter 4, the study results addressed, and an explanation of the findings were projected.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education middle school teachers in inclusion classrooms. The results of the study may be used to inform leaders of the importance of collaborative strategies that are effective in solving problems between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The interview questions were used to identify the gaps in practices among general education and special education teachers collaborating in the classroom when teaching SWDs. The research question was developed to explore the difficulties that middle school general education and special education teachers encountered that prevented them from attaining a symbiotic relationship.

The conceptual framework for this study and the origin of the research question was Pratt's (2014) achieving symbiosis theory that includes three stages of group development: initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment. These stages of group development addressed the interaction between coteachers in the inclusion classroom. Pratt's theory was used to describe how coteachers should work together effectively in teaching SWDs in the same classroom. The basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because it allowed teachers to explain their individual experiences based on their perspectives (see Boddy, 2016).

In Chapter 4, I describe the study setting, the participant demographics, and the process used for collecting the data. I explain the procedures used throughout the study for data collection and analysis. The explanation includes how the data were gathered and

recorded. The data analysis process is explained in terms of open coding with participants' exact words or word phrases, as well as details of repetitive stories used to formulate thematic coding for analyzing the data. Evidence of trustworthiness is then discussed, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, the study results are presented. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Setting

Organizational Conditions

After obtaining research study approval from the Institutional Review Board, the data collection process began a week later with email requests to potential participants. Teachers were invited to be interviewed for a study designed to explore the relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The open-ended interview questions were related to experiences middle school teachers had when teaching SWDs in Grades 6 through 8 in the same classroom setting. Risks for participation in the study were minimal. These risks included uneasiness in having time to participate in the Zoom session and some discomfort, such as fatigue. However, the study involved no risk to participant safety or job security.

Demographics

Participants were required to meet certain criteria for participation in the study. The teacher had to be a certified teacher, teach in an inclusion classroom for at least one class period per day, and consent to participate in the study. I emailed invitation/consent forms to 40 potential participants with details of the study, along with my direct contact information for interested teachers. I reiterated to each potential participant that the

interview was voluntary and confidential. Participants had the right to withdraw from the interview at any point without harm to themselves, to me, or to the participating school. In addition, to safeguard participant confidentiality, no identifiable information was used related to the interviews. Participants were issued numerical identification, as listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Distribution of Participants

Participant	Instruction type	Grade level	Subject
P1	Special	7	ELA, mathematics
P2	General	8	ELA
P3	General	7	Science
P4	Special	8	Science and social studies
P5	General	8	Mathematics
P6	General	8	Science
P7	Special	8	Mathematics
P8	General	7	ELA
P9	Special	6, 8	Mathematics and social studies
P10	Special	7	Science and social studies

Note. $N = 10$. ELA = English language arts.

Data Collection

Participants

I emailed invitations to 40 general education and special education teachers with a complete explanation of the study. Ten teachers across all grade levels (Grades 6 through 8), including five general-education teachers and five special education teachers, met the

selection criteria and consented to be interviewed. I then requested all participants to inform me of available dates and times for interviews.

The interview process involved the use of open-ended interview questions designed to explore coteaching relationships between middle school general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. All participants were required to respond to the email "I consent" to participate in the study. Each participant then received an email of the agreed upon date, time, and Zoom reservation. I followed up with each participant the day before our meeting to confirm the interview. I allotted 30 to 45 minutes for each interview. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to guide me through each interview. Each participant was reminded that I used Zoom and a voice recorder to record the interview, as stated in the invitation/consent form.

Zoom was useful for the study because the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow for face-to-face interviews. In addition, the voice recorder was used as a backup system. Each interview was transcribed using Microsoft Word and my notes to ensure that I had the participant's precise words and to avoid unknowingly imparting my own biases.

Variations in Data Collection

There were some variations in the data collection process from the data collection plan described in Chapter 3. I projected that I would acquire six general education teachers and six special education teachers to participate in the study. However, only 10 participants returned invitation/consent forms, including five from each of the two categories. These 10 participants provided data on the relationships between general education and special education teachers coteaching in the inclusion classroom.

Data Analysis

After conducting the interviews, transcribing the data, and reviewing for correctness, I used thematic coding to analyze the data. In the data analysis process, codes were created based on the words or word phrases of the participants. I made open counts of how frequently a word or phrase appeared in the data set (see Creswell & Poth, 2016).

I used Atlas ti (Version 9) qualitative software to analyze the data by uploading the interview transcripts into the program. Atlas ti is a software program used for qualitative analysis of textual, graphical, audio, and video data. I read and made notes of each transcript from Microsoft Word after uploading all transcripts, and I reread each transcript. I noted words and phrases that appeared repeatedly. Open codes were established to analyze participants' open-ended interview responses. I used participants' exact words or phrases to identify concepts. Codes were created to formulate categories, which were used to identify themes.

After analyzing each interview, I put the highlighted codes into a chart titled codes and interviews with the participants. The chart had four columns: codes, categories, themes, and numbers identifying the participants. I highlighted the participants' responses and color-coded them. There were a few phrases from codes that were used to formulate some of my categories of the 10 participants' interviews. Orange was the color code for *establishing relationships*. For example, teachers are expected to work together in inclusive classrooms. The best practices must be shared between the two teachers to meet the students' needs (Florian, 2017). P1 stated "sometimes they have a different

perspective, and sometimes we are a little too close to the action, and we can step back and look from a different viewpoint." P2 affirmed "coteachers are experts too; I have to go to her in situations, and I ask her what she thinks will work for those students." Light green represented the words, phrases, or quotes for *equality*. Purple represented *coplanning*, and yellow signified *administration involvement* (see Appendix B).

