

2018

# Dynamics of Special Education Teacher Collaboration on Bullying

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Velma P. Smith

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Dynamics of Special Education Teacher Collaboration on Bullying

by

Velma P. Smith

MA, Concordia University - Chicago, 2010

BS, Chicago State University, 1980

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Walden University

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## Abstract

Bullying has plagued U.S. public schools: special education students become victims on a consistent basis and their academic outcomes may be adversely affected. Few studies have focused on the collaboration of teachers to reduce bullying. The purpose of the qualitative study of 12 special education teachers and counselors was to understand the process they use when they collaborate on reducing the bullying problem in a small Midwestern school in the United States. Montiel-Overall's theory of collaboration and Shulman's model of pedagogical content knowledge reflected the focus of the 2 research questions that informed this study. Participants described their collaboration and the influence it had on their knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum. Analysis of open coding of interviews led to 5 themes. The value of collaboration in special education theme defined and described collaboration from the teachers' perspectives. The theme of the dynamics of the collaboration described the school's unique collaborative culture. Specific pedagogy and implementation of school curricula and initiatives were influenced by collaboration on bullying. Limitations of the study include the school culture influenced by frequently transferring students. The implications for action include the potential for the findings to be used as a guideline to formatively evaluate special education teachers' collaboration to reduce bullying. Implications for further research suggest observing collaborations about bullying, as this study only included interviews. Implications for positive social change include using a collaborative, cyclical social process to prevent bullying and to support students in order to contribute to a more peaceful and inclusive society based on civil behavior and a civil society.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated in memory of my parents, who taught me resiliency.

To my husband, who gave me effortless support.

To my mentor, who gave me remarkable guidance to get to the finish line.

To my colleagues, who gave me encouragement to see the light at the end of my journey.

And most of all to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who has been the source of my perseverance and inspiration, lifted me up when I was down, helped me through challenging times, and gave me the strength to complete this dissertation.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

First published in *Tappy's Chicks: And Other Links Between Nature and Human Nature*, Cupples's (1872) rhyme, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," was once a reassuring phrase (p. 78). This phrase was used by generations of teachers in the United States to comfort children emotionally wounded by classmates who bullied. Today, however, comforting words are insufficient. In one study, students expected that teachers would intervene against bullying by taking an active stand (Veenstra, Lindenberg, Huitsing, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2014). After surveying students aged 9–12 years old, Veenstra et al. (2014) found that bullying was lowest in classes where the teacher was actively involved in preventing it.

Research has demonstrated the negative effects of bullying in schools. According to Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve, and Coulter (2012), victims of bullying had lower levels of school performance and attachment to school. Habashy-Hussein (2013) conducted a study of 623 fifth- and sixth-grade Egyptian children to compare social and emotional skills among bullied students with students who were not victims of bullies. The study found that victims exhibited poorer social and emotional skills than those who were not victims.

Often times there are a minimum of two teachers in the special education classroom. To establish safe boundaries for students, these special education teachers can make collaborative efforts to decrease bullying. However, the lack of collaboration among teachers who coteach in the classroom could cause a lag in progress in stopping bullying. This appears to be evident as indicated in the Veenstra (2014) study when

teachers did not intervene. Understanding the process teachers use when they engage in collaborative efforts to stop bullying may contribute to other efforts to create safe boundaries among students and thus contribute to better educational outcomes. Such efforts could include providing incentives for good behaviors and or making strict rules.

In this chapter, I cover the following topics: background information on bullying and teacher collaboration, the problem statement, and the purpose of the study, the conceptual framework, the nature of the research, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

### **Background**

Bullying among children is a serious problem in schools (Grumm & Hein, 2013). During the 2012-2013 school year, 8% of U.S. public school students between the ages of 12 and 18 reported bullying incidents on a weekly basis (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), approximately 22% of students between the ages of 12 and 13 reported some form of bullying during the school year 2014-15 (NCES 2016-076). According to Capel (2013), oftentimes, bullied victims are shy, isolated and not interested in associating with bullies. Capel claims victims who behave in this manner may void learning experiences. Victims could even experience learning disabilities, which may intersect with the costs of bullying and could further challenge their academic achievement. Bullying must be managed because mismanagement could create lifelong mental difficulties (Capel, 2013; U. S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 2010). According to Capel, “victims are found to be more anxious, depressed, withdrawn, and have lower self-esteem

in comparison with those who bully” (p. 498). Bullying needs to be addressed because of its correlation with mental health issues, low academic achievement, low aspirations, and learning disabilities.

Some school districts have tried to implement antibullying efforts such as zero tolerance and behavior modification initiatives. But according to Swearer and Hymel (2015), schoolwide antibullying initiatives may not adequately address bullying by or toward students who are in special education. Swearer and Hymel argued that the social ecology of a school needed more study. After reviewing the compilation of research on bullying and peer victimization from a socioecological perspective, Swearer and Hymel concluded that human behavior is determined and influenced by several factors. Thus, they argued that the study of bullying must take place in six contexts: individual, peer, family, cultural, community, and school (Swearer & Hymel, 2015).

Bullying affects children from all groups, but those with special needs may be affected disproportionately. According to Spaulding and Spratt (2015) on the education of people with disabilities, societal attitudes have reflected general cultural attitudes concerning the obligations of society to its citizens (Spaulding & Spratt, 2015). They provided a description of changes in the special education community through societal attitudes, legislation, and educational provisions. The examples Spaulding and Spratt shared concerned the emergence of themes, such as the treatment of people with disabilities and the changing concept of disabilities. For example, derogatory terms such as retarded were used to label children with special educational needs. This term was replaced by other specific terms based on the disability of the children’s diagnosis. They

also indicated that the treatment of individuals with disabilities had been contingent on the attitudes and norms of contemporary society (Spaulding & Spratt, 2015).

Children with disabilities who have been victims of bullying tend to transition into society where it is a possibility they may continue to get mistreated in society. Giroux (2009) claimed that violence was the major rhetoric in the U S culture. The violent culture consisted of a hidden and ruthless dimension of cruelty. Teacher collaboration, a process that occurs when individual teachers gained useful knowledge about instruction to enhance student learning (Montiel-Overall, 20015), could be an important asset for reducing the incidence of bullying of special education students. Much of the research on teacher collaboration has been on its impact on student achievement. For example, Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015) conducted a 2-year case study that investigated different collaborations across the district of Miami-Dade County. Ronfeldt et al. found that while different kinds of teachers and schools reported different collaboration quality, the average collaboration quality improved student achievement in mathematics and reading. After the district learned about the benefits of collaboration, all early-career teachers were required to participate in monthly professional learning communities (PLCs). Ronfeldt et al. reported that student reading and mathematics achievement continued to climb because of quality teacher collaboration. It is possible that collaboration can be used as a potential benefit to prevent bullying similar to the way it was implemented in the Ronfeldt study.

Habashy-Hussein (2013) found that transforming a disruptive school climate to one that is conducive to learning allowed students to learn and teachers to teach in a safe



environment. Special education teachers need to teach academics without dealing with bullying problems. There have been various programs and initiatives designed to assist teachers in preventing bullying, for example, Bullying and Harassment Prevention in Positive Behavior Support: Expect Respect and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (BPP). In 2015, Veenestra et al. reported that some interventions have been successful. There are other aspects of bullying, such as understanding teachers' responses to bullying, which can contribute to reducing bullying (p. 1135).

Veenestra et al. (2015) discussed the wealth of literature on the roles peer groups have played when they bully; however, not enough is known about the special education teachers' role. The researchers looked at how comfortable teachers would be in collaboration with others and found students were more likely to report bullying if teachers prioritized reducing bullying behaviors. The researchers concluded that teachers with efficacious attitudes towards the students experienced minimal bullying in their classrooms. However, there is a gap in research about the contribution of special education teacher collaboration and if their collaborative efforts could reduce bullying, harassment, and taunting in the special education classroom.

### **Problem Statement**

Bullying is still prevalent in U.S. schools (Blake et al., 2012); it prevents teaching and learning (Aydin, 2011; Capel, 2013). Special education teachers have worked with students who exhibit behavior problems constantly. Tangen and Campbell (2010) found that social skills training and social competency among students can help students develop problem-solving skills via teacher collaboration. However, it is not clear how

comfortable special education teachers are in collaborating to reduce the bullying of special education students or collaborating about pedagogy or curriculum to reduce bullying. It is not clear what process special education teachers are using to collaborate about bullying.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore and describe how 12 special education teachers collaborated about bullying to reduce it and how such collaboration influenced their knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum. A description of what special education teachers collaborate about provided some specificity about what processes these teachers used when they collaborated about bullying. The phenomenon of interest was the teachers' collaborative dynamics in reducing or eliminating bullying among special education students.

### **Research Questions**

Two research questions helped to drive the research were as follows:

- RQ1: How do special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying?
- RQ2: How does special education teachers' collaboration regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum?

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework has to do with an exchange of thoughts to affirm experiences when teachers collaborate to obtain useful information. A combination of

Shulman's (1987) theory of pedagogical content knowledge and Montiel-Overall's (2005) theory of collaboration provided the conceptual framework for this study. Shulman (1987) postulated that teaching emphasizes several aspects of teaching such as comprehension along with reasoning, transformation, and reflection. Shulman infused pedagogical knowledge (the method of teaching) with content knowledge (what to teach) by introducing them as pedagogical content knowledge. Shulman argued that pedagogical knowledge is built on other professional knowledge. In collaboration with one another, some teachers have demonstrated an attempt to assimilate and extrapolate their new teachers' skills, experiences, and attitudes into a meaningful, transformative approach to reduce or eliminate the bullying problem. Montiel-Overall (2005) agreed with Shulman and argued that an underlying assumption of collaboration is that there is a co-construction of meaning and knowledge.

Not only does collaboration consist of teachers meeting to enhance students' knowledge as Montiel-Overall (2005) has defined it. Collaboration also consists of teachers sharing expertise inclusive of ideas to construct innovative ways to make transformations about a shared problem. In collaborative efforts, teachers can interrupt their exchange of dialogue to modify and revise gained knowledge (Murphy, 2015). The framework of collaboration included two foci: one focused on the collaboration process about bullying, and the other on the influence collaboration may have on special education teachers' knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and the bullying curriculum. I will provide a more detailed analysis of the conceptual framework in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### **Nature of Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine and describe how special education teachers collaborate about bullying and how such collaboration influenced their knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum. This study used a basic qualitative design, the most appropriate platform for this study because it captured informative, detailed information from teachers using the qualitative interview approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, given the versatility of the basic design, it can be applied in an educational setting to assist with the interpretation and meaning of experiences shared by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The key concept of investigation was the collaborative process special education teachers used to address bullying to reduce or eliminate bullying in schools. I explored how changes had occurred in the areas of content knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum. In this study, special education teachers and counselors known for collaborating were interviewed. In the process, I used field notes and a researcher's reflection journal. The purpose of the interviews was to provide a platform for special education teachers to describe their collaborative efforts to reduce bullying. The field notes were used to capture nonverbal communication, such as tone of voice, and body language. I coded the data and identified emerging codes. I then categorized and grouped the code into meaningful themes.

### **Definitions**

The terms and definitions used in this study to help guide the study are as follows:

*Bullying:* Bullying is “an unwanted, aggressive behavior . . . that involves

a real or perceived power imbalance and repetition of behaviors such as threats, spreading rumors, attacking someone physically or verbally or excluding someone from a group on purpose” (Ahuja, 2014, para. 1).

*Collaboration*: “A process in which two or more individuals work together to integrate information” (Montiel-Overall, 2005, p.1).

*Participation*: Actively listening and mutually engaging in providing feedback, initiating and cultivating a thought, in addition to, being receptive to the ideas of colleagues to obtain clarification about professional discourse (Smith, 2016).

*Special education teachers*: People who teach students diagnosed with an educational disability or educational disorder.

### **Assumptions**

This study was based on four assumptions. (a) In this study I assumed that special education teachers were honest and forthcoming in their interviews about bullying. (b) Using interview data, I assumed that teachers would have enough reflective capacity to look back on their experiences as a collaborating teacher to help me answer my research questions, or that the process of being interviewed would help evoke memories of collaborative experiences. (c) I assumed that special education teachers would be motivated to reflect on changing pedagogical and curricular practices and student behavior based on their collaboration about bullying. (d) I assumed that as a result of teacher collaboration, participants’ knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum had been influenced such that they could better their educational setting.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

Using a qualitative basic descriptive study, I studied 12 special education teachers and counselors who participated in collaboration on bullying in a small elementary school—one that serves only special education students—in a residential area in the southern suburbs of Chicago. The school's year-round attendance status was a factor in the selection of this school because students who attend schools year-round have an opportunity to receive an uninterrupted education. It is important for students to focus on what is taught; however, when student's education is interrupted while the teacher is teaching, the student may not obtain the meaning of the subject taught. It is valuable to my study for students to have an uninterrupted education because teachers are challenged to find ways to diminish interruptions as much as possible. Therefore, by learning what strategies individual teachers use that works for them to help counter interruptions, especially bullying encounters may be a way to help reduce bullying in the school as a whole. Since too few special education teachers volunteered to be interviewed, I expanded the scope of the study to school counselors.

### **Limitations**

The primary limitation of this study is the school educates only those students who have had learning difficulties or behavior problems in a special education school setting; therefore, the results may not be applicable to other kinds of schools. An additional limitation was how this school collaborates about bullying; its methods could differ from those at other schools. Because this school was committed to educating special education students on a year-round basis, it may have been incumbent on the

educators to search for various ways to resolve their bullying problems. Also, I chose to restrict this research to one school to explore the bullying problem on a small scale.

Another potential limitation was my potential bias concerning the topic. Although I have experience in observation, special education, and collaboration, it was possible for me to bring bias into the data collection process. To address these biases, I allowed my experience as a teacher to help me to understand the teachers' perspectives while simultaneously staying attuned to the participants' responses. I also questioned my assumptions to ensure my interview questions were not leading questions. My insight helped me make sense of their interpretations based on their experiences and background (Creswell, 2013). To minimize the impact of my biases, I also acknowledged the origin of the analysis and redirected foci on the interpretation of the findings by using a researcher's journal.

Additionally, my research design presented a limitation to observe participants' body language and nonverbal cues when I interviewed three participants on the telephone. Therefore, I addressed this limitation by listening attentively for voice inflections and voice tone indicative of emotions participants might project. I reached out to each participant, offering the option to clarify, change, or solidify their interview responses.

### **Significance**

The results of this study contributed to existing knowledge about the effectiveness of special education teacher collaboration. The results of the study confirmed that participants perceived bullying adversely affects special education students' mental

health and degrades both teaching and learning (Aydin, 2011; Capel, 2013). The practical contribution of this study to education is that it has given special education teachers more avenues in which to use collaboration. According to the results, special education teachers can be comfortable collaborating about bullying and they can now collaborate on dealing with the social and psychological aspects of students' needs rather than just discussing academics. Figuring out what happens when special education teachers collaborate to reduce bullying could also help special education teachers manage bullying behaviors and teach academics rather than stopping instruction to deal with bullying issues. Another practical contribution is the application of collaborative learning by other educational stakeholders, such as superintendents, administrators, and parents. They too can help eliminate bullying among special education students.

The implications for social change of the results may be to help special education teachers and counselors encourage students to begin to reflect on their own behaviors. Another implication is that teachers and counselors can begin to set the path for social change by inspiring students to contribute to a peaceful and inclusive society. These changes can be directly addressed collaboratively at the school level and as students transition into society; the favorable behaviors can continue to flourish into society, leading to social change.

### **Summary and Transition**

In Chapter 2, I presented the literature review supportive of this study. It began with the literature search strategy followed by the conceptual framework. Then I provided an analysis of the empirical literature pertaining to key factors. Afterwards, I



identified gaps in the literature and described how this study could fulfil a gap in the research.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Since 2013, bullying has become a problem in schools among children in the United States (Grumm & Hein, 2013). Grumm and Hein (2013) found that how teachers handle bullying varied according to many factors. Richard, Schneider, and Mallet (2012) found that bullying is affected by the teacher's vigilance, by appropriately intervening, or by overlooking or ignoring the bullying behavior. The purpose of this study was to understand the processes that special education teachers use when they collaborate to reduce the prevalence of bullying in their school.

