


2015

# Impact of Professional Learning Community on Coteaching

Lalita Karpen  
*Walden University*

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Lalita Karpen

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Walden University  
2015

Abstract

Impact of Professional Learning Community on Coteaching

by

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MEd, Grand Canyon University, 2011

BA, Georgia State University, 2005

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2015

## Abstract

A professional learning community (PLC) is designed to increase pedagogical knowledge and encourage collaboration amongst teachers. Many schools are using a variety of PLCs to increase collaboration and improve teaching and learning. The study school implemented a PLC, but collaboration and effective coteaching practice have not improved. Guided by social constructivism and social cognitive learning theories, the goal of this research was to explore coteachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the PLC coteaching model to improve instructional strategies. A qualitative case study with semistructured interviews to collect data and a narrative analysis for reporting was utilized. The population was limited to 5 general and 4 special education teachers. A hand analysis method was used to identify and code recurring themes before using thick description to report the findings. The findings showed that the teachers perceived an ineffective PLC implementation, a lack of coteaching training and collaboration, and a lack of administrative support. Improvements in these areas are needed to boost the effectiveness of the coteaching model. The findings from this study led to a project consisting of a series of professional development workshops for coteachers and school leaders. The goal of the project is to eliminate barriers to coteaching practice and create an effective PLC. This study may bring about positive social change by providing insight into understanding how an effective PLC, administrative supportive, and meaningful professional development can enhance coteaching practice. This knowledge can provide school leaders with insight to make adaptations to coteaching practice that may lead to positive student learning outcomes.

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## Dedication

I would first like to thank Mariamma for giving me the strength to continue this journey. I would like to thank my husband Arjunen, my daughter Rayana, and son Rajin for their unwavering support, love, loyalty, and encouragement during this journey. I would like to thank my father Perma Gounden and my in-laws Mootoo and Gloria Armoogan for your support. Finally, I want to thank my amazing grandparents Iris and the late Permaul Gounden for being wonderful role models. I owe both of you a debt of gratitude that I can never repay. I would not have completed this journey without the love and support from each of you! I dedicate this research to all of you.

*“Let us make one point, that we meet each other with a smile, when it is difficult to smile.  
Smile at each other, make time for each other in your family”*

~Mother Theresa

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*"Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will"*

~Mahatma Gandhi

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **Introduction**

In an era of high-stakes testing and increased accountability, general and special education teachers must create academically challenging environments for both students with special needs and nondisabled students, ensuring that both groups continue to learn with neither being disadvantaged. In practice, challenges arise, as some students with special needs can be disruptive and engaged in inappropriate behaviors. These disruptive behaviors can impede the learning of other students (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2009). Yet, the primary laws governing special education, namely, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) requires students with disabilities must have access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) and must be educated in the least restricted environment (LRE). The challenges of behavior and learning presented by students with special needs were once solely the responsibility of special education teachers; however the responsibilities are now shared with general education teachers. Schools are increasingly serving more students with special needs in general education classrooms using the coteaching model. The coteaching model was developed with the passage of Public Law 94-142, Education of All Handicapped Children's Act in 1975, currently known as IDEA (Bryant-Davis, Diekar, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Nierengarten, 2013).

According to Kilanowski-Press, Foote, and Rinaldo (2010) coteaching normally includes a special education and general education teacher working collaboratively to provide instruction to non-disabled and disabled students in one classroom. There are six

commonly known models of coteaching which are: (a) one teach, one observe; (b) one teach, one assist; (c) station teaching; (d) parallel teaching; (e) alternative teaching; and (f) team teaching (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). The *one teach, one observe*, and *one teach, one assist* coteaching models place academic and behavioral responsibility on one teacher. These two teaching models should be the least utilized but are frequently the most commonly used in coteaching classrooms (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Station teaching is beneficial to students by having teachers provide instruction in a smaller setting (Friend & Cook, 2010). The parallel teaching model is also beneficial to students because instruction is provided in a smaller setting as opposed to whole group (Friend et al., 2010). Friend and Cook (2010) stated that in the alternative teaching model, students can maximize their learning potential because teachers can choose to take both special and general needs students to a different location and provide explicit individualized instruction. According to Wet et al. (2010), the team teaching model is the most effective approach because both teachers share equal responsibility in planning and providing instruction for all students. However, the necessary requirements to coteach successfully pose a significant challenge for teachers. Some of these challenges occur because teachers do not typically receive training as preservice teachers in methods such as differentiating instruction, supporting challenging behaviors, and collaborating with other educators to address individualized instruction for specific learning needs in the coteaching environment (Voss & Bufkin, 2011).

### **Definition of the Problem**

The literature defines a professional learning community (PLC) as a group of educators working collaboratively to acquire new knowledge to enhance success for all students (Blanton & Perez, 2011; DuFour, 2007; Sigurdardottir, 2010). According to DuFour (2007), schools may make a claim about having a PLC; however a PLC exists only when educators align their practice to the PLC concept. In an effort to have educators align their practice with the PLC framework, the local district located in the southeastern region of the United States implemented a PLC in each school, including the researched school. In order to ensure confidentiality, I have assigned the pseudonym Canefield Elementary School (CES) to the researched school, which will be used throughout this study. The establishment of the PLC at CES was mainly due to the local district accepting federal funds from Race to the Top (RTT) and Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSS). For example, CES is located in one of the forty-five states who adopted the CCSS and was therefore awarded federal funds from RTT (Stotsky, 2012). The mandate from RTT requires states to recruit, prepare, and retain effective teachers while increasing achievement for all students (██████████ Department of Education, 2015). The CCSSI was a joint project with the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State Schools Officers (CCSSO) to standardize academic content in each grade level across the United States. In conjunction with the work of the CCSSO, the local district looked at ways to improve teacher effectiveness by providing on-the-job professional development; PLCs were established in each school including CES. However, according to the CES principal, teachers

continue to resist co teaching practices, and special needs students continue to lag academically when compared to their general education peers (personal communication, October 15, 2014). Thus, conducting a qualitative case study using semistructured interviews and narrative analysis would allow for further insight into the problem.

The PLC at CES was established because a new teacher evaluation system was implemented as part of the responsibility of accepting RTT funds and because participating in a PLC-related research based practices has shown to increase pedagogical knowledge by encouraging collaboration amongst teachers leading to positive outcomes for all students (████████ Department of Education, 2014; Blanton & Perez, 2011; DuFour, 2007). The CES principal reported that teachers frequently expressed reluctance to accept coteaching assignments each year, citing inadequate training to teach students with disabilities, lack of shared responsibilities, and lack of common planning time as reasons (personal communication, October, 15, 2014). Due to the reluctance, teachers rarely work collaboratively to create instructional activities or take responsibility for all students in cotaught classrooms. According to Pugach and Winn (2011) special education teachers and students with disabilities are frequently isolated in the general education classroom because the general education teachers are usually viewed as the primary teacher. Thus, CES implemented the PLC model to increase collaboration amongst educators (DuFour, 2007). Graziano and Navarrette (2012) reported that coteachers benefit professionally and students benefit academically when there is an understanding of: (a) individual roles; (b) shared common planning time; and (c) opportunities for open and constructive dialogue. Problems arise when teachers continue



to work in isolation and resist collaboration. The CES general education teachers frequently report during faculty meetings that they do not understand students' special needs, and they feel unprepared and unsupported to be co-teachers because the PLC activities have no relevancy to their current classroom duties. Thus, there appears to be a lack of communication between the general education teacher and special education teacher. The problem leading to this study is related to the reported lack of preparation, lack of collaboration, lack of support, and teachers' self-efficacy toward the coteaching model.

It is the hope of the researcher that the study will lead to solutions that can be adopted by CES, and allow the PLC to be perceived as beneficial for increasing teacher knowledge of special needs students and increasing collaboration among coteachers. It is anticipated that this qualitative case study using semistructured interviews and narrative analysis will provide insight into coteachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs toward the PLC to enhance coteaching practice, allowing school leaders to make adaptations that will lead to positive learning outcomes for students.

## **Rationale**

### **Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level**

The CES implemented the framework of the PLC to increase professional knowledge and promote collaboration between special and general education teachers. The goal of the PLC is crucial for CES because the district adopted a new teacher evaluation that uses 50% of classroom observations and 50% of students' standardized test scores to determine teachers' proficiency as part of the requirements of accepting

RTT funds. An analysis of CES state standardized testing data shows a disparity between academic performances amongst general and special needs students. For example, 52.2% of students with special needs (SWD) did not meet the standards in English language arts when compared to 25.9 % of general education students in Grades 3 through Grades 5 (see Table 1). The disparity is even greater in mathematics with 65.2% of SWD students not meeting the standards compared to 36.6% of general education students in Grades 3 through Grades 5 (see Table 2). According to the CES lead teacher for special education (LTSE), teachers report having a lack of training to teach special needs students, minimal opportunities for collaboration, and few job-embedded professional learning activities (personal communication, February 26, 2014). Coteaching practice requires teachers to receive professional development to learn collaboration skills, effective communication skills, and to understand individual roles and responsibilities in the classrooms (Nierengarten, 2013).

Table 1  
*Comparison of English Language Arts for Grades 3 Through 5*

General Education Students		Students with Special Needs (SWD)
Does Not Meet	(25.9%)	(52.2%)
Meets	(65.2%)	(45.7%)
Exceeds	(11.6%)	(2.2%)

*Note:* Data retrieved from public records from the local district website.

Table 2  
*Comparison of Math for Grades 3 Through 5*

General Education Students		Students with Special Needs (SWD)
Does Not Meet	(36.6%)	(65.2%)
Meets	(48.3%)	(30.4%)
Exceeds	(15.1%)	(4.3%)

*Note:* Data retrieved from public records from the local district website

Students with special needs frequently receive instruction in isolation from their general education peers. General education teachers report that they receive little or no professional development to teach students with disabilities (Orr, 2009; Wei, Darlington-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). The building assistant principal observed that increasing responsibilities such as: (a) the new teacher evaluation, (b) retaining qualified special education teachers, and (c) getting general education teachers to volunteer for coteaching continues to be a challenge for the district (personal communication, February 26, 2014).

Increased accountability as mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2002 and mandates from RTT require greater collaboration amongst educators while gradually eliminating isolated practices. Innovative practices such as participating in PLCs have the potential to increase teacher preparedness by collaborating with peers to increase outcomes for students with special needs (Blanton & Perez, 2011). Research supports the establishment of PLCs stating that PLCs foster collaboration by increasing teacher knowledge and expertise while positively impacting student academic success (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009; Darling-

Hammond, & Richardson, 2009). Elboutsy and Bratt (2010) argued a PLC should foster an environment where teachers engage in deep levels of inquiry aimed at improving learning for all students.

According to Killion and Roy (2009) teachers should have opportunities for professional development that are meaningful and relevant to their current teaching practice. However, it is unclear if the current model of the PLC is effective to address the needs of coteachers at CES. Teachers might be more receptive to work collaboratively if the training were tailored to meet their needs as coteachers.

### **Evidence of the Problem From the Professional Literature**

The literature indicates PLCs have the capacity for transforming schools into institutions of learning by increasing collaboration amongst faculty to increase student learning (Hord, 2009). For example, Peter Senge (1990) argued that the workplace can be viewed as a learning environment where all employees worked collaboratively sharing one vision in solving problems. Conversely, DuFour (2007) asserted schools with an effective PLC will: (a) focus on learning, (b) have a culture of collaboration, and (c) focus on data driven results. The literature supports the benefits of a PLC. According to Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) effective professional development that allows for job-embedded learning opportunities will increase teachers' pedagogical knowledge more than the traditional one day workshops. However, many PLCs continue to utilize the one day workshop which is the least effective model of professional development (Wei et al., 2010). Effective professional development for special education teachers continues to be inaccessible with only 42 % of special needs teachers reported having

access to effective professional development (Wei et al., 2010). Effective PLCs training requires teachers to have opportunities to engage in reflective practice with ongoing training instead of brief and sporadic trainings (DuFour, 2007; Killion & Roy, 2009; Ofer & Peddler, 2011). The one day professional development training workshops are often a target for criticism because they frequently have no connection to curriculum and learning, and little relevancy to teachers' current practice (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Teachers may feel a sense of frustration and might prefer to work in isolation because working in a PLC with unproductive colleagues can create more work (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Hirsh, 2009). Effective professional development should allow for teachers to receive ongoing training in a collaborative environment rather than having teachers working in isolation (Barton & Stepanek, 2012). The current PLC model at CES meets each Tuesday during teachers' common planning time. This poses a problem for special education teachers. For example, special education teachers and general education teachers at CES do not share a common planning time since special education teachers provide services to students in multiple grades. An effective PLC allows teachers to collaborate during common planning time, engage in job-embedded activities that are relevant, meaningful, and encourage teachers to share individual expertise and knowledge in order to maximize students' learning potential (Killion & Roy, 2009). There are successful schools with effective PLCs (Von Frank, 2009). However, it seems a lack of common planning time and access to professional learning activities at CES could result in poor implementation of the PLC model.

There is considerable research documenting the benefits of participating in a PLC, such as teachers working collaboratively to plan instructional tasks, share teaching responsibilities, increasing pedagogical knowledge, and having a positive attitude being part of a collaborative community (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Elboutsy & Bratt, 2010; Ofer & Pedder, 2011). However, additional research is needed to determine why CES teachers are reluctant to coteach after participating in PLC. By conducting a qualitative case study utilizing interviews as the main source of data, critical information can be gleaned directly from CES teachers to understand their reluctance to coteach.

### **Definitions**

The following definitions are intended to provide specific meaning of key terms used in the context of this study.

*Barriers to coteaching:* Barriers to coteaching may include a variety of factors such as lack of communication and collaboration, and inadequate planning time for coteachers (McConkey & Abbott, 2011).

*Collaboration:* occurs when educators share resources, decision making responsibility, and assume joint responsibility for student outcomes (Carter et al., 2009).

*Co-teaching:* A coteaching classroom is where a certified general and special education teacher work collaboratively to provide specialized instruction to non-disabled and disabled students in one classroom (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

*Individual Education Plan (IEP):* The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that any students receiving special education services in a public school

must have an IEP. The IEP is a legal document that includes the learning goals and type of services students will receive (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012).

*Professional learning community (PLC):* A term used to describe a group of educators working collaboratively in an ongoing process that includes job-embedded opportunities to acquire new knowledge in order to ensure success for all students (DuFour, 2007).

*Self-efficacy:* The term self-efficacy refers to an individual ability to enhance or hinder motivation (Bandura, 1997).

*Self-contained special education:* A special education teacher that provides services to special education students in classroom separate from general education students.

*Social cognitive:* The social cognitive theory is largely based on the work of Albert Bandura's work and the concept of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

*Social constructivism:* Social constructivism is based on the work of Lev Vygotsky's and refers to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) that stated proficiency is attained when a learner is guided with a capable peer (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

### **Significance**

It is the hope of this researcher that this doctoral project study will contribute to an understanding of, and add to the current research body on the extent to which, teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards coteaching may change after attending PLC training sessions. This researcher is particularly interested in how coteachers perceive the PLC training session and what recommendations the coteachers

will make to enhance the PLC to better prepare them to teach students with disabilities. Also, this researcher has an interest in whether the PLC training will lead to any differences in the teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs for working in a coteaching classroom. By exploring coteachers perceived lack of preparedness for coteaching classrooms, leaders within the school and local district can make adjustments to professional learning specifically targeted to meet the needs identified by the practicing coteachers. It is envisioned that the study's findings can be applied to improve and enhance current coteaching practices.

The findings from this study will culminate with a project to assist CES and the local school district to design and implement professional learning activities specifically targeted for teachers working in coteaching classrooms. This information can then be shared with other institutions and districts grappling with teachers' reluctant to engage in collaborative practices in coteaching classrooms.

### **Guiding/Research Question**

The focus of this project study is to determine whether participating in a PLC has the potential to increase collaboration and pedagogical knowledge in cotaught classrooms. The evidence from the literature suggests professional learning has a positive impact on developing teachers' pedagogical knowledge to teach specific skills (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; DuFour, 2004). However, an important consideration for professional development and teacher learning is to focus on individual teachers' knowledge, local practice, problems, routines, and unique student needs (Ofer & Pedder, 2011). Thus, this study may be useful to administrators at CES, leaders in the district,



and other school districts to make changes to their professional development training that specifically address coteachers perception of their lack of preparedness and their perceptions and attitudes towards coteaching classrooms. The following research questions guided this study:

**Research Question:**

RQ1: What are regular and special education teachers' general perception, attitudes and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the professional learning community's coteaching model to improve instructional strategies?

**Sub-Research Questions:**

- What are regular and special education teachers' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching model to enhance teacher collaboration?
- What are regular and special education teachers' beliefs about the prospect to build self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies?
- What are regular and special education teachers' attitude concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching model?

**Review of the Literature**

The literature review for this study was conducted using a Boolean search on the Walden University library website using EBSCO, ProQuest, SAGE, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The database criteria used were peer-reviewed journal articles from 2009 to present. The search terms *collaboration*, *coteaching*,

*professional learning community, professional development, social constructivism, social cognitive, self-efficacy, barriers, challenges and special education* were reviewed.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on social constructivism and social cognitive theories.

#### **Social Constructivism**

The conceptual framework of social constructivism was chosen because it requires qualitative researchers to consider the context in which participants develop personal meanings (Creswell, 2012). Social constructivism theory is largely based on the work of Lev Vygotsky who stated that learning is centered on social interactions and cooperative learning to create deeper understanding (Vygotsky, 1962). Vygotsky's work on the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) stated proficiency is attained when learners are guided by a more capable peer (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Novice teachers who engage in collaborative inquiry are more likely to increase professional knowledge by learning from peers and more advance individuals (Abramo & Austin, 2014). Social constructivism would support the PLC as way of enhancing coteaching practice. Lippy and Zamora (2012) studied professional development in 12 middle schools and found teachers maintaining an isolationist stance would be ineffective in meeting the needs of all learners in an inclusive environment. However, when teachers are open to collaboration there is a reduction in teacher isolation and an increase of teachers' ownership (Lippy & Zamora, 2012). Thus, it is through social collaboration coteaching classrooms can work successfully for students and teachers because individuals construct

ideas from their experiences (Powell & Kalina, 2009). This would support the social constructivism view of teachers constructing personal meaning from their experiences such as participating in a PLC.