Although these codes that did not become categories but appeared frequently, *staff placement*, *personalities*, *teacher model*, and *teacher training* all involved compatibility in pairing coteachers. These codes were combined and categorized as *compatibility*. Some participants had similar phrases and concepts related to *staff placement* and the need to consider personalities. P3 stated "it would be nice if personalities and teaching styles were taken into consideration when pairing coteachers" as well as more involvement from administration. P1 stated "what goes into these decisions, and sometimes we put the wrong people together, and it's a disastrous coteaching situation, and you can see it in the productivity of the class." Similarly, P5 added "I think obviously if two people aren't getting along, they probably don't need to stay together, but if you have a good relationship like don't mess up a good thing." *Teacher training* was another code that needed to be considered in creating effective inclusion classrooms.

Coteachers gain experiences in class, but teacher training gives instructions. Friend (2016) suggested that teachers who combined their expert training enhanced the chances of meeting their students' needs. Inclusion teachers must collaborate and solve problems to meet the needs of their diverse learners (Morgan, 2016). Some current

participants had similar phrases and concepts related to *teacher training* that needed careful consideration as I continued reading the transcripts. P6 suggested "maybe if you know you're with the same person and if you're getting the training that you need." P5 expounded on *teacher training*: "We went through that training where we had to talk about what you know the norms were going to be, because talking doesn't bother her." Participants also described the benefits of teacher training and how they could receive proper instruction to meet their students' needs. I combined *teacher training* with *compatibility*. Collaboration played a role in determining the teaching model coteachers used to create an effective inclusion classroom.

Teaching model was another code that became evident as I continued reading the transcripts. Coteachers can use six research-based teaching models for instruction: one teaches, one observes; one teaches, one assists; parallel teaching; station teaching; alternative teaching; and team teaching (Brendle et al., 2017). Brendle et al. (2017) proposed "in order to experience positive results implementing models of co-teaching, there are crucial steps within the models requiring effective collaboration utilizing both the general and special education teacher strengths" (p. 540). The findings became clear as participants discussed similar concepts related to the teaching models and which models were implemented in their classrooms.

Eighty percent of the teachers agreed that the general education teacher teaches the lessons and that the one teaches/one assists model was the most commonly used model in inclusion classrooms. Teachers shared that their expert training dictated who provided instruction. Teachers reiterated that some received certification in the subject

and grade-level content areas and others received certification in providing individualized instruction for struggling students. Da Fonte and Barton-Arwood (2017) recommended that teachers collaboratively integrate their skills and knowledge to meet the needs of their learners. Hence, the *teaching model* was combined with *compatibility* because participants provided similar concepts related to the model used in their classroom and why it was appropriate.

Some of the codes were comparable, as participants were explaining similar concepts, words, or phrases. For example, *shared responsibility* was described by one participant as an "ensuring equality," and another participant explained *shared responsibility* in a similar manner. *Shared responsibility* and *ensuring equality* were combined to establish a category. Codes that continually appeared included the following: *co-planning time*, *administration involvement*, *equality*, *communication*, *shared responsibility*, and *relationships*.

Teachers who work together and share in the decision-making process gain equality in the inclusion classrooms (Kelly, 2018; Morgan, 2016). Communication is an example of establishing relationships. The participants expounded on their similar concepts, which included *relationships* and *communication* (see Appendix B). P4 explained how she and her coteachers communicated: "If something happened, we talked about what happened if we didn't agree." P7 reiterated the importance of "keeping communication open." P8 explained how communication is key to "establishing relationships." I combined the codes to identify a category. Establishing relationships

between coteachers enhances the communication and instructional delivery in inclusion classrooms (Hamdan et al., 2016).

Code categories of coplanning time, administration involvement, equality, communication, shared responsibility, and relationships that appeared most often were created when combining the codes. The finding produced four themes aligned with the conceptual framework of Pratt's achieving symbiosis theory and the research question. Table 3 shows the themes and theme statements, including similar concepts, words, or phrases that participants used about the collaborative practices they encountered in establishing relationships in inclusion classrooms.

Table 3

Theme and Theme Statements

Theme	Theme statement
Lack of equality in the classroom	Express that equality is needed in the classroom
	Reveal that coteaching is like being in a marriage
	Report the importance of sharing responsibilities
Coplanning time needed for effective coteaching	Report an abundance amount of planning is needed in coteaching
	Express the need for time to coplan together
	State that most of the time they planned all of the lessons
Importance of relationships in coteaching	Express that communication is necessary in establishing relationships
	Report that teachers need to learn to work together
	State that teachers must collaborate and work together
Not enough administration involvement	Report that coteachers need administration involvement
	Seek administrative support when placing coteachers
	State that coteachers should not be moved year after year

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education middle school teachers in inclusion classrooms. The research question was the following: What difficulties do middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms? Data analysis revealed that four themes emerged from this research: (a) lack of equality in the classroom, (b) coplanning time needed for effective coteaching, (c) importance of relationships in coteaching, and (d) not enough administrative involvement.