In Chapter 2, I begin with the strategy used to select the literature for review. I present the conceptual framework involving Montiel-Overall's (2005) theory of collaboration and Shulman's (1987) theory of pedagogical content knowledge. Next, I review the literature on bullying, victims, and bullying-victim roles, the consequences of bullying, the impact of teacher relationships on reporting bullying, collaboration as a means to reduce bullying of special education students, antibullying initiatives, teacher collaboration about special education students, pedagogy, and teacher collaboration efforts.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

I found the peer-reviewed articles for this literature review by searching in the following online databases: EBSCOhost, Education Search Complete, SAGE, Google Scholar, ERIC, and ProQuest. The keywords and phrases for this search included *bullying, bullies, pure bullies, collaboration, teacher collaboration, learning communities, bully initiatives, victims, victim-bullies, school achievement, discipline,*

*school psychology, teacher perspectives, teacher attitudes, and teacher collaboration about bullying.*

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study consisted of two theories: Shulman's (1986) pedagogical content theory and the collaboration theory of Montiel-Overall (2005). Shulman's model consists of three types of content knowledge. The Montiel-Overall framework consists of four models of collaboration.

#### **Shulman's Pedagogical Knowledge Content Model**

Shulman's (1986) model of pedagogical knowledge content applies to understanding teacher's knowledge and pedagogy about initiatives such as preventing bullying. Shulman postulated that teaching requires three types of knowledge: content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and curriculum knowledge.

The first type of knowledge is content knowledge, that is, the amount of knowledge and the organization of that knowledge in the mind of a teacher (Shulman, 1987). Shulman (1987) (a) argued that a teacher must provide a rationale for why knowledge is warranted in a content area and (b) reflected on how a teacher can transform information for students so they may understand the information more effectively. In this instance, the subject matter is bullying. Shulman's theory is applicable for special education teachers to reflect on how they can transform their knowledge and convey it to the students so they could understand the information as the teachers meant it. The knowledge the teachers reflect on is beneficial when they collaborate with others

to understand if their students comprehended the concept the teacher was trying to convey.

Shulman (1987) discussed the second type of knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, as going beyond the subject-matter. In other words, pedagogical knowledge is the way teachers present their understanding of what they know in the way they know it in the hopes of getting the students to understand what they are trying to convey to them. Teachers use the methods and techniques they know to teach students the subject matter in the way they know how to teach. Pedagogical knowledge is comprised of “representing and formulating the subject that makes it comprehensible to the students” (Shulman, 1987, p. 9). Shulman indicated some examples of pedagogical knowledge could include providing a visual, charts, an analogy, an illustration, a demonstration, or an explanation. Such strategies come from the instructor’s wisdom and understanding about what makes learning specific to its topic. Teachers can collaborate with one another about strategies to advance their pedagogical knowledge concerning bullying.

One strategy Shulman suggested is understanding students’ misconceptions of what is being taught to them. According to Shulman (1987), teachers must understand how to transform those misconceptions to instruct students in such a way that students overcome and change their initial concepts. The model might imply that special education teachers may reflect on what method is necessary to educate special education students in getting along with one another and how teacher collaboration may enhance their own understanding. In this way, students may not become distracted by bullying problems and the impact those problems have on student learning might be mitigated.

Shulman argued that pedagogical knowledge is a combination of content knowledge and methodological knowledge. Teacher responses to bullying might best apply to both content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge; therefore, this model is useful for framing my research study.

Curricular knowledge is the third type of knowledge described by Shulman (1987). Curricular knowledge is “representative of a full range of programs designed for teaching particular subjects” (Shulman, 1987, p. 10) at appropriate developmental levels. It includes various instructional materials for a program or curricular initiative, an example of which is the curriculum for a bullying program. The curricular knowledge includes a set of characteristics for teachers to use. They may choose to use the set of characteristics for a specific curriculum or program materials for specific topics (Shulman, 1987). Several initiatives can assist teachers with bullying problems. What Shulman is proposing is that it is necessary for teachers to understand how to use the programs before they implement them.

The pedagogy Shulman (1986) researched is related to the process teachers participated in when they collaborate. This social process of teacher collaboration can occur when special education teachers consult one another to discuss bullying as a content subject matter along with using pedagogy and bullying curriculum or initiatives. The curricular knowledge category related to how teachers collaborate about initiatives they use or do not use to teach students not to bully. Shulman (1987) proposed that program materials are tools that should be reasonable and alternatives for teachers to have at their disposal to use when necessary. It is important to understand the curricular

choices available for instruction. Preparation to transform the knowledge gained from program materials by understanding how and when to use them is another important aspect of curricular knowledge. The ability for teachers to transform information may benefit from reflection about the process in addition to collaboration with one another.

### **Montiel-Overall's Model of Collaboration**

Musanti and Pence (2010) reported that in recent years there had been a large amount of research conducted on collaboration. Montiel-Overall (2005) identified collaboration as a 21st-century trend, which she called “social elaborated learning” (p. 1). Montiel-Overall claimed that collaboration was a ubiquitous term and that its various definitions cut across diverse fields. According to Montiel-Overall, collaboration can be defined “as a process in which two or more teachers work together to integrate information to enhance student learning” (p. 1). The construction of the social process is equivalent to high-quality collegial communication (Richard et al., 2012). Togetherness and mutual respect are expected among a group of skilled people who depend on each other to help them understand ideas (Richard et al., 2012). Therefore, collaboration includes the act of articulating thoughts and sharing ideas, making appropriate justifications, modifications, and revisions, and creating overall win-win outcomes. All of these aspects make collaboration a holistic approach.

Educators can adapt and learn new ways of thinking by using collaboration. Grumm and Hein (2013) claimed that collaboration among teachers might be crucial to the prevention of bullying. According to Montiel-Overall (2005), collaboration among teachers was a new way of teaching, learning, and planning because it involved a

profound exchange of knowledge. The exchange of knowledge is indicative of the collaborative process. The conceptualization of collaboration validated an exchange of thoughts to affirm experiences when teachers discussed their knowledge to obtain information they can understand and use to teach their students (Montiel-Overall, 2005).

Montiel-Overall's (2005) theory of collaboration is tied to the constructivist learning theories of Bruner, Dewey, and Vygotsky. According to Montiel-Overall, discussions among group members construct meaning. Montiel-Overall claimed that various attributes are necessary for a productive discussion: collegiality, respect, and trust (p. 1). Montiel-Overall recommended four models of collaboration to differentiate collaboration from other joint efforts such as coordination and cooperation:

- Model A: coordination
- Model B: cooperative/partnership
- Model C: integrated instruction
- Model D: integrated curriculum

According to Montiel-Overall, each model serves a different function. While my focus is on collaboration among teachers and counselors, Montiel-Overall was particularly interested in collaboration between teachers and librarians.

Each of Montiel-Overall's (2005) models consist of teachers and librarians as collaborators working together for the good of the students. Model A consists of teachers and librarians making collaborative efforts to select a coordinator. The coordinator's responsibilities are to coordinate events and organize schedules for students (Montiel-

Overall, 2005). This same selection process and responsibilities of a coordinator were applicable in this study.

Model B consists of using the attributes of collegiality, respect, and trust to cooperate on creating a common vision for the students (Montiel-Overall, 2005). In this model, teachers should contribute content knowledge and librarians should provide literacy information to the group discussion. While Montiel-Overall (2005) sought to identify whether teachers worked cooperatively with librarians to create a common vision for students, I sought to identify whether special education teachers used a similar concept. However, my research involved special education teachers and counselors working cooperatively to create a common vision for students surrounding collaboration about the bullying issue. As a result of this research, it was evident the special education teachers worked cooperatively to create a common vision when they collaborated about which pedagogy to use to stop the bullying.

Model C, or integrated instruction, consists of collaborators conceptualizing together to integrate their areas of expertise into learning experiences that are meaningful (Montiel-Overall, 2005). In Model C, educators synergize to plan activities, lessons, and units (Montiel-Overall, 2005). According to Montiel-Overall (2005), the experience of synergy will assist teachers in feeling like they want to develop curriculum together rather than developing it alone. Model C is demonstrative of how the special education teachers planned together. I sought to identify whether the special education teachers demonstrated synergy when they planned together, which was indicative in their informal daily meetings.



Model D involves all the collaboration components inclusive of Model C; however, what is unique about Model D is that the collaboration references the entire curriculum (Montiel-Overall, 2005). Montiel-Overall's (2005) model is demonstrative of Shulman's (1987) summary of attributes in his theory which includes the teacher, comprehension, transformation, and reflection. Montiel-Overall's four models are demonstrative of collaborators working together to integrate content knowledge and information literacy in all grade levels. Gaining knowledge about the curriculum is important for teacher implementation of the information. While Shulman's (1986) theory was indicative of teachers having to be knowledgeable about curriculum, Montiel-Overall's theory encouraged teachers to develop curriculum. Although both theories were applicable in this study; teachers did not develop curriculum together, however, teachers were knowledgeable about the curriculum they taught their students because they were in-serviced on how to use the curriculum before they taught it.

According to Montiel-Overall (2005), the four models support the conceptual development of all curriculum across all grade levels. Montiel-Overall argued that the collaboration model can be used to support curricular development across all grade levels. The four models create "synergy among collaborators that needs to transcend grade level and subject content" (Montiel-Overall, 2005, p. 21). Synergy can also be used to obtain numerous perspectives concerning the delivery of design of the curriculum. This integration of collaboration is a way for the collaborators to reflect, revise, modify, and improve their cognitive and reading processes, as well as researching (Montiel-Overall, 2005) subject content. While Musanti and Pence (2010) argued that knowledge

can be produced via social interaction, knowledge appears to be produced via collaborative models and social interaction.

In this study, the framework's key elements consist of two foci. One focus included the collaboration process about bullying via social interaction. The other focus was composed of the influence collaboration had on special education teachers' knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and the bullying curriculum. Within the category of content knowledge, special education teachers can collaborate based on the amount of information they have and the organization of their knowledge about bullying. Within the category of pedagogical knowledge, teachers can collaborate on their most useful ideas about bullying. Special education teachers can collaborate about the analogies they use, along with illustrations, explanations, examples, and demonstrations they have found to work. Within the curricular knowledge category, special education teachers can begin to collaborate on the curriculum they found useful as well as derive interventions and understandings of the curricular alternatives available for instruction. It is through collaboration that teachers can find ways to comprehend, transform, and reflect about bullying through content knowledge, pedagogy, and bullying curriculum. Since the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how special education teachers collaborate about bullying and how such collaboration influences their content knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum, the infusion of the two theories seemed appropriate.

### **Literature Review of Related Key Factors**

In this section, I discuss the key factors in recent studies involving bullies, victims, and bully-victim roles, the consequences of bullying, and teacher's relationship with the student. I also discuss the impact of reporting of bullying, bullying initiatives, teacher pedagogy about bullying, and teacher collaboration as a means to prevent bullying.

#### **Bully, Victim, and Bully-Victim Roles**

Many researchers have identified the word bully through children's conceptions and bullying descriptions. Yang and Salmivalli (2013) discussed the differences between bullying and victimization in children's conceptions. Yang and Salmivalli (2013), in a quantitative study of students from the first through eighth grades, found pure victims and pure bullies were more maladjusted than bully-victims. They characterized bully-victims as emotionally unstable and impulsively aggressive. The bully-victim may have externalized problems indicative of a high propensity to exhibit more physical and verbal bullying than passive aggression. Further, they suggested the combination of poor emotional regulation of skills and aggressive-impulsive behaviors will put bully-victims in risky situations. These conditions could inevitably lead to maladjustment and violent involvement.

Peer victimization correlates with academic, social, cognitive, and psychological problems (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). Cook et al. (2010) stated that forms of bullying, such as relational and physical, do not matter as much as those that are social and emotional. Such problematic bullying behaviors can persist on a daily basis. In

Yang and Salmivalli's (2013) study, 19,869 students completed the internet-based questionnaire about forms of bullying and victimization. The students answered the questionnaire in their school computer lab supervised by their teachers. Based on the self-reports and reports about their peers, the researchers concluded bully-victims were less prevalent than pure victims and pure bullies. Male bullies were more likely to be rejected by their peers and were less likely to have friends to protect them from aggressive attacks; bully-victims were viewed as outcasts rejected by their peers.

Yang and Salmivalli (2013) theorized that bully-victims would employ physical and verbal bullying of victims. They hypothesized more direct bullying and less indirect bullying experiences were less frequent experiences. In their conclusion, the researchers stated that bully-victims employed more direct bullying than pure-victims or pure-bullies. The results of the research also showed that the bully-victim experienced more verbal and physical bullying than the pure-victims. When targeted, bully-victims encounter amplified levels of multiple types of victimization. Yang and Salmivalli attributed this bullying to elevated levels of current maladjustment and future maladjustment. Other researchers have also indicated that the bully-victim have been observed to experience worse outcomes than the pure-victim or pure-bully (Fanti & Kimonis, 2013).

### **Consequences of Bullying**

There are many consequences of bullying. Lam, Law, Chan, Wong, and Zhang (2015) drew on the self-determination theory in a quantitative longitudinal study of 536 adolescents. In the latent growth analysis of school bullying and victimization data, Lam

et al. found adverse consequences for both the bully and the victim. Lam et al.'s study examined the antecedents and consequences of peer bullying. Students in the seventh through ninth grade participated in the study. In the latent class pattern analysis, the student-reported data showed students reporting behaviors, victimization, perceived support for relatedness, autonomy support, and perceived competence support from teachers (Lam et al., 2015). Lam et al. also found the victim may experience poor academic performance and internalizing problems such as low self-esteem, loneliness, social anxiety, and depression. Those who were both the bully and victim self-reported experiencing serious negative outcomes such as internalization and externalization of psychopathology across development. Finally, Lam et al.'s findings showed that students who perceived they would have supportive teachers had a significantly lower likelihood of being bullies or victims.

It is important to gain more insight into the consequences of bullying for teachers by reviewing studies about bullies from the perspective of victims in addition to bullies and bully-victims. According to Bradshaw, Waasdorp, Goldweber, and Johnson's (2013) examination of bully involvement, bullies and bully-victims were found to be the greatest risk of experiencing violence in comparison to victims. Bradshaw et al. conducted a quantitative web-based survey and collected data from 16,302 adolescents ranging from ages 12-16 years old. The researchers examined different subtypes of bullying involvement—primarily a victim, a bully, and a bully-victim and a person who has no bully involvement. The Lam et al. findings aligned with Yang and Salmivalli's (2013) conclusions that bully-victims were more likely to develop internal issues, such as social-

emotional issues, whereas, Bradshaw et al. found bullies and bully-victims engaged in multiple types of substance use, were truant, and experienced academic problems.

While some educators may punish students for bullying behaviors, these punishments may cause a bully to internalize their feelings (Aydin, 2011). These internal issues could produce anxiety, resistance, aggressiveness, and self-mutilation, as well as emotions of rage, obsession, rejection, and even suicide (Aydin, 2011). Rudolph, Troop-Gordon, Hesse, and Schmidt (2011) found that increased victimization over an extended amount of time is contributory to mental health issues, such as depressive symptoms and aggressive behaviors. Lam et al. (2015) confirmed that external problems could arise because of the experiences of a bully-victim. The studies found examples of external problems that included delinquency, use of illegal substances, gang affiliation, and engagement in criminal activities (Lam et al., 2015). The external adverse effects may exacerbate situations, causing more difficulty for the bully-victim to handle in many circumstances.

### **Impact of Teacher Relationships on Reporting of Bullying**

Research suggested teachers play a major role in the educational system's ability to reduce bullying (Morgan, 2012). Teachers' handling of situations may affect both the victim and the bully (Grumm & Hein, 2013). Some students have difficulty reporting bullying to teachers. The relationships teachers build with students have been found to contribute to students' rationales for reporting bullying (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014).

Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) conducted a quantitative longitudinal study of 278 students. In an analysis of a Perceived Teacher Response Scale, they found significant differences in whether third graders reported bullying more than the fifth graders. Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd found that third graders reported they did not need their teachers to get involved in helping them solve their bullying problems as much as kindergartens. Additionally, the third graders felt they would be tattling. The fifth graders also did not want teachers to get involved in helping with solutions to their issues. The fifth graders felt they could handle their issues.

Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) found students had a greater chance of being victims and bully-victims when their academic performance was low. Given a teacher-student relationships survey, teachers indicated they were aware of the importance of a relationship. Students surveyed reported that if teachers took an active role in intervening, they would report more times than they had in the past (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). While Lam et al.'s (2015) and Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd's studies found students reported bullying for different reasons, both studies found that as students matriculate from elementary schools to higher grades, they do not report bullying to their teachers as much as they did when they were younger.

A teacher response could play a vital role in lessening the distress a child may experience after being bullied (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). While one of the findings of the Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) study showed the students' view was indicative of their willingness to tell their teachers someone bullied them, the researchers found a correlation that reflected a positive classroom environment when

children were encouraged to report bullying. Children felt the teachers who took an active role in intervening helped them decide how likely it would be that the teacher would help them if they were in a bullying situation (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd shared the result of teachers creating a supportive environment would encourage the child to develop “relational schemas” (p. 343). The students reported that not many of their teachers were helpful and sympathetic to victims of bullying.

The Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) and Masten et al. (2013) research shows that the basis of the elimination of bullying consists of a myriad of factors centered on input from teachers. In the Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd study, students reported a greater willingness to report bullying and provided evidence of lower levels of victimization. The students who believed their teacher would take an active role in intervening associated with a greater willingness to report the incident (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). While the Masten et al. (2013) study showed the different responses, students had about reporting bullying when they believed teachers cared, Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd argued the climate of the classroom is contingent on students’ willingness to report bullying to their teachers. The likelihood of students not telling teachers about bullying is decreased to “low telling, high victimization and negative classroom climates” (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014, p. 343). Furthermore, Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd concluded that the expectations of students to report bullying is contingent on teacher’s effectiveness in creating a classroom climate where students feel they have a supportive teacher.



Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) argued that teachers must take bullying reports seriously so students could feel comfortable reporting it. However, in the Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd research, teachers stated they were aware that it is important to establish high-quality relationships with their students. Teachers said they were aware, when looking at the predicament from the student's perspective, that it caused them to want to show an act of kindness. Lam et al. (2015) validated that the process of building close relationships with their students includes building a climate where students feel comfortable reporting bullying to teachers.

Lam et al. (2015) claimed that the critical reduction of bullying is the basis for the way the victims and bullies perceive the support they receive from teachers. They contended that the support from teachers for relatedness or connectedness is a predictor that determines membership of the groups of bullies and victims (Lam et al., 2015). Lam et al. concluded that bullying affects social-emotional factors. The student perception of teacher support over time tends to decrease the reports of bullying. Connectedness is one factor of teacher involvement and teachers demonstrate it by showing they care about the individual student (Lam et al., 2015).

Regarding gender, Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) reported that females feel more comfortable telling teachers about bullying than males do. They argued that if teachers were to try to encourage males to report more, it would inadvertently cause more harm than good because the teacher-male relationship would consequently become ineffective (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). Findings involving girls indicated they felt comfortable telling teachers about bullying. Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd's findings

showed it is more socially acceptable for girls to seek support for social problems than boys who are expected to stand up for themselves and cope independently.

According to Masten, Eisenberger, Pfeifer, and Dapretto (2013), adolescents experience peer rejection on a regular basis and constantly witness such behaviors among their peers. The researchers conducted a quantitative study to examine neural activity among adolescents. For participation, all students had to have at least 1 year of middle school and needed to be from 12.4 to 13.6-years old. Masten et al. selected 23 adolescents and administered MRI scans to each participant while they viewed a simulation of a real interactive experience showing social exclusion. After viewing a simulation, the adolescents reported desensitization to rejection and bullying behaviors. The researchers claimed that the adolescents who were most sensitive to rejection might experience more feelings of hurt. The researchers reported that the potential impact of the psychodynamics of thoughts and emotions an adolescent might experience could be traumatic when witnessing bullying regarding inclusion or exclusion (Masten et al., 2013). Findings indicated that immediately after witnessing a peer being accepted then rejected, the participants' sensitivity heightened consistent with distress. These traumatizing events may be crucial to students' academic success.

### **Collaboration as a Means to Reduce Bullying of Special Education Students**

Some aspects of teacher connectedness and comfortableness include teacher-student relationships. Other objectives include special education students' sense of security. When special education teachers are comfortable, they create an atmosphere

where students feel encouraged to report incidents (O'Brennan, Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2014).

O'Brennan, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) conducted a web-based and telephone survey to 5,064 staff and teachers with National Education Association affiliation. Dimensions of personal connectedness inquiries by O'Brennan et al. (2014) as well as staff connectedness to students, staff, and administration data were collected for the research. The research findings indicated that connectedness is particularly important regarding teachers intervening in bullying situations involving special education students. O'Brennan et al. reported that increased staff connectedness with special education students was associated with the greater comfort of teachers when it came to intervening with bullying. O'Brennan et al. stated that resources should be available to help comfort staff regarding bullying such as workshops, training on the school's bullying policy, and getting involved in bullying prevention efforts.

Habashy-Hussein (2013) reviewed the differences between social and emotional skills among various students and indicated that both skill sets are necessary to prevent bullying problems. Students expect teachers to actively intervene against bullying (Veenstra et al., 2014). Veenstra et al. (2014) indicated that academic achievement could change the paradigm. Veenstra et al. provided two strategies to reduce bullying: (a) propagating anti-bully norms and (b) having an efficacious approach to decrease bullying. At the conclusion of their research Veenstra et al. demonstrated the importance of teacher intervention. Teacher intervention tends to ensure that bullying decreases when students report bullying behaviors. Students believe teachers care when they intervene

and show they will handle the situations (Veenstra et al., 2014). Teacher comfortability with intervening is encouraged via collaboration. Espelage, Polanin, and Low (2014) shared teacher views from their research that in positive relationships with teachers and students, there is less fighting, less bullying, and less peer victimization. In contrast, (Morgan, 2012) purported that teachers must intervene or the bully will perceive inaction as a license to display bullying behaviors; whereas, Espelage et al. (2014) found that a positive teacher-student relationship creates a greater willingness on the part of the teacher to intervene in the bullying encounter.

### **Bullying Initiatives: A Form of Curricular Knowledge**

There are different kinds of bullying initiatives. I will address the Philosophy for Children (P4C) approach, Bullying and Harassment Prevention in Positive Behavior Support: Expect Respect program, Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (BPP), and Prevention in Positive Behavior Support (PBIS). To implement the initiatives, teachers should be knowledgeable about these initiatives and know how to use them (Shulman, 1987). Dever and Lash (2013) added that professionals should set goals for student/teacher success and professional growth. Morgan (2012) proposed that to achieve the goal of academic success it is necessary for teachers to have an effective program to deal with bullying.

The major concept in most research about bullying focuses on bullying and bullying initiatives in schools. Swearer and Espelage (2011) cited over 300 published violence prevention programs geared toward schools to help with the bullying problem related to bullies. Black, Washington, Trent, Harner, and Pollock (2010) reported the that

the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' attempts to reduce bullying have failed because they do not integrate important dynamics. Other reviewers such as Tangen and Campbell (2010), Eckes and Russo (2012), and Nese, Horner, Dickey, Stiller, and Tomlanovich (2014) studied the impact of initiatives regarding bullying. Black et al. explained the dynamics of child development and educational theories. Based on their research, Black et al. claimed an integration of both dynamics was necessary to improve school climates. At one juncture, many districts had imposed zero tolerance policies, causing an increase in suspensions or expulsions of students (Eckes & Russo, 2012). Black et al. reported these zero-tolerance policies appealed to people who wanted a punitive response to violence. After careful consideration, some school districts tried other initiatives.

The P4C approach encourages children to collaborate on bullying without teacher input. The P4C approach is a structure indicative of the principles of constructivism (Tangen & Campbell, 2010). According to Tangen and Campbell (2010), many researchers argued that teachers needed to offer explicit teaching to encourage children to disengage from bullying and to develop skills and strategies to address problems. A program like P4C is one way to transformation, but collaboration among teachers is another way. O'Brennan, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) argued that teachers need to offer explicit teaching. Absent from this program are feelings of respect, connectivity, and support from the educators (O'Brennan et al., 2014).

Another initiative that Black et al. (2010) examined was the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (BPP). The program has two goals: to reduce bullying by improving

school climate and safety and for schools to create a provision for sustainability of the program without support from others. The BPP model is a 3-tiered approach to prevention that has been implemented school-wide (Black et al., 2010). A school can decide to transition from one tier to the next based on selectiveness and intensiveness and when additional services become necessary. Black et al. argued that major obstacles in the prevention practice may cause an evidence-based program such as the BPP to fail in the real world. Black et al. insisted that obstacles such as working conditions, target audiences, and relevance were indicators for the program to fail.

As Black et al. (2010) found, one criticism about many programs is the existence of power imbalances in bullying. Eckes and Russo (2012) discussed several issues about a program similar to the BPP called the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports program (PBIS). This program had issues with treatment fidelity, the reliability of office discipline referral for the sole purpose of measuring improvement of the school, and cost factors (Eckes & Russo, 2012). Another issue that befell the program was the limitations of research methodology regarding PBIS initiatives. Those same factors apply to the BPP. The efficacy of both programs tends to depend on implementation by educators to determine to select and intensify modification of the program. The continuance of the program structure is therefore dependent on implementation by educators to determine how much of the program they want to implement at their school. Both the BPP and the PBIS initiatives appear to have a difficult task to sustain fidelity of the programs.

While teachers work directly with students, teachers must be an integral component of any intervention designed to reduce bullying. O'Brennan et al. (2014)

proposed the likelihood to reduce bullying rates and the implementation of an efficient program could hinge on fostering support and trust amongst school members including teachers. Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014) encouraged teacher support in bullying initiatives.

The Bullying and Harassment Prevention in Positive Behavior Support: Expect Respect is another whole school intervention approach to decrease bullying behaviors. According to Nese et al. (2014), the purpose of the program was to teach students to distinguish respectful behavior from disrespectful behavior. They conducted a study regarding the impact of an Expect Respect program taught in three 1-hour lessons over the course of 6 months. The researchers found the fidelity of the program was only effective regarding three out of four indicators.

The investigators, Nese et al. (2014), reported the implication of the program was for the students to learn four indicators for disrespectful behaviors. One indicator of the program the bystander needs to learn is how to signal stop when encountering a disrespectful person. The researchers defined bystanders as students who may encounter a disrespectful behavior by the bully or perpetrator (Nese et al., 2014). The disrespectful person is the term used in the program to define the bully. A second indicator necessary for the students to learn was how to follow what the program writers termed as a “stopping routine” (Nese et al., 2014, p. 273). In this routine, someone has asked the disrespectful person to stop an unwelcome behavior. A third indicator the student needed to learn was how to use a “bystander routine” (Nese et al., 2014, p. 273). The bystander routine is when a student witnesses a disrespectful behavior and the bully or perpetrator

does not stop the behavior after requested to stop. After asking the bully to stop several times, the bystander will use the bystander routine. The last routine students learn would be implemented based on whether the bully continued their inappropriate behavior. This routine consists of how to recruit adult support. In the Expect Respect program, learning the four indicators was the basis for the students to expect respect. In addition to expecting respect, the students expect the bullying to stop at some point.

Nese et al. (2014) conducted a study to assess the fidelity of the Expect Respect program. They recruited eight students from each participating school to engage in a focus group to define the need for the bully prevention. The researchers reported it was necessary to implement the Expect Respect program because it was the best fit for the school. Nese et al. found, through direct observation in each school, that the implementation of the program showed a reduction of verbal and physical aggression in the cafeteria. However, Nese et al. found no indication that bystanders or victims would utilize the program's indicators with consistency.

Swearer and Espelage (2011) stated that dedicated people must be involved in reducing bullying behavior. Graham (2010) discussed that one ineffective bullying intervention was the implementation of zero tolerance policies. Graham believed zero-tolerance policies were used irrationally and were designed to reflect racial and gender biases rather than the reduction of bullying. O'Brennan et al. (2014) proposed that "if schools [were] able to foster support and trust among staff members, they [were] more likely to reduce rates of bullying and implement the program with efficacy" (p. 877). The



common denominator in reducing the bullying behaviors appears to be the effect of the people involved in the relationship.

Espelage et al. (2014) further validates that a positive student/teacher relationship may provide the comfortability for a student to perceive their teacher as the person who is going to handle the bullying issue. While Morgan (2012) and Espelage et al. (2014) contend that teacher intervention is a necessity, Allen (2010) proposed an argument for school-wide initiatives. However, according to Morgan, the teacher's role appears to be the most significant factor in ensuring that any bullying-reduction program works.

### **Teacher Collaboration and Special Education**

Although the teachers in the study conducted by Murphy (2015) collaborated on the challenges experienced by their students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), they also collaborated about setting educational goals. Drawing from the notion that teachers could collaborate about their ADHD student's experiences, it is evident that teachers can collaborate on other topics in sociable collaborative learning communities (CLCs) including the subject of bullying. To inquire and or collaborate about the bullying problem, researchers have conducted various types of bullying research. According to Tangen and Campbell (2010), while most researchers are exploring cyberbullying, others are researching areas related to bullying, such as victims, and bullying-victims (Jansen, Veenstra, Ormel, Verhulst, & Reijneveld, 2011; Tangen & Campbell, 2010). In contrast to research relating to the teacher collaboration on student achievement (d' Entremont, Norton, Bennet, & Piazza, 2011), there has been little research conducted on teachers in

collaboration about bullying. Additionally, the majority of research involving special education students is void of the bullying topic.

According to Murphy (2015), a major goal for the participants in this study consists of obtaining help with the situations and circumstances they faced because of their students' disabilities. Murphy reported that the participants were those who taught literacy and collaborated about students with the diagnosis of ADHD. Murphy stated that the participants' learning unfolded as a process because, over time, the teachers were able to re-conceptualize their understandings of their ADHD students. Murphy also stated that teachers were able to re-conceptualize their understandings of themselves as teachers of ADHD students using self-reflection. By using the CLC strategies, teachers were able to gain knowledge and an understanding of their students along with compassion, motivation, and willingness to learn and employ supportive literacy teaching (Murphy, 2015). According to Murphy, they learned while simultaneously reducing stress. Teachers reported that after engaging in collaboration, they taught the supportive strategies they learned to their students. Murphy stated that study groups aimed to collaborate on a topic to gain positive results. Murphy demonstrated how teachers could socially collaborate in the education setting to address behavioral issues. Additionally, their challenges showed professional and personal growth. The implementation of the collaboration process in this study showed it was a thought-provoking catalyst.

While Murphy's (2015) qualitative research study has shown progressive results in teacher collaboration about teaching literacy to special education students, the inquiry suggests there might be positive results by replacing the topic with bullying. Schneider et

al. (2012) stated that “the prevalence of bullying is continuing to raise concerns about what impact it may have on student achievement” (p.171). Murphy’s longitudinal qualitative case study is about the various forms of psychological distress that influence students.

Duy (2013) reported that teachers tend to have a low level of intervention because they are not fully aware of the bullying phenomenon. It is difficult for teachers to determine whether students are experiencing problems with bullies (Duy, 2013). Murphy (2015) found some positive results about collaboration. Murphy found that before the collaboration about ADHD, teachers reported their knowledge was limited, and they did not have enough information to help their students. Having gained information via collaboration, the teacher participants gained an awareness of what they lacked to make a difference in the lives of their students. Furthermore, teachers revealed they gained more supportive strategies, which helped them with challenges they had never thought they could overcome. The teachers reported they shifted their awareness of how their students learn and process information (Murphy, 2015).

O’Brennan et al. (2014) argued the importance of connectedness about the intervention of bullying where the special population is concerned. Parallel to the Murphy (2015) study group, and while collaboration took place, the CLC participants gradually became more confident in their teaching. Murphy, along with Carbone and Reynolds (2013) reported that when behavior issues were addressed, teachers became comfortable and their focus shifted towards the specificity of learning and the teaching of their students.

### **Pedagogy and Teacher Collaborative Efforts**

One concept key to this study is teacher collaboration. When teachers collaborate, “they share knowledge with each other, which increases the collective capacity of the overall organization. The first step toward consistency, predictability, planning, and accountability is shared knowledge” (Fullan, 2010, p. 78). Harris (2014) stated that “purposeful collaboration is one way of ensuring there is coherence” (p. 85). Ronfeldt et al. (2015) argued that reformers have encouraged teacher collaboration to increase student achievement, and that teacher collaboration correlates with student achievement. In a descriptive analysis of teacher collaboration, Ronfeldt et al. evaluated the kinds of collaboration that exists in urban districts, how teachers perceive collaboration in a certain instructional domain, and the quantity of variation in collaboration within and between schools. Ronfeldt et al. investigated the differences in teachers’ reports of collaboration and the quality of teachers’ collaboration associated with achievement gains. Ronfeldt et al. discovered that almost 90% of the respondents reported that instructional teams were helpful and that collaboration was extensive across instructional domains. Based on their findings, Ronfeldt et al. concluded that collaboration increased achievement for general education students.

Collaboration may be resourceful for teachers to use in other capacities. It may be necessary for teachers to participate in various types of collaboration. For example, one type of collaboration is the PLC. Dever and Lash (2013) reported that the implementation of a successful PLC encompasses many benefits. Dever and Lash proposed that such benefits include the ability to adapt instructions, the acquisition of content knowledge,

and the possibility members will continue to stay committed to professional change and adaptation. They also indicated that professionally renewed teachers tend to be more likely to inspire their students (Dever & Lash, 2013).