The social constructivism paradigm also supports the view that teachers will gain expertise while increasing student opportunities for success in the classroom by collaborating to share best practices (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). According to Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle (2010) social constructivists accept that individuals' construct reality based on personal experiences. Individuals develop their own reality from social interactions, experiences or from participating in a particular event (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Rodriguez (2010) reported teachers participating in professional development with peers in a culturally and socially relevant environment are more likely to establish inclusive classrooms to meet the need of all learners by working collaboratively. Finally, the social constructivism paradigm supports the notion that when adults have opportunities to participate in professional development activities, they are willing to learn and help each other (Ruey, 2010). The Vygotskian sociocultural lens indicates that when teachers have opportunities to participate in meaningful professional development activities, that they are able to reflect and make significant changes to their teaching practice (Johnson, 2007; Killion & Roy, 2009).

### **Social Cognitive and Self-efficacy**

The second element of the conceptual framework is based on social cognitive theory and the concept of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is based on the work of Albert Bandura (1997) who proposed that self-efficacy is the belief in one's own abilities and

capabilities. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy will work diligently towards accomplishing tasks or goals while individuals with low levels of self-efficacy are more likely to be unmotivated to accomplish tasks or goals (Bandura, 1997). Teacher self-efficacy relates to educators believing in their ability to positively affect the learning and behaviors of their students. There is a large body of literature documenting teachers with high efficacy believing in their ability of positively influencing student outcomes even under difficult circumstances (Bandura, 1997; Bruce & Flynn, 2013; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). For instance, Bruce and Flynn (2013) depicted the effects of self-efficacy and professional learning in a 3-year study involving 200 teachers and 1000 students. The researchers found an increase in: (a) teacher efficacy; (b) student achievement; and (c) student beliefs. Conversely, teachers with low self-efficacy are less likely to implement strategies in the classroom and may experience less job satisfaction (Viel-Ruma, Houchins, Jolivette, & Benson, 2010). A study involving 95 preservice math teachers found teachers with a strong belief of self-efficacy were more likely to have confidence in mathematical abilities (Briley, 2012).

Teachers with high rates of self-efficacy are likely to plan activities geared towards attaining educational goals for students while reducing the possibility of occupational stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Thus, attending a PLC may motivate teachers to believe in their abilities and skills to positively impact student achievement while increasing job satisfaction (Brown, 2012; Swackhamer, Koeller, Basile, & Kimbrough, 2009). Teachers are likely to have high self-efficacy when PLC activities

are aimed for long-term classroom-embedded sustainable strategies rather than activities that are outside of their scope of practice (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010). As a result, professional development activities must consider teachers' prior knowledge and beliefs in order for teachers to be motivated in making systemic changes to classroom practices (Hollenbeck, 2013).

### **Professional Learning and Self-Efficacy**

Providing opportunities for job-embedded professional learning opportunities for teachers who participate in a PLC increases coteachers' effectiveness and self-efficacy (Polly, 2012). Teachers who work collectively in small groups to research and plan instructional lessons promote greater self-efficacy (Chong & Kong, 2012). Teachers with high levels of self-efficacy believe in their capability to affect positive academic performance for students, while teachers with low self-efficacy lack capability in their skills and motivation to implement teaching strategies (Bruce et al., 2009; Viel-Ruma et al., 2010). Individuals with positive self-efficacy can collectively impact the entire team and student learning outcomes. Teachers engaged in meaningful professional learning with instructional coaches are more likely to have higher levels of teacher efficacy (Shidler, 2009). Instructional coaches and other curriculum leaders can encourage teachers self-efficacy by aligning PLC activities from theory to practice by including long-term and classroom-embedded professional learning (Bruce et al., 2010; Shidler, 2009). Swackhamar et al. (2010) argued professional development has an effect on teachers' self-efficacy. Professional learning designed around teachers' specific content knowledge can increase teachers' self-efficacy (Swackhamar et al., 2010). Therefore,

professional development should include activities that will increase self-efficacy for the entire group in order to promote a positive learning experience for all team members (Purzer, 2011).

### **Co-Teaching and Self-Efficacy**

There are several studies that found coteachers require proper training in order to increase their self-efficacy in cotaught classrooms. For example, pre-service coteachers receiving professional development had an increase in self-perceptions, confidence level and skills, and were more prepared to work in inclusive settings classrooms (Voss & Bufkin, 2011). General and special education pre-service teachers have higher confidence, interest, and attitudes towards coteaching (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013). The Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) study found coteachers who have had more opportunities for professional development have higher levels of positive attitudes when compared to coteachers with less training and professional development.

Teachers who receive professional development on coteaching practices are more likely to be receptive towards students with disabilities, and have favorable attitude towards inclusion. (Eriks-Brophy & Whittingham, 2013; McCray & McHatton, 2011). A quantitative study involving 196 educators across ██████ found special education teachers had favorable opinions towards co-teaching when compared to unfavorable opinions of educators with general education backgrounds (Segall & Campbell, 2012). Segall and Campbell (2012) also found educators who are adequately prepared for inclusive practices have positive attitudes towards coteaching because they frequently receive training on special education laws and on best practice to meet students' unique

learning needs. Coteachers are often willing to embrace the principles of inclusive practice but students' unique disabilities in overcrowded classrooms and teachers' lack of professional knowledge are contributing factors that may lead general education teachers to have negative perceptions towards coteaching (Korkmaz, 2011). Thus, coteachers with high self-efficacy tend to have access to professional learning that meets the unique needs of all learners (Linder et al., 2012; Rodriguez, 2010).

### **Barriers to Co-Teaching**

Students with disabilities are being mainstreamed into coteaching classrooms; however, teachers assigned to coteaching classrooms receive little or no training to work with special education students. As a result teachers are not well prepared to teach students with disabilities (Casale-Giannola, 2010). For example, Casale-Giannola (2010) asserted that coteachers need to have access to professional development and support from the administrative team in order to take equal ownership of all students learning. Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007) conducted a meta-analysis of 32 qualitative studies and found coteachers generally supported coteaching but the following barriers reported were: (a) planning time; (b) student skills; (c) lack of administrative support; and (d) the subordinate role of the special education teacher. However, general education teachers often takes the lead role as the primary teachers, while the special education teachers take on a subordinate role, which is the least effective model of the coteaching practice (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Scanlon and Baker (2012) declared that coteachers are often uncertain about their duties and responsibilities as it relates to working in a coteaching classroom. Teachers

often lacked training in implementing instruction for students with disabilities who need accommodations and may only put into practice those accommodations when students are displaying inappropriate behaviors (Scanlon & Baker, 2012). According to McConkey and Abbott (2011) coteachers' lack of clarity may originate from: (a) nonexistent communication; (b) collaboration; and (c) inadequate planning time for coteachers. Teachers may frequently rely on pacing guides or other predesigned structured programs when designing and implementing instructional content instead of considering the individualized needs of students. Thus, professional learning opportunities need to be made available for all coteachers to receive the training that includes collaborative practice to improve teaching and learning (Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Woodcock (2013) found barriers to successful coteaching models exist because general education teachers lack knowledge on how to modify and differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. It is important to note that inclusion models vary across school districts and across the country. Orr (2009) found inclusion models vary across settings, and lack of professional knowledge and negative attitudes of some teachers are the main barriers to successful inclusion. For example, successful inclusion requires both teachers' equally sharing teaching duties and collaborating by planning student activities together (Chang & Lee, 2010).

### **Professional Learning and Collaborative Practice**

Professional learning and collaborative practice refers to a group of educators working towards a common goal to gain new knowledge to improve teaching and learning practice (Sigurdardottir, 2010). Schools actively promoting collaboration and a



strong professional learning community are likely to see positive student outcomes (Sigurdardottir, 2010). Nevertheless, teachers may be resistant to collaborate to improve teaching and learning practices if professional learning activities are not related to current teaching practices (Killion & Roy, 2009). Thus, teachers working in cotaught classrooms may increase their knowledge on collaborative practice by participating in a PLC when: (a) it is teacher driven, (b) sustained over a period of time, and (c) when educators are engaged in meaningful collaborative activities (Musanti & Pence, 2010; Pella, 2011).

For example, Pella (2011) argued teachers who participate in teacher-driven professional learning tend to focus less on students deficiencies and more on collaborating on creating literacy-rich activities. However, to establish a teacher-driven PLC there must be an effective building leader. Fullan (2002) argued “principals must be instructional leaders if they are to be the effective leaders” (p. 16). Supovitz, Sirinides, and May (2010) noted principals have profound influence on teachers’ instructional practice. Principals can motivate educators to engage in collaborative practices by: (a) focusing on the mission and goal of the organization, (b) fostering an environment of collaboration and trust, and (c) consistently supporting teaching and learning outcomes (Supovitz et al., 2010). For example, Williams, Brien and LeBlanc (2012) conducted a case study involving 50 schools that implemented PLCs and found teachers were open to collaborating with colleagues. Teachers who have access to professional learning opportunities demonstrated significant positive changes in their instructional practice six months after the training (Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010). When teachers participate in PLCs’ activities, there is a positive correlation between the teachers’ moral and students’

successes (Nolan & Stitzlien, 2011). Finally, an effective PLC is one that fosters a safe environment for teachers to share in constructive dialogue with principals taking a nurturing and trusting leadership role that encourages a collaborative culture during learning activities (Nolan & Stitzlien, 2011).

An effective PLC might be an empowering call for teachers to collaborate and share collective responsibility to improve learning for all students (Fulton & Britton, 2011). According to DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (2008) in successful schools “educational leaders must help establish new assumptions and new systems” (p. 86) in order to help students learn at higher levels. DuFour et al. (2008) stressed it is the current complex issues that require schools to systematically implement ongoing professional support systems through PLCs. An effective PLC will include opportunities for educators to collaborate with peers and share new knowledge while participating in socially engaging learning activities related to their learning environment (Graziano & Navarrette, 2012). As such, ensuring teachers access to teacher-driven professional development would promote greater instances of collaboration (Pella, 2011).

Collaborating in a PLC may: (a) increase co-teachers professional knowledge; (b) foster a collaborative culture; (c) improve classroom practice; (d) jointly sharing expertise; and (e) establish joint responsibility for all students (Hudson, Hudson, Gray, & Bloxham, 2013). For example, Gates and Watkins (2010) concluded teaching and learning practices are strengthened when teachers are given opportunities to engage in collaborative inquiry by contributing towards a common goal based on sharing their personal expertise. This sentiment was shared by Rytivaara and Kershner (2012).

Teachers jointly sharing expertise are more likely to collaborate and share mutual responsibility for all students in a coteaching classroom. For example, there are greater instances of collaboration when each coteacher has opportunities to engage in open dialogue and can use their individual strengths to create instructional learning based on students needs (Rytivaara & Kershner, 2012). However, teachers need to have access to quality professional development in the PLC in order to improve classroom practice (Ofer & Pedder, 2011). Conversely, Burke, Marx, and Berry (2011) conducted a study and found PLCs have a positive impact on teacher collaboration. Still, while a PLC can positively impact teacher collaboration there is little evidence to suggest there is a positive relationship between teacher practice and student achievement (Burke et al., 2011).

Elbousty and Bratt (2010) argued a successful PLC includes sharing of ideas and leadership responsibilities amongst all members. A professional learning community with one individual in charge will not motivate teachers to collaborate because it will be short-lived. A successful PLC must have a leader willing to listen and respect a variety of viewpoints (Fullan, 2002). For example, teachers enter the classroom with varying learning styles, educational and social backgrounds. As such, professional learning and the PLC must be a place that is safe and where all individuals unique learning needs can be met (Eaker & Keating, 2009). Additionally, ensuring teachers have professional learning activities embedded into the school day with school principals working collaboratively with teachers will increase cooperation with all educators (Eaker & Keating, 2009). Finally, coteachers who have common planning time are more likely to

collaborate and implement effective strategies in the classroom (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011).

### **Professional Learning and Special Education**

Professional development activities can be varied and complex within a PLC. Butler and Schnellert (2012) found that effective professional development increases collaborative inquiry by allowing educators to jointly share knowledge, expertise, and to find solutions to support students in classrooms. Effective professional development can foster collaborative inquiry while breaking down the traditional model of working in isolation (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). Teachers engaging in collaboration rather than isolation practices are more likely to see student successes (Nelson, Deuel, Slavit, & Kennedy, 2010). For example, conversations should be specifically focused on teaching and learning practices rather than emotional or irrelevant topics that do not increase professional knowledge (Nelson et al., 2010).

The isolationist model of working separately with students in one classroom is preferred by special education teacher as opposed to sharing classroom responsibilities with a general teacher and students. According to Cancio, Albrecht, and Johns (2013) special education teachers often lack: (a) administrative support with student disciplinary issues; (b) access to professional development; (c) adequate work space; (d) instructional materials; and (e) support from general education teachers. As a result, special education teachers often lack the knowledge and negotiating skills in the learning environment, and are viewed as assistants rather than as equal instructional partners (Friend et al., 2010). Hollenbeck (2013) postulated that special education teachers often lack meaningful

professional development, and as a result are unaware they may have to adjust their practice to have a positive effect on student outcome. The Blanton and Perez (2011) study echoed the sentiment when it was noted that special education teachers are rarely included in school-wide PLC activities when compared to their general education peers. Furthermore, special education teachers are frequently, unintentionally isolated from academic and social settings within the school environment (Blanton & Perez, 2011). Special education teachers and teacher-aids often lack clear definition of their roles in coteaching classrooms due to inadequate professional training and lack of inclusive school policies (Ward, 2011). As a result, special education educators often faced unintended barriers to inclusive practice because they are unable to adjust their classroom practice to meet daily demands of coteaching practice (Hollenbeck, 2013; Ward, 2011).

The lack of training and collaboration among coteachers has caused some special education teachers to provide limited support to special needs students in the cotaught classroom, thus negatively impacting student achievement levels (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Hollenbeck, 2013). Many teachers are reluctant to coteach since they lack the proper training and support to engage in coteaching practice (Casale-Giannola, 2010; Friend et al., 2010; Hollenbeck, 2013; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Finally, for teachers to be effective coteachers, they must access trainings that focus on collaborative practice to better meet individual learning needs in the classroom (Butler & Schnellert, 2012; McCray & McHatton, 2011; Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Wei et al., (2010) found the systematic lack of access to meaningful professional learning for special education teachers is over 40% in the United States when compared

to general education teachers. A lack of professional learning contributed to special education teachers being seen as assistants and being unable to adjust their teaching practice (Friend et al., 2010). Researchers in other countries observed the reduced role and lack of professional learning opportunities of special education teachers. For example, the general education teachers frequently viewed special education teachers as visitors or as assistants in Turkey and not as equal partners (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010). According to Gurgur and Uzuner (2010) special education teachers frequently experience occupational burnout and are more prone to be in conflict with general education teachers. The result of their study indicated special education teachers have high attrition rates due to a lack of training on coteaching practices and conflicts in the coteaching classrooms (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010). Another qualitative study done in Israel looked at 34 co-teachers attitudes towards coteaching and found teachers citing feelings of injustice regarding trainings as well as a feeling of burnout. As a result, special education teachers do minimum work in the classroom (Gavish & Shimoni (2011).

Similarly, a study involving 607 pre-service special education teachers from Canada, Australia, Hong Kong, and India looked at their beliefs towards inclusion and concluded: (a) lack of common planning time, (b) training (c) and support from administrators were barriers to effective coteaching practice (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012). Sharma et al., (2012) recommended that schools ought to ensure coteachers are adequately prepared for inclusive classrooms by providing targeted professional development to all teachers. Conversely, (Narain, 2009) observed that in order for schools to establish successful inclusion classrooms, coteachers must collaborate for

students to benefit from teachers' individual expertise. Teachers need to have access to professional development related to coteaching practices or they will become unmotivated and unwilling to participate in professional learning activities when the learning is not aligned to student needs (Dingle, Brownell, Leko, Boardman, & Haager, 2011).

### **Barriers to Professional Learning**

Teachers are willing to support the framework of the PLC but often face unintended barriers that prevented collaboration such as: (a) lack of regular meeting times to discuss student progress, (b) conflicting teacher schedules, and (c) teaching assignments (Williams et al., 2012). It is important to note some principals have tried to establish a functioning PLC but lack of funding and pressure from parents and teachers unions have failed to meet the goals of the PLC framework (Ferguson, 2013). Teachers may be resistant to the PLC because there might be a lack of meaningful goals, outcomes or relevancy to the learning activity. For example, Dever and Lash (2013) conducted a study and found when coteachers lack common planning time and perceive professional learning as meaningless; there might be higher level of resistance to collaboration. As a result, teachers are frequently resentful and unmotivated to participate in the PLC activities especially when the principal is not present or actively participating in the learning activities (Dever & Lash, 2013). Another barrier to a school maintaining a successful PLC is the ability to customize the learning activities. Hofman and Dijkstra (2010) noted schools with PLCs often model professional development trainings after the one-size-fits all model, which fails to address teacher's specific teaching needs.

Some administrators and other professional learning facilitators are advocating for teachers to have opportunities to fully participate in PLC activities. Nichols and Sheffield (2014) contend effective PLCs should consider the multi-cultural perspective of adult learners in order to promote collaboration. Nichols and Sheffield (2014) found that principals have difficulty with implementing PLCs because of: (a) lack of ongoing meaningful professional development; (b) common planning time; (c) administrative support; and (d) opportunities to participate in meaningful PLCs activities. Teachers are expected to help students attain higher levels of academic achievement but frequently struggle with providing effective instructional practice due to inadequate professional development and lack of collaboration opportunities (Wayman & Jimerson, 2013). Finally, Cranston (2011) reported principals are important figures in fostering a nurturing environment and creating relational trust in a PLC. Cranston (2011) noted that principals would need to take a leading role in breaking down barriers and increasing dialogue amongst administrators and teachers in order to increase student learning.