Theme 1: Lack of Equality in the Classroom

Several participants express their concern of a lack of equality in the classroom. Participant P5, a general education teacher, stated, “I feel like they just throw you in a classroom, and you may not know that material.” Participants P10 believed that to be equal, they had to be participating partners in the relationship. Participants P4 and P9 expressed their concerns about not knowing the content material and limiting their involvement in class.

Participant P1, a special education teacher, stated, “I haven’t taught seventh grade ELA and so a lot of it comes down to one teach/one assist, and my role in that model.” Participant P3, a general education teacher, also stated, “I think it ends up with the gen ed. teacher doing 99 or 100% of the instruction and the co-teacher assists.” However, this lack of equality would have to come as a directive from the administration. Participant P9, a special education teacher, said, “It would have to come down from the top to the

bottom" for teachers to use a different teaching model. Participant P9 also stated, "I've seen it in other locations, other schools, other counties, and when it happened, it was established in the beginning of the year and came from the top down."

Participants P4 and P9 communicated their concerns about their limited knowledge of the content material. Four special education participants in the study expressed that not being familiar with the content material affected their willingness to be more involved in the teaching process. These teachers expressed concerns that they did not know enough about the subject to offer meaningful instruction to the lessons. Participant P1 stated, "ELA is not my curriculum area, I don't know that curriculum." Participant P3 stated, "My co-teacher's knowledge level isn't as high in the subject." Participant P6, a general education teacher, added, "I do it all; yes, I'm the one doing the entire lesson." Participant P1 expressed, "There's no shared ownership of the classroom. It is generally the general ed teachers in charge, and the special ed teacher becomes a para-pro because they don't have time to plan." Moreover, according to Participant P10, a special education teacher, almost all the lessons were taught by the general education teachers: "The general ed for science and social studies they pretty much teach." Participant P1 stated,

> Without planning, then you fall into that one teacher is in charge of things and the other person just hanging out. Where there's no shared equity you know there's no parity, and there's no communication, there's no shared ownership of the classroom.

Participants expressed that gaining parity and equality was challenging when both parties were not equally participating in the teaching and learning process. Participant P10 added, “Share responsibility together, divide the lesson. Just where they can intermingle together and two teachers actually being one team.”

Theme 2: Coplanning Time Needed for Effective Coteaching

General education and special education teachers both discussed their concerns that the difficulty of planning schedules created insufficient time for co-planning. In some cases, co-teachers taught cross-team and were responsible for teaching several subject areas. This responsibility prevented them from meeting with co-teachers to co-plan. Participant P1, a special education teacher, stated,

> If you’re on a cross-grade schedule subject, you might see as a co-teacher you may not have a common co-teacher planning time; maybe now you might get 5 minutes to talk to somebody between classes to figure out what you’re doing.

Participant P6, a general education teacher, added, “Co-teachers having multiple classes or multiple units. I don’t think they’re ever going to be efficient in both settings.” Participant P8, also a general education teacher, stated, “I do all the planning and just tell them what we’re doing.”

A related concern expressed by both general education and special education teachers was the inability to establish routines for their classes. Participant P5, a general education teacher, explained that routines were processes that “we have to plan for, we don’t always get to do that now.” Participant P5 continued, “Like I’ll have a group, and

she'll have a group, or I'll do a bigger group, and she'll do a smaller group." Participant P2, a general education teacher, stated:

> I think we've learned to work together. In the past, we didn't plan together all the time. We learned that we had to do that, and we started doing that because she had to be involved in the lesson planning as much as I did, so that she could know what to expect and what to look for to accommodate her students.

Participant P5 added, "Normally, back before she had a crazy schedule, we would meet every Friday, and then we would go through what was happening the next week."

Several participants described what they did to plan together with their co-teachers. Participant P1, a special education teacher, stated, "We work backward from the test and are working backward to figure out how we're going to teach that skill or concept. We just try to identify the known barriers." Participant P7, another special education teacher, stated, "Having time to plan together is setting aside time to sit down and plan who's going to do what." Participant P10, another special education teacher, pointed out the importance of continual planning, saying, "With regular-education or special education students, it has to be constant planning every single day to make it a well-oiled machine." Teachers also emphasized that monitoring student progress played a vital role in the planning process. Participant P5 added, "We would look at our progress monitoring sheets. We would talk about who needs help with what and how we could fit that into the following week."

Theme 3: Importance of Relationships in Coteaching

Both general education and special education teachers described the importance of establishing relationships. General education and special education teachers shared their concerns about staff placement and what criteria were used to determine the pairing of co-teachers. Special education teachers were placed in inclusion classrooms based on the needs and numbers of SWDs. Participant P8, a general education teacher, stated, "You're not working with just numbers and data. You're working with another teacher and children." Participant P1, a special education teacher, stated, "Once you have a good co-teacher team, you protect that. You can't always do it because of numbers, but you try your hardest." Participant P5, a general education teacher, added, "I feel like my co-teacher, and I get along."

In contrast, participants sometimes complained about the problems that arose when two co-teachers were not sufficiently compatible. Participant P1 shared that there were situations in which "their philosophies on disabilities were different, their philosophies on teaching were different, their styles were different." Participant P3, a general education teacher, shared,

> I've been in situations where there were two, where I was working with another teacher with a gen ed, and our scores were really high compared to other years. Things were really working, or classroom environment was very strong, and the kids were excelling, and the next year they broke it up, and we both cotaught with somebody different. It's like, why did you do that?