In essence, some studies have shown the ineffectiveness of noncollaboration in teacher development. According to Dever and Lash (2013), rather participate in a PLC, teachers would receive better instruction from an expert brought in by their administrator. However, the teachers in Dever and Lash's study conducted at one middle school admitted they would not actively listen. The researchers collected data by focusing on a 5-member, eighth-grade team of teachers. The researchers conducted a case study observing the group during common planning time, PLCs, and one in-service. Teachers participated by providing initial and final personal memos written during and after observations, interviews, and questionnaires. Teachers would instead, "covertly grade papers; write notes back and forth, whisper to one another, or discreetly text and play games on their phones" (Dever & Lash, 2013, p. 12). Dever and Lash contended that PLCs were a promising reform model because of the change the paradigm of professional development would provide teachers. Dever and Lash reported that the opportunity to participate in PLCs would be helpful to engage teachers in a professional discussion with one another or even with the expert.

In PLCs, professionals meet regularly to study effective learning and teaching practices towards common goals for student achievement (Bureau of Educator Recruitment, Development, and Retention, 2012). The foundation of PLC discussions includes collaboration on performance standards, assessment strategies in reading, and

evaluation of data. Mourshed, Chijioke, and Barber (2011) demonstrated that highly collaborative practices such as PLCs could impact student achievement after having analyzed schools in 20 countries and finding that collaboration among teachers to be common in schools where student performance in Grades 4 and 5 increased. When teachers collaborated, mathematics scores increased by 50% and 75% respectively (Mourshed et al., 2011). Similarly, Siguroardittur's (2010) study on the effectiveness of PLCs found that students from schools holding PLCs obtained higher scores on national tests than students from schools that did not have PLCs.

Ash and D'Auria (2013) discussed learning cycles as a way to participate in the collaboration. According to Ash and D'Auria, learning cycles consist of two phases: studying the problem and investigating potential strategies. Teachers can switch roles between learner, collaborator, or teacher as they work with one another. When teachers collaborate, they constructively "ask questions, collect data, facilitate teamwork, implement strategies, assess impact, and where necessary, recycle through these phases until goals are achievable" (Ash & D'Auria, 2013, p. 4). As teachers progress through the learning cycle, Ash and D'Auria claimed that teachers continue to enhance their knowledge through trial and error.

A study group is another form of a collaborative group. Carbone and Reynolds (2013) met with a group of six to eight high school teachers to examine collaborative teacher development of pedagogical orientations. According to Carbone and Reynolds, one goal the researchers had was to provide professional development to the teachers.

Carbone and Reynolds (2013) began to meet their goals to help teachers focus on academic literacy. Carbone and Reynolds stated that collaboration among teachers motivates them to participate in collaboration and promote positive outcomes. The teachers claimed that collaboration prompted them to deal with the overwhelming challenges they encountered in their classroom (Carbone & Reynolds, 2013). Carbone and Reynolds reported that their rationale for the approach was meaningful based on the teachers' ability to construct their knowledge within a social setting. While teachers were motivated to engage in collaborations about literacies, they could also be motivated to make collaborative efforts about bullying in social settings such as CLCs.

In another teacher collaboration, Murphy (2015) reported on CLCs in relationship to ADHD students. Similar to study groups, a CLC provides opportunities where teachers learn from one another in social settings. Murphy indicated that the teachers not only shared their experiences, thoughts, and ideas, they became motivated to self-reflect during the CLC meetings. Finding a pedagogical collaboration suitable for the group dynamics can motivate teachers to apply what they have learned.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 2, I have provided a review of the literature of the collaborative efforts of teachers, as well as a discussion of the literature regarding bullying. In the literature review, I found there was a gap in research regarding the contribution special education teacher collaboration could provide regarding bullying. Also, although teachers have been reported as being aware of bullying encounters, they needed to feel comfortable enough to build relationships with their students in order to reduce bullying. When

teachers have a positive teacher-student relationship, they will intervene in the bullying encounters. In the special education classroom, there was a lack of research about pedagogical knowledge that would help them prevent bullying.

Using a combination of the types of knowledge and models of collaboration the theorists proposed, I have described the conceptual framework used to guide this proposal. I have also examined the peer-reviewed literature in relationship to the research questions. The research questions will address the gap in the research.

In Chapter 3, I will address the study design and rationale. I will provide an explanation of my role as researcher. Additionally, I will explain the methodology issue of trustworthiness.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine how special education teachers collaborate about bullying and how this collaboration influences their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum. In Chapter 3, I addressed the study design and rationale. Additionally, I explained my role as researcher, the methodology, as well as issues of trustworthiness.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research questions included (a) How do special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying? and (b) How does special education teachers' collaboration regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum?

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a basic qualitative research design seeks a rich, thick description of the topic under study. Since the objective of my study was to describe the processes of the participants' collaboration on bullying, this approach was appropriate. I chose to use the basic qualitative research design because the behaviors, feelings, and the interpretation of a special education teachers' experiences are not always observable. Therefore, they have to be learned through listening (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Choices in designing qualitative research studies vary, and researchers are encouraged to use strong designs for two reasons (Yin, 2011). (a) The first reason I chose a basic qualitative design was because listening to participants' descriptions about their collaborative efforts would strengthen the validity of my study. (b) The second reason

was I wanted to ensure that the data collected could properly address the research topic (Yin, 2011). Therefore, it was my belief that I could use a qualitative design (interview teachers) to capture the depth of teacher collaboration about bullying.

I originally began my proposal with the intent to conduct a case study, which could have been a viable design. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote that a case study is empirical research used to investigate a contemporary case in its real-life context. I rejected the case study approach because of the unavailability of different sources of evidence, such as teacher portfolios, documents, and observations, which I felt might change the interactions between teachers or teachers and students (Yin, 2014). Also, it was impossible to observe teachers in action because the school leader did not grant approval for me to observe teachers throughout the day, perhaps because I might distract them during their lessons. Additionally, teachers in the school might not have been readily available to observe because the scheduling varies based on numerous factors. I also felt it would be difficult to obtain parental consent to observe classrooms of students because I was informed that most students who ride the school bus to the school, may not bring back consent forms in a timely manner.

A phenomenological study seeks to help the researcher understand the essence and underlying structure of an intense phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, the aim of this study supports my rationale for rejecting the phenomenological study. I wanted to understand more than just the teachers' lived experiences of collaborating, and I could not assume that my study would be an intense experience worthy of deeper investigation than a basic study would entail. Collaboration is integral to my research;

therefore, I felt the insight that special education teachers could provide in an interview could lead to findings that could guide future teacher practices without detailing their lived experiences.

### **Role of the Researcher**

My role in this research consisted of gathering data by interviewing teachers and transcribing and analyzing the data. I met some of the teachers briefly when I visited the research setting, but I had never worked with any of them in any capacity. I felt my experience with observing teachers interact with their students, working with special education, and collaborating about reading strategies could cause researcher bias. I kept a journal for the purpose of reflecting on possible responses to the data. This journal was used to reduce bias when interpreting the results of the research. I also used the journal to jot down questions that came to mind while interviewing, which I asked during the interview. I also wrote down comments and notes I needed to make to myself and documented non-verbal actions of participants.

### **Methodology**

In the methodology section, I described the research site and explained my logic for participant selection. I explained the procedures for recruitment and discussed instrumentation along with data collection. The data collection discussion followed the data analysis.

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I had plans to select the participants via convenience sampling, purposive sampling, and snowball sampling. Invitations were to initially get sent to all teachers and

counselors regardless of years of service in the school. There were 18 special education teachers and or teacher assistants, and 5 counselors in the school. I was seeking at least 10 participants.

To secure enough participants, my plan was to interview teachers and teacher assistants, as well as counselors, if necessary. The school protocol for teachers to follow was to collaborate with one another first, then collaborate with a counselor when behaviors such as bullying required more adult supervision. Some duties counselors may perform include making modifications of scheduling based on behaviors, managing reports, creating individualized educational plans, coordinating assessments, monitoring behaviors and reviewing academic reports. Their duties also required them to meet with special education teachers where they often negotiate and collaborate on a consistent basis. Additionally, when teachers are absent, counselors' step in as substitute teachers.

In the teachers' role, counselors perform teacher duties and are seen as teachers on a consistent basis. Since, counselors and special education teachers collaborate regularly and perform similar duties from time to time, I felt counselors would qualify as participants in the study in the event they were needed. If counselors replied before at least five teachers had replied to participate in the study, I plan to send reminders only to the teachers a second time to ensure that at least one-half of the participants are teachers.

If necessary, I planned to use the snowball sampling strategy to obtain additional teacher participants. I planned to request that the initial respondents ask any of their colleagues if they would be interested in participating in the study. My plan also included posting the flier in the school lounge and reposting it in the school lounge again, if

necessary. Patton (2002) claimed that saturation occurs when between one and 10 participants could take part in a qualitative study, and my plan was to include a minimum of 10 teachers and counselors. I believe the job functions that the participants perform provided information that will contribute to my effort to address the research questions.

### **Research Site**

The location of the Academy where I collected data was in a suburb in a Midwestern state. The principal is the lead administrator. The Academy has 18 elementary, middle, and high school special education teachers, inclusive of five school counselors. All of the employees work full-time. Although the staff is diverse, the majority of them are Caucasian. The student body consisted of at least 80 students. Some of the students were diagnosed with mental health disorders and special education disabilities.

Some of those diagnosis included autistic disorders, bipolar disorders, cognitive delay disabilities (CD), emotional and behavior disorders (EBD), learning disabilities (LD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD). Other diagnosis also included the prader willi syndrome, other health impairments (OHI), and traumatic brain injury (TBI). The racial breakdown of the student population is unknown. The grade levels consisted of (a) elementary school, kindergarten –5<sup>th</sup> grades, (b) middle school, 6<sup>th</sup> –8<sup>th</sup>, and (c) high school. 9<sup>th</sup> –12<sup>th</sup>. Most of the students are bussed to the school; however, some parents transport their own children.

My rationale for selecting this school was threefold. First, the special education teachers in this setting educate students who have either learning or behavior problems

while attending this small school where bullying may be prevalent. These behaviors require collaboration on the teachers' part, which is the core of my interest. Secondly, teachers at the site co-teach on a daily basis. Co-teaching provides a setting where teachers can collaborate about how to facilitate students' achievements, as well as improve their behaviors. The third rationale is that this small alternative school does not suspend or expel its students. The school provides a 1-week break in the winter, a 1-week break in the spring, and a 2-week break in the summer. However, during the summer break, students can elect to attend school if they qualify for the extended school year (ESY) program. This program is provided to help special education students meet their individualized educational program (IEP). Since students are in school the majority of the school year, the teachers must find ways to resolve bullying issues, if they arise.

After meeting the school's addictions counselor before the study at a local conference held at my previous place of employment, I visited the school and was introduced to the principal. Following an initial meeting, I received approval from the principal to conduct research at the school. During the approval period, I developed a working relationship with the principal. While there, I met the assistant principal, who later became the principal and had given me approval to conduct research. Before my research was completed, the principalship had changed; however, this principal also gave me permission to continue the research.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrumentation used to collect data was a set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A), which guide myself and participants. I ensured all questions

were asked in the same manner and order for all participants while allowing discussions to be relatively open (Seidman, 2013). The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions to minimize fixed responses (Patton, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I developed open-ended questions based on the conceptual framework and the reviewed literature relevant to the topic with the assistance of my committee. For example, the first question was “How would you describe one of your meetings or one of the situations you have collaborated regarding bullying with another colleague?” I improved the questions through testing them in a trial run with colleagues who teach collaboratively in another school. Most of the questions have probing questions I used if I felt participants hadn’t elaborated enough and needed encouragement to share more of their perceptions and experiences in line with my research questions. An example of a probing question to the first interview question is “What type of bullying have you collaborated about?” Such probes may solicit, may clarify, or may request more elaboration from the participants.

In the event I needed clarification about something I had heard or if I later realized something, I wrote a field note in the margins of my researcher’s journal/log next to the interview question number on interview protocol sheet. During the interview, I returned to the note to ask additional questions, when necessary.

### **Procedures for Recruitment and Participation**

My hope was to recruit a minimum of 10 special education teachers from the school by initially leaving a flier at the school (with permission from my community partner) in the school lounge, which teachers visit on a regular basis. The initial flier contained my contact information and instructed potential participants to contact me if

they were interested in participating in the study. Within 48 hours of being contacted by a potential participant, I sent a message with a synopsis of my research via email to potential participants clarifying that I would be asking them to participate in one individual interview. After posting my fliers in the school lounge, I returned to following week to find out if anyone would participate in my study. I found that 13 people had signed up to participate in the study (one of whom was later unavailable, resulting in a sample of 12). Therefore, I had collected consent forms from 13 participants the same day I returned to the school. Immediately, upon finding out 13 participants were willing to participate, I provided the consent forms for them to examine and sign. I informed the participants I would be available in the assigned room I would be interviewing in if they had any questions. At that point, I explained the purpose of the study, the consent form and the interview process. I also provided a sign-up sheet for the participants to list the time and date they wanted to interview. I explained to the participants I would also be available to conduct a telephone interview if it was convenient for them.

The participants received information stating they had a right to ask questions and to discontinue their participation in the study at any time. Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study without fear of repercussion. I arranged for the participants to pick up the consent forms at the school before their interview. I had plan to provide a self-addressed envelope for any participant who wanted to mail the consent form, especially those who had decided to interview via Skype or telephone. Additionally, participants could choose to email the consent forms to me. All potential participants would have received consent forms with a self-addressed envelope so they



could mail them or give them to me when we meet for the initial individual interview if they chose to mail the form. Along with the consent form, I attached a list of counseling facilities participants could refer to if they wanted to contact a professional in the event traumatic events might arise during the interview. These precautions helped to ensure there were no ethical issues. This study followed Walden University's criteria and IRB's guidelines.

To accommodate the special education teachers and or counselors, I sought permission from my community partner to inform participants that I could meet them for the individual interviews on campus if that was a comfortable place for them. These meetings took place in a private room where I could maintain confidentiality for each participant. The meetings were held before or after school or during breaks to eliminate time restraints. I also sought permission and explained to participants that an interview could be scheduled via Skype or telephone if necessary. Additionally, participants received information that the interview would be digitally recorded and transcribed by me. There was no compensation for participation; however, I extended my gratitude by offering refreshments during the in-person interviews.

### **Data Collection**

After IRB approval, I began collection of the data. Each participant was informed that they would participate in one interview. However, after the initial interview, I suggested I might contact them via a brief phone or email or in person in the following week or two, if they were willing to clarify something I may have heard or written down. While interviewing, I used the interview question sheet to gain an in-depth view of how

collaboration about bullying could take place among participants, as well as use my researcher's journal. I digitally recorded the individual interviews. The purpose of the researcher's journal/log was to document field notes and non-verbal actions I thought might be pertinent to responding to the research question. I anticipated the individual interviews to take 60 to 90 minutes.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) when the interviewing is conducted in a supportive, nonconfrontational, and gentle manner, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee became personal. When the relationship is carried out in this fashion it becomes personal because the obligations are reciprocal (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). If the interviewee answered questions indirectly or provided information that seemed to follow a different path, I planned to document it and reorder the questions. According to Seidman (2013), listening to more than one level is an important skill. While I captured the description of what teachers collaborate about when they collaborate regarding bullying, I listened attentively, with an inner voice, and remained aware of the process of recording while simultaneously documenting nonverbal cues (Seidman, 2013). Therefore, I carefully listened to responses to questions and added probes that reflected perceptions as they arose in the interviews such as attention probes and conversation probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). These practices helped ensure I listened carefully and not overly guided the interview (in addition to writing non-directive initial questions, followed by probes).

After reviewing my field notes, I planned to transcribe the recorded transcriptions and compare and contrast the notes with the transcriptions. If after reviewing my field

notes and transcripts I felt there is something I didn't understand, I asked participants for a brief phone call or email to clarify responses to the questions. In the transcripts, I de-identified the participants by using pseudonyms.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

As the researcher, I planned to begin to analyze the interview data by searching for codes that emerged, which I categorized and eventually clustered into meaningful themes. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the “categories should be responsive to the purpose of the research and the research questions, exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, and conceptually congruent” (p. 212). I read the interview transcripts several times to get an idea of how to categorize the codes more efficiently. When I placed the codes into categories, I planned to seek similar codes and make connections to the data so I could develop the major themes or categories (Merriam, 2002).

Next, I planned to code the reflections from my field notes and categorize any relevant codes. Then I planned to look at the emergence of categories and themes that would help me further elucidate the data. I planned to achieve this by performing a word, statement or phrase search via the Microsoft Word find tab. I planned to continue to search for repeated phrases or words or statements. I planned to continue the process of elucidating the data continually revisiting the research questions, renaming the categories and sub-categories, as well as combining them when they were relevant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Following that, I planned to demonstrate the categories and themes into a concept/thematic map.