### **Implications**

There are several implications anticipated from the findings of this project study. First, coteachers may improve their pedagogical skills if they have opportunities for job-embedded practices relevant to their current teaching duties (Killion & Roy, 2009). Teachers may be more willing to coteach when professional development includes collaborative effort that is: (a) sustained, (b) ongoing, (c) intensive, and (d) includes coaching support for all educators (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). This research has the potential to promote social change by serving as a guide to educational



leaders who design professional development for teachers who work in coteaching classrooms. It is anticipated that the study may provide insight into coteachers' individual roles and responsibilities, which may allow school leaders to make adaptations that may lead to improving learning outcomes for all students, especially students with disabilities.

### **Summary**

In Section 1, I illustrated the lack of collaboration between coteachers at CES after attending a PLC. I documented the problem by discussing coteachers' lack of professional knowledge regarding special education students, preparedness for coteaching, and attitudes and perceptions towards the PLC. In this section, I also discussed the review of the literature. This study is based on a conceptual framework of social constructivism and social cognitive theories (Brown, 2012; Powell & Kalina, 2009). In addition, the literature suggests that PLCs have the potential to improve coteachers' professional knowledge through collaboration (Wayman & Jimerson, 2013). Nevertheless, school-wide PLC efforts frequently exclude special education teachers (Blanton & Perez, 2011). Section 2 discusses the methodology that was used to conduct a qualitative case study on the professional development training of coteachers for the purpose of improving the PLC at CES.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Introduction**

Teachers need to receive the proper training in order to be prepared to work in coteaching classrooms. Crafton and Kaiser (2011) found effective professional development in a PLC has the potential to increase teachers' professional knowledge, decrease chances of new and veteran teacher burnout, and lead to positive student outcomes. The shortage of special education teachers' has caused educational leaders to focus on ensuring the quality of professional learning by aligning it to current classroom practice, which will enable teachers to gain the necessary skills to meet students' unique needs (Brownell, Ross, Colon, & McCallum, 2005; Mizell, Hord, Killion, & Hirsh, 2011). The goal of this study is to explore coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and self-efficacy in relation to the PLC. This study also seeks to understand if teachers might make any recommendations to enhance the PLC, and whether the PLCs led to any differences towards working in a coteaching classroom. A qualitative case study research approach will describe a PLC training targeted specifically for coteachers to increase knowledge and collaborative practice. By gathering information on coteachers' perspectives of the PLC, school leaders may affect positive social change by making adaptations that might enhance coteaching practice leading to positive outcomes for all students.

### **Description of the Qualitative Design**

This research study followed a qualitative paradigm. The study was based on inductive reasoning and followed typical types of qualitative case study data collection

methods such as interviews and observation. Merriam (2009) noted qualitative case study typically includes quotes, pictures, or excerpts from interviews to present a richly descriptive narrative of the findings. A quantitative design was not selected because data collection typically involves numerical data and would not provide the type of rich data required to answer the research questions. Qualitative designs may take the form of: (a) a case study; (b) ethnography; (c) grounded theory; and (d) phenomenological designs (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative approaches are considered appropriate to the aims of an in-depth phenomenon within the case of one particular school. A qualitative design is aligned to the social constructivists' view that individuals construct multiple realities based on personal experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). Thus, conducting interviews to hear directly from participants is preferred. An ethnographic design was not selected because it is primarily concerned with understanding practices and norms over an extended time and is used to answer what, why and how questions. A grounded theory design was not selected because the study does not have an established theory that is grounded in data. A phenomenological design was not chosen since the study is not seeking to understand the essence of the participants' shared lived experience (Merriam, 2009).

A case study is bounded by time and activity such as teachers participating in PLC activities (Creswell, 2012). Merriam (2009) posited a case study is useful when studying a process such as how a PLC is being implemented at CES. For example, a case study uses "thick" description to describe the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009, p. 43). A case study is selected to illuminate the PLC activities of teachers in their natural environment (Stake, 1995). Because the goal of this study is to understand

teachers shared perceptions and attitudes in their natural environment a case study is found to be the most appropriate design (Yin, 2009).

### **Justification of the Research Design**

A qualitative case study using narrative data was deemed the most appropriate research design to capture the phenomenon as it occurs since the focus of this study was to explore teachers' participation in a PLC (Yin, 2009). Lodico et al. (2010) noted case studies are used by researchers to gain in-depth understanding and specific insights into school settings or other classroom decision making such as a group of coteachers participating in a PLC. Thus, a qualitative case study using narrative data was most suited to gain insight into teachers' reflections, knowledge of their participation in the PLC, and empowering teachers to share their experiences (Creswell, 2012). Kvaal (2006) and Turner (2010) asserted that using interviews in qualitative research would allow individuals to express in-depth information on their life situations in their own words. This research is working within the lens of the social constructivists' paradigm of individuals constructing multiple realities such as understanding teachers perspectives and experiences in a PLC, the choice of utilizing interviews aligns well with this study (Lodico et al., 2010). Thus, conducting individual interviews would allow teachers to freely express their views on coteaching and the PLC.

### **Participants**

This section describes the procedure that was used for selecting and gaining access to participants. Measures to protect students' rights are also described.

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

The ultimate goal of the study is to understand coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and self-efficacy towards the PLC as it relates to the coteaching model to improve instructional strategies. Thus, the selection of participants is limited to coteachers who attend a PLC. Therefore, I used purposive sampling, specifically convenience sampling to select participants for the study (Lodico et al., 2010; Turner, 2010). The rationale for purposive sampling allowed the researcher to consider the aims of the study before selecting the participants (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Convenience sampling was used to select individuals who were accessible, convenient, and have knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Lodico et al., 2010).

The target population was current and previous CES teachers assigned to coteaching classrooms and participating in the PLC. The school currently has a total of 32 general education teachers and 8 special education teachers. An invitation to participate was sent to 5 special and 5 general education teachers currently working in coteaching classrooms and 1 general education teacher and 1 self-contained special education teacher with previous coteaching experience to potentially capture a variety of perspectives (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). A total of 9 teachers responded and agreed to participate in the study (See participants' demographics in Table 3). The sample size of 9 participants is consistent with qualitative sampling since a smaller sample size would allow for an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). The rationale for limiting the participants to teachers with prior and current coteaching

experiences would allow for a variety of opinions and understanding to the phenomenon under investigation (Marshall, 1996).

Table 3

*A Comparison of Participants' Education and Teaching Experience*

Teacher	Level of Education	Teaching Experience
Teacher 1	Master's	11 Years
Teacher 2	Master's	12 Years
Teacher 3	Bachelor's	2 Years
Teacher 4 <sup>1</sup>	Specialist	10 Years
Teacher 5	Master's	4 Years
Teacher 6	Master's	3 Years
Teacher 7	Doctorial	29 Years
Teacher 8 <sup>2</sup>	Bachelor's	3 Years
Teacher 9	Master's	4 Years

*Note:* The <sup>1</sup> represents a general education teacher with past coteaching experience.

The <sup>2</sup> represents a self-contained special education with coteaching experience.

### **Gaining Access to Participants**

Creswell (2012) stated qualitative researchers frequently find it helpful to use a gatekeeper to facilitate access to participants and research site. As such, I sent a letter of cooperation to the principal of CES seeking written permission (Appendix B) to help identify potential participants. I was granted permission by the principal to conduct the study. The principal's help was solicited because of insiders' knowledge of teachers' duties and responsibilities. Additionally, the principal also has CES teachers' records of

attendance for professional learning opportunities. Finally, the principal was an ideal candidate as a gatekeeper because the local school district policy requires principals to give permission before any research can be done in the district. Therefore, initial contact was made with potential participants after written permission from the principal was obtained and approval was granted from the IRB.

### **Researcher-Participant Working Relationship**

The researchers' role is to foster a relationship with participants based on trust and rapport (Kvale, 2006; Morrison, Gregory, & Thibodeau, 2012). As the principal researcher in this study, respecting participant views, presenting a professional and non-judgmental demeanor to foster a trusting relationship is of utmost importance. According to Lodico et al. (2010) developing a positive rapport with participants could allow researchers to gain an insider view into the participants' world. By encouraging participants to talk freely about their perceptions, I sought to establish a relationship based on trust (Glesne, 2011). My relationship as a co-worker at CES and my participation in faculty meetings and other school literacy activities allowed me to establish a rapport with the participants. My current position as a special education teacher could potentially lead to personal bias such as a favorable opinion towards special education co-teachers' point of view. In addition, my personal experience in participating in the PLC might have some influence on my perceptions of PLC. However, during this research process I tried to separate my own personal assumptions in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Merriam, 2009).

## **Ethical Considerations**

As the principal researcher, I am committed to following all established protocols and guidelines established by Walden University to protect participants. First, I have completed the web-based training course on protecting human participants offered through the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and was issued a certificated number 1302809 (Appendix C). I was granted IRB approval on April 2<sup>nd</sup> 2015. My approval number is 04-03-15-0339603, and my IRB approval is valid until April 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2016. Next, after obtaining IRB approval, the informed consent process included providing participants a detailed overview of the study. The informed consent process included emailing an invitation to all potential participants to participate in the study. Next, I provided all respondents with: (a) detailed information including the purpose of the study, (b) amount of time participants may have to commit, and (c) type of data collection participants will engage in (Appendix D). I also informed participants that they may choose not to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. In addition, participants was notified that (a) there will not be a monetary reward by participating in the study, (b) possible risks and benefits, (c) all information will be kept confidential, and (d) participants can withdraw from the study at anytime without risk or harm (Howe & Moses, 1999). The participants selected for the study signed the consent form to participate and were provided an additional copy to each keep for their records. I assigned a code to each participant in order to protect their identities. The codes were used to track all data and are only known to the participants and me. The codes were used to create password-protected documents, which is stored on a USB drive, and



is stored in a locked filing cabinet. Finally, all data associated with the study is being stored in a locked cabinet in my home office and will be destroyed after a period of five years.

### **Data Collection**

Creswell (2007) noted that qualitative researchers typically engage in a series of activities during the data collection process such as: (a) gaining access to individuals; (b) building trust with participants; (c) collecting and recording data; (d) and resolving technical field issues and data storage. The data collection method consisted of one individual recorded interview for each participant lasting approximately 45 minutes to one hour. I selected interviews because it would allow participants to share their views on the phenomena under investigation. Observations were not selected because I would not be able to fully develop an understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives of the phenomenon by conducting observations (Creswell, 2012). An interview protocol was developed to guide the interviews (Appendix E). I used the protocol as a reminder to explain to participants the purpose and nature of the study, informed consent process, follow-up procedures for clarification, and structuring of interview questions (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012; Turner, 2010). Creswell (2012) noted that typically no more than five open-ended questions followed with probes are used to encourage participants to elaborate on a given response. I utilized an open-ended semistructured interview format with five questions to gather rich descriptive data about the PLC trainings and the impact the trainings have on teachers' perceptions, preparedness, and attitudes towards coteaching. The interviews were conducted at a time

and place convenient to participants such as their classrooms and after the end of the regular school day to decrease the chances of distractions and also not to interfere with instructional time. This supports Glesne's (2011) view that an environment conducive for interviews should be free of distractions. I listened attentively and used probes whenever necessary to elicit additional information or to seek clarification (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011).

### **System for Keeping Track of Data**

I maintained a reflective journal in order to document my experience and to refer to questions I encountered during the data analysis phase of the study. In addition, participant was assigned a color group with a numerical code, which is stored in a password secured word document. I assigned general education teachers to group blue and special education teachers to group red. In addition, each participant was assigned a numerical code such as Teacher 1, which is referenced in the research findings. This process allowed participants identity to be protected.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have worked as a special education self-contained classroom teacher at CES for the past 13 years. My years at CES and my role as a member of the teaching staff have allowed me to develop a positive rapport with all of the participants. For example, I have attended weekly staff meetings and PLC training with teachers across grade levels and subject area. However, I have never worked as a coteacher nor am I currently a practicing coteacher. In addition, I have not held any past or current supervisory role in

the school as this may be seen as an imbalance of power between participants and the researcher (Creswell, 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

I was the primary instrument for this study because qualitative researchers are considered the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009; Pezalla, Pettigrew, & Miller-Day, 2012). The interviews were transcribed within 48 to 72 hours of conducting the interview. I followed a systematic approach, which involved a series of sequential steps in order to triangulate the data. First, I utilized the hand analysis method to inductively identify recurring patterns, ideas, and themes. Then, I used open coding and broad themes to reduce the data into smaller segments. Next, axial coding was used to link data into categories. The open and axial coding is an iterative process that allowed for discovering themes and subthemes. This process allowed for unique insight into how the data is linked forming a descriptive narrative (Glaser & Laudel, 2013; Goldkuhal & Cronholm, 2010). The transcribed data were coded into themes and categories before using thick descriptions to report the findings (Merriam, 2009). The use of thick descriptions is used to provide a vivid account of the extent to which PLC is perceived as increasing teachers' knowledge of special education students' disabilities, providing insight into coteachers perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the PLC, and recommendations or modifications would increase collaboration between coteachers.

### **Evidence of Quality**

Guba (1981) stated qualitative researchers must establish trustworthiness by achieving the following criteria: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) conformability. In order to address evidence of quality, I used triangulation to increase the study's credibility and trustworthiness (Hussein, 2009). For example, member checking was employed to ensure accuracy of participants' words (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2009). I met for follow-up interviews with participants to review the transcribed interview to ensure the accuracy of their words. I ensured my coding system was aligned to the correct data set before asking participants to for accuracy. According to Lodico et al (2010) qualitative researchers can establish credibility through meaningful interactions at the study site with participants. Finally, using member checking, reviewing my coding system, and interacting with participants were part of the triangulation process to establish quality.

### **Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Case**

I reviewed all data for recurring themes and patterns without excluding any particular set of data that might be contradicting from general data. The social constructivist argues individuals' constructs reality on personal experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). As result, the data shows some variation amongst teachers' responses. All data were coded into themes and subthemes until saturation of data were reached before reporting the results in narrative form.

## Findings

In this section, I have discussed the findings from the data analysis. I carefully analyzed each transcribed interview to note themes and subthemes that emerged that directly link back to the research questions in this study. The information shared by the coteachers formed several themes, which I summarized in the study findings in narrative form. I used a separate heading for each research question to present the findings in a chronological manner.

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1: What are regular and special education teachers' general perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the professional learning community's coteaching model to improve instructional strategies? The following themes emerged after coding:

1. Ineffective implementation.
2. Lack of knowledge.
3. Relevancy of training.

The participants' perceptions, attitudes, or beliefs towards the overall effectiveness of PLC to improve instructional strategies in the coteaching classroom are described with this research question. Supporting evidence is included with and sample of a participant transcribed interview in Appendix F and sample codes and themes in Appendix G.

**Ineffective implementation.** Ineffective implementation of the PLC was reported as recurring theme of the PLC ability to improve instructional strategies in the

coteaching model. At the research school, the PLC was created because the local district accepted federal funds to train and maintain highly effective teachers in the classroom. According to the data, the PLC is viewed as ineffective because there was little planning or training activities during the implementation process for coteaching. Training specifically to address the needs of coteachers is reported as minimal or non-existent.

Teacher 3 stated:

Not much consideration was given to providing training to the coteachers to improve training and learning outcome in the classroom environment. I feel that since our school is mandated to have a PLC we are having one but no one has given any thoughts on the actual implementation process and the needs of teachers.

The participants were consistent in their views regarding the need for structure and change to the implementation process of the PLC in improving the coteaching model.

Teacher 7 stated, “We must go back from the beginning and look at the goals and outcomes of why the PLC was implemented if we are concerned with effectiveness.”

Another weakness in relation to the implementation of the PLC was the lack of accountability or follow-up of the coteachers’ action in the classroom. The participants noted: (a) lack of administrative support, (b) leadership, and (c) blindly following mandates has led to an ineffective PLC at the research school. Teacher 1 said, “It is not done on a consistent basis and there is no real follow-up or accountability to make sure that teachers are actually implementing the different coteaching models with fidelity.”

The data revealed several of the participants' negative attitudes is a direct result of school leaders implementing the PLC due to mandates from the district level. For example, Teacher 9 said "We cannot just keep blindly following mandates without actually assessing how things are affecting our teachers and our students". Teacher 8 supported this sentiment by making a similar comment by saying "I feel having the PLC is a good thing but if we don't have the building leaders make changes immediately to our PLC our students will ultimately fail". The data revealed participants perceived the ineffective implementation was a contributing factor hindering the effectiveness of the PLC. The data showed participants were not opposed to the concept of a PLC but want the structure of the implementation to be changed such as having a defined goal and outcome for the PLC.

**Lack of knowledge.** Lack of knowledge to effectively teach in the co-teaching classroom was a common theme amongst the teachers. The data revealed teachers' negative perceptions stem from their lack of knowledge of the coteaching model and the lack of knowledge of the facilitators' regarding coteaching strategies'. Both special and general education coteachers shared this perception. The participants viewed the PLC implementation as ineffective due to a lack of teachers' and school leaders' knowledge about the cotaught model. The participants consistently stated the PLC must make adjustments due to the various dynamics of the coteaching classroom because specialized knowledge is needed to address students with various behavior and cognitive issues.

Teacher 5 responded:

I am not sure how I can improve instructional strategies when I lack the knowledge to address the various issues. My personal perception is that the PLC sessions are a waste of my time as a coteacher.

A common theme that emerged from the data showed coteaching training was non-existent with little opportunities for teachers to have ongoing support or opportunities to model coteaching strategies in order to be effective in the classroom. The general education teachers reported that they feel the building leaders lack knowledge on the coteaching model, which negatively affects the teachers' knowledge. Teacher 8 said "I think you have individuals that want to say that we have a coteaching model, but they don't actually know what it actually looks like". Several participants noted their lack of coteaching knowledge and their PLC facilitators' lack of knowledge, which has negatively affected coteaching practice.

The participants were consistent in their views regarding receiving one session on coteaching training at the beginning of the school year. The teachers felt one training session each year was not enough for effective coteaching practice. Teacher 6 stated "I feel that one training session on coteaching is not enough because I was not trained as a special education teacher". Teacher 3 made a similar observation by commenting "I think receiving only one training session at the beginning of year is not enough for teachers." Teacher 1 made an overall statement regarding the lack of knowledge:

The underlying issue for most teachers is they just do not know what to do. The facilitators do not come in and model for them what needs to be done. If we are



taught or shown what is to be done and model the strategies together, then the teachers can do it.