Participant P1 emphasize the role of personalities in compatibility:

> I think everything pretty much boils down to those two things. Sometimes you have personalities. They may be great teachers, they may have the same philosophies. That's something that administrator should take into consideration before they make that final staffing position decision. Personalities.

Participants believed that equality in the classroom was created when responsibility was shared, and the teachers believed in one another. Some participants expressed the view that coteaching was like a marriage, a partnership between two people working together with common goals in mind. Participant P8 stated, "You don't marry somebody you don't know; you marry after you spend time with them." Participant P10, a special education teacher, shared the importance of working together, stating: "They have to start planning together, work together. Divide and conquer." The participant added that partnership required flexibility and a willingness to compromise, also saying, "It's like working out marriage issues."

Three general education teachers discussed the importance of compatible personalities in coteaching. Participant P3 added, "When you find that pair that really meshes, do everything you can not to break that up." Participant P6 stated, "You get two or three different people each year, it's hard to really build a relationship and find out how that person learned the curriculum." Participant P8 shared, "I think it's unfair when special ed teachers get changed so often from grade level to grade level, subject to subject…I think co-teachers are moved around too much."

Theme 4: Not Enough Administration Involvement

Eight of the 10 participants addressed concerns about the importance of administration involvement. These statements were in response to the interview question: What suggestions can you offer that could improve the collaboration between co-teachers? Participant P2, a general education teacher, stated, “Administrators need to be able to encourage school teaching teams to work together, because it’s not about us teachers. It’s about our students and getting our students where they need to be.” Participant P3, a general education teacher, stated, “Administration can determine which teachers work well together in the classroom.”

Participants also discussed what happened when some issues and concerns prevented them from achieving success in the classroom. Participant P1, a special education teacher, shared, “Careful placement of co-teachers is a huge issue, and I think a lot of administrators I’ve talked to don’t see that as a problem.” Participant P5, a general education teacher, expressed, “I feel like me and my co-teacher get along, and then administration says, we need to move her to 6th grade and get someone else to help me.” Participant P6, another general education teacher, stated, “I think just working with that same person is good, but when you are getting two or three different people each year, it’s hard to build a relationship and find out how that person learned the curriculum.” Participant P5, another general education teacher, added, “I think co-teachers that receives training in the particular subject area can function in that classroom.” Participant P6, another general education teacher, added, “If you’re working and training with your co-teacher, that’s something administration can do.”

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The components of trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These components were followed throughout the study. Trustworthiness was exemplified from the beginning of the study until the results were reported (Elo et al., 2014).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the accurate representation of the thoughts and perceptions of the participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure credibility, the transcripts were systematically reviewed, with member checking to include participant input (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). All participants were asked to member check the results by reviewing their own transcripts and affirming that the transcripts were reliable reports of what they said during the interviews (Birt et al., 2016). Participant input provided a clear understanding of the collaborative practices the participants used in inclusion classrooms. Participants were able to make corrections or provide additional responses if needed.

Transferability

Transferability refers to whether the results of the data apply to a larger population (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Transferability depends on the relevant data collected from the participants. Korstjens and Moser (2018) suggested that transferability was achieved through thick description, allowing the reader to determine whether results were transferable to their own settings. Transferability in the current study depended on how the participants answered the interview questions and how their answers related to

the research question. A limitation to transferability in this study was that it took place in only one school in the southeast United States.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the same results over time (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To ensure dependability, I took notes of the interviews, thereby creating an audit trail. The purpose of this plan was to create consistency and confirm dependability. The data were also uploaded to Atlas ti (Version 9), a software program used for qualitative research analysis.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the efforts made against bias by ensuring that the data can be traced to their origins. To ensure confirmability, a journal in Altas ti of each participant's interview included my notes about responses to the interview questions. This approach was used along with the audit trail to ensure confirmability (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Summary

In this basic qualitative research study, semi-structured interview questions were used to collect data online through Zoom. I described the setting, demographics, and data collection process for the study. Evidence of trustworthiness was presented in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Four themes emerged in the data process: (a) lack of equality in the classroom, (b) co-planning time needed for effective coteaching, (c) importance of relationships in coteaching, and (d) not enough

administrative involvement. Chapter 5 presents the interpretation of the results and the limitations of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. My investigation revealed problems coteachers encountered were a lack of symbiotic relationships in inclusion classrooms because of inadequate planning, parity, and interpersonal difference. Coteachers are having difficulties working together to create effective teaching relationships in inclusion classrooms. During the data analysis process, I realized that some of the interview questions connected to more than one theme related to Pratt's (2014) theory.

This basic qualitative study was designed to explore coteaching relationships between five general education and five special education teachers. The investigation focused on inadequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences. I used Pratt's (2014) achieving symbiosis theory for building effective teaching relationships. Data collected from teachers' interviews were analyzed and interpreted to identify themes. In Chapter 5, a summary of findings is presenting, including comparisons to Pratt's theory and to the literature related to coteaching relationships between general education and special education teachers. Limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for future research, and a conclusion are also included.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used the interview questions to explore the gap in literature regarding collaboration between general education and special education teachers and to answer the research question. The research question was: What difficulties do middle school general

education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms? The interview questions were developed to prompt participants to provide in-depth data concerning the collaborative practices coteachers used in their classrooms. Also, I explored what insight teachers could offer to improve the collaboration between general education and special education teachers.