If I believed there was incomplete data, I had planned to ask the participant to clarify responses. If any discrepant codes or categories arose or if I felt the data was incomplete to answer the research questions, I planned to also ask the participant to clarify their response. However, there were no incomplete data or discrepant codes. Therefore, I categorized the findings.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

When reviewing issues of trustworthiness and credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) described four components. Those components are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability/triangulation. I planned to minimize threats to trustworthiness by using the recommendations of these theorists and increasing confidence in the findings.

One potential limitation was my bias with the topic. I have had experience in observation, special education, counseling, and collaboration, but I may also bring bias into the data collection process. My experience, however, may help in understanding the participants' perspectives. I planned to use my counseling skills to prevent myself from being intrusive or judgmental.

I also planned to use convenience sampling, and purposive sampling, as well as snowball sampling because I wanted to seek out teacher participants who collaborated with one another first. However, one modest limitation was that I may not be able to find enough experienced teachers in the small school where I was conducting my research study. The school has had many staff changes. Therefore, I planned to interview participants who met the criteria of my research. I planned to not place limitations on the

length of service a participant could have to participate in the study because I felt any teacher or counselor who participates in collaboration may have valuable information to enhance the research study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility is the first component proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure trustworthiness of research. According to Lincoln and Guba, credibility means the research is believable by demonstrating that the gathering of data had been exhausted to the point where there is also an exhaustion of information. To establish credibility, I used triangulation, saturation, and reflexivity. I probed participants during the interview and documented their responses verbatim from the digital recordings. Reporting data as it formulates is a form of credibility and integrity (Patton, 2015). Another way to establish credibility is by the development of questions from the literature review. I also tested the interview questions in a trial run with colleagues. If after the interview was concluded and I had begun to transcribe the data and realized I did not understand something, I planned to ask the participant(s) if she or he would be willing to spend time in a brief phone call or email to provide clarification, thus adding to the credibility of the data. However, I did not have to clarify anything.

### **Transferability**

The second component Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed to assess trustworthiness is transferability, which consists of application. Transferability is demonstrating that the research findings could apply to similar situations, groups, similar settings, or other individuals. This study increases transferability by clarifying what is

unique about the setting so other researchers could know how to apply the findings. For instance, the setting is unique because it operates year-round without the possibility of student suspensions. The participants consisted of both special education teachers and counselors.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the third component of the trustworthiness and credibility assessment proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To assure dependability, I planned to show details of the data collection and analysis processes. I documented the process and the data it produced by keeping a running record (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also performed the data analysis and synthesis of data in the same manner throughout the research. In addition to following the same processes for data collection for each participant, to establish consistency, I placed personal notes and documentation about my thinking in my field notes located in my researcher's journal/log throughout the research process.

### **Confirmability and Triangulation**

The final method Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed for researchers to assess trustworthiness is confirmability or triangulation. Lincoln and Guba explained that this component consists of peer review and debriefing. This study has demonstrated confirmability and triangulation to confirm information and data in other ways. I demonstrated confirmability when my colleagues participated in a practice run of the interview questions and my chair read through a few of my interview transcripts.

Triangulation was demonstrated using the researcher's journal/log, running record, and interviews. I documented personal notes and my thinking in field notes located in my researcher's journal/log. I kept a running record of my data analysis. I also audio-taped and transcribed the interviews verbatim.

The data was available if I needed to check the study's findings. Data was also be available for verification of the initial findings and conclusions. The archival process consists of locking the raw data in a secure file cabinet and destroying it after 5 years.

### **Ethical Procedures**

According to the policies of Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), this study was granted access to participants and/or data based on agreements between myself and the community partner. Treatment of the participants from the school consisted of receipt of a consent form from the participant to participate in the study. The consent form ensures that the participant is releasing participation by choice inclusive of information regarding ethical concerns. The consent form makes participants aware of the procedure to follow if any ethical concerns they may have as it is related to data collection, intervention activities including a participant's refusal, or early withdrawal from the study, and response to any predictable adverse events take place. Participants were also made aware of the procedure to follow if any ethical concerns arose related to the recruitment materials attained, as well as the processes and any plan to address these concerns.

The confidential and de-identified transcripts were coded and only shared with my committee members. My chair read three transcripts to help with identifying codes.

As the researcher, I have access to all tangible data, which is locked securely in a cabinet in my home. A folder on my computer holds the electronic data in a password-protected folder. The data will be kept for 5 years and then destroyed, by shredding the raw data and deleting the electronic data from my computer.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 3, I established the research design and rationale. This descriptive basic qualitative study examined how collaboration may help special education teachers to eliminate or reduce bullying. The rationale for choosing the descriptive basic qualitative study consisted of (a) strengthening the validity of my and (b) ensuring the data collected could properly address the research topic. Therefore, the data will ultimately demonstrate the depth of the teachers' collaborative efforts.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the researcher's role consisted first obtaining permission from the community partner, in addition to, participant recruitment and selection. It also consisted of gathering, transcribing and analyzing the data. In this chapter, the logic for participant selection consisted of convenience and purposive sampling. The instrumentation consisted of 10 semi-structured interview questions and probes. Additionally, I provided evidence of trustworthiness in terms of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Finally, I discussed ethical procedures, which included an explanation of the informed consent form.

In Chapter 4, I will discuss data collection, and data analysis. I will also discuss evidences of trustworthiness used in the study. Additionally, I present the results of the data analysis.



## Chapter 4: Results

The primary purpose for conducting this qualitative study was to understand the process used by special education teachers in their small school when they collaborate to reduce the bullying problem for special education students. In Chapter 4, I discuss data collection, data analysis, and evidence of trustworthiness. Additionally, I present the results of the data analysis. The two research questions for this study were as follows:

RQ1: How do special education teachers and staff describe their collaboration about bullying? and

RQ2: How does collaboration amongst special education teachers and staff regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum?

### **Setting**

The study took place in a U.S. school located in a suburb of a Midwestern state. The school employed a principal, who is the lead administrator, and 18 elementary, middle, and high school special education teachers, teacher assistants, along with the crisis team and three school counselors. All were full-time employees. The staff was ethnically diverse. The student body consisted of at least 80 students diagnosed with mental and learning disabilities, such as cognitive delay disorders, learning disabilities, and behavior disorders. The racial breakdown of the population was unknown. The grade levels consisted of elementary school, Grades kindergarten–5; middle school, Grades 6–8; and high school, Grades 9–12. The majority of students were bussed to the school;

however, some parents transported their children. The school setting was unique because it operated year-round without the possibility of student suspensions.

During the time of the study, there were no changes in any personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experiences. There were no influences at the time of the study that could have influenced the interpretation of the results. I interviewed three people via telephone; nine face-to-face interviews took place in a quiet conference room near the school office. Shortly before the study began a new principal took over leadership after the previous principal had been there for several years, but the change in principalship did not come up in the interviews. However, participants reported that when some teachers left and new ones were hired, such change in staff improved the culture of the school.

### **Demographics**

I was seeking to interview at least 10 participants. Out of the 18 special education teachers/teacher assistants, 10 teachers/assistant teachers consented to participate. To secure enough participants, my plan was to interview counselors if necessary. Out of the five counselors, three consented to participate in the study. While 13 people had consented to participate, scheduling did not permit one teacher to participate. Therefore, I interviewed 12 participants.

All 12 participants were classified as either special education teachers/teacher assistants or counselors. Out of the 12 participants, I interviewed three staff members who were counselors/therapists. This was a convenience sample. Originally, I had planned to select participants via convenience sampling and purposive sampling, as well

as snowball sampling because I wanted to seek out teacher participants who collaborate with one another first. I also wanted to provide the participants with the opportunity to contribute to my dissertation based on their interest coinciding with my interest in learning what it could possibly take to decrease bullying in their school. It was also my intention to seek out counselors if there were not enough teachers responding to participate in the study after 48 hours. I had made the decision to send out reminders to all teachers and counselors and in the event, I did not obtain enough teachers to avail themselves in participating, I had planned to ask counselors.

My rationale for asking counselors had to do with counselors' availability to collaborate with teachers about student behaviors on a daily basis. I had decided that if I did not get a minimal of 10 participants, I would request teachers and counselors to ask their colleagues to participate in my study, which is snowball sampling. The criteria for inclusion was indicative of teacher participants along with counselors, if needed, who collaborate with one another and who agree to participate in my study. In order to participate in the study, the criteria were based on those who collaborate about the subject of student bullying, inclusive of pedagogy, and curriculum. The exclusion criteria were indicative of those who choose not to participate in the research study and those who did not participate in collaboration about bullying. Participants excluded from the study consisted of those who were not classified as teachers and or counselors. Additionally, exclusions included those teachers and or counselors who chose not to participate in the study and those teachers and or counselors who did not collaborate about the subject of bullying inclusive of pedagogy, and curriculum. The demographic factors considered in

selecting participants included choosing teachers and or counselors who collaborate about bullying. After posting my fliers in the school lounge, I returned the following week to find out if anyone would participate in my study. I found that 13 people had signed up to participate in the study. Therefore, I had collected consent forms from 13 participants the same day I returned to the school. Immediately, upon finding out 13 participants were willing to participate, I provided the consent forms for them to examine and sign. (One of the 13 was later unable to participate.) I informed the participants I would be available in the assigned room I would be interviewing in if they had any questions. At that point, I explained the purpose of the study, the consent form and the interview process. I also provided a sign-up sheet for the participants to list the time and date they wanted to interview. I explained to the participants I would also be available to conduct a telephone interview if it was convenient for them.

In order to disguise the participants' information as not to risk revealing their identity, I used pseudonyms and decided not to provide grade levels or subjects taught by participants. My rationale for this decision was that there were practically one teacher and teacher assistant for each grade level. Also, many of the students were grouped into the special education classrooms by grade level and disabilities. For example, a classroom could consist of a special education teacher and a special education teacher assistant. The teachers teach eaching students in Grades 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> diagnosed with disabilities and or disorders such as other health impairments (OHI), cognitive delay disabilities (CD), bipolar disorder, and learning disabilities (LD). If there is only one class with this make-up, and I wrote "Jodi is a special education teacher who teaches 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grades,"

her identity would be revealed. Or if I reported “there is a special education teacher assistant and his name is Jason who works with students diagnosed with OHI, CD, Bipolar and LD,” his identity would no longer be confidential. Revealing these specifics may have jeopardized participants’ anonymity.

Although 13 people had initially signed up, 12 people participated in the study. I originally had decided to meet some of the participants at the school on a specific day. However, the school was dismissing the students early and the teachers would not be available. This minor change in scheduling caused some of the participants to have to sign up another day. It appeared to be difficult for one of the participants who had signed up to schedule a time to interview. Therefore, I managed to interview 12 people. The participants who participated in the interview included three counselors (one female and two males); and nine teachers/teacher assistants (four females and five males). Although the teachers and or counselors who consented to participate reported they had taught special education students for a minimum of 1 year to 25 years, the participants’ employment at the school ranged from 2 weeks to 6 years. One counselor, two teacher assistants, and one teacher had started after the school year had begun in September. When I collected the data, the teachers had been employed at the school for 3, 4 and 5 months; and one counselor had been employed for 2 weeks. However, they had all been employed as special education teachers/assistant teachers or counselors working with the special education population elsewhere.

Table 1

*Participants' Pseudonyms, Roles and Length of Service in the Academy*

Participants' pseudonyms	Roles	Length of service in school
Angie, Billy, Blue, Buddy, Dominic, Kenneth, Nell, Nicky, Otto	Special education Teachers/teacher assistants	3 months to 5 years
Brittany, David, Tee	Counselors/therapists	2 weeks to 6 years

**Data Collection**

After receiving IRB Approval Number 03-15-18-0124594 to complete the research, I had difficulty getting started with collecting data. The difficulty was two-fold: first, I learned from my school contact the principal had resigned and secondly, I learned the staff was getting ready to go on break. When school resumed, I visited the new principal, who allowed the research to move forward. I collected data from 12 participants via interviews. I interviewed nine participants via face-to-face interviews at the school. The interviews were held during school breaks throughout the day or after school, which did not interfere with the participants' duties. Located away from the classrooms, the door to the conference room remained closed while the interviews took place for maintenance of privacy. I interviewed the other three participated via telephone.

To build rapport, brief introductions took place and I shared the purpose of my research, as well as thanked the participants for agreeing to participate in my research

study. I asked participants to share the grades they taught, the length of time they had been teaching at the school, the length of time they had been in education, and the diagnosis of the students in their classrooms. I also asked if they had any questions in regard to the study. Additionally, I reminded the participants that the consent forms included a list of agencies they could contact if they felt they needed counseling. I reminded the participants that if they felt at any time they wanted to stop interviewing to inform me. Afterwards, I reminded the participants I would be recording via audio. While I had anticipated the interviews would take 60–90 minutes, the interviews took approximately 30–90 minutes. All of the data were recorded via audio tape with permission from each participant.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) when interviewing is conducted in a supportive, nonconfrontational, and a gentle manner, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee is personal because the obligations are reciprocal. While interviewing each participant, I believe each interview was supportive, and nonconfrontational as suggested by Rubin and Rubin. I also believe I presented myself in a gentle manner, which seemed to be reciprocated by responsive relationship between myself and the participant. Each participant was warm, cordial, and welcoming. Each participant appeared to answer questions honestly. When the participant answered questions indirectly or provided information that seemed to follow a different path, I tried to document it and adjust the order of the interview questions in a reciprocal fashion. I was also careful, while listening to responses to questions, to add probes that reflected perceptions as they arose in the interviews such as attention and conversation probes

(Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Seidman (2013), listening to more than one level is an important skill. However, while I attempted to capture the responses to my questions, I simultaneously tried to listen attentively with my inner voice and remain aware of the recording process. Additionally, I attempted to document nonverbal cues in my field notes in a journal (Seidman, 2013). These practices helped to ensure I listened carefully and not overly guide the interview.

After reviewing my field notes and transcripts, I compared and contrasted them. The data collection was completed within one month. After transcribing the data, I sent a copy of the transcript to each participant to obtain transcript validation by asking them to respond with any corrections or comments. Three people responded: one said he agreed with the transcription, one responded by changing a couple of words, and the other one reported he was going to review the transcription; but did not provide any more feedback. There were nine participants who did not respond at all. I de-identified the participants by using pseudonyms in the transcripts.

### **Data Analysis**

As the researcher, I began to analyze the interview data by searching for codes that emerged in the transcript. As I analyzed the interview transcripts I also looked over my journal for confirming or disconfirming insights. I read the interview transcripts several times to get an idea of how to categorize the codes more efficiently. I performed a word, statement, and phrase search to help me achieve my goal. I made a copy of the transcript. Then I used the Microsoft Find tab to assist me in searching for common codes. As codes emerged, I examined them to determine if there were commonality



among the words, statements, and phrases. Then, I used my computer highlighter to highlight the relevant codes and used my computer to decontextualize the data by cutting and pasting each code into a table. After placing each code into a table on my computer, I used comparisons to further analyze the data. I used the table to compare the data for each research question.

Afterwards, I placed each code into a category based on similarities. After placing the codes into categories, I looked for similarities in the codes several times and labeled them according to relevancy, trust and history, culture, connections, meetings, synergy, duration of time, locations, curriculum, pedagogy, collaborations, types of bullying, emotions, academic achievement, and environments. Then, I made connections to the data so I could develop the major themes (Merriam, 2002). My themes were responsive to the purpose of the research and the research questions, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggested themes should be “exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the data, and conceptually congruent” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 212).

After searching the transcripts, I typed up notes from my journal. Then I coded the reflections from my field notes located in the researcher’s journal. Sometimes, the journal writing pressed me harder to revisit the interview transcripts. Rereading the journal reinforced insights so I had to repeatedly read the transcripts. Then I used Microsoft Find tab to assist me in searching for common codes and highlighted some of the relevant codes, which I decontextualized by cutting and pasting and categorizing the codes based on similarities. I placed the codes into a table, which I used to assist me in clustering the relevancy of common words, statements and phrases. Next, I

recontextualized the codes by combining the codes from the transcripts and notes together under the categories that emerged from the comparisons in response to the research purpose and research questions. Then I continually reviewed the emergence of categories and themes to help me further elucidate the data. I repeatedly searched for words, phrases and statements.

While this process assisted me to grasp the meaning of the collected data, I continued the process until I had saturated the data. I determined saturation by continuing to follow the evolving process of elucidating the data, revisiting the research questions, renaming the categories and subcategories, decontextualizing the data, and finally recontextualizing the data into themes and subthemes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Afterwards, I demonstrated the categories and themes into a thematic structure as a further check (see Table 2).