In general, the teachers reported that without the proper training coteachers would not have the knowledge to respond appropriately to student needs. Teacher 2 said “I was not given any type of training so I lack the proper knowledge and cannot improve instruction with different instructional strategies”.

**Relevancy of training.** Relevancy of training was an important factor impacting the overall effectiveness of the PLC and the coteaching model. A common sentiment amongst the participants was the need to have training that is relevant and unique to the coteaching model. In general, the 9 participants felt the PLC sessions had little relevancy to do with coteaching. For example, Teacher 5 reported:

When the PLC meets there are never any discussions on improving the coteaching model or to address the needs of special education students. The discussions sometimes seems like a venting session while at other times it seems like more mandates for me to implement in my classroom.

There were similar statements made regarding the relevancy of the PLC training by several general and special education teachers: One general education teacher reported, “I feel that during the PLC we spend time on data analysis and meaningless tasks when time should be spend on students’ academic and coteachers’ needs.” Teacher 8 said, “I feel that if the PLC were to provide some meaning and relevant training then coteachers would have an understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities.” The

relevancy training was a significant factor leading to the participants' negative perceptions towards the PLC. An overall statement on the relevancy of the training was made by Teacher 2: "They make us do things that have nothing to do with what my student needs so I think the whole thing is a waste of everybody's time". The participants reported the PLC is scheduled each Tuesday but in reality meetings rarely occurs. The participants also reported when meetings are held, they typically do not address issues related to coteaching practice.

The data showed that ineffective implementation of the PLC was seen as a hindrance to effective coteaching practice. Teacher's negative perception of the PLC as being ineffective stems from the lack of: (a) poor implementation of the PLC; (b) inconsistent coteaching training; (c) facilitators lack of professional knowledge on coteaching issues; and (d) activities not relevant to coteaching practice. Overall teachers believed the PLC must be changed to address the needs of the coteaching classrooms in order to increase the effectiveness of the instructional strategies used in the coteaching model. The participants felt the PLC activities or trainings were not unique to the coteaching learning environment. Thus, the trainings were not beneficial to their teaching practice to improve student-learning outcomes.

### **Sub-Research Question 1**

Sub-Research Question 1: What are regular and special education teachers' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching model to enhance teacher

collaboration? The following themes regarding collaboration emerged after data analysis and are described in narrative form:

1. Common planning time.
2. Multiple schedules.

**Common planning time.** Common planning time was a missing element at the research school. All of the participants at the research school were in agreement that collaboration is non-existent due to a lack of common planning time for coteachers to attend the weekly PLC meetings. Teachers felt the PLC is ineffective in promoting collaboration because general and special education teachers are not able to attend meetings together and no provisions are made for the coteachers to have a common planning time. Teacher 1 said:

When it comes to building collaboration it is very hard to do when you do not have the time since coteachers are more or less working in isolation. I feel collaboration is non-existent. I think this is one of the greatest failures of the PLC.

All nine participants were consistent in their views that a common planning time was a barrier to effective collaboration. The teachers were consistent in their views that there was little support in place to encourage collaboration. Teacher 2 said “Nobody is on the same page because they have training for the general education teachers and most of the time there is never training for the special education teachers.”

The participants frequently noted special education teachers are unable to attend the meetings and plan with their general education coteachers. Overall, both special education and general education teachers felt a common planning time is necessary for effective practice but a lack of common planning time was hindering collaboration. Teacher 3 made this observation, “If coteachers were given a common planning time we might be able to work better in the classroom. I say this because special education teachers do not have a common planning time with their general education coteachers.”

The special education coteachers were consistent in noting that no provisions are made for them to attend face-to-face meetings. The special education teachers felt the lack of planning time was a major factor hindering collaboration with their general education peers. Teacher 4 reported:

As the special education coteacher, I am told that I can collaborate through emails or texts. I need to be able to have face-to-face meetings in order to plan mutual lessons, analyze data, or discuss instructional strategies that are working and ones that did not.

The lack of common planning time for collaboration between coteachers was a consistent theme that emerged from the data. Teacher 5 stated, “I feel that the way the PLC is currently functioning does not allow for collaboration amongst general and special education teachers”. The participants frequently expressed a need for collaboration but felt that a common planning time was the means to achieve this goal.

**Multiple Schedules.** Multiple schedules of special education teachers were hindering collaboration. The data exposed both special and general education teachers

felt that the multiple schedules of the special education teachers were a factor hindering collaboration. One general education teacher, Teacher 9 stated, “Collaboration is a challenge because special education teachers are floating from different classrooms”. The general education teachers were consistent in noting that it is difficult for special education teachers to find time to collaborate because they are required to work with students in multiple grade level. Teacher 8 stated “They cannot collaborate to improve instructional strategies in the classroom since the special education teacher is not available due to managing multiple schedules”. The general education teachers felt that special education teachers are the individuals with expert knowledge and when they are not present it hinders their ability to collaborate: Teacher 6 said, “We cannot collaborate to improve on instructional strategies when the person with expert knowledge on special education issues is not there.”

The data disclosed special education teachers with expert knowledge were willing to work to meet the needs of students in the coteaching classroom. However, a consistent trend from the data showed a lack of collaboration was due to coteachers working with students in multiple grade levels. Both general and special education teachers acknowledged the conflicting schedule of the special education teacher makes collaboration impossible and it does not allow for meeting student needs. Teacher 1 said, “If you have to be in different classrooms because you are working with multiple grade levels, you cannot effectively meet the needs of the students.” In sum, the data showed coteachers were open to collaboration and improving instructional strategies in the coteaching classroom but felt the multiple schedules of the special education teachers,

lack of common planning time, and respect of individual roles were barriers hindering collaboration.

### **Sub-Research Question 2**

Sub-Research Question 2 was as follows: What are regular and special education teachers' beliefs about the prospect to build self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies? This research question was answered with Interview Question 3: How would you perceive the ability of the PLCs coteaching model to shape teachers self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies? After analysis and coding of the data the following themes emerged on self-esteem and self-efficacy:

1. Overwhelm.
2. Motivation.
3. Lack of training.

**Overwhelm.** Overwhelm was a recurring feeling expressed by the participants. The participants consistently reported having a low self-esteem because they lack the knowledge to effectively meet the needs of their students. Teacher 2 said, "I think it can become overwhelming for teachers when you do not have the knowledge of how to assess a student or know how to address students that have a behavior challenge".

Teacher 4 remarked:

I often feel unwanted in the coteaching classroom. I am sometimes told to go make copies or take a child with behavior problems out of the class. It can become overwhelming at times to be a special education coteacher.

The participants at the research school frequently cited their feelings of low self-esteem stems from being overwhelmed due to a lack of proper training. Teacher 5 said, “I think I have a low self-efficacy towards working and improving instructional strategies for co-taught students because of a lack of coteaching training”.

Teachers expressed feelings of low self-esteem that they perceived was related to having too much responsibility with too little time. Teacher 7 said, “I feel as if teachers have too much responsibility and not enough time to do everything”. The participants stated they were open to special education students in their classroom but reported feeling overwhelmed since teachers rather than administrators frequently handled issues such as discipline. Teacher 3 said, “We are constantly asked to handle discipline and other things that should be done by an administrator”.

The teachers expressed the belief that working collaboratively will lead to high self-esteem while working in isolation will lead to low self-esteem. Teacher 5 shared the following view, “To build my self-esteem in the coteaching classroom, it would be either for my coteacher to teach together, or tag teaming, or working with different instructional strategies with different groups of children.” The teachers’ expressions of feeling overwhelmed were an emerging theme.

**Motivation.** Motivation was low towards working in a coteaching classroom because teachers felt there was a lack of mutual respect. The participants expressed a lack of self-efficacy or motivation towards working in a coteaching classroom. The data revealed two different perceptions regarding motivation. First, special education teachers expressed not being treated with the same quality of respect that the general education

teachers receive. The special education teachers perceived that they were treated as inferiors when compared to the general education teacher. Conversely, general education teachers lacked motivation towards the coteaching classroom because they felt the special education teachers are not taking on a leadership role in the classroom. Teacher 1 said “I feel that a lot of time the general education teachers are territorial because they do not want you in the classroom”. Teacher 4 said “The general education teacher doesn’t see me as a certified teacher so I am not motivated to be there. I sometimes feel like it is my fault that I have a crazy schedule”. The data showed general education teachers viewed the special education teacher presence more of a hindrance rather than an asset. Teacher 5 made this comment:

There is no motivation for me personally to be a coteacher. I have to do all the work and I don’t have any help. My coteacher sometimes doesn’t even show up to class. Sometimes it is just a distraction when they do show up because I am in the middle of my lesson.

According to the data, general education teachers felt there is an unequal partnership in the classroom when it comes to the teaching and learning duties because they view themselves as the teacher in charge of the classroom. The general education participants frequently considered themselves as the “main teacher” or “classroom teacher”. Teacher 8 said, “I feel the main teacher gets a lot of the grunt work. There is no shared work because the main teacher is responsible for most of the work”. Teacher 9 made a similar statement regarding having the responsibilities fall on the general



education teacher: “What I know is that most of the responsibilities fall on the homeroom teacher because we are the ones that have to create and plan the lessons, and manage behaviors”.

An overall analysis of the data revealed that both special and general education teachers lack the motivation to work in the co-teaching classroom. Special education teacher schedules of being in the classroom part of the time hindered motivation. Conversely, general education teachers’ perception of having to do the majority of the work has created a lack of motivation. Making adjustments to special education teacher schedules and providing clear directions for teachers regarding their duties and may help to address the motivation factor.

**Lack of Training.** Lack of training had a negative impact on teachers’ self-esteem to improve instructional strategies in the coteaching classroom. Teacher 9 mentioned: “If you don’t know what you are supposed to be doing then it is impossible to have a high self-esteem and high motivation towards being a coteacher”. Teacher 8 noted a similar view: “It is very hard to have a high self-esteem if you are not confident in what you do”. The data showed a consistent pattern amongst participants in regards to the lack of training and low self-esteem towards the coteaching model.

The lack of training to address specific special education issues was a concern for many of the general education teachers. There was a consensus amongst the general education teachers that a lack of specialized training unique to the coteaching classroom was a factor leading to their low self-esteem and self-efficacy. Teacher 6 said, “Since I

am not trained to address the behavior and medication issues because I am often unclear of my responsibilities towards these students”. Teacher 5 expressed similar feelings of inadequate training, “I really don't know what I am suppose do or how to meet the needs of the special education students”.

The data also expressed that special education teachers had a low self-esteem and self-efficacy towards the coteaching model due to a lack of coteaching training. Teacher 4 observed: “Teachers that are not given adequate training to address students’ needs will create a bigger problem because you will start to see teachers being less motivated”. Teacher 3 said, “I personally feel a lack of motivation because you do not get any type of training and support, and you have to deal with students with emotional behavior disorder or have other health impairments”. An analysis of the data pointed to teachers perceiving that low self-esteem and self-efficacy were due to the overwhelming day-to-day responsibilities of the coteaching classroom. The lack of motivation and lack of appropriate special education training were factors noted as causing low self-esteem and self-efficacy.

### **Sub-Research Question 3**

Research Sub-Question 3: What are regular and special education teachers’ attitude concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching model? An analysis of the data expressed that teachers had negative attitudes towards the effectiveness of the coteaching model. The following recurring themes emerged after data analysis:

1. Clarification of duties.

2. Trust.

3. Administrative support.

**Clarification of Duties.** Clarification of duties and responsibilities was perceived as major factor hindering the effectiveness of the coteaching model. The teachers perceived there are not given guidance on classroom procedures and felt there is little evidence of positive a relationship amongst coteachers. Teacher 9 reported:

The individuals in charge do not let you know what you are supposed to do. Since we are not given any idea on what to do in the coteaching setting the coteachers do not make any effort to work together.

The data revealed an absence of a job description has an impact on coteachers' attitude towards the classroom. Teacher 8 stated "I do not think that there is respect of the individual roles nor is there much trust or teamwork amongst colleagues." The lack of trust and teamwork exists between coteachers since there is a low school culture in the learning environment. Teacher 8 further commented: "When teachers have clear job descriptions of what they should be doing then we will see positive attitudes towards the coteaching model and increase trust to collaborate with each other." This was not an isolated sentiment expressed by only general education teachers. For example, Teacher 3, commented, "I do not know what I need to do so I just take my special needs students and work on their individual goals." The data showed teachers at the research school were consistent in their views that a lack of clarification on their roles was a factor impeding the effectiveness of the coteaching model.

**Trust.** Trust amongst colleagues was low because participants felt they lack knowledge on individual responsibilities because a culture of trust is nonexistent amongst colleagues. Teacher 2 said “I do not think the PLC has given me all the tools to effectively understand my role and responsibility of being a coteacher.” Teachers generally felt they lack the guidance on their specific roles in the coteaching classroom because they are not clear in what they are supposed to do. Teacher 1 said, “I do not think teachers really understand what they are supposed to do because we do not work as a team.” Teacher 3 said “There is a lack of trust and no teamwork in the classroom.” Teacher 6 reported “If we were given some type of directive or protocols to follow then teachers would have a better understanding of how to address the various issues in the classroom and work as team.” Teacher 7 stated, “I feel if coteaching was embraced by the entire school then it will be successful.” Teacher 8 stated “We are never asked our opinions on things so there is not a high level of trust amongst the faculty.” In general, major factors hindering the effectiveness of the coteaching classroom was a lack of clear directions or guidelines on what is expected of a coteacher. Coteachers stated that without the clarification of their expected roles in the classroom, teamwork, and trust amongst colleagues will continue to be ineffective.

**Administrative Support.** Administrative support for the coteaching model from building leaders and administrative personnel were limited or non-existent. Teacher 9 noted: “My feeling on this subject is that the administrators must plan for the PLC to focus on some coteaching issues.” Several of the participants expressed a lack of administrative support is hindering effective coteaching practice at the research school.

Teacher 7 said, “There seems to be little administrative support for teachers so the result is lack of respect amongst coteachers.” The participants also stated that the building leaders lack the knowledge on the coteaching model. Teacher 1 stated:

The true coteaching situation should include sharing of responsibilities of everything. But I feel because of a lack of knowledge and support from the administrative team has caused the special education teachers to humble themselves and become more of an instructional aide.

The data also revealed that participants expressed that the coteaching model would be enhance if the administrative and PLC team leaders focus on the coteaching models being utilized in the classrooms. Teacher 5 made this statement on the topic: “I feel right now in my classroom the coteaching model is one teach- and- one assist.” All the general education coteachers shared this sentiment. The general teachers felt this model was being utilized most because of the special education teachers’ schedules and lack of support from the administrators. Teacher 5 stated “The administrators’ need to focus on ensuring other models are being utilized in the classroom.” Teacher 4 stated, “We need to work together to find solutions but teachers are never recognized as having insider knowledge of the classroom.”

The participants were in agreement that administrative support and a shared leadership was necessary to foster an effective coteaching learning environment. Generally, the participants believe that coteaching is ineffective at the research school due to: (a) lack of administrative support, (b) lack of knowledge of special education

issues, and (c) lack of shared leadership. Teacher 8 noted, “I think without the support from the building leaders our PLC will continue to fail.” The participants felt the culture of the school is a hindrance to the PLC. Teacher 6 stated, “I feel teachers need to be part of the decision-making team but we are not.” The teachers felt the current instructional policies cannot lead to positive changes in the learning environment. Teacher 1 stated “I think until the administrative team is committed to coteaching we will not see any positive change.” The teachers felt a lack of administrative support and trust were obstacles to effective coteaching practice.

The participants generally felt that while the research school is being mandated to have the PLC, effectiveness can be achieved with administrative supportive and training. Teacher 1 summarized: “I think general education teachers need to have some sensitivity training so they can understand that the coteaching model is a collaborative effort between two educators and not just individual effort.” A careful analysis of the data revealed teachers were more likely to have positive perceptions of the PLC if the structure of the implementation process changed and if a positive school culture were created.

### **Procedure to Establish Quality**

The evidence of quality in qualitative research is a difficult process to establish. However, researchers must make every effort to validate their study findings link to the research questions and problem to establish validity and quality (Merriam, 2009). In this study, I used triangulation, which included member checking to increase the study’s credibility and trustworthiness (Hussein, 2009). According to Creswell (2012) and Yin

(2009) engaging in activities such as member checking will allow researchers to capture the accuracy of participants' words. I reviewed each transcript several times while simultaneously listening to the audio recordings. A sample transcribed interview is included in Appendix F. Then, I reviewed my coding process to ensure my themes accurately matched my assigned data. I have included sample data codes and themes in Appendix G. I ensured my coding system was aligned to the correct data before asking participants to review the data. Finally, I scheduled individual follow-up interviews with participants to review the data to ensure the accuracy of their own words.

### **Summary**

The results of the findings in relation to Research Question 1: What are regular and special education teachers' general perception, attitudes and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the professional learning community's coteaching model to improve instructional strategies?, I found that the teachers perceived: (a) ineffective implementation, (b) lack of knowledge and (c) relevancy of training was not relevant to their current coteaching practice.

With regard to Sub-Research Question: What are regular and special education teachers' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching model to enhance teacher collaboration?, I found that teachers felt the coteaching model was ineffective to enhance collaboration due to a: (a) lack of planning time, (b) multiple schedules, and (c) lack of respect for individual roles in the classroom. With regard to Sub-Research Question: What are regular and special education teachers' beliefs about the prospect to build self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies? I found teachers self-

esteem is low due to the: (a) overwhelming responsibilities as a coteacher, (b) lack of motivation, and (c) lack of training to work in cotaught classrooms. With regard to Sub-Research Question: What are regular and special education teachers' attitude concerning the effectiveness of the coteaching mode? Teachers did not have a positive attitude towards the coteaching model because they lack clarification of duties, there is no trust amongst colleagues, and administrative supportive for the coteaching model is non-existent. The data showed that teachers recognized that receiving relevant training in a PLC and sharing knowledge is beneficial to coteaching practice. Coteachers combining individual expertise can better meet the needs of all learners. To meet the needs of all teachers, a series of PLC workshops aimed at coteachers and building leaders is recommended.