The research question was based on Pratt's (2014) achieving symbiosis theory. The theory has three stages: initiation, symbiosis spin, and fulfillment. The first stage, initiation, involves coteacher expectations when working together in the same classroom. During the second stage, symbiosis spin, teachers build relationships with one another. Finally, during the third stage, fulfillment, teachers gain parity, equality, and shared responsibility. Pratt's theory describes how coteachers should work together in inclusive classrooms. Teachers can use Pratt's theory to determine the appropriate strategies for creating effective inclusion classrooms. Coteachers who collaboratively combine their expert training increase their chances of meeting the needs of their diverse learners (Friend, 2016).

Eighty percent of the participants I interviewed shared their concerns about the importance of "administration involvement" in improving the collaboration between coteachers. The collaboration between both teachers in the inclusion classroom is essential to meeting the students' needs (Koh & Shin, 2017). Current participants expressed their concerns about staff placements and noted that it would be nice if personalities and teaching styles were considered when placing staff together. Coteachers must collaboratively work together to problem-solve and meet the needs of their diverse

learners (Friend, 2016; Morgan, 2016). Weber and Young (2017) stated that for coteaching to be successful, the administration must support the coteachers. Current participants felt that there was not enough administrative involvement, especially in providing training for coteachers. Teacher training is a vital part of professional development, and it provides direct instructions for both teachers (McCall et al., 2018). Research suggested that professional development continues during the year to provide support for coteaching teams (Weber & Young, 2017). Current participants also expressed that administration should start supporting them at the beginning of the school year, which would allow teachers to plan their year accordingly. General education and special education teachers agreed that receiving administrative support could enhance the collaboration between teachers.

General education and special education teachers are expected to work together. The two teachers are responsible for creating and designing lessons that meet the learners' needs (Friend, 2016). In Pratt's (2014) third stage, fulfillment, teachers successfully establish relationships (gain parity and equality) with their coteachers. Collaboration is critical to coteaching, and it is the heart of inclusion (Florian, 2017). The current participants were asked what suggestions they could offer that could improve the collaboration between co-teachers. The participants expressed similar responses; they felt it is critical that the administration carefully consider the two teachers' personalities and coteaching beliefs before placing them together. An interesting finding in the study was participants with many years of experience could not articulate their coteaching beliefs.

This finding confirmed the need for coteacher training so teachers can understand their role in the inclusion classroom.

Coplanning is vital between general education and special education teachers in creating an effective inclusion classroom. Wilson (2016) suggested coplanning is a part of effective coteaching. All participants that I interviewed communicated the importance of coplanning and having time to plan with their coteachers. The participants voiced their concerns about not having enough coplanning time with their coteachers. Cross-grade-level teaching was one reason teachers believed they did not have coplanning time. Coteachers taught multiple subjects on different teams and did not have the same planning schedule as their coteacher. During the coplanning time, teachers can build lessons designed to meet the needs of their students and collaborate about teaching strategies that will enhance their instruction. According to Sailor (2017), coteachers who work together in the planning process can build relationships and create flexible practices that support their diverse population.

In addition, participants had another c-planning concern; they felt that they could not establish routines for themselves or their students. Routines are processes teachers create to know what part they will play in the teaching of instructions. Routines are vital to coplanning (Pratt et al., 2017). The participants expressed that coplanning was important for both teachers so each teacher knew what was being taught and they could create accommodations for students who might struggle with the content. Furthermore, coplanning provides detailed information for the special education teacher who may not know the content material. Pratt et al. (2017) noted that equality and shared responsibility

are problems for special education teachers because they are unfamiliar with some of the content. Eighty percent of the special education teachers in the current study agreed that not being familiar with the content material affected their readiness to participate in the teaching. This finding reiterated the importance of coplanning. It also was interesting to find out that most general education teachers planned all of the lessons and were responsible for providing accommodations for SWDs.

Coteachers who establish coplanning time can create routines that are beneficial for their inclusion classrooms. McWhirter et al. (2016) suggested that coplanning is necessary to create effective inclusion classrooms. Pratt's (2014) first stage, initiation, described teachers' expectations. This stage includes the coplanning time between the two teachers. Coplanning is an approach that allows teachers to create and design lessons, but they also can establish working relationships. Coteachers who coplan can develop working relationships that enable them to achieve success (Pratt et al., 2017). Also, coteachers can create an effective inclusion classroom when they have enough coplanning time. Cook and Cook (2016) suggested that coteachers who know their specific roles can share responsibilities. However, not having enough coplanning time decreases the opportunities for creating effective inclusion classrooms.

Additionally, current participants were concerned about teacher relationships. Murawski and Bernhardt (2015) suggested that teachers share their experiences by getting to know one another. Current participants felt that like-minded teachers work better together. General education teachers were frustrated with having different teachers every year, and special education teachers were frustrated with being moved year after

year. Cohesive relationships were achieved when the administration considered compatibility for staff placement in inclusion classrooms. Participants agreed that coteacher placement is essential and teachers should be compatible. Teachers' willingness to build collaborative cultures and relationships helped them discover commonalities (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015).