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility/Triangulation**

Credibility is the first component proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure trustworthiness of research. According to Lincoln and Guba, credibility means the research is believable by demonstrating that the gathering of data had been exhausted to the point where there is also an exhaustion of information. To establish credibility, I developed the interview questions from the literature review. Additionally, I tested the research questions in a trial run with colleagues. To also establish credibility, I used triangulation, saturation, and probes during the interview process to further establish credibility to ensure the research study was conducted ethically and that the findings

would adhere to trustworthiness, reliability and validity. I developed the interview questions aligned with the research purpose and research questions. I audio recorded the data as it was formulated so it would be accurate, which additionally demonstrated credibility and integrity (Patton, 2015). When interviewing the participants, I followed the same process. Afterwards, I documented participants' responses from the digital recordings by transcribing the interviews. Then, I used open coding by reviewing the data, where I tried to see if I could make sense of the data followed by identifying themes and subthemes to categorize it. I repeated the coding process until I reached saturation of the codes. Then I decontextualized the data by cutting the codes out. Finally, I recontextualized the data by arranging the common and relevant codes into themes and subthemes based on the purpose of the research and the research questions.

### **Transferability**

The second component Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed to assess trustworthiness was transferability, which consists of application of the findings. Transferability is demonstrating that the research findings may apply to similar situations, groups, similar settings, or other individuals. In this study I attempted to increase tentative transferability by clarifying the uniqueness of the school setting so other researchers could know how to apply the findings duplicating the thick descriptions of the research design, data collection and data analysis. The school setting is unique because it operates year-round without the possibility of suspensions of special education students. Therefore, the research findings can be applied to a typical special education school that house special education students. The variation of the participant selection

included thick descriptions of the special education teachers and or counselors present in the school year-round.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the third component of the trustworthiness and credibility assessment proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). To assure dependability, I used triangulation, which consisted of a running record, researcher's journal/log and interviews. I explained details of the data collection and analysis processes in a running record. Furthermore, I used reflexivity to maintain dependability when I demonstrated how interventions generated data. I documented the interview process and the data it produced by keeping field notes in a researcher's journal/log (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to following the same processes for data collection for each participant, to establish consistency, I placed personal notes and documentation about my thinking of my field notes throughout the research process. This was achieved by taking field notes in the researcher's journal/log. I also have performed the data analysis and synthesis of data in the same manner throughout the research.

### **Confirmability**

The last component is confirmability. In this study to ensure confirmability, confirmation of data and information was achieved using reflexivity. Therefore, my role consisted of allowing the interview questions to guide me as I asked probing questions until I reached saturation. The study's findings were objective because I was diligent in ensuring accurate portrayal of the participants' responses. Also, I kept checking my field notes written in my researcher's journal/log to ensure I clarified what I heard and to

engage in self-reflection for the sole purpose of staying objective throughout the interview process. Additionally, my committee chair reviewed some of the interviews to confirm information and data.

While I provided a consent form to each participant to ensure that participation was by choice, I also informed participants they could withdraw from the study at any time. I informed the participants the withdrawal could be for any reason inclusive of any ethical concerns related to the data collection, any ethical concerns that may arise related to the recruitment materials attained, as well as the processes. I informed participants that in the event they felt emotional or traumatized by the subject matter, intervention activities such as a list of counseling sites was provided to them at the time they had signed their consent forms. Additionally, I included responses to any predictable adverse events which might take place during the interview process.

### **Findings**

I will present the findings in regard to the two research questions, using both the themes and subthemes with illustrations of quotations from the interviews to deepen the understanding of the themes. The findings resulted from analysis of a combination of the transcripts along with my journal notes.

I would like to emphasize the school has had many staff changes throughout the year and four of the participants had been at the school for less than a year. However, criteria for participation in the study included having had collaborated about bullying excluding length of time at the school. The participants were enthusiastic to share their stories and provided valuable data to the research study. To better understand the

participants, I will introduce each participant and will provide descriptions based on my insight from my journal notes first, which I wrote while simultaneously recording the interview. The quotes are the responses the participants gave when they were asked to describe their thoughts, emotions, actions, and reactions at a time when they had encountered a bullying incident.

### **Portrayal of Participants**

In this section, I will describe the 12 participants summarized from their responses throughout the interview process regarding their descriptions of their emotions, reactions, thoughts, and feelings. Each participant described a time when they encountered a bullying incident. These rich descriptions of the participants and their experiences provide details that could assist others in duplicating or applying the research.

Kenneth has been a special education teacher at the school for more than a year. In my journal I recorded that I perceived that Kenneth appeared to provide an analysis of problems, searched for solutions to conflict, and implemented quick action. Kenneth appeared to be a knowledgeable teacher. He reported that he likes to listen to any kind of input. I wrote that Kenneth was a listener and collaborator. Kenneth is observant and applies new ideas. In response to a bullying incident, Kenneth described his emotions and the process saying:

Well the phrase I always use is the more upset the student is or agitated the student is in a bullying situation the calmer I have to be. Because I can't be screaming or yelling, I just got to be very business-like and strict and say "go out,

let's work on this and we'll go on from there" so if I get all reactive and emotional that just kind of makes things worse in a situation and adds gas to the fire."

Counselor Brittany worked at the school for less than a year. However, she had worked at another special education school before being employed at this one. I recorded in my journal that Brittany appeared to have a personal interest in bullying because Brittany said she is a big advocate about collaborating with staff about bullying. Brittany elaborated about finding out the student's history of past behaviors. I also wrote in my journal that Brittany appeared to be passionate about gaining an understanding and gaining insight about bullying. Brittany collaborated about the "plug and chug" pedagogy (implementation of trial and error methods to see if the method worked or not). I wrote that I perceived that Brittany wanted to be knowledgeable about the students so she could provide solutions to their behavior issues. Brittany stated, "collaboration is incredibly essential." Brittany reported she is a big advocate of collaboration. Brittany said, "the only way to make a difference in the lives of the students is to be able to come together and bounce ideas off one another. Everyone should be an advocate." In another entry in my journal, I wrote my perception of Brittany's beliefs was that everyone should collaborate with the victim and bully. In response to encountering a bullying incident, Brittany responded:

So, because I work with students who have behavioral needs, I am often having to put on different hats and jump in and be able to be pretty flexible. So, really knowing how that student was able to be successful and how what works best for

them is kind of key. So right now, as I'm getting to know students I have kind of been kind of testing things out to see what best works for them. So, as for now I am just kind of being new, I have had to plug and chug to see what's going to be beneficial for them.

Otto is a special education teacher who has taught at the school for more than a year. In my journal, I wrote that I perceived Otto as a person who was very informative and aimed to please. I also wrote that my perception about Otto's beliefs were reflected in his passion to help. Otto appeared to implement a cycle of reflection. I wrote this because Otto reported that after a bullying encounter, he would reflect on the situation and collaborate about it with his co-worker, then go home and reflect and collaborate more. Once Otto returned to back to the school, he would continue to reflect and collaborate some more. I felt Otto applied what he learned from coaching to teaching, i.e., Otto reported upon encountering a bullying incident, he would stop the problem by using the coaching technique. Otto said he would inform the students about good strategies, which had to do with getting immediately back into the game. Otto reported his thoughts about his feelings when he said:

I just think when this stuff happens that all the good that we try to do in the classroom, you just don't feel like you're really making any progress when kids still revert back to stuff they were doing on the first day of school and we're almost at the end. You just feel like you didn't reach them. You blame yourself. And you figure out ways that we could do stuff better. And that's why I implemented, through just being home thinking about what I do with these



children, that I needed to coach to bad behavior. If we see something and then somebody does something, we have to coach to it right away. And kids need to talk about what the best choice would have been in that situation. So that's how my emotions have dictated a bit of my curriculum and the culture of the classroom.

Nell is a special education teacher assistant who has been employed at the school for less than a year. In my journal, I recorded that Nell is passionate, emotional, and firm. Nell appeared to have a lot of awareness, mindfulness, and insight about how to implement pedagogy surrounding bullying. Nell said, "Knowledge is key. Bullying looks different now than it did 20 years ago." After a bullying encounter, Nell reported she had difficulty believing her students had covertly bullied a particular student. Nell concluded that a new student who had just transferred into the school had encouraged the rest of the class to bully a mild-mannered student. In response to the bullying encounter, Nell shared her feelings:

I guess I was in disbelief, first of all, because I couldn't believe that they would do it. Again, with our population, some of these kids are in the same classroom with each other all the way until they leave...We generally get new students who like to come in and show off, so I think it was one of them particular moments. ... I felt because of their awareness of the child and the awareness of their affection [she had with a particular item]. So, I was more disappointed, but then I had to realize, again, that they are here for a reason. So, disappointment wasn't the word that I

was trying to say in the first point, so yeah. I think my kind of transference came more into that situation.

Angie is a special education teacher has worked at the school for more than a year. In my journal I recorded that Angie appeared to be empathetic and passionate about working with the special education population. Angie reported her thoughts were to always use empathy first; and always be aware. Angie reported using an old method learned from a previous school. Angie appeared to try to apply information learned from trainings attended. Angie said she believes collaboration helps morale to look at things to help students when collaborated with counselors about what was learned in a training. I also recorded that Angie appeared to be open-minded, wanting to share information gained, and appeared to be encouraging. Angie reported she had increased her knowledge when she collaborated about bullying. At times Angie appeared to go off the subject and did not answer some questions directly.

When Angie was asked to describe her thoughts, emotions, actions, and reactions about a particular bullying incident she had encountered, Angie responded by describing an incident which involved gender issues. Angie explained the difficulty she had with trying to teach a student to not allow the boys to tease her because the bullies were saying negative things to the victim. Angie explained the student did not appear to understand her motive and could not get the student to understand the concept. Angie responded to the question by saying, “My thoughts with her? My thoughts are always to offer kids alternatives. To empathize with what they're feeling to start, but to say look, how else could we approach this?” Angie appeared to be keen on a method beginning with an

empathy statement and then offers good choices as opposed to the negativity that might be displayed by students. Angie reported that if a student does not choose a positive behavior, you choose for them.

Billy is a special education teacher assistant who has been employed at the school for more than a year. In my journal I wrote that Billy appeared to be cool, calm, and collected. He appeared to follow through on the teacher's lead and assist when he felt he needed to, which is what he believes his job is. Although Billy gave good feedback, he appeared to be passionate against bullying at school and in his personal life. When asked about his emotions, reactions, and action after encountering a bullying incident, Billy said:

As a person, I always try to stay calm because I know I'm at that school for a particular reason. These kids are definitely there because they can't cope in a regular school setting. So, I'm always calm and I never get loud with the kids. So, at any time when I am dealing with any kid I'm talking to them like I'm talking to you right now. So, I asked him. That's what I did. I asked him "can you please stop doing that? That's inappropriate", and he wouldn't. So, I asked him a couple more times and said "if you don't I'm going to have to have you come out the room". And he said do what you have to do. So, I said "alright". And what I did, I came out to the hall and I said crisis manager I want him out. And that is what happened; he came and escorted the gentleman out of the room."

Billy went on to say:

I can just say I am passionate about anybody putting their hands on somebody who don't want them putting their hands on them. I'm just passionate about that. I don't think nobody should be hit if you don't want to be hit. So, I don't know. So, I don't like to see violence. I don't like to hear about violence. I don't like to hear about anything that's happening against the law man. So, I'm just passionate about that. So, I'm willing to help or talk to anybody, if I can do that. That's how I feel.

Dominic is a special education teacher assistant who has been employed at the school for almost a year. In my journal, I wrote my perception of Dominic was that she appeared to have ah ha moments as we discussed scenarios and she appeared to have worked through them by reflecting out loud, while I was sitting there. Dominic reported she realized she was more apt to make a difference when she talked things out. Dominic appeared to have related personal things in her life about bullying and was able to apply them to collaborating about working with the children and her colleagues. Dominic appeared to be very trusting and willing to continue to establish collaborative efforts to continue to make a difference. In response to the interview question asking to share her emotions, reactions, and actions after a bullying encounter, Dominic wrote that

I always try to stay calm because I know I'm at that school for a particular reason. These kids are definitely there because they can't cope in a regular school setting. So, I'm always calm and I never get loud with the kids. So, at any time when I am dealing with any kid I'm talking to them like I'm talking to you right now. So, I

asked him. That's what I did. I asked him "can you please stop doing that? That's inappropriate." and he wouldn't.

Nicky is a special education teacher who has been employed at the school for over a year. In my journal entry, I wrote that Nicky appeared to be honest and interested in the collaboration topic. Nicky's mannerism appeared to demonstrate she was serious and anxious about speaking about the topic. During the interview, Nicky was asked to describe a time when a lesson was improvised or a routine was changed to deal with a bullying issue that occurred in the spur of the moment. Nicky began to describe a moment when a student was allowing others to victimized her. Nicky said:

Let me just tell these girls again. Please, don't let these boys talk to you like that. Then I would have to do my little speech again, but then I always I also have to remember. Ah what's going on at home. If their moms or aunts or grandmothers are also giving them that speech or who's at home to guide them. Are they being taught that womanhood is valuable? And I have to remember what has happened to them in the past, and I have to remember the culture. I have to take so many things into consideration you know. There are cultural factors. There are household factors. Are they at home. Where are they living? Are they in foster care? Are they in a shelter? Are they in a stable home? Are there moms or aunts telling them that their womanhood? There are so many factors. I do my little speech, but anyway, that's what I do.

Tee is a counselor who has been employed at the school for over a year. In my journal, I recorded that Tee's mannerisms appeared to show he was invested because

when he responded to the questions he leaned forward. I wrote Tee continued to show passion about what he was saying in his movements by leaning forward and speaking with enthusiasm in his voice. I especially saw and heard the passion when he responded to a probing question asking about whether there was a particular incident where he had to change a routine to deal with a bullying incident at the spur of the moment. Tee responded there was a time when he had to come up a 45-minute question and answer session. During the session he shared with students:

When you hold in a lot of stuff and you don't talk to people and you don't let it out, at some point it can be that serious. So, to just let them know that there's people that they can come to, they can talk to if they feel something, if they're feeling some type of way or if someone's making them feel unsafe, don't hesitate to share this information with us because that's why we're here.

After answering yes that he had this discussion with a particular child, I asked him if he could describe his thoughts, feelings, actions and or reactions. Tee responded:

I'd be surprised that some kids don't realize the impact that bullying behavior can have on a person, how it could send a person to the point where they may want to harm themselves or harm others. Some kids don't understand how bullying could do that much damage. So, you have to explain to kids, some people are stronger in certain areas than others. Some people can endure more than others. Some people can't handle some things.

David is a counselor that the school. David has been employed for more than a year. In my journal, I recorded that David appeared to be the fixer. In my perspective, it

appeared that David talked about identifying behaviors and working on pedagogy to change behaviors of both the teachers and the students, especially when he said, “But I think we've created a culture of support.”

When asked to describe his thoughts, actions, reactions and feelings after a bullying incident, David responded:

I guess, for the most part, it's frustrating. [Especially], if you're trying to conduct a group and actually benefit people, give them some knowledge, try to teach them to be better students, as well as just more successful people in general because school's just a microcosm of society. But yeah, it gets frustrating. But you understand that at the same time, they're all there for a reason and that's why they're there. So, those behaviors can be problematic and frustrating, but that's why we're there.

Buddy is a teacher who has been employed at the school for less than a year. In my journal, I recorded that I perceived Buddy as insightful, knowledgeable, and invested in making a change for the better. When asked to describe his thoughts, emotions, actions and reactions about a particular bullying incident he had encountered, Buddy responded by describing his perspective to prevent a chaotic school day. Buddy said:

Sometimes I can get emotional but, on the outside, I am calm. I don't want them to ever see me get flustered, but they will see it once in a while but they will get it out of me. I think when the teacher shows when they are mad and the kids are getting all worked up and that kind of lead out into a more chaotic day. But if I just keep an even temper and say come here. You are gonna sit here from now on

or you need to go take a break. Just show them that it's not affecting me the way they probably wanted it to because if I'm getting all riled up that could be just what they are looking for.

Blue is a teacher who has been employed at the school for over a year. In my journal, I wrote that Blue appeared to be very participatory and mentioned trust a lot. What stood out for me with Blue was his mention of trust amongst the staff and the trust he had gained from the students. Blue mentioned open collaboration, student imitation, systems, and the need to create a culture in order to create a balance. When Blue was asked to describe his thoughts, feelings, actions, and reactions about a bullying incident he had encountered, Blue said:

I wasn't upset with the student because I know it had nothing to do with me. But I was more protective of the other students because I didn't want a student to harm another student. So, I was more protective. But, I was also concerned about the student at the time too. So, I didn't let myself you know get power. I wasn't going to let myself get angry at the student because I know it's something wrong and if it is something wrong then why is this student doing this. So, I was just was kind of a, I was directive, I was directive, I was stern with the student, but also concerned and also protective of the other students. And I feelings as kind of neutral because I didn't want myself to get drawn into it a battle or say something I shouldn't say or be aggressive. Because sometimes students want you to get into these power struggles with them you know.