### **Conclusion**

School systems are frequently utilizing the cotaught model to educate special needs students in the general education setting (Fitzpatrick & Knowlton, 2009). Students with disabilities educated in the cotaught model have experienced academic success but academic success cannot be realized if coteachers are not willing to collaborate in a PLC to enhance instructional strategies (Gurgur & Uzuner, 2010). Hord (2009) argued that schools that prioritize collaboration within a PLC may have increase faculty collaboration and student achievement. However, sustainable and effective PLCs must include job-embedded professional learning relevant to current practice while fostering a culture of collaboration (Darling-Hammond & Richardson (2009; DuFour, 2007; Yoon et al, 2007). The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore coteachers' perceptions, attitudes,



and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the PLC coteaching model to improve instructional strategies. The major themes discussed in this section summarize how changing the structure of the implementation of the PLC may enhance the coteaching model and student learning outcomes. The themes also provide insight into coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards collaboration, self-esteem, and administrative support for the co-teaching model. The data collected from this study involved only a small number of participants but the results could be beneficial to other school leaders attempting to implement or make changes to an existing PLC. The findings from the data showed coteachers expressed interest in receiving relevant coteaching strategies and administrative support. Thus, teachers and school leaders may benefit from additional professional learning opportunities.

### **Project as an Outcome**

As I reflected on these findings, I concluded that the leaders and teachers at the research school must foster a positive school culture and embrace the concept of collective self-efficacy to sustain an effective PLC. Rodriguez (2010) stated educators are willing to embrace collective self-efficacy and meet the needs of all learners when they participate in professional development with peers in a culturally and socially relevant environment. The data analysis during this study showed that teachers felt the structure of the PLC implementation must be reorganized to remove barriers to collaboration, while including meaningful professional coteaching activities and leadership support to form a unified common goal at CES. For example, one participant stated “I think coteaching will be effective if teachers receive proper training and support

from the administrators”. Teachers expressed that the PLC should provide specialized training relating to their current practice to all members in order to address the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. The lack of administrative support for the coteaching model was seen as negatively influencing teachers’ perceptions towards co-teaching. By creating a series of workshops that details the benefits of an effective PLC, special education requirements, and instructional strategies, school administrators may better understand the need to support the PLC and the coteaching model. Finally, teachers would also be empowered if they have opportunities for collaboration with meaningful coteaching training, and leadership support. These suggestions will be taken into consideration when designing the project study, and will be discussed in further detail in Section 3.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

The focus of this research study was to understand coteachers perception, attitudes and beliefs of the overall effectiveness of an established PLC to improve instructional strategies in the cotaught classroom. In this section I provided a (a) description of the project, (b), description and goals of the project, (c) a rationale for the selected project, and (d), review of the literature that supports the project. Next, I provided a description of the implementation and evaluation of the process. Finally, a discussion on the potential impact for social change with and conclusion is provided. The artifacts associated with this project are located in Appendix A.

### **Description and Goals**

The results of this study indicated that teachers perceived the lack of administrative support and the ineffective structure of the PLC are barriers to improving instructional strategies in the coteaching classroom. Thus, a three day professional development (PD) training geared towards improving knowledge on effective PLCs, special education regulations, and coteaching practice will provide a framework for the current PLC to function more effectively. Schools with effective PLCs can improve teaching and learning while increasing student academic achievement (Pella, 2011). Therefore, the PD trainings will be geared towards PLC implementation and coteaching practice. The first goal will provide guidelines for implementing an effective and successful PLC. The PD workshop will include activities such as establishing clear descriptions of each educator's roles and responsibilities while increasing teaching and

learning through collaborative inquiry within a PLC. The second day of PD training will focus on special education regulations and requirements of an IEP. The findings from this study and the literature review revealed educators are successful in the coteaching classroom when they have the requisite knowledge and PD on special education requirements and coteaching practice (Friend, 2014; McCray & Hutton, 2011). Thus, the goal is to increase coteachers and school leaders' knowledge on special education services within the learning environment in order to fully implement and sustain effective coteaching practice. The final PD training goal is to increase teachers and school leaders knowledge on coteaching strategies that may lead to higher student achievement. The PD workshop will include a variety of hands-on-learning, discussions, and role-playing activities to address coteaching instructional strategies and effective PLC implementation.

The project will include a formal request to the local district leaders seeking permission for coteachers to design PD trainings based on their current instructional practice. The request will include allowance for both special and general education teachers to attend PD training together and to have common planning. The ultimate goal of the project is to remove barriers to coteaching and to support an effective PLC. Some of the findings can be addressed through an effective PLC but some issues such as lack of planning time for coteachers and district mandates must be addressed at the administrative and local district level. Therefore, a written request will be made that will include some of the study findings to support the request.

## **Rationale**

The findings from this study revealed that coteachers have negative perceptions and attitudes towards the current PLC ability to increase the effectiveness of the co-teaching model. The participants reported barriers such as (a) ineffective PLC implementation, (b) lack of collaboration, (c) low teacher's self-esteem, and (d) lack of administrative support were hindering effective coteaching practice. As result, the PD genre was selected for the project to equip school leaders and coteachers with the knowledge to improve coteaching practice and student achievement through the implementation of an effective PLC. The data analysis revealed the current structure of the PLC is ineffective because there is a lack of administrative support and PD training is sporadic and ineffective. The data showed participants were frustrated with the lack of training and frequently cited that a one day workshop was insufficient to understand the dynamics of the coteaching environment. According to Yoon at al. (2007) sporadic and infrequent training is the least effective method to be utilized for PD training.

Many schools including CES have implemented coteaching classes in response to federal mandates without considering PD for coteachers (Nicholas & Sheffield, 2014). As a result, it will be necessary to include the school administrative team in the PD workshops so they may increase their knowledge on the benefits of supporting an effective PLC and coteaching practice for all members of the learning community. The findings from this study indicated coteachers lack clarification of their roles and responsibilities in the classroom. The data indicated general education teachers felt they are the main teacher or the teacher in charge while the special education teachers are

viewed as an assistant. This finding supports the findings in the literature review which revealed that special education coteachers frequently lack access to PD, adequate work space, and are viewed as a helper instead as equal partners (Cancio, 2013; Blanton & Perez, 2011; Hollenbeck, 2013). However, effective coteaching practice espoused that both teachers are equally in charge of the classroom (Friend, 2014). Thus, it will be necessary to have a three day PD sessions for coteachers to understand the expectations of the coteaching classroom in order to increase student achievement. Next, the study findings revealed participants lack a common planning time and are frustrated with training that has no relevancy to their current practice. Therefore, the project will include a request to district leaders for educators to participate in designing PD based on their current needs and to have opportunities for a common planning time.

### **Review of the Literature**

The information from this literature review provided an explanation of why the PD genre was used as a guide to develop the project. I used a variety of databases to conduct the literature including ProQuest, SAGE, Educational Research Complete, ERIC, and PsycINFO. I used several Booleans phrases such as *professional learning community implementation, professional development, collaborative planning, collective self-efficacy, differentiation instruction, and school culture*.

### **Professional Learning Community Implementation**

The literature described several benefits of implementing a PLC such as, teachers collaborating to improve teaching and learning and increasing academic outcomes for all learners (Harris & Jones, 2010; Hilliard, 2012; Smith, Johnson, & Thompson, 2012). In

addition, an effective PLC requires: (a) commitment of time, (b) time to effect cultural change, (c) and collaborative team planning (Wells & Feun, 2013). Many school districts are implementing PLCs within the local school house without considering the goals or vision of PLC. Richmond and Monokore (2010) stated that it is important for all participants to have equal opportunities to actively learn from each other while working collaboratively towards a shared common vision within a PLC. Ermeling (2010) stated that an effective PLC has a positive impact on teachers' classroom instruction that results in positive student learning outcomes. The successful implementation of a PLC is contingent not on why it was created but on its final purpose (Ermeling, 2010). Pokert (2012) did a study on PLC implementation on two different schools and found that: (a) training, (b) resources, and (c) materials are necessary for maintaining an effective PLC. Schools that are willing to invest in training and materials are more likely to have a successful PLC (Pokert, 2012).

The literature shows that effective PLCs have strong leaders working toward a common goal and shared vision focused on positive student learning outcomes (Timperley, 2011). Garrent (2010) and Spanneut (2010) stressed that principals are crucial to a successful PLC, and getting buy in from stakeholders will determine the success of the implementation process. Owen (2010) investigated PLCs at two schools and found a functioning and effective PLC where the principal was an active member with full teachers' participation working towards a common goal and vision. Conversely, the school with little principal participation showed minimal growth and a lack of teachers' participation within the PLC (Owen, 2010). The role of the principal is crucial

in ensuring all individuals work towards a common goal and vision when implementing an effective PLC. For example, Alkert and Martin (2012) found teachers are more willing to work towards shared values when given leadership roles in a PLC. Therefore, effective PLC includes shared a common goals and vision and while encouraging shared leadership amongst participants (Alkert & Martin, 2012; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

### **Effective Professional Development**

Schools are increasingly looking at ways to increase student achievement due to new initiatives such as the Common Core Standards and new teacher evaluation systems (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). As a result, PD is being used by many school districts to increase teachers' knowledge in order to improve student achievement. Royster, Reglin and Losike-Sedimo (2014) stated students with disabilities experience academic success in inclusive settings when teachers have: (a) ongoing professional development for general and special education teachers, (b) training on special education laws and regulations, (c) time for collaboration, (d) and support to accommodate students personal learning styles. The findings from this study showed that teachers expressed negative attitudes to training with little relevancy to their current practice. This finding supports the literature review, which found teachers have positive attitudes towards professional learning when it is ongoing, job-embedded, and related to their current practice (Pella, 2011; Musanti & Pence, 2010).

In order to meet the demand of providing PD to teachers, schools are using a variety of PD formats. The literature defines PD as existing in a variety of formats. For example, Dunst (2010) did a study on different types of PD in 26 states and found PD



formats exists through: (a) weeklong institutes, (b) conference presentations, (c) intensive in-service training, and (d) training in their classrooms. The participants reported that PD training in their classrooms were the most beneficial to their current practice (Dunst, 2010). Educators attending PD workshops have opportunities to increase their pedagogical knowledge while engaging in learning experiences with other educators (Petti, 2013). The learning environment is continually changing and having effective PD is vital for teachers to effectively meet the needs of their students. Kollener, Jacobs and Borko (2011) did a study and found quality PD should include opportunities for teachers to: (a) participate collaboratively in a professional learning community, (b) adapting PD goals to support local goals, (c) and provide opportunities for teachers to inquire and reflect on their practice. Van Driel and Berry (2012) concluded that effective PD should include: (a) time for reflective practice, (b) align with teacher's practice, (c) and time to implement new initiatives.

In another study, Hughes-Hassel (2012) found successful PD that includes job-embedded opportunities has the capacity to change teachers classroom practice leading to positive student achievement. Similarly, Meyers and Rafferty (2012) concluded that teachers should have access to ongoing PD with opportunities to reflect and make changes within the PLC. Finally, effective PD is more than the weekly PLC training, rather it should be embrace as a cultural shift within the district in order for it to be a success (Richardson, 2011).

## **Collaborative Learning**

Teachers that have opportunities to collaborate and plan learning activities are able to combine their expert knowledge to address issues and find solutions to problems (Hunzicker, 2010). The findings from this study showed coteachers expressed negative perceptions towards working in the coteaching model because they lack a common planning time and had little opportunities for collaboration. This finding is in contrast of the conceptual framework of social constructivism, which advocates for learning to be centered on social interactions (Vygotsky, 1962). Teachers are able to reflect and adjust teaching practice when they have opportunities to socially interact during professional development activities (Johnson, 2007; Killion & Roy, 2009). The framework of social constructivism is supported by Kempen and Styen (2015) when they completed a qualitative study within a PLC and found collaborative learning can lead to improve learner outcomes. Teachers that have opportunities to collaborate are more likely to build trust and respect and have a high motivation to work together (Kempen & Styen, 2015). Conversely, Dever and Lash (2013) found teachers that had common planning time within the same academic subjects were more likely to be productive within a PLC. However, teachers that were part of an interdisciplinary team and do not have a common planning time were less likely to focus on academic tasks (Dever & Lash, 2013). Teachers working in coteaching classrooms will have to adapt teaching and learning to meet the variety of learning needs. Owen (2014) stated that collaboration is important to planning innovative lessons and responding to student unique learning needs. Teachers collaborating within a PLC are able to work together to differentiate instruction to meet

students specific academic needs simultaneously building trust, and increasing their knowledge (Blanton, 2011). Finally, Pierson and Howel (2013) conducted a study on full inclusion in two schools and found students with disrupted behaviors had minimal success accessing the general curriculum when teachers did not receive training. However, students were successful when teachers were given meaningful PD and common planning to adjust and modify the curriculum (Pierson & Howel, 2013).

### **Collective Self-Efficacy**

An effective PLC can be a great tool to increase teachers' self-efficacy when they are working as part of a team to plan lessons and other instructional activities (Chong & Kong, 2012). The findings from the study showed participants expressed low self-esteem from being a coteacher because they lacked training and administrative support. This finding supports the conceptual framework of social cognitive theory and the concept of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997) individuals with high self-efficacy are motivated to complete tasks and goals but individuals with low self-efficacy will become unmotivated to complete tasks and goals. The social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura was validated by Raham and Hafizur (2011) when they found teachers are more likely to: (a) be engaged in the learning, (b) increase confidence when supported, and (c) committed to identifying gaps in to increase student learning. The collective will of one group can have an impact on another group. For example, Dimopoulou (2012) conducted a study on teachers collective self-efficacy involving 137 schools and found teachers with high self-efficacy has the capacity to positively motivate others. Another study done by Stephanou, Gkavras and Doulkeridou (2013) found teachers with a strong sense of self-

efficacy are a motivating factor to address student achievement. The researchers concluded that in-service should be designed to promote individual self-efficacy in order for collective self-efficacy to foster in the learning environment (Stephanou, Gkavras, & Doulkeridou, 2013).

### **Differentiated Instruction**

The demands of federal regulations such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004) have affected how educators are providing instruction to students with special needs in the general education classroom. The co-teaching model is a common trend schools are utilizing to meet the needs of students with special needs in the inclusive learning environment (Pierson & Howel, 2013). The coteaching model includes: (a) special and general education teacher, (b) working collaboratively, (c) planning instructional lessons for all students, and (d) sharing equal responsibilities for all students (Cook & Friend, 1996; Sileo, 2003). King-Sears and Bowerman-Kruhm (2011) found when coteachers use students IEP's to collaboratively plan differentiated lessons and make accommodations, students have positive learning outcomes.

Rubenstein, Gilson, Bruce-Davis and Gubbins (2015) stated students learn best when activities are at their zone of proximal development (ZDP) in order to decrease chances of frustration and boredom. However, the findings from the study showed that coteachers lack the proper training to address the various disabilities in the cotaught classroom. The review of the literature and theoretical frameworks indicated that students with disabilities are being mainstreamed into coteaching classrooms; however,

teachers assigned to coteaching classrooms receive little or no training to work with special education students (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011; Ward, 2011). The findings and literature indicates coteachers are not opposed to teaching students with special needs but a lack of planning time, lack of training, and lack of administrative support were factors negatively impacting successful coteaching practice (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Teachers having access to meaningful PD can create tired lessons to create an academically challenging learning environment leading to positive outcomes for all students (Rubenstein, Gilson, Bruce-Davis, & Gubbins, 2015). Similarly, Roiha (2014) investigated differentiated instruction with special needs students in the coteaching environment and found the greatest challenges were: (a) time, (b) material, and physical classroom environment. Teachers using flexible grouping, working collaboratively to differentiate lessons, and matching students individual ZDP were able to affect positive learning outcomes (Roiha, 2014).

### **School Leaders Impact on School Culture**

The concept of school culture is defined by Schien (2004) as a set of values, beliefs or assumptions made by the members within an organization. Successful schools with positive school culture shares a common vision where educators work to build a culture of professional learning that promotes academic improvement over time (Cook, 2014; DuFour, 2004). School culture can be impacted when teachers continues to follow a set of established rules, procedures, or set of assumptions (Schien, 2004). Fuchs (2010) investigated and found educators are willing adjust their teaching practice if they have more PD to accommodate and adapt instruction to meet student needs. In general, long-

term cultural shifts cannot be sustained without administrative leadership (Fuchs, 2010). Similarly, Burke, Marx and Berry (2011) did a study with principals and teachers and found the goal of the school culture shifted from teaching to addressing academic achievement.

A study done in six public elementary found effective PD and principal support were essential for organizational changes to impact instructional practice (DeMatthews, 2014). In order to maintain a positive school culture in the learning environment principals and other educators' needs to share collective responsibility in order to sustain growth for all students within a PLC (DeMatthews, 2014). A cultural shift needs to occur in order for students with disabilities to prosper in inclusive settings (Carrol et al., 2011). Carrol et al. (2011) stated students with disabilities experience more success in inclusive settings when all stakeholders embrace the coteaching model to collaboratively deliver instruction. When committing to school improvement initiatives, trust amongst all members is essential with the principals taking charge. The findings from the study showed administrative support for the coteaching model are non-existent. The literature review documents the important role of building leaders and the impact they make on creating a positive school culture. Cranston (2011) asserts school principals were critical in fostering an environment based on relational trust. Principals that are successful in establishing relational trust with teachers were successful in fostering a positive culture of collaboration and professional growth within a PLC (Cranston, 2011).

In recent decades the responsibilities of school principals have changed such as: (a) improving academics, (b) supporting overwhelm teachers to implement CCSS, and

(C) dealing with a variety of stakeholders (Prytval, Noonan, & Hellesten, 2013; Tobin, 2014). Cook (2014) stated principals committed to long-term school improvement are successful when they practice sustainable leadership. Hargreaves and Fink (2004) described sustainable leadership as: (a) shared responsibility (b) creating and sustaining leadership, (c) and building an organization that promotes diversity. Sharing leadership duties and decision making activities has the potential to increase teachers' motivation towards collaboration while reducing teachers stress (Akert & Martin, 2012; Tobin, 2014). However, sustainable leadership requires principals to ensure the school structure is: (a) built on trust, (b) provide teachers with job-embedded training, and (c) monitor instructional practice (Young, 2013).