Establishing relationships was associated with Pratt's (2014) second stage, symbiosis spin. During symbiosis spin, teachers were seeking to build relationships (parity and equality). Participants expressed their eagerness to work with their coteachers, but they also stated that having something in common is nice. An interesting finding from the study was that coteachers did not feel administration considered compatibility as a factor when coteachers were placed together.

Lastly, participants expressed that the lack of equality in the classroom was not parity because they did not have enough familiarity. They discussed their frustration with not having time to focus on getting to know one another along with other responsibilities. The general education teachers were frustrated with having to plan all of the lessons. The special education teachers were frustrated with not having time to plan and learn the content materials to teach. The frustration was apparent from both sides; they felt unequal in the classroom. According to Kelly (2018), equality is gained when teachers work together in the decision-making process. If teachers are expected to share responsibilities in the inclusion classrooms, they need to know their specific expectations. Coteaching is a shared responsibility by people who are willing to work together (Morgan, 2016).

General education teachers are trained in specific content. They receive specific subject and grade-level certifications (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). These teachers know the subject and standards. In the current study, general education participants expressed their frustrations with writing all of the lesson plans and teaching all of the content material. General education participants noted that they should share their content knowledge so special education teachers could play active roles in the teaching process. Buli-Holmberg and Jeyaprathaban (2016) noted that a flexible approach between partners is vital for lesson planning and instructions.

Additionally, special education teachers are trained in accommodating and differentiating the content material. They are skilled specialists in accommodations and modifications for students with individual education plans (e.g., sharing their knowledge of interventions and strategies that will assist general education teachers in writing lesson plans that include differentiation components designed for meeting students' needs). This flexible approach is essential for meeting the instructional needs of both the teacher and the student.

General education and special education teachers integrate their knowledge to create effective inclusion classrooms. Participants admitted they did not know how to approach one another in determining feasible strategies for establishing relationships. Pratt's second stage, symbiosis spin, is established when teachers practice building relationships (van Velzen et al., 2019). Equality is possible only when both teachers are collaboratively working together.

Establishing coteaching relationships is vital to the improvement of coteaching in inclusion classrooms. Florian (2017) stated that the heart of inclusion is teachers collaboratively working together. Teacher relationships will be improved when general education and special education teachers' concerns are addressed, including inequality in the classroom, not enough coplanning time, not enough administrative involvement, and the importance of relationships in coteaching. Disregarding these concerns will continue to prevent teachers from attaining symbiotic relationships.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations to qualitative studies because the data collected are based on the participants' responses. The focus of the current study was to receive honest answers from participants; however, they may have provided information that they felt would benefit my study (see Creswell & Poth, 2016). I took steps to avoid potential biases by not asking questions that would lead participants to provide answers that I thought they should provide. I followed the interview protocol; all participants were asked to check the transcripts to affirm their responses, and they were given opportunities to make corrections or clarifications. Also, following the interview protocol assisted in avoiding possible skewed data and helped me keep my biases to a minimum.

Other limitations included the location of the study, participants' demographics, and the sample size. The study site is a local school in the Southeast United States. All participants were required to be certified in general education or special education and teach in an inclusion classroom for one period a day. The study sample was five general education teachers and five special education teachers. Three were men, and seven were

women; however, the grade levels varied from sixth to eighth. Some of the more experienced participants felt their years of experience helped them decide to participate in the study. P6 stated “I’ve been teaching for 20 years, so it’s easier for me, and in that maybe I don’t always see like how some of the lower kids are struggling.” On the other hand, participants with fewer years of experience may not have known how to help the struggling kids. Nevertheless, the study location may limit the transferability to a larger population because the study took place at one school.

Recommendations

This study focused on lack of adequate planning time, lack of parity, and interpersonal differences between inclusion teachers. I also explored what suggestions teachers could offer that could improve the collaboration between coteachers in a school in the Southeast United States. I concluded that more research is needed based on findings and my review of the current literature.

This qualitative study on middle school general education and special education teachers should be duplicated in high school. Future research is recommended to explore the coteacher’s perspective of equality in the classroom, coplanning times and opportunities, administration involvement, and the importance of relationships in coteaching. Understanding the teacher’s concerns and receiving suggestions about the collaboration between coteachers may enable teachers to create effective classrooms and transfer the study to larger populations. Also, a quantitative study using a survey tool could be conducted to determine whether general education and special education teachers receive coteacher training in college or teacher preparation classes. Considering

teachers' training as it relates to administrative support needed and staff placement may help to create effective inclusion classrooms in middle and high schools.

Meanwhile, four recommendations can impact the inclusion classrooms immediately. Firstly, the administration needs to consider teachers' personalities and coteach philosophies before placing co-teachers together (Friend, 2016). Teachers will have communication challenges if they do not have similar values and beliefs when teaching students, especially those with diverse learning needs. Secondly, teacher training is a must. General education and special education teachers receive different certifications in college; therefore, they may not know the other person's teaching practices or responsibilities (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprathaban, 2016). Coteaching training can be vital in setting classroom guidelines. The training can give teachers opportunities to role-play and determine what will work best in their classrooms.