## **Thematic Findings**

As a result of coding and categorizing the data, I found that some of the participants provided responses to interview questions that were answers to other interview questions. So, I chose to follow the flow of their thinking rather than just try to stick rigidly to the order of my interview questions. For example, when special education Teacher Angie was asked to describe one of the meetings or one of the situations she had collaborated about regarding bullying with another colleague, Angie's response involved discussing an informal meeting saying, "We, in general, meet very quickly about it." Then Angie was probed about the types of bullying she had collaborated about and Angie responded, "We have collaborated about verbal bullying, physical bullying, social media bullying, or cyberbullying." Afterwards, I prompted her by saying, "Cyber" in a questioning tone, and Angie responded, "We have done a variety of things. For instance, the building itself, we brought in the... police to talk about cyberbullying and what would happen if charges were brought." I used probes, which helped to solicit, clarify, or request more elaboration from the participants and helped to ensure all questions were asked in the same manner and order for all participants while allowing discussions to be relatively open (Seidman, 2013).

In this section, I will discuss my analysis of the findings. I analyzed the data and it revealed five major themes and 11 subthemes which I aligned with the research purpose and research questions. (See Table 2). The first two themes and six subthemes were in alignment with the first research question. The last three themes and given subthemes were aligned with the second research question. Table 2 shows the themes and subthemes

describing collaboration about bullying in a thematic structure. Following the table are descriptions of subthemes and themes that emerged from the data. Additionally, I emphasized the importance of the themes by quoting some of the participants, which showed is evidence aligned with the research questions describing the participants words, stories and comments.

Table 2  
*Structure of Themes and Subthemes in Dynamics of Special Education Collaboration*

	Themes	Subthemes
1.	Value of collaboration in special education	<p>Descriptions of the environment and bullying causes</p> <p>Collaboration described as a purpose and process</p> <p>Collaboration on reducing bullying and academic success</p>
2.	A school's collaborative culture	<p>Culture of collaboration</p> <p>Synergy in formal and informal meetings</p> <p>Trust based on a history of working together</p>
3.	Pedagogy influenced by collaboration on bullying	<p>Pedagogical knowledge gained</p> <p>Implementation of pedagogy</p> <p>Emotional responses</p>
4.	Knowledge influenced by Collaboration	Does not contain a subtheme
5.	The school curriculum and Initiative	<p>The bullying curriculum</p> <p>The bullying initiative</p> <p>Making teacher-student connections</p>

### **Themes Related to RQ 1 and RQ 2**

In RQ1 which asks how special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying, there were major codes, which emerged from the data titled environment, collaborations, types of bullying, history, trust, meetings, synergy, working together, culture, and academic success. From those codes emerged the first two themes which had similarities. The first theme, *value of collaboration in special education*, provided descriptors of the environment, in addition to what collaboration is to special education teachers and counselors. The three subthemes include *descriptions of the environment and bullying causes*, *collaboration described as a purpose and process*, and *collaboration on reducing bullying and academic success*. The second theme, *a school's collaborative culture*, explores the dynamics of the collaboration among the special education teachers and counselors. The subthemes under this theme are *culture of collaboration*, *synergy in formal and informal meetings*, and *trust based on a history of working together*.

In the second research question, the last three themes addressed how collaboration influences knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum amongst special education teachers and staff regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students. The major codes that emerged from the data included influences, pedagogy, knowledge, curriculum, emotions, reducing bullying, teacher connections and initiatives. The third theme, *pedagogy influenced by collaboration on bullying*, demonstrates how collaboration was influenced by pedagogy. The subthemes under the third theme are:

*pedagogical knowledge gained, the implementation of pedagogy, and emotional responses.* The fourth theme is *knowledge influenced by collaboration.* This theme demonstrates knowledge gained about bullying when participants collaborate. The final and fifth theme is *the school curriculum and initiative.* This theme describes the implementation of the school's bullying curriculum and bullying initiative. It consists of three subthemes, which are *the bullying curriculum, the bullying initiative* and *making teacher-student connections.* Throughout the presentation of each theme, I will provide quotations from the interviewees to emphasize the meaning of the themes.

**Value of collaboration in special education.** In this section, I present the first theme, which addressed the first research question, "how special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying." The subthemes are *descriptions of the environment and bullying causes, collaboration described as a purpose, and process* and *collaboration on reducing bullying and achievement.* I combined these cluster of subthemes together because they contained descriptors about how special education teachers described their collaboration about bullying. Out of the 12 participants, seven participants described their collaboration about bullying as "very effective." Two participants reported their collaboration could get better, one participant ranked it between an 8 or 9, and one participant said there is always some collaboration going on. Mr. Blue said it was, "Good because regardless if everything works out, you know another person is giving you their experience and it's helping you see something different."

*Descriptions of the environment and bullying causes.* This subtheme, describing the first subtheme for the first theme, is aligned with the first research question. Many participants provided their rationale for why students bully. For instance, Nicky focused on the environment and their backgrounds when she expressed:

It's a very fluid environment and it changes. It can be very volatile at times because if these kids, these kids are angry kids they are angry kids, and sometimes the bullying can be a defense mechanism too because they have been bullied for whatever reason. Some of them are foster kids. They are sheltered kids and they bully because they've been bullied.

Tee, a counselor, also pointed out the home environment could encourage students to bully at school. While students miss weeks of school at a time and stay out of school unsupervised, Tee said:

They haven't had structure all of this time and they come back ...starting over...the kids' [are] angry...and want to be supervised, whether they say it or not, because they really can't make a lot of decisions on their own. But if you leave them to make decisions on their own, a lot of times it will be the wrong decision...they need us to guide them...We can't give them everything they need in 8 hours.

Tee speculated that students bully because they are angry. When students attend school angry, Tee said he mediates between students who get into a disagreement. Tee said he:

Brings the bully and bullied together to try to understand each other's situation to try to create some empathy...maybe a kid don't know how harmful what they're

doing is and a lot of times, maybe they're just doing it because their peers are doing it so that they won't be bullied.

***Collaboration on purpose and process.*** This subtheme is aligned with the first theme. In this section, I provide the results of the participants' descriptions. After analyzing the interviews, my findings showed that the participants described collaboration in different ways. While veteran teacher Angie discussed her interpretation of collaboration as a purpose, so did counselor Brittany and teacher Buddy, who have both been employees at the school for less than a year, who provided informative descriptions of their interpretation regarding the purpose of collaboration. Those subthemes included telling the purpose of collaboration, providing definitions and or descriptions, as well as describing the process they used to collaborate about bullying. There were several different responses to the interview question, "how you describe one of your meetings or one of the situations you have collaborated regarding bullying with another colleague?" First, I will describe how some participants addressed the purpose. While Angie and Buddy expressed similar views regarding the purpose of collaboration, Brittany's rationale was focused on the teachers' input.

Angie, a teacher, discussed her interpretation about why collaboration takes place when she said, "When we see bullying, we meet very quickly. Collaboration has given students and staff a common language...to address topics. Bullying decreases when teachers collaborate...because they can hold children accountable no matter where the behaviors take place."

Brittany, a counselor, gave a rationale for why she believed collaboration should take place when she stated, “collaboration is a place where people come together to bounce ideas off one another and teachers become more bolden [sic] to speak up. Collaboration is essential.”

Buddy, a teacher who has been at the school for a short amount of time, also gave his interpretation of why collaboration is beneficial when he said, “I think it just getting many perspectives...two heads are better than one...collaborating you get more ideas, you might not think about...that’s one immediate benefit you get from collaborating... With bullying that is something you want to stop right away.”

Half of the participants elaborated about the process of collaboration. The most important aspect of collaboration the participants described was the process they followed when collaborating about bullying. I found the processes they shared were more attuned to answer my first research question, “how do special education teachers describe collaboration about bullying?” than were any of the other responses. All of the participants described similar processes when responding to the interview question, “how do you describe one of your meetings or one of the situations you have collaborated regarding bullying with another colleague?” Teacher assistant Dominic and teacher assistant Nell, who have both been employed at the school for less than a year, along with veteran teacher Kenneth reported elaborated on a process of collaboration. Although each approach was different, each participant provided a process of how they collaborate with others regarding trying to solve a bullying problem. Dominic said the approach she used immediately began with collaboration about the bully, while Nell said the approach she

used began with collaboration about norms for each teacher to follow. Kenneth's approach began with an inquiry about the students involved in the incident.

Dominic shared the process her and her colleagues used when she collaborated with the other teachers regarding a discovery of a student bullying another student.

Dominic said:

We collaborate again, redirect it, start over again. We discuss how we can make things better. In the end, we'll decide on what kind of consequences; what should we do with the student(s). Should we send them out to (STP) [Stop, Think, and Process], a time-out room where students go to think about things they need to reflect on]? Or if they should stay in the classroom and just take the timeout? And then we would also talk to the student to process with them. We'll let them know well, bullying is not right.

Nell, one of the teacher assistants, spoke of a process, which included steps. Nell said the first thing the group does is to ensure everyone is "interpreting the situation the same." Then, Nell said, "Sometimes people's ideas and thoughts are different.... Once we have that established, we try to come up with a scenario on how we can make the situation better so, it won't happen again and ...elaborate on what was wrong."

In the process format Kenneth, a teacher, also included steps. Kenneth said the first thing his colleague and himself do is, "go over who was involved, what was said and what was done." Then the next step Kenneth elaborated about was figuring out who the aggressor(s) was followed by the aggressor's action. Afterwards, he reflected about why the aggressor(s) would pick on a certain kid. The process Kenneth shared he followed



when he collaborated with other colleagues consisted of Kenneth also saying: “First, we would go over who were the people involved.... Were they making themselves feel good...or is there some kind of feud...look for the motivation and then figure out from there...are we are going to talk to this kid privately.” Kenneth reported the rationale is to inform the kid he or she should not bully because there are consequences for bullying.

*Collaboration on reducing bullying and academic achievement.* In this subtheme, the research question is aligned with the theme. While everyone could not say that collaboration was the cause of increasing achievement, many participants said the effectiveness of collaboration helped academic achievement and reduced bullying. Otto, a veteran teacher said, “Collaboration is the key to reducing bullying, but there needs to be structure in the classroom.”

Buddy, a teacher, described collaboration with an idiom when he stated: “two heads are better than one.” When asked whether academic success was influenced by collaboration, Buddy felt academic success needed to be examined more. He said:

Where they are getting better and better, but there is still room for improvement. I will say as far as the classroom is going we are doing pretty good. And then it’s a matter of when you open that classroom up and you see where they are academically, you kinda look at their IEP goals where they are at and there are so many different levels that they are on sometimes there is a challenge to give them all the same work and then all of them think it’s way too easy and half of them think it’s impossible. And as the week goes on you kinda find a middle ground

but I think I'm better at differentiating what to give them and the staff that I collaborate with too, the aides in my room.

Similar to Otto's expression, Nell, a teacher assistant, said "collaboration is the big key when talking about bullying." Nicky, another veteran teacher felt collaboration with students to stop the bullying was not an easy task and expressed her opinion when she said:

We have to be consistent with our discipline immediately; the minute it is said, take a break and do a write up, but there are some who are a bit kinder...

Collaboration works for some kids, but some say "Oh, I don't care, write me up."

Although this research did not focus entirely on academic achievement, the data revealed that the participants perceived the students showed academic achievement as a result of their collaboration. Angie and David had similar viewpoints about academic achievement and bullying. Angie said, "we address behavior first...So the social learning and the social emotional growth is probably equal value as academic growth." David validated Angie's response when he said: "When you feel more comfortably socially and emotionally, it is amazing the progress you see academically."

Tee, a veteran counselor, speculated that being proactive is the precursor to reducing bullying when he said: "Academically they should improve...we're being proactive. We're catching the problem before it's a problem." Kenneth, a veteran teacher, felt his students were achieving academically. Kenneth expressed he is getting more out of his students as a result of collaboration.

A school's collaborative culture. The first research question contained a second theme titled, *a school's collaborative culture*. In this section I will discuss findings related to the three subthemes of the second theme, which are *culture of collaboration*, *synergy in formal and informal meetings*, and *trust based on a history of working together*.

***Culture of collaboration.*** The second theme addressed the first research question asking how special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying. In this section describing the first subtheme, I describe the culture the special education teachers participate in on a daily basis. This theme showed special education teachers and counselors who consistently collaborate on a daily basis had interjected a 'culture of support,' which they perceived has changed student bullying from decreased physical bullying to mostly verbal bullying. Many participants felt the most change had taken place is a result of having had more vested staff interested in collaborating daily.

While on one hand, David was optimistic about the change he saw in the culture of teacher support for the better, Tee expressed his apprehension about the elimination of bullying. David, a veteran counselor, reflected he believed the school had created a 'culture of support' because he has seen the students happier this year than previous years. As Tee, another veteran counselor, projected that bullying is a problem the school will continue to face, and he cited dialogue as part of the solution. According to Tee, bullying is discussed all of the time. He said, "Bullying is an ongoing thing because it's an ongoing problem. So, that is always going to be at some point, part of our dialogue working in this field because it's an ongoing thing."

Many of the participants reiterated David's reflection that the school culture has changed. In addition to David's reflection, Kenneth, a teacher, reported, "the culture has changed...and everyone is pretty much in sync to what is tolerated and what is not tolerated." Some participants who had been employees at the school the previous year reported the culture had changed "a little bit" because there was different staff this year. Those participants reported the staff this year seemed to be more invested in the students than some of the teachers who worked at the school last year. Now, they believe there is more of a change in the school climate in a positive manner for at least three reasons: because there is less physical bullying this year than last year, people are more invested in the students, and they collaborate more about bullying than they did last year.

When asked, "what type of bullying had teachers collaborated about?" the participants recalled various types including cyberbullying, overt bullying (i.e., hitting, grabbing, fighting) and covert bullying (i.e., being sneaky, mean-spirited, assaulting others, teasing, name calling, intimidation, antagonizing, throwing jabs, gender bullying, demeaning others, and saying hurtful, negative words). Covert bullying was mentioned more than any other type.

Tee, a counselor, shared an incident when a younger student was getting bullied on the bus by an older student. The younger child was to supply the older child with his juices. When the child did not have the juice for bully, the child was afraid to board the bus. It was at that moment when Tee approached the child and found out the status of the bullying. After speaking with the bully, the child no longer bullied that younger child. Some of the things Tee does to motivate the students to stop bullying includes

communicating and mediating with them. Tee projected that when the students adopt a positive culture as opposed to a negative culture, they may start to try to feel some empathy for their peers and change.

As a result of participants' observations in regard to less physical bullying, in addition to this year's teachers being most invested teachers and having collaborated more, all participants have reported they work together and help each other out. Billy, a veteran teacher, said he had collaborated with his colleagues "more this year than last because of the change" he sees in the culture. Billy interjected that his basis for saying that has to do with him seeing everyone helping each other out because it wasn't like that when he first got there last year. According to Billy, he has seen a lot more people who are there now who are more there for the kids. Billy acknowledged the culture made a difference in the change: "The culture has changed a little bit. We got some different staff, and it seemed like now the people that's here is more invested in their position. I want to say in that way. That's how it changed, the staff."

***Synergy in formal and informal meetings.*** This subtheme is aligned with the first research question. In this section, describing the second subtheme related to the second theme, there are descriptions of meetings from special education teachers and counselors. These participants describe their experiences while attending such meetings.

Nicky, a teacher, emphasized there has been collaboration in the school as a whole school. Each morning, the staff meet for a 5-minute formal morning announcements meeting. Nicky explained this meeting is held to provide everyone with an update of the events of the day. The meetings may be led by the principal or lead

person in charge. Information disseminated in the morning meetings may include teacher coverage in the event a teacher is absent and student behaviors. Nicky said: “If we hear something or if the principal has something interesting ...that might be applicable to a situation...she will bring that up for us to take a look at.”

Another formal meeting teachers and counselors participate in are IEP meetings. Otto, a teacher, referred to participating in an IEP meeting as a place where he feels powerful because he can advocate for his students. Otto said collaboration with the district representatives, who lead the meetings, is very effective in these meetings. Otto reported:

“When you get together with the district representatives and the principal and everybody’s here sitting around talking about how they can reach a child and how is he progressing...is really something that’s...very powerful. It lets you know...you feel...vested...on the kid’s behalf.”