A strong school culture of shared responsibility to support teaching and learning cannot exist without teachers having a clear sense of their individual roles within the organization (Duff & Islas, 2013). A study done by Taylor, Goeke, Klein, Onore and Geist (2011) found teachers were willing to collaborate and share knowledge when they had opportunities to take an active role and share leadership tasks during school improvement work. Teachers are willing to work towards improving student learning outcomes when they are able to fully participate in their own PD guided by a leadership team within a safe and nurturing learning environment (Harris, 2011).

The schoolhouse as a learning organization is a complex structure. Thus, it will require more than sharing responsibility and collaboration to affect change for all members within the learning organization. Woolf (2014) argued shared leadership and collaboration cannot be enough to sustain positive academic changes over a long period

of time. For example, special education teacher's evaluations measures, lack of meaningful PD for special education teachers, and lack of clear teaching responsibilities for teachers continues to hinder effective teaching practice (Woolf, 2014).

Sustainable school improvement that supports a positive school culture requires a leader that is knowledgeable on a variety of issues (Tobin, 2014). O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015) did at the elementary school level and found principals lacks basic knowledge on special education regulations and student rights. As a result, special education teachers were frequently excluded from PD and special education students were placed in the most restrictive learning environment (O' Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). The principal is critical in ensuring the school functions as a community of learners where each individual has access to ongoing to PD in order to promote a positive school culture while sustaining a strong PLC (DuFour, 2004; Prytual et al., 2013; Young, 2013). Principals are the leaders of the building and ongoing PD for all educators allows for an environment where teachers can: (a) increase knowledge, (b) share best practice, and (c) provide ongoing support to each other (Smith, 2012; Routman, 2012). The literature review shows principals can positively influence general education teachers by taking an active and supportive role towards the cotaught model (Routman, 2012).

The lack of school leaders' knowledge on special education may hinder coteaching practice. Many school leaders typically do not have adequate knowledge on special education regulations which often leads to negative perceptions on coteaching practice (Ball & Green, 2014). The lack of understanding on special education laws and requirements for coteaching has help fostered negative perceptions towards coteaching



amongst school administrators (Ball & Green, 2014). Finally, the key to a successful PLC within the coteaching model should includes: (a) effective implementation that focus on student outcomes (b) effective PD to meet the needs of coteachers and new initiatives, (c) collaborative learning to share expert knowledge, (d) collective efficacy to accept responsibility for all students, (e) differentiated instruction to modify activities, (f) and school culture that includes shared leadership with strong administrative support.

### **Implementation**

I developed a PD training program based on the study findings and the literature review. The PLC is for educators to increase knowledge and implement best practice. The district has included ten professional learning days in the district school calendar, and three of these days will be utilized for implementation of the project. The first PD session will be at the beginning of the school year in August and will focus on effective PLC implementation through collaborative inquiry. The second PD session is proposed for September and will focus on special education regulations and requirements for following a student IEP. The final PD session will be in October and will on coteaching strategies and other key components to increase teachers' self-efficacy that will lead to higher student academic achievement.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

There are a variety of resources to support a PLC workshop. For example, the local school district maintains a professional learning library which houses a variety of journal articles and media products such as videos on DuFours' PLC workshops. The DuFours' videos are an excellent tool for educators because they will be able to see the

power of a PLC in action. Another resource at the research school is a data room equipped with an interactive board with adequate seating for all members of the learning community. In addition, the school media specialist could be a potential resource by helping to find additional PLC and instructional articles and the instructional technologist could be a potential resource by providing any needed technical assistance during the PD sessions. Finally, coteachers could be a support since the results indicates they support the framework of a PLC but wants PD to enhance their current teaching practice.

### **Potential Barriers**

There potential barriers that could impact the proposed PD that might be obstacles to enhance the current PLC. First, the findings from the study and the literature both documented the need for administrative support. As such, administrative support will be necessary to make any type of instructional changes within the PLC. Another potential barrier is a lack of time for teachers and administrators. The local district frequently schedule teachers and administrators to meetings and trainings at different locations across the district. Therefore, availability of both teachers and administrators attending the PD could be a potential barrier. Finally, unwillingness of teachers to participate in the PD workshops could be a potential barrier. The PD sessions will require teachers and administrators to commit three full days which may be a potential barrier.

### **Proposal for Implementation and Timetable**

The PD workshops will be most beneficial during the first semester of the school year. This is an ideal time of the year since the district has several pre-planning days built in the school calendar. This is also an appropriate time because it will provide critical

information to teachers and administrators to receive training on effective coteaching practice within a PLC. The second PD workshop will be in September during a full-day teacher staff development. This time would be more appropriate to conduct the PD workshop since teachers will not be focus on dealing with open house and other responsibilities that come with a new school year. The third PD session will be held in October. This will be an ideal time for the final workshop because teachers will have their student rosters and information on students' academic needs. This information can be useful for brainstorming different activities during the PLC. Additionally, it is an ideal time to have the final workshop since it will focus on increasing coteachers knowledge on instructional strategies and other collaborative activities aimed at higher student achievement. Finally, a formal request to the district and the administrative team will be made to allow special education teachers access to PD, allow all coteachers time to collaborate, and allow teachers input in designing PD to meet their current needs.

### **Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others**

The roles and responsibilities of students are to actively participate in the differentiated lessons created by the teachers. The students would be challenged at a higher level based on their various cognitive abilities and preferred learning styles. The roles of teachers will be to work collaboratively to plane lessons, review IEP's, work on common assessments, and share teaching responsibilities, and work within the PLC to solve academic challenges. The principal plays an important role in the implementation process. The role of the principal is to support the project and to promote a learning environment of shared leadership. Finally, as researcher, it is my responsibility to work

with the building administrators, PLC leaders, and teachers to organize the PD workshops. I will be serving as facilitator of the proposed PD plan and will be responsible for creating all materials and provide the training for the workshops.

### **Project Evaluation**

The evaluation for this project consists of three evaluations (See Appendix A). The first evaluation is a mixed evaluation consisting of a Likert scale and opened questions. The teachers and administrators would have an opportunity to provide feedback if any additional training is needed to attain the PD goal. The next evaluation also consisted of a Likert scale and opened questions. The community of learners will have an opportunity to provide feedback on whether the goals were met and if any additional trainings or follow-up might be needed. The final evaluation consisted of a pre and post-evaluation rating on coteaching practice. The teachers and administrators will also be given an opportunity to provide an open response regarding the PD. This would allow the facilitator to gauge if the PD goals were met or if additional training might be needed.

### **Implications Including Social Change**

#### **Local Community**

An effective PLC has the potential to increase students' academic performance when it is implemented with fidelity (Sigurdardottir, 2010). The project offers opportunities for the research school to enhance the current PLC by offering PD workshops to administrators to increase their knowledge on coteaching practice through the PLC. The PD will provide administrators with valuable information on the

importance of: (a) common planning time, (b) special education regulations, (c) shared leadership, (d) and effective PLC implementation (DuFour, 2004; Nichols & Sheffield, 2014; Woolf, 2014). The project also offers opportunities for increase teacher collaboration and greater teacher' self-efficacy by creating a learning environment based on collective responsibility and mutual trust. The PD workshops has the potential for social change for educators within the research school to address the needs of all students including those that frequently are placed in the most restrictive learning environment (O' Laughlin & Lindle, 2015).

### **Far-Reaching**

This study was qualitative in nature and cannot be generalized to the larger population. Nevertheless, the findings from this study support several similar studies regarding the implementation of a PLC. The results of the study can be beneficial to other schools looking to implement or restructure an existing PLC. For example, the PD workshop can be beneficial to other school leaders attempting to implement a PLC in understanding the power of shared leadership and school culture (Harris, 2011; Tobin, 2014). The empowerment of teachers to have access to PD relevant to their current practice, time to collaborate, and to share knowledge within the PLC could improve teachers' effectiveness in the cotaught model (Segall & Campbell, 2012). Through ongoing job-embedded training, collaboration, and differentiated instruction the implication for social change could result in positive student outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

The goal of the project was to remove barriers hindering the PLC by empowering teachers to improve instructional strategies in cotaught classrooms. In this section, I provided a proposed project based on the study results. The results shows that teachers support the framework of a PLC but feel the implementation of the PLC was ineffective. A literature review is included in this section as well as the goals and outcomes of the PD. I included a timeline for implementation of the proposed PD workshop. The proposed project includes a 3-day PD training for teachers and administrators. In addition, resources, roles, responsibilities, and implication for social change were discussed.

The ultimate goal for this project was to increase coteachers effectiveness leading to positive student outcomes. It is hoped that the results from this study could have the potential for social change both locally and far reaching by helping students to learn at higher levels. In Section 4, I have included a discussion on the proposed strengths, recommendation, and remediation of the project. Finally, Section 4 includes a reflection on my growth as a scholar and discussion on possible future research.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the PLC to improve instructional strategies in the cotaught classroom. The use of PLCs can be beneficial to teachers, administrators, and students when all stakeholders work collaboratively towards a common goal. Schools with effective PLCs allows for teachers and administrators to jointly share responsibility, reflect on teaching practice, and work towards improving teaching practices. An effective PLC has the potential to provide educators with professional development opportunities to develop their teaching practice leading to positive student outcomes (Butler & Schnellert, 2012). After the data analysis was concluded, I developed a series of professional development workshops that might lead to positive changes in coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs regarding the PLC ability to improve teaching outcome in the co-taught classroom. This section includes the projects' strengths and limitations, and the project's development and evaluation. I also included a reflection on my growth as a scholar, practitioner, and as a project developer. Finally, this section ends with a discussion on the potential impact for social change and direction for future research.

### **Project Strengths**

A series of PD workshops were designed to address the negative perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of coteachers regarding the effectiveness of the PLC. The project will meet the needs of the researched school by addressing issues of PLC

implementation, unique needs of the staff, students, local practice, routines, and the critical role of the administrative staff of sustaining an effective PLC (Ofer & Pedder, 2011). A second strength of the project is the opportunity for teachers and administrators to establish a positive school culture. This is done by everyone working collaboratively to establishing duties and responsibilities for PLC members, providing PD to all teachers, and establishing a culture of shared leadership and responsibilities within the PLC. Finally, the project will provide coteachers with opportunities to increase their knowledge on best practices used in coteaching classrooms while proving vital information to school leaders on the benefits of sustaining an effective PLC.

### **Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**

There are potential limitations associated with the proposed project. For example, a limitation could be the unwillingness of teachers and administrators to embrace change within the current PLC. Teachers might be resistant to changes due to their familiar routines and procedures during professional learning days. Teachers must be willing to commit their time and embrace change in order to sustain an effective PLC. I will assist teachers by working with the administrators to ensure the potential benefits of an effective PLC are highlighted.

Another limitation could be the allotted dates and days for the PD workshops. The district has designated professional learning days and typically requires teachers and administrators to attend workshops at different locations within the district. Since the PD workshops will require teachers and administrators to be at one location this could pose a challenge if they have training obligations elsewhere. One remedy to this issue may be to



break-up the PD workshops from 3 full days to a series of workshops where the material would be delivered in smaller segments after the instructional day. To achieve this goal the building principal will need to make having the teachers attend the PD workshops a top priority. Teachers reported they would like to have time to collaborate and have meaningful PD that will help increase their teaching skills in the classroom. I could help facilitate this collaborative effort by providing teachers the agenda and any handouts associated with the training sessions in advance in order to maximize the allotted PD time.

### **Scholarship**

I initially considered conducting a quantitative study at the start of my doctoral journey. However, as I started my research on PLCs and the coteaching model it became apparent a qualitative approach would best describe coteachers' perceptions towards the PLC. My research of the literature on PLCs has been an enlightening process because it provided a deeper understanding on the benefits of an effective PLC. I read a variety of books and articles on the research topic to gain an in-depth perspective of the issue, challenges, and benefits of implementing a PLC. Through my research I was able to identify a problem at the researched school and propose a potential solution. As I concluded my data analysis it became apparent the implementation of the PLC was ineffective. As a result, I utilized the skills and knowledge gained from my previous courses at Walden University and from this doctoral journey to propose a project to meet the needs of research school.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

The project was developed after synthesizing the data and the literature that a series of PD workshops were needed to address the coteachers unique needs within the PLC. Thus, when developing this project I had to consider the participants and the research school unique needs. Harris (2011) stated successful strategies from one country cannot be replicated in another with similar results. To successfully implement a strategy adaptation must be made to accommodate the individuals in charge (Harris, 2011). It was evident based on the data a project that included training for the administrators was needed to address the negative perceptions of the existing PLC. Thus, the project focuses on effective implementation, goals and outcomes, and school leadership before targeting instructional strategies. The project is designed for both teachers and school leaders to learn and reflect in a collaborative environment based on the local school needs. Finally, the project includes Likert-type scale and open response for participants to evaluate the workshops. These evaluations would allow for any additional adjustments that may be needed for future training sessions.

### **Leadership and Change**

Throughout this doctoral journey I have continually reflected on the local problem identified in this study and the leadership styles of leaders to promote and sustain change over time. I have concluded that effective changes require leaders that have the skills to inspire, lead, and convey their vision to others to embrace change. Significant changes cannot be sustained over time without the commitment of leaders gaining support from other stakeholders. Thus, when I developed the PD, the

administrators were included as part of the learning community. As I delved into the literature, I found successful PLCs exist in learning environments with positive school culture that has shared leadership. For this reason the proposed project includes teachers and leaders working in a collaborative environment to: (a) develop goals, (b) learning outcomes, (c) defined job responsibilities, (d) and discuss potential coteaching strategies. I firmly believe that sustained change will require leaders to participate in shared leadership. Gardner and Laskin (2011) states strong leaders not only lead but also create a sense of community. The literature and the conceptual framework confirms teachers are likely to be committed to a PLC goal when there is sense of community and shared leadership amongst members. As a result, creating the project to include the school leadership team will hopefully increase teachers' self-efficacy towards the PLC leading to greater student achievement.

### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

When I embarked on this journey I could not have foreseen the amount of knowledge I would attain through this process. I have grown as a scholar by analyzing numerous research articles, books, and in the process enhance my writing skills. My growth as a scholar included learning the qualitative research process such as, interviewing participants and coding data. This journey enabled me to become a task oriented individual. I was able to develop critical skills such as, time management and organizational skills to complete this journey. Additionally, with the help of my committee members, I was able to streamline my research questions, literature review, and research design to write a scholarly paper addressing the local problem that could

potentially bring social change in my learning environment. As I reflect on all I have learned, I have concluded it is imperative to be a life-long learner due to changes continuously occurring in the learning environment.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

I did not give much consideration to the capacity of PLCs to enhance the coteaching model to increase student achievement. As I went further into the research process, I had to re-examine my own thought process regarding the importance of collective self-efficacy and shared leadership. I found that using the knowledge gained through this doctoral journey will enable me to enhance the current PLC that may potentially overcome obstacles in the cotaught classrooms. Finally, through this research process I came to understand a PLC cannot function without all members working collaboratively towards a common goal. Thus, I plan to use the skills, theories, and knowledge I have gained to encourage my colleagues to embrace changes within the PLC to improve teaching and learning outcomes for all stakeholders.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

I have attended many PD sessions that were disorganized and not relevant to my teaching practice. I took my personal experiences and recommendations from the literature when creating my project. For example, I created a project that included a series of workshops that will include information relevant to the audience. My project was developed around the major themes that emerged from the data such as including activities from PLC implementation to coteaching strategies. Finally, as a project developer, it was important to include hands-on activities for the teachers and leaders to

work collaboratively to embrace changes within the PLC. It is hoped that illustrating the benefits an effective PLC will lead to positive perceptions regarding the coteaching model.

### **The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change**

The proposed project has the potential for impact on social changes because it could empower the local school administrators and teachers to embrace changes within the PLC. An effective PLC supported by the school administrators has the capacity to increase collaboration, trust, and student achievements (Supovitz et al., 2010). The proposed project could also bring about social change by empowering coteachers to share in collective responsibility to differentiate instruction, engage in and reflect in practice, and build trust amongst colleagues to positively impact student learning outcomes.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

The purpose of this qualitative project study was to understand coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the PLC coteaching model to improve instructional strategies. The findings indicated the participants perceived the implementation of PLC as ineffective, lack of collaboration, and administrative support are barriers to effective coteaching practice. The findings from this study cannot be generalized to the general population since the study was qualitative in nature with a small sample size. However, the current literature shows that teachers are motivated to increase student achievement when they can collaborate with peers, have job-embedded PD training, and support from administrators (Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Hudson et al., 2013; Rytivaara & Kershner, 2012). The administrators will need to

play a critical role in ensuring coteachers have the support and training to work collaboratively to share knowledge in order to make changes in the cotaught classroom. The school principal must ensure special education teachers have equal access to PD and coteachers have ample opportunities to collaborate in order to be effective coteachers. When teachers work together they will be able to build trust, share responsibility, and make innovative changes to their teaching practice in order to reach all learners in the classroom.

There are a few options that could be explored for future research such as, conducting a quantitative study with a larger sample size. A quantitative design using a larger sample would allow for generalization back to the larger population (Creswell, 2012). Another possibility for future research could be to conduct a study on the perception of the entire teaching staff in relation to the PLC. Finally, a third option could be to investigate student achievement before and after the implementation of the PLC. A quantitative design on this topic could be used which could then be generalized to the larger population.

### **Conclusion**

The ultimate goal of this research was to discover coteachers perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs towards the current PLC at the research school as it relates to improving coteaching practice. Through this research it was discovered that the PLC was ineffective in improving coteaching strategies. A project was created that included a series of PD workshops specifically targeted for administrators and coteachers to address PLC implementation, special education regulations, collaboration, and instructional

strategies for the coteaching classrooms. The PD workshops will provide teachers and administrators with the necessary information to implement and sustain an effective PLC in order to address student achievement.

In this section I discussed the proposed project strengths and limitations. I also provided my personal reflections as a scholar and as a practitioner. I provided a reflection on myself as a project developer and the potential impact for social change. Finally, I concluded with the implications and recommendations for future research.