Thirdly, co-planning is a must, and it is a vital part of effective coteaching (Wilson, 2016). Teachers can write lesson plans that meet the needs of their students,' including differentiation components. The components can work for students who struggle and those who learn at a high level. Finally, administration involvement can be the key to whether the inclusion classroom function effectively or is a total disaster. Teachers must have a clear understanding of what is expected of them in the classroom. This statement may seem simple; however, some teachers may be unaware that they must collaboratively work together to meet the learning needs of all students. Florian (2017) stated that the heart of inclusion is teachers working together. Consequently, to have a

clear understanding, the administration can provide teacher expectations at the beginning of school by meeting with all co-teachers.

Implications

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore co-teaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The collection of data and exploring the research question, what difficulties do middle school general education and special education teachers encounter that prevent them from attaining a symbiotic relationship in inclusion classrooms? The findings can offer a clearer picture of the concerns co-teachers have regarding co-teaching. All parties involved in the coteaching process can start focusing on addressing the concerns and improving co-teaching. Co-teachers provided suggestions on what is working between teachers, and they also offered concerns vital to improving coteaching. The study size was limited to one school. Still, the information gained can be enormous in improving practices at the study site and possibly generalized to a larger population once the study has been researched in the future.

Positive Social Change

The study implies that co-teachers want to work together, and with the appropriate support, it is possible to create effective inclusion classrooms. Moreover, social change implications can impact policies by sending a message to the administration to request more college teachers' training by offering additional co-teach preparation classes. Also, the administration can be made aware that co-teachers need support before staff placement. In addition, co-teachers need professional development

training continually during the year. Teachers have expressed that the training must be co-teacher training with both general education and special education teachers. The finding of this study can help bridge the gap in understanding the collaboration experiences between co-teachers in middle school inclusion classrooms.

Conceptual Implications

The basic qualitative study explored co-teaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. The study's findings allowed teachers to explain their concerns about co-teaching and offer their insights on collaborative practices that need improvement. Analyzing the data allowed teachers to explain in detail the problem that co-teachers encountered. I used Pratt's (2014) conceptual framework of achieving symbiosis theory to address the experiences teachers encountered because of inadequate planning, parity, and interpersonal difference. Also, I gained a better understanding that teachers were willing to work with one another; however, they did not have a clear understanding of the co-teaching expectations. Participants agreed that having administrative support and knowing their expectations will help them in the inclusion classroom.

Conclusion

The study was designed to explore the coteaching relationship of five general education and five special education teachers in inclusion classrooms. Teachers expressed their concerns about their lack of understanding of what was expected of them. The concerns include the lack of equality in the classroom, not enough co-planning time, not enough administrative involvement, and the importance of relationships in

coteaching. The study results may be used to inform leaders of the importance of collaborative relationships and effective strategies for solving problems between co-teachers. Furthermore, the study will demonstrate the importance of improving relationships across the educational system and enable students to reach their greatest potential and become productive citizens.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

(Template adapted from Creswell & Báez, 2020)

Study: Exploring Collaborative Practices in Middle School Inclusion Classrooms

Time of interview:

Date:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interviewee Position:

Study Description: The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to explore co-teaching relationships between general education and special education teachers in the inclusion classrooms.

1. Describe your inclusion setting.

What co-teaching model is used in your classroom?

Describe your role in the model that is used.

2. Describe the process that you and your co-teacher go through to plan lessons for our students.

How do you plan differentiated lessons for SWDs that struggle with reading compared to students that are on-grade level?

How do you plan differentiated lessons for SWDs that struggle with writing compared to those students that are on-grade level?

How do you and your co-teacher decide who will teach different parts of the planned lessons?

1. Describe how you and your co-teacher demonstrate equality in the classroom?

How do you and your co-teacher establish classroom rules and procedures?

How do you and your co-teacher address students when they break class rules and procedures?

4. Describe what collaborative practices you and your co-teachers use for teaching SWDs.

How do you and your co-teacher decide what are the best interventions to meet the needs of SWDs that are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught?

How do you and your co-teacher decide what are the best strategies to meet the needs of SWDs that are struggling with learning the content material that is being taught?

5. Describe how you and your co-teacher handle disagreements.

How do you and your co-teacher resolve disagreements on how to meet the learning and behavioral needs of SWDs?

6. What suggestions can you offer that could improve the collaboration between teachers?

Appendix B: Transcript Evidence

Codes	Transcript Evidence
Co-teaching model (share in the teaching)	P8- **One teach/one asst.,** "I would say 99% of the time probably." Also, "normally they just let me **take the lead and that can be both in planning, but also in the classroom,** and then they do kind of a support role." P7- "sometimes we do like **a true Co-teach model** where I might do a mini lesson and then the Gen Ed teacher might do the mini lesson and then you know we kind of bounced back and forth." P5- "**I teach and then my Co teacher assist."** P3- "I think it ends up with the gen ed. teacher doing 99 or 100% of the instruction and the co-teacher assists." P2- It depends. P1- "I don't know that curriculum that well it's really hard to be a good team teacher if you're if you don't know the curriculum." The teaching model is "**teaching and assist**" make sense alright.
Communication/ Relationships (establish relationships, communicate)	P10- "I can work with one perfectly fine the other teacher is **not quite as an open** situation." P9- "I think mainly is "getting to work for you is **establishing a relationship** that's one of the main things." P8- "I think that's natural sometimes for you to run into hiccups but as long as both of you are being professional, and **being respectful of both your jobs**, and you as a person that I think anything can be worked through." Also, "You know and then I feel that having a co-teacher is like being in a marriage, like you have to **complement each other."** Also, "And the more time you **have to collaborate and work with someone that you know**," P7- And just "**keeping communication open**" and being open to somebody else's opinion because I feel like I have that in my current situation but it has not been in other situations before where it was not that way. Also, "I feel like if you have **a real hostile Co teach relationship then the kids definitely suffer** from that because they don't get the benefit of the two teachers." P6- "try to **come to a resolution** maybe better understand." P5- "I think each year that we are together, we get better and better; **we can be like remember we did last year** and let's do that again." Also, "I think obviously if two people aren't getting along they probably don't need to stay together but if you have **a good relationship** like don't mess up a good thing." P4- "most of the time **we're very in sync with each other."** P3- "**We have several times this year sat down** and specially when I know there's something that's going to have a lot of reading or something like that a lot of a capillary specifically coming up." P2- "I think because **we've learned to work together."** P1- "We come up with a shared ownership"
Personalities	P8- "I've only run into one situation and it was just a clash this person with a very strong **personality** and she just wanted to do it her way, so I let her and for several students it worked." P6- "I think her **personality** also helped." P5- "I think because **we get along** so well we kind of just read each other."