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## Appendix A: The Project

The project for this study includes a formal request to the local district to allocate a common planning time for co-teachers and to allow coteachers to request training relevant to their current practice. The project also consists of a three day professional development (PD) session for coteachers and leaders to address issues within the current PLC implementation and to enhance co-teaching practice at CES.

The project is based on the study findings and current research on PLC and coteaching practice. The study findings revealed coteachers felt the PLC implementation process was ineffective and there was a lack of support from school leaders for coteaching. The data also showed that participants felt they lack adequate training regarding special education, had little opportunity to plan, and lack relevant training on coteaching strategies. This series of PD workshops are intended to serve as an easy and practical guide for teachers and leaders to address barriers hindering the current PLC, which may improve coteaching practice.

### **Formal Request to the Local District**

May 27<sup>th</sup> , 2015

To ABC County School District and Central Administrative Staff:

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the ABC County School District for placing students first. The ABC County School District has a long tradition of working with all stakeholders to increase student achievement. I fully support the district commitment for all educators to collaborate and embrace continuous professional

development. I believe that collaboration and ongoing professional development will increase our capacity to improve our students' performance positively.

The ABC County School District initiated professional learning communities (PLCs) within each school more than three years ago. The goal of the PLC was retain highly effective teachers that can positively impact student learning outcomes. There is a vast body of research supporting the benefits of a PLC such as increase collaboration amongst faculty members and increase student performance (DuFour, 2007; Eaker & Keating, 2009; Ferguson, 2013; Harris & Jones, 2010; Linder, Post & Calabrese, 2012). Schools with successful PLCs allocate time for teachers to have job-embedded training and time to collaborate (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Killion & Roy, 2009). However, the research shows time for collaboration and empowering teachers to participate in their own professional development are major factors hindering successful PLCs in some schools (Cranston; 2011; Roiha, 2014). Schools with successful PLCs have empowered their co-teachers to become an active participant in designing professional developments activities related to their current practice (Harris, 2011). For example, coteachers with common planning time likely to collaborate and implement effective strategies in the classroom (Fenty & McDuffie-Landrum, 2011).

Time is a valuable resource but there is ample evidence that allocating time for professional development will positively impact both educators and students. It is with this consideration that I am making a formal request for coteachers to have a common planning and to actively participant in professional learning activities related to their current practice. I have recently completed a doctoral study on coteachers perceptions

regarding the effectiveness of the current PLC to improve coteaching at CES. I found a lack of common planning time and professional learning activities were major obstacles hindering the PLC. This request for a common planning time and active participation in professional learning activities for teachers is of a project that I have developed to address barriers within the PLC that are hindering coteaching practice.

It is my hope that the ABC County School District will take time to consider this request. I strongly believe that when educators collaborate towards a common goal great success can be achieved. I look forward to answering any additional questions related to this request.

Thank you all in advance for your attention,

Lalita Karpen

Canefield Elementary School

66 ABC Way

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## **Agenda for Professional Development Session Day One**

### **Professional Learning Communities**

**August, 2015**

- 8:00-8:15-Welcome and introduction of PLC members
- 8:15-8:30-Discussion of this session goals (Slide 2)
- 8:30-8:45-Discuss the need to establish group Norms (Slide 3)
- 8:45-9:15-Activity-Create group norms
- 9:15-9:30-Activity-personal definition of a PLC (Slide 4)
- 9: 30-9:45-Reflection-Group discussion on the definition of a PLC (Slide 4)
- 9:45-10:00-Discuss research based definition of a PLC (Slide 5)
- 10:00-10:15-Break
- 10:15-10:30-Group discussion on PLC goals, vision, mission statements (Slide 6)
- 10:30-11:30-Establish PLC goals, vision, mission statements in small group
- 11:30-12:00-Presentation of PLC statements-whole group
- 12:00-12:30-Lunch
- 12:30-1:00-Discuss effective and successful PLCs (Slide 7 & 8)
- 1:00-1:30-Whole group discussions-share examples of effective PLCs (Slide 9)
- 1:30-1:45-Discussion on Leadership and PLCs (Slide 10)
- 1:45-2:00-Roles and responsibilities (Slide 11)
- 2:00-3:00-Create job description for PLC members
- 3:00-3:15-Reflections/Final thoughts on the session
- 3:15-3:30-Complete Evaluation (Slide 12)



Note: A PowerPoint presentation is included in the following pages to be used with this agenda. A copy of the presentation will be provided to each PLC member to take notes during the workshop.

**Professional Learning Communities (PLC)**  
Training Session One

**Goals**

- ▶ Develop a set of norms for the PLC
- ▶ Understand factors for an effective PLC
- ▶ Write a vision and mission statement
- ▶ Develop a concise guide for co-teachers to understand their individual duties and responsibilities

**Establishing New Norms**

- ▶ Norms will enable PLC members to function more effectively as a collaborative group
- ▶ The facilitator will have a volunteer write agreed norms of the PLC on chart paper
- ▶ Post PLC norms where all members can view

PLC FROM NORMS  
WHAT ARE NORMS?

**Activity**

- ▶ Turn to your partner and explain in your own words explain what is a PLC. Next each member will share their definition with the group.

**STOP**

**PLC Defined**

- ▶ A professional learning community (PLC) refers to a group of educators who meets regularly to share expertise, and works interdependently to improve teaching skills and learning for all students (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006).

**Discussion**

- ▶ What are our goals?
- ▶ What is our vision?
- ▶ Do we share the same values?
- ▶ Are we engaging in innovative practice to maximize student achievement?

### An Effective PLC

Effective PLC implementation includes:

- ▶ Shared and supportive leadership based on trust and openness
- ▶ A common mission defined by positive student learning outcomes
- ▶ Shared values and vision focus on effective teaching practice focus on positive student outcomes
- ▶ Collaborative learning based on innovative practice

### Successful PLCs

Schools with successful PLCs ensure:

- ▶ Continuous through job-embedded PD for all-individualized training to match educators and students needs
- ▶ Promotes a culture of collective responsibility-focus on peer responsibility rather than on administrative accountability
- ▶ Establish policies for accountability-includes a system for on going support and ensures the mission and vision continues to be align
- ▶ (Hord, 2004)

### Activity

Let's discuss and share examples of effective PLCs

- How can we incorporate job-embedded training?
- How can we promote collective responsibility?
- What system will be have for ensuring accountability?

### Leadership and PLCs

- ▶ The research states successful PLCs can be sustain over time with school leaders support (Cranston, 2011)
- ▶ School leaders can:
  - Embrace a culture that all students can learn
  - Organize members into meaningful teams and foster a collaborative culture
  - Foster a school culture that allows for shared leadership roles
  - Ensure teachers have common planning time to collaborate and reflect on teaching practice
  - Ensure teachers have meaningful PD training relevant to their current practice

### Job Responsibilities

- ▶ What am I responsible for as a leader?
- ▶ What am I responsible for as a general education teacher?
- ▶ What am I responsible for as a special education teacher?

### Reflection

- ▶ Thank you for time! Kindly complete the survey regarding your PLC session. This information will provide valuable insight on your experience and will be used to make adjustments for future PLC sessions.



### PLC Training Evaluation-Session One

Thank you for participating in today's training session. Your evaluation of this session will provide valuable insight when planning future workshops. Please choose one answer for each question while providing specific examples for open-ended questions.

**Survey Key: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree**

1. The goals of the training were stated: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
2. The goals for the session were met: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
3. I have a better understanding of effective PLC implementation: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
4. This session helped me understand the PLC vision: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
5. I have a clear understanding of my role and responsibility: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Please provide detailed examples as it relates to the following questions:

6. What do you believe is the most critical element needed for a successful PLC?

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7. What action can you take to foster and sustain a successful PLC at CES?

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**Agenda for Professional Development Session Day Two****Special Education****September, 2015**

- 8:00-8:15-Welcome and review PLC Norms
- 8:15-8:30-Discuss goals for the session (Slide 2)
- 8:30-9:00-Discuss definition of Special Education (Slide 3)
- 9:00-9:30-Group activity-complete worksheet activity (Slide 4)
- 9:30-10:00-Discuss provisions within IDEA (Slide 5)
- 10:00-10:15-Break
- 10:15-10:30-Discuss the categories eligible for Special Education services (Slide 6 & 7)
- 10:30-11:00-Read handout describing of each disability
- 11:00-11:15-Activity-share new knowledge and misconceptions clarified (Slide 8)
- 11:15-11:45-Discuss requirements of an IEP (Slide 9)
- 11:45-12:00-Reflect on consequences associated to not following an IEP (Slide 10)
- 12:00-12:30-Lunch
- 12:30-1:00-Discuss inclusion in the co-teaching classroom (Slide 11 & 12)
- 1:00-1:45-Role-play-student groupings (Slide 13)
- 1:45-2:00-Reflect on any red flags observed during the role-play activity
- 2:00-2:30-Discuss collaboration and inclusive practice (Slide 14 & 15)
- 2:30-3:00-Share personal ideas on how to increase collaboration (Slide 16)
- 3:00-3:15-Reflections/Final thoughts on the session
- 3:15-3:30-Complete Evaluation (Slide 17)

Note: A PowerPoint presentation is included in the following pages to be used with this agenda during the training session. A copy of the presentation will be provided to each PLC member to take notes during the workshop.

<h3>What is Special Education?</h3> <p>Training Session 2</p>	<h3>Goals for this session</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Increase awareness of Special Education Law</li> <li>▶ Increase awareness of Special Education category of disabilities</li> <li>▶ Increase awareness of IEP's</li> <li>▶ Increase awareness of special education students in the general education classroom</li> <li>▶ Increase awareness of collaboration in co-teaching</li> </ul>
<h3>What is Special Education?</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Special education is defined as specialized instruction to meet the unique needs of eligible students, and/or related services necessary to access and make progress in the general curriculum.</li> <li>▶ The law that governs special education is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).</li> </ul> 	<h3>Activity</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Complete worksheet activity</li> <li>▶ Turn to your partner and compare and contrast your answers</li> <li>▶ The facilitator will circulate the room and ask random PLC members to share their answers</li> <li>▶ Share answers with PLC members</li> </ul>
<h3>Special Education Law (IDEA)</h3> <p><b>IDEA guarantee:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Parent and student participation in meeting</li> <li>▶ Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)</li> <li>▶ Appropriate Evaluation</li> <li>▶ Individualized Education Program (IEP)</li> <li>▶ Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)</li> <li>▶ Procedural Safeguards</li> </ul>	<h3>Special Education Services</h3> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Students eligible for special education are served under at least one of thirteen categories</li> </ul>

### Special Education Categories

- Autism
- Deaf
- Deafness
- Emotional disturbance
- Hearing impairment
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disability
- Orthopedic impairment
- Other health impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Speech or language impairment
- Traumatic brain injury
- Visual impairment including blindness (NICHCY, 2012)

### Discussion

- Spend a few minutes reading about each disability on the handout (NICHCY, 2012)
- Share one new thing you have learned
- Share one misconception that was clarified

### Individual Education Plan (IEP)

- IEP: A plan mandated by IDEA that is used by all members of the educational team to create continuity of learning (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012)
- IEP can include the following, but is not limited to:
  - Description of services and supplementary aids
  - Individualized goals based on student's abilities
  - List of accommodations to meet individual needs
- The IEP a roadmap for educators to guide special education students along the right path to achieve their unique goals

### Discussion

- Share something new learned in relation to IEP's
- What might be some consequences for not following a student IEP?

### Inclusion



- Inclusion refers to "...educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms" (Heward, 2013)
- Teaching special education students is not just about access and accommodations; it is about delivering specially designed instruction that is explicit, intensive, and supportive and meets each individual student's specific learning needs (IDEA, 2004)
- Students will receive instruction in general education classrooms based on their IEP service hours

### Inclusion Con't

- Your role as a teachers would be to provide direct and individualized attention for each student
- The main goal for each student is to achieve the highest standard of learning in the classroom
- Promote a sense of community within the classroom
- Emphasis open communication and teamwork
- Avoid placing special needs students in "slow groups" or do not foster an environment of "us versus them" (Sapon-Shevin, 2010)
- Keep an open line of communication with all members of the PLC to find solutions to challenges or to share innovated practice

### Activity

- ▶ Role-play: Select two members of the group to play the role of the general and special education teacher
- ▶ Task: Teachers will engage in a dialogue aimed at grouping students for instructional activities
- ▶ Additional team members will observe and take notes—look for any red flags that will lead to groupings such as "slow group".

### Collaboration

- Collaboration is key to an inclusive environment
- ▶ Frequent opportunities for planning between special and regular education teachers increases the efficiency of communication and motivation towards co-teaching (Scanlon & Baker, 2012)
  - ▶ Teachers are willing to make changes to their practice when given support from school administrators (Alkert & Martin, 2012)

### Collaboration Con't

- ▶ Collaborating with physical therapy, speech and language therapy and paraprofessionals creates a coordinated plan for all service providers
- ▶ A coordinated plan minimizes the potential of students not receiving the services they require and provide clarification of duties and responsibilities

### Activity

- ▶ What can I do to increase collaboration with colleagues?

### Reflection

- ▶ Thank you for taking the time to learn about special education
- ▶ Kindly complete the survey regarding your PLC session
- ▶ Your experience and will be used to make adjustments for future PLC sessions



## Special Education Law Activity-Training Session 2

The law that governs special education is known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Please jot down everything you can remember about IDEA. Next, turn to your partner and compare and contrast your answer. Finally, fill in what you have learned from your partner as it relates to IDEA.

What I already know about IDEA	What I learned about IDEA
I know that...	I learned that...
I know that...	I learned that...
I know that...	I learned that...
I know that...	I learned that...
I know that...	I learned that...

The facilitator will access the [www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org) to describe the 13 disability categories defined under IDEA.



### PLC Training Evaluation-Session Two

Thank you for participating in today's training session. Your evaluation of this session will provide valuable insight when planning future workshops. Please choose one answer for each question while providing specific examples for open-ended questions.

**Survey Key: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree**

1. The goals of the training were stated (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
2. The goals of the session were met: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
3. I have a better understanding of IDEA: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
4. I have a better understanding of the 13 categories: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
5. I have a better understand of an IEP: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Please provide detailed examples as it relates to the following questions:

6. What can actions can you take to sustain in inclusion practice in CES?

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7. How can collaborating within a PLC improve co-teaching practice at CES?

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## **Agenda for Professional Development Session Day Three**

### **Co-teaching Strategies**

**October, 2015**

- 8:00-8:15-Welcome and review PLC Norms
- 8:15-8:30-Discuss goals for this session (Slide 2)
- 8:30-8:45-Activity- write a personal definition of co-teaching
- 8:45-9:00-Reflect and share what is not co-teaching-complete pre-evaluation survey
- 9:00-9:30-Discuss the first two models of co-teaching (Slide 5 & 6)
- 9:30-10:00-Select two members to role-play One-teach, One Observe
- 10:00-10:15-Break
- 10:15-10:45-Discuss the next two models of co-teaching (Slide 7 & 8)
- 10:45-11:15-Select two members to role-play Alternative Teaching
- 11:15-11:45-Discuss final two models of co-teaching (Slide 9 & 10)
- 11:45-12:00-Reflect on the four models learned
- 12:00-12:30-Lunch
- 12:30-1:00-Discuss the final two models (Slide 11 & 12)
- 1:00-1:30-Activity-complete Co-teaching handout (Slide 15)
- 1:30-2:00-Discussion-whole group discussion of pros and cons of each model
- 2:00-2:30-Discuss success for all students (Slide 16)
- 2:30-3:00-Share personal ideas for ensuring success for all (Slide 17)
- 3:00-3:15-Complete post-evaluation survey

3:15-3:30-Complete Evaluation for session (Slide 18)

Note: A PowerPoint presentation is included in the following pages to be used with this agenda during the training session. A copy of the presentation will be provided to each PLC member to take notes during the workshop.

## Co-teaching Strategies

Training Session Three

### Goals for this session

- › What is co-teaching?
- › Co-teaching models
- › Best practice for co-taught classroom
- › How can we determine which model is best?
- › How can we ensure success for all students?

### Activity

- › Use a sticky note and write a personal definition of co-teaching and complete pre-evaluation survey. Now, let's discuss what is co-teaching!
- › Co-teaching is the equal sharing of responsibility of a general and special education teacher for all students in the classroom
- › It allows two educators with different educational backgrounds to blend their expertise
- › It is based on equality between co-teachers
- › It allows for differentiated instruction to meet to meet individual student needs

### Discussion

- › Members will share examples of what is NOT co-teaching

### Six Models

Friend and Cook (2010) developed six established models for co-teaching

#### **One Teach, One Observe**

- › In this model one teacher leads instruction while one teacher observe and collect data
- › Purpose of this model is to collect data such as inappropriate behaviors or how well students are responding to instructional activities
- › A disadvantage of this model is the same teachers typically leads and collect data
- › May cause student to view the teacher collecting the data as an "aid" or not a real teacher
- › Could lead to negative perceptions towards the teacher collecting the data and towards co-teaching

### Six Models Con't

#### **Station Teaching**

- › In this model the students are divided into three or more heterogeneous or homogenous groupings
- › Allows for teachers to provide instruction to individualized groups or monitor student progress
- › Allows for smaller student teacher ratio
- › A disadvantage could be if groupings does not meet individual student needs

### Activity

Role-play activity:

- ▶ Select two members of the PLC team to role play **One Teach, One Observe**

### Six Models Con't

#### Parallel Teaching

In this model the students are divided into two groups and each teacher provide instruction

- ▶ Allows for smaller student teacher ratio
- ▶ Allows for differentiation of instruction
- ▶ Each teacher provides instruction to a group
- ▶ A disadvantage could be one group of students would not interact with one co-teacher during instruction

### Six Models Con't

#### Alternative Teaching

In this model one teacher leads the majority of instruction while one teacher re-deliver instruction to a small group of students still having difficulty with previously taught content

- ▶ Allows for differentiation based on student unique learning needs
- ▶ Allows one teacher to provide remediation in a small group to address misconceptions to struggling students
- ▶ Allows accelerating of content to the rest of the class
- ▶ A disadvantage could be assigning the same teacher to provide remediation instruction

### Activity

- ▶ Select two members of the PLC team to role-play **Alternative Teaching**

### Six Models Con't

#### Teaming

The model requires both teachers to share the role of lead teachers in providing instruction and support to students in the co-taught classroom

- ▶ It allows both teachers to share in teaching responsibility
- ▶ Increase energy levels in the classroom with two teachers actively leading instruction
- ▶ Allows teachers to model collaboration for students
- ▶ This model allows little room for differentiation
- ▶ Not recommended for novice teachers-potential for miscommunication if teachers are not familiar with each other teaching style

### Six Models Con't

#### One Teach, One Assist

This model requires one teacher to teach the entire class while one teacher circulate the room providing assistance to students

- ▶ Allows for individual student support
- ▶ Allow for informal observation
- ▶ This is the least effective co-teaching model-may allow students to view one teacher as an assistant
- ▶ Does not allow teachers to share equal teaching responsibility

### Activity

- Grab a partner and complete the Co-teaching worksheet handout

### Which Model is Best

- Each model has advantages and disadvantages
- Collaboration is critical for determining which model to use in the classroom
- Co-teachers must analyze all student data including IEPs before creating instructional activities
- Honest and open communication will be essential for collaborative practice in the co-teaching classrooms

### Activity

- PLC members will complete co-teaching handout after learning about the six models of co-teaching
- Discuss pros and cons of each model

### Success for all Students

- Administrative support for co-teaching—foster a culture of collective responsibility
- Provide meaningful and job-embedded training within the PLC
- Empower co-teachers to request professional training based on their current practice
- Allow time for co-teachers to have a common planning
- Allow opportunities for special education teachers to have access to professional training
- Ensure all members within the PLC have training on federal mandates regarding special education

### Discussion

- What can leaders do to ensure success for all students?
- What can teachers do to ensure success for all students?