	P3- "I would say that it would be **nice if personalities and teaching styles were taken into consideration."** P1- "co-teacher on each team that just did not get along, they personally didn't get along, **their philosophies on disabilities were different, their philosophies on teaching more different**, their styles were different, and it was a train wreck."
Administration involvement (need help, consideration, support)	P8- "I think it's unfair when **special ed teachers get changed so often** from grade-level to grade level, subject to subject for them to walk into my language arts class and they haven't ever co-taught before me, expect them to be expert in my standards." Also, "I think **co-teachers are moved around too much."** And, "**you're not working with just numbers and data you're working with another teacher** and children." And, "I think the more **consistent you can be with the person you're co-teaching with the easier that all of those things will be."** P6- "I think just working with that same person that's you know you get **two or three different people each year, it's hard."** Also, "working in the **training with your Co teacher that's something administration can do**. you know training with your co-teacher." Also, "Co-teachers having multiple classes or multiple units, **I don't think they're ever going to be able to be totally efficient in both you know settings**, it's going to be one or the other." P5- "I feel like they just **throw you in a classroom** and you may not know that material." Also, "I think if our co-teachers had the same schedule the whole day, I think that they would feel more confident." And, "I feel like me and my co-teacher get along, and then **administration says, we need to move** her to 6th grade and get someone else to help me." "I think obviously if two people aren't getting along they probably don't need to stay together but if you have a good relationship like don't mess up a good thing." P3- "Like administration, it's being able to identify what's working well. Also, Adm … "the next year they broke it up, and we both co-taught with somebody different. It's like why you did that." P2- "**administrators need to be able to encourage school teaching teams to work together** because it's not about us teachers its about our students." P1- "**careful placement** of a co-teachers that's a huge issue, and I think a lot of administrators that I've talked to don't see that as a problem."
Staff placement	P8- "you're not working with just numbers and data you're working with another teacher and children." P5- "I also wish that your Co teacher was your Co teacher forever **they weren't pulling you to different grades."** P1- "about staff placement and not **moving good teachers around all the time."**
Teacher training	P6- "I just I mean maybe if you know you're with the same person maybe if you're **getting the training that you need."** P5- **"**having **the Co-teachers more trained in their area**, Also, "**particular subject area that they're in if they will have some training** to be able to function in that classroom." And, "we went through that training where we had to talk about what you know the norms."
Equality/equal (no equality/not equal)	P10- "I am **more of an equal in one of the classes;** it just depends on who your regular teacher is." P9- "They don't mind me stepping in and presenting something or helping good teacher established like classroom procedures and rules normally."

	P8- "I feel that having a **co-teacher is like being in a marriage**, like you have to complement each other." P7- "I think we're pretty good at **breaking up the responsibilities** in the classroom equitably." P6- "so I think that if they **have that bond** with you and I think that's fine, I think that's good that brings you can reach more people, more students that way." Also, "**it's hard to really build a relationship."** P5- "I mean in my eyes they just see that we're both adults and they better know that **we're equal."** "I try to make it seem like it's both of our classroom, so she feels welcome in there." And, "to **build relationships** with your Co teacher." Also, "I may make the assignments and put them into Canvas sometimes, she does that, so it just depends on what we're doing, and we try to **use each other's strengths**, like usually, if I make the lessons and uploaded them in to canvas." P4- "**We try to be very equal** in that part so that students don't you know try to take advantage of one teacher over the other." P3- "we try to **present everything as a as a team** front." P2-"I might get carried away but **I want her input** I want students to see us both as equals and not you know like if my Co teachers not a teacher." Also, "**I might know start out and then my co-teacher will jump** in or maybe she will take the lead and I'll just let her roll with it and then I'll give my you know I'll come in if I feel that I have to add something or we just take turns." And, "I think teachers need to move from that old way that the general Ed teacher was the leader and the main person in the classroom." Also, "getting our students where they need to be and the only way that we can do that is by having that **team in the classroom working together**, united and actually, team teaching it's a team it's not one over the other." "Bounce off of each other not that one is better than the other." P1- "it's **our class not one or the other person's class.** we come up with a shared ownership you know we discussed early on the year behavior management in the classroom both of us get on the kids about stuff."