### Reflection

- Thank you for participating these professional learning workshop. Kindly complete the survey regarding this training session. This information will provide valuable insight on your experience and will be used to make adjustments for future PLC sessions.



### Co-teaching Handout-Training Session 3

Educators have the option to use the six co-teaching models established by Friend and Cook (2010) to support effective instructional practice in the co-taught classroom. Complete the worksheet with your partner by considering how each model can be used. Also you will need to identify potential advantages and disadvantages associated with each model.

<b>Co-teaching Model</b>	<b>How can it be used</b>	<b>Advantages and Disadvantages</b>
<b>One Teach-One Observe</b>		
<b>Station Teaching</b>		
<b>Parallel Teaching</b>		
<b>Alternative Teaching</b>		
<b>Teaming</b>		
<b>One Teach, One Assist</b>		

Friend, M. & Cook, L. (2010). *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.). Boston: Pearson.

**PLC Training Evaluation-Session Three (Part 1)**  
**Pre-Evaluation Survey**

- 1.I am familiar with Friend and Cook’s six model of co-teaching (Yes/ No).
- 2.My ability/knowledge on co-teaching prior to the session can be best describe as

**Exemplary**-I have a wealth of knowledge on co-teaching practice  
**Proficient**-I am good understanding of co-teaching practice.  
**Emerging**- I am familiar with some aspect of co-teaching practice.  
**Developing**- I plan on learning more about co-teaching practice.

**Post-Evaluation Survey**

- 1.I am familiar with Friend and Cook’s six model of co-teaching (Yes/ No).
- 2.My ability/knowledge on co-teaching prior to the session can be best describe as

**Exemplary**-I have a wealth of knowledge on co-teaching practice  
**Proficient**-I am good understanding of co-teaching practice.  
**Emerging**- I am familiar with some aspect of co-teaching practice.  
**Developing**- I plan on learning more about co-teaching practice.



**PLC Training Evaluation-Session Three (Part 2)**

Thank you for participating in today's training session. Your evaluation of this session will provide valuable insight when planning future workshops. Please choose one answer for each question while providing specific examples for open-ended questions.

**Survey Key: 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3-Neutral, 4-Agree, 5-Strongly Agree**

1. The goals of the training were stated: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
  
2. The goals of the session were met: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)
  
3. The session was relevant to co-teaching practice: (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

Please provide detailed examples as it relates to the following questions:

4. What aspect of the session helped facilitated my knowledge on co-teaching practice?

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5. What additional activities can be incorporated into future PLC sessions to enhance co-teaching practice at CES?

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## Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation

November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014

Dear Principal \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student at Walden University and I am requesting your assistance with identifying and giving consent to potential co-teachers to participate in a study on the impact of professional learning community on co-teaching. Your assistance is sought because of your role as principal and instructional leader of the school; you will be able to identify candidates that meet the study criteria while giving consent for teachers to participate.

The purpose of the study is to explore co-teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and preparedness towards co-teaching. If you agree to help, I will need to interview 4 special education teachers and 4 general education co-teaching classroom. The interviews will be recorded and will last 45 minutes to an hour after the regular school day. All participation in the study is voluntary, and there is no monetary compensation for participation. If you agree to assist, I will send an invitation letter to selected teachers inviting them to participate in the study.

My study will exclude minors, mentally or emotionally disabled individuals, and senior citizens. The benefits of the study are that participants may have an awareness of effective practice for a professional learning community. Teachers may increase collaborative practice in co-teaching classrooms by learning new strategies that will help produce academic success for all students. Participation in this study poses no risks to potential participants, stakeholders, or the school. Nor does participating in this study will contribute to any negative outcome for the participant, school or district. I will keep all information confidential and any information obtained during the course of this study will not be used for any purposes outside of this project study. An addition, I will not include any names or identifying information in the reports of the study. A copy of this letter will be given to you to keep.

Thank you in advance for your anticipated cooperation.

Lalita Karpen

Principal

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I have read the above information and agree to assist Mrs. Lalita Karpen and allow her to conduct her interviews with the participating teachers.

## Appendix C: NHI Certificate



## Appendix D: Letter to Potential Participants and Consent Form

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

Dear Teacher:

You are invited to participate in a research study titled “*Impact of Professional Learning Community on Co-teaching*” conducted by Lalita Karpen, a doctoral student at Walden University. You are invited to participate in the study because of your current/past role as a co-teacher and your knowledge and experiences in participating in a professional learning community. Your participation will allow the researcher to collect represented data on the research topic. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate and to obtain your informed consent.

The following information is provided to assist you in understanding the scope of your participation in the study if you choose to become a participant:

**Background Information:**

The purpose of the study is to explore co-teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and preparedness towards co-teaching.

**Procedures:**

If you choose to participate in the study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in an in-depth individual audio recorded interview that may last about 45 minutes to an hour.
- Participate in a 30 minutes member checking session to validate the researcher’s findings and determine credibility.
- Participate in a debrief session to discuss the study findings.

Please be advised that all interviews will take place outside of any instructional time and will be held at a time and location convenient to you. You will be contacted by phone/email to set-up a time and location for the interview. The interview process will not last more than one hour. In addition, member checking will occur after the interview has been transcribed. The researcher will schedule a meeting that is convenient with you to review the transcribed data for accuracy. The meeting will not last more than thirty minutes and will be outside of any instructional time.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in the study is voluntary. As such, your decision will be respected whether or not you choose to participate in the study. Your decision to participate or not in this study poses no risks nor will it contribute to any negative relations for you with the researcher, stakeholders, local school or the district. If you choose to become a participant in the study, you may change your mind and withdraw at any time without any negative consequence or penalty. Finally, there will not be any type of compensation for becoming a participant due to the voluntary nature of the study.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

This study seeks to benefit your school and school district by providing insightful information about participating in a professional learning and its effects on co-teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and preparedness towards working in co-teaching classrooms. There are no known risk in participating in this study but discussing professional learning experiences may be personally sensitive and might be minimally stressful. For example, foreseeable sensitive and stressful factors may include psychological stress greater than what one would experience in daily life. You may choose not to respond to any questions you feel are stressful or you feel uncomfortable answering. If such an event occurs, please be aware you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty, loss of benefits or rights which you otherwise may be entitled to. The potential benefits for this study may provide insight into co-teachers' individual roles and responsibilities, which may allow school leaders to make adaptations that may lead to improving learning outcomes for all students, especially students with disabilities.

**Confidentiality:**

I will keep all information confidential and any information obtained during the course of this study will not be used for any purposes outside of this study. Your name will not be used in the study because a number code will be used to protect the identity of all participants. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will only be known to the researcher.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any question now. Or if you have any questions later, you may contact the researcher by email at [lalita.karpen@waldenu.edu](mailto:lalita.karpen@waldenu.edu) or by telephone at 404-421-2746. The research chairperson for this study is Dr. Michelle McCraney and she can be reached at [michelle.mccraney@waldenu.edu](mailto:michelle.mccraney@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. If you have additional questions or concern you can contact the Institutional Review Board at [irb@waldenu.edu](mailto:irb@waldenu.edu). The Walden University's approval number for this study is 04-03-15-0339603 and it expires on April 2, 2016.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I understand my participation is voluntary. My signature below indicates that I am in agreement with the terms described above. Please place signed letter in envelope and seal before placing in my mailbox at your earliest convenience.

Printed Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Interviewee Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Time & Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Before the Interview:

Describe the purpose of the study and confirmed the recorded interviewed. Remind participant all data will remain confidential and will only be use in the study. Confirm interview will be between 45 minutes to one hour and have participant sign consent form. Turn on tape recorder and record the word “test”. Replay to ensure the tape recorder is recording. Verbal prompts and follow-up questions will be asked whenever necessary.

## Questions to Guide Interview

- IQ<sub>1</sub>: Please tell me how long have you been teaching at this school and your educational background?
- IQ<sub>2</sub>: What is your perception of the overall effectiveness of the PLCs coteaching model to improve instructional strategies?
- IQ<sub>3</sub>: How would you perceive the ability of the PLCs coteaching model to shape teachers self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies?
- IQ<sub>4</sub>: How would you perceive the ability of the PLCs coteaching model to build collaboration among co-teachers’ to improve instructional strategies?
- IQ<sub>5</sub>: What is your attitude concerning the ability of the PLCs coteaching model to foster an understanding of individual roles and responsibilities?

## After the Interview

Thank participant for participating and assure each participant of confidentiality of all information pertaining to the study.

## Appendix F: Sample Transcribed Interview

Study Title: Impact of professional learning community on coteaching

**Teacher 1**

*IQ<sub>1</sub>: Please tell me how long have you been teaching at this school and your educational background?*

Participant: I have been teaching at this school for ten years but have been teaching for twenty nine years. I received my have an undergraduate degree in psychology, a master degree in special education, and after teaching for some years I received a doctorate in leadership.

*IQ<sub>2</sub>: What is your perception of the overall effectiveness of the PLCs' coteaching model to improve instructional strategies?*

Participant: It is not effective because it is not done on a consistent basis and there is no real follow-up or accountability to make sure that teachers are actually implementing the different coteaching models with fidelity. The glitch is the follow-up and the lack of accountability of someone holding teachers responsible for implementing the model. I feel that one of the biggest factors is that teachers do not have time to plan together. For example, a lot of times there are a lot of meetings going on and because of that coteaching training falls through the crack. I also feel that it is ineffective because teachers do not have the knowledge to evaluate students appropriately or to even to debrief with each other regarding what has occurred during the day. So when PLC facilitators what teachers to co-teach but there is no time for teachers to plan and debrief, things are not implemented as they are supposed to. And a lot of times since the administrators are not watching and monitoring, then the teachers are not going to do what they are supposed to do. However, the underlying issue for most teachers is they just do not know what to do. The facilitators do not come in and model for them what needs to be done. If we are taught or shown what is to be done and model the strategies together, then the teachers can do it by themselves. So after the building expert has shown the teacher what to do then they will have a clear understanding of what they need to do. Some teachers need that hands on training not just too actually have some tell them. Probe: So kind of like that job embedded training. Absolutely! I feel without proper on the job training and ongoing monitoring the PLC will continue to be ineffective.

IQ<sub>3</sub>: *How would you perceive the ability of the PLCs' coteaching model to shape teachers self-esteem/efficacy to improve instructional strategies?*

Participant: I feel that a lot of times teachers do not have a high self-esteem because the general education teacher wants to take over. The general education teacher has in mind what they want to do without regard to what the special education teacher wants to do. Probe: Give me one example of this happening in the classroom. I feel that a lot of time the general education teachers are territorial because they do not want you in the classroom. Speaking personally, you cannot bring attention to yourself in the classroom because the students will catch on to what is going. It feels almost like conquer and divide. So a lot of times the teacher just to save face goes along with whatever the regular education teacher wants to do. So there is not any incentive to be motivated to be in the co-taught setting.

IQ<sub>4</sub>: *How would you perceive the ability of the PLCs' coteaching model to build collaboration among co-teachers' to improve instructional strategies?*

Participant: Well you need to have a time for them to plan together and when we have that time to plan together then you can decide who will teach what. When you have time to plan you can make sure students are in the correct flexible groups or pair a student that is real sharp with a student that might not be so sharp in some areas. You want to make sure that whatever the lesson is you are implementing the right instructional strategies are being used. But the problem is if you are have to be in different classrooms because you are working with multiple grade level you cannot effectively meet the needs of the students. It could be station teaching or parallel teaching. Say if you were teaching a lesson on poetry and half of the students did not understand the skill, you can divide the students that need to be remediate while the other teacher move on to a new skill with the rest of the students. So basically both teachers can flip-flop so that they are working with both groups of students. Unfortunately, when it comes to building collaboration it is very hard to do when you do not have the time. Since coteachers are more or less working in isolation I feel collaboration is non-existent. I think this is one of the greatest failures of the PLC because for the coteaching model to work, coteachers must have time to collaborate. We must be able to properly plan, look at our students Star data, and try to understand what our students need. But without that common planning time we cannot improve upon any instructional strategies in the classroom.



*IQ5: What is your attitude concerning the ability of the PLCs' coteaching model to foster an understanding of individual roles and responsibilities?*

Participant: I do not think teachers really understand what they are supposed to do. Now, I do not think all teachers are ignorant but some teachers resent having another teacher in their classroom. They resent that special need students are in their classroom and now they have to address special education issues instead of just general education issues. They feel now to have to take on the low or special education students. These general education teachers really do not want the special education teachers and students in the classroom and there is no one providing that leadership to explain the difference. Probe: You do not feel as if there is any sharing going on in terms of the students and the classroom. That is exactly what I am seeing and feeling. The true coteaching situation should include sharing of responsibilities of everything. But I feel because of a lack of knowledge and support from the administrative team has caused the special education teachers to humble themselves and become more of an instructional aide instead of a true equal partner in the learning environment. I think general education teachers need to have some sensitivity training so they can understand that the coteaching model is a collaborative effort between two educators and not just individual effort.

## Appendix G: Sample Themes and Codes

Participant	Ineffective Implementation	Lack of Knowledge	Relevancy of Training
Teacher 1	The glitch is the follow-up and the <b>lack of accountability</b> of someone holding teachers responsible for implementing the model.	The underlying issue for most <b>teachers</b> is they just <b>do not know what to do.</b>	If we are <b>taught or shown what is to be done</b> and model the strategies together, then the teachers can do it by themselves.
Teacher 2	Things are <b>constantly handed down</b> to you to do but you are not aware how to do it. So, I feel right now that <b>it is ineffective.</b>	I feel that the PLC is not effective because of a lack of training. <b>I was not given enough training</b> so I cannot improve instruction upon the instructional strategies.	One problem I see with the PLC is it does not meet on a consist basis. Then when it does meet they <b>make us things that have nothing to do what my student needs.</b> So, I think the whole thing is a waste of everybody's time.
Teacher 3	I feel the implementation of the PLC is an excellent idea but not much <b>consideration was given to providing training</b> to the co-teachers to improve	I think the PLC is not effective because <b>it does not address all of the needs of co-teachers.</b>	I feel that during the PLC we spend more time on data analysis and other <b>meaningless tasks</b> when time should be spend on special and general education students' academic and co-teachers'

	training and learning outcome in the classroom environment.		needs
Teacher 4	Honestly, I feel that the <b>effectiveness of the co-teaching model is not so effective</b> because we need to look at the establishment of the PLC	The level of behaviors in those classes makes it ineffective then you have teachers that are <b>not given adequate training</b> and instructional strategies but are expected to address these student needs.	The times that I am able to attend and training is spend on <b>discussions that have little or no relevancy to co-teaching issues.</b>
Teacher 5	Well I really don't feel as <b>if it's very effective</b> because the PLC does not meet each week at it should.	I am <b>never given strategies to address students with special need issues.</b> I am not sure how I can improve instructional strategies when I lack the knowledge to address the various issues.	When the PLC meets there are <b>never any discussions on improving the co-teaching model</b> or how to address the needs of special education students.
Teacher 6	My attitude is very negative towards it. Again, negative in a sense because of a lack of training and the <b>manner in which the PLC is being implemented.</b>	I feel that <b>one training session on co-teaching is not enough.</b>	The PLC <b>does not provide any type of strategies or skills-set</b> for both special education and general education teachers to implement in a co-taught classroom.
Teacher 7	We must give considerations on <b>how things will be implemented before making a change.</b>	I feel the training <b>is not structured to meet the needs of the teachers</b> and the other stakeholders in this building.	I feel <b>providing instructions or handout is not enough</b> because the teachers to be engage in various

Teacher 8	My perception is that this PLC is <b>not effective because the individuals in charge don't know what it entails.</b>	I feel this way because of a <b>lack of training and a lack of knowledge</b> of what the co-teaching model is all about.	hands-on activities We <b>need to have actual trainings on co-teaching</b> before it can be effective.
Teacher 9	Well, I <b>perceive it to be ineffective overall.</b> The co-teaching model does not improve instructional strategies.	We are told to just do things <b>without any type of training, support or tools to assist us</b> in implementing co-teaching properly.	Since <b>we are not given any training or idea</b> on what to do in the co-teaching setting, I don't feel the model can be effective.

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*Note:* The following codes and themes emerged after data analysis for Research Question 1: “What are regular and special education teachers’ general perception, attitudes and beliefs about the overall effectiveness of the professional learning community’s co-teaching model to improve instructional strategies? The codes are color coded and the themes are categorized into the table headings.