Nicky, a teacher, discussed the rationale for a different type of formal meeting, such as when counselors present to teachers. Nell also interjected what the school had implemented as a result of a time when they met as a school group. One topic Nicky reported counselors had presented was assertiveness versus aggression. Nicky reported:

Based on problems we were having with students coming in the morning and being very upset by what happened...verbal aggression or bullying is now immediately discussed...with the kids...such as different coping mechanisms and ways to stop either bullying or being bullied.

When teachers were asked if they had participated in any collaborative groups, 4 participants reported they participated PLCs at their old school; four participants reported they had participated in study groups; and two participants had participated workshops. Two participants reported they had only attended the meetings at the school. Nicky was vehemently against implementing a PLC. She pointed out that since they collaborate daily, PLCs are not needed as she emulated a bullying incident:

Well it happened to me, too bad, I don't care, but they do care and they are in so much pain in their own past that they cannot feel kindness towards others. They are hurting themselves and they can't feel anything towards somebody else. It's what it comes down to. So we don't need to do any of these professional learning communities. We collaborate among ourselves in this building, we see much hurt and pain and hear so much violence, sexual abuse, physical abuse.

The data revealed the majority of teacher collaboration takes place in this school during informal meetings. Most teachers reported they meet afterschool to collaborate about the day and what pedagogy they can utilize to prevent the increase of bullying behaviors. Nell, a teacher, explained how teamwork is a part of collaboration and as a result of it her and her colleagues have prospered a lot through their collaboration. Nell said when colleagues are working together, you have to show that you all work together as a team to the students. Nell said, "It's no metaphor, because you don't ask mommy for something and mommy says no, you go ask daddy."

Nell reported that working together has shown students the teachers are a team and the team has brought a strong communication they have with their classroom

students. Nell said that after the children are dismissed at the end of the day, the staff has a 45-minute break. Nell said while in collaboration about a bullying situation, a decision is made to follow through on whatever decision is made about the situation. Nell pointed out collaboration in an informal meeting in reference to bullying taking place at the end of the day, “We collaborate on...how we can make it better. If we have to do sitting arrangements...take away some of their incentives...we can, to de-escalate it.”

Brittany reported she is a big advocate about communicating with fellow co-workers. Brittany’s rationale for saying “collaboration is essential” is evident when she stated she purposefully enjoys collaboration. Brittany said:

I am definitely the type of person who enjoys having that kind of conversation in seeing...how we can kind of figure out...what might be appropriate for that student...Maybe what might not be working so much and seeing do we have any other ideas we might have for this student.

Dominic, a teacher, explained a time when she attended an informal meeting. Dominic said she continued to discuss with her colleagues the same bullying issue in an afterschool meeting until it was resolved. Dominic said it took 2 days. Dominic stated, “Once the kids leave we talk...about what can we do to make it better tomorrow. We try to figure out ways to make it a better day for the students. I think when you communicate... It makes a difference.” Dominic reported they work together and trust each other to know they will stand firm on an agreement.

***Trust based on a history of working together.*** The last of the subthemes related to the second theme, is aligned with RQ1. In this section, I provide two descriptions



about how trust was developed over the years. One description is from Angie, a special education teacher who has been at the school for over a year. The other one is from Buddy, a special education teacher who has been at the school for less than a year. According to the participants, the development of trust transitioned into working together to eliminate bullying.

Angie's explanation of why the staff works so well together is because there is a prevalence of trust. Angie said "trust is based on a history of working together. It brings respect and brings forth relationships." Angie shared the team in her wing has worked together for several school years now. Angie said they might get complacent with one another, but they do listen to each other and "the trust relationship goes across everything they do." Angie reported that as a result of their history they have been able to maybe think outside of the box or accept another person's plan because of the trust they have built over the years. Angie said she thinks collaboration works out very, very well. She said she is very trusting and willing to continue to establish collaborative efforts to continue to make a difference: "The history we have together, we have a lot of trust, and because of that trust, we can come up with ideas and say, 'Okay, we'll give it a try.' I might not agree with it, but let's see if it works."

Some participants mentioned trust, open collaborations, systems, and needing to create a culture in order to create a balance. On one hand, some of the participants discussed the complacency teachers might encounter from time to time, even stating the culture could be improved. On the other hand, many participants discussed how teachers were vested because they listen to one another and try to build upon what they have in

addition to how to make what they have even better. According to Buddy's experience at the school, there is a lot of shared responsibility and a lot of "stuff" divvied up. Buddy said:

We would collaborate on...teaching math and reading and...what students need...Some students need a lot of differentiation...we can't split it by subject cause some subjects we kind of cut in half...And the same in behavior management...we trust each other to get things done.

**Pedagogy influenced by collaboration on bullying.** The third theme addresses the second research question, how does collaboration about bullying amongst special education teachers and staff regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum. The third theme, *pedagogy influenced by collaboration on bullying*, demonstrated how collaboration was influenced by pedagogy. The subthemes under the third theme are: *pedagogical knowledge gained, the implementation of pedagogy, and emotional responses.*

***Pedagogical knowledge gained.*** In this the theme, gained pedagogical knowledge is aligned with the second research question and third subtheme. The pedagogical knowledge gained is necessary to implement pedagogy. In this section, I provide a few explanations the participants shared about how they gained pedagogical knowledge regarding bullying.

Dominic explained a time when she gained knowledge. Dominic gave an example of a child who was running around the classroom at inopportune times. When he sat

down in a reading group with others, he would kick his classmates under the table. After collaboration with her colleagues, it was determined that the student needed to sit alone. Dominic reported she learned that by observing the behaviors, she could better collaborate about what pedagogy to implement to stop the behavior. Dominic reported that her team did a lot and reflected about how her mom would always tell her “if you stay on top of things you’ll see a change, and a difference and people will take you more seriously.”

Brittany reported that she believes her “gained knowledge is beneficial.” As a result of working with “students who have behavioral needs,” Brittany reported oftentimes she has “to put on different hats and jump in and be able to be pretty flexible.” Brittany said she has learned that, “Knowing how that student was able to be successful and what works best for them is kind of key...I have had to plug and chug to see what’s going to be beneficial for them.”

While Dominic and Brittany expressed similar descriptions, Kenneth said he learned through observation more so than collaboration:

I saw how other teachers...handle kids in different situations...they were tough like professionals. I picked up a lot from them, especially that part about...the more agitated the kid, the more you have to be in a situation. I’ve learned a lot from observing.

***The implementation of pedagogy.*** The implementation of pedagogy is the subtheme. It is aligned with the second research question and the third theme. It demonstrates the collaborative influences on pedagogical knowledge. In an effort to

minimize bullying, all of the participants provided rich descriptions of times when they had implemented pedagogy focused on bullying. However, I have provided descriptions to demonstrate the range of pedagogy that was influenced based on collaboration.

Otto, a teacher, said when physical assaults transitioned into verbal assaults, (because the physical assaults had decreased), he turned to the gym teacher to collaborate with on a bullying problem. Otto said he also collaborated with the counselors, as well as other teachers. Otto shared a situation, “I had a student come to me and...the gym teacher with the same concern of being bullied verbally by a kid in my class that is pretty much a known bully.” He and the gym teacher agreed to monitor the two boys and decided “when he’s not busy teaching gym, he could pop over...to observe. We just think...the bully knows we are... keeping an eye on him.”

One example of implementation of pedagogy came from Dominic, a teacher, who told of a time when teachers collaborated about a bully. Dominic said that “when you put a lot of brains together, you come up with ways to make things better.” Dominic said when they collaborated about how to keep the class bully from kicking the other students, they decided to “just change the desks around.” Dominic pointed out their routine to deal with a bullying issue that occurred in the spur of a moment changed after collaboration. Dominic said:

When I was in the middle of a lesson when I had a student keep repeating behaviors and I would give him a few chances to stop. If he does not stop, he can go to STP for a break...or I will just make a point and just move their entire desk.

Dominic reported that her and her colleagues moved desks the first couple of weeks: “Every student’s desk got moved at least once...The simple change in the physical arrangement of desks made a world of difference for everyone...We kept trying different methods until one worked.”

Brittany, one of the counselors, explained that collaboration about bullying provides a better understanding of what she might be able to do differently in her approach. When taking the opportunity to meet after school, some teachers said they spend time talking about how they can make lessons better. Many participants said another strategy that could help reduce the bullying problem would be using incentives. Participants said collaborating about setting goals and making decisions to set classroom goals in order to earn classroom incentives is another strategy.

Tee, another counselor, said pizza is a “big motivator” to help students stay on task. He said feeling empathy “can be contagious.” Tee suggested that when students begin to feel empathetic, they help each other to not bully.

***Emotional responses.*** This subtheme is aligned with the second research question and third theme. Emotional responses were acknowledged by participants when they encountered a bullying situation. Participants reported they have feelings, but must contain them within the classroom around the students. In this section, I will provide quotes of how some teachers described their feelings.

Some teachers reported how surprised they were that some kids did not realize the impact of bullying. Almost all of the participants reported they have learned to stay calm when the bullying begins for several reasons. Buddy, a teacher who has been at the

school for a short period of time, explained that although he has gotten flustered, the kids get all worked up, which causes the day to be more chaotic when the teacher had gotten mad in the past. Nicky, a veteran teacher, explained one reason bullying can escalate to something else is that the fluid environment changes and it can be very volatile at times because kids are angry. Nicky reported “some of the kids are shelter kids that bully because they get bullied.” Nicky also said:

Sometimes the bullying can be a defense mechanism too because they have been bullied for whatever reason. So when you tell them “stop it, why do you do that?”, sometimes you see the pain on their faces because they don’t want to say ‘Hey I got bullied’... Independently, sometimes the tears come and they say, ‘Well it happened to me, too bad, I don’t care’, but they do care and they are in so much pain in their own past that they cannot feel kindness towards others. They are hurting themselves and they can’t feel anything towards somebody else.

Otto, another veteran teacher, said collaboration is very powerful and Otto felt vested in his classroom. So, when a student was physically assaulting another student in Otto’s classroom, he reported he had to stay calm about it.

Nell, a teacher assistant, reported a time when she was hurt because a group of bullies conspired and actually damaged an emotional support item another child had been bringing to school since she had been enrolled in the school. Nell reported most new students like to come in and show off, which is how she thinks this situation unfolded in the first place. Nell said:

Some of them have been in the classroom with this particular child for over 3, 4 years, so they know her... I felt that if they knew that it was going to happen, then somehow should have maybe stopped it...I was hurt.

Nicky said she is glad she chose special education and she allows God to guide her in reference to her feelings about choosing to go into the special education field.

Nicky said: “There were many, many factors that kind of pushed me into special education and I think that molded this... I am grateful I chose special education. I think God guides me too in this and those are all factors.”

**Knowledge influenced by collaboration.** The second research question addressed by the fourth theme *knowledge influenced by collaboration*. There are no subthemes. This theme demonstrates the content knowledge gained about bullying when participants collaborate about bullying. Out of the 12 participants, 11 said they had gained knowledge about bullying when they collaborated about it. While most teachers and counselors reported they had gained knowledge about bullying from one another, three teachers reported they had also learned from collaborating with the counselors. David, a counselor, reported “collaborating about bullying makes everybody more aware of it... allows you to see the little things that happen.”

Otto, a teacher, expressed an analogy. In his analogy, Otto said he learned from counselors to identify stressors. Otto said when he began to identify and talk about stressors, he became less stressed than before when he did not collaborate about stress. Otto applied that concept to collaboration saying, “the more we collaborate about bullying, the more educated we are, the better off we will be.” Otto was very informative

and exhibited beliefs that reflected in his passion to help. Otto applied what he learned from coaching to teaching, i.e. stopping the problem and coaching about good strategies to get immediately back into the game. Otto said he gained knowledge by collaborating with the speech therapist, occupational therapist, and counselors, as well as his sports coach. Otto reported:

I learned from a basketball coach...to coach good behavior. When somebody... did something wrong or that he didn't like, he immediately turned to the people...and coached to it. I thought that was so cool because they know what's right.

Angie, a teacher, talked about how she gained knowledge about bullying as a result of the social workers' and counselors' collaboration in a meeting. Angie reported what she learned was a lot about the proper language to use with students when addressing bullying. Angie said she and her colleagues are now in the process of using a common language when they collaborate about bullying. Angie said that when everyone uses "the same language, the students see everyone is on the same page. Then the students get the same message... so that all the adults around them are on the same page and the students are hearing the same message."

Not everyone reported they learned via collaboration. Teacher Kenneth reported he gained knowledge first by observation. Then Kenneth described the way he assimilated and extrapolated information. Kenneth said, "I'm always willing to sponge off of somebody else's ideas...and I saw how other teachers and teacher assistants handle



kids in different situations...I've learned a lot from observing...eventually taking part and doing that same kind of thing.”

Many of the participants acknowledged they learned that kids today are much more sensitive to things said to them or about them. Nell expressed collaboration means a lot, and a person should try to get as much knowledge from collaboration in order for it to be effective especially within a classroom and with colleagues. Nell reported she gained knowledge by collaborating, reading, and incorporating what she had learned into the lessons. Nell said:

You can't go off of what you know, you have to have teamwork and collaboration is the key. Collaborating about bullying makes everybody more aware of it... and you can be proactive...Collaboration helped me because the things that I didn't know, the teachers shared with me that to see other forms of bullying that were subtle.

Many participants reported they gained knowledge through experiences. For example, some teachers admitted they had been bullied, which inspired them to advocate for good behavior. Others admitted the years of experience they had working with kids helped them to learn what to do in bullying situations. Blue, a veteran teacher, said he learned through collaborations and then through experiences.

Many participants gained knowledge about bullying, saying that after they had collaborated, they implemented the knowledge they collaborated about. Some of those participants learned by what counselor Brittany discussed as “plug and chug,” which is implementing what was learned via collaboration and seeing if it works. If the strategy

did not work participants would try another one and continue to change the strategies until one worked to reduce the bullying behaviors. So, trying one method and if it does not work, then plugging in another one, continuously changing methods until one works.

Brittany reported student behavior while changing methods can be difficult:

Some students respond well to [a] direct [approach]; in a direct approach, others might shut down...noticing what could be helpful for each individual student...the nice thing ...for teachers is when there is something happening in class they are very quick to manage it...I can help the student process through it.

Although teacher Otto said he learned about bullying when collaborating with counselors and his basketball coach, he also reported he had gained knowledge via constant collaboration with other colleagues. Otto reported one thing he had learned was how to organize his classroom better, which helped him to better deal with student bullying issues. Another thing Otto reported he learned was how to gain support when he collaborated with a gym teacher. About the organized classroom Otto said:

We built a solid profile on a kid that we could reach and grab at any time and tell you exactly what his goals or her goals are, how many minutes they were receiving, what the parents' personality is, what the parent values, what the kid values... what we gained out of it was just becoming very organized...Now, the gym teacher and I work together to spot bullying. Because we don't tolerate bullying and we have to try to cut down on the frequency of it. And we decided to do it through collaborating.

**The school curriculum and initiative.** Also addressing the second research

question, which is: How does collaboration amongst special education teachers and staff regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum? is the final theme, the school curriculum and initiative. The final theme consists of three subthemes. One is the bullying curriculum, one is the bullying initiative, and the last one is making teacher-student connections.

*The bullying curriculum.* The bullying curriculum is aligned with the second research question. In this first subtheme of the fifth theme, I will elaborate about when the bullying curriculum is most implemented in the school, how it is derived and provide an example of how it is implemented within a classroom. While collaboration has influenced pedagogy, a few teachers have said curriculum has also been influenced by collaboration, but on a small scale. For one month out of the academic year, the school implemented an anti-bullying curriculum, which was influenced by collaboration. Coordinated by counselor David, teachers met with counselors to collaborate about what they would present and how they would present it to the children. They put up posters around the school and focused academic learning around the topic of bullying groups more at this time of the year than any other time. Some teachers acknowledged they needed an ongoing awareness of the problem because bullying goes on throughout the year. The participants also acknowledged that bullying is an ongoing concern outside of the school, as well as inside due to cyberbullying on social media

Some participants discussed the depth of cyberbullying and how they have to stay on top of it. Participants say they collaborate about what happens as soon as the day

begins because most of the time students cyberbully outside of school. Tee, a counselor, said as a result of cyberbullying outside of school, “stuff gets spilled into the school the next day and the staff has to address it.”

Billy, a teacher, and another teacher co-teach in a classroom together. Billy discussed that after collaborating with his colleague, they have implemented classroom assignments in regard to bullying. In one assignment, Billy said he talked about bullying with the students first. Billy described the discussion entailed what the victim could do in certain instances. After the discussion, Billy and his co-teacher gave the students a skills development assignment to turn in to them, which focused on the bullying discussion. Billy said: “The classroom assignment that we do was about themes on that month... could be a theme like for bullying... where we talk about bullying and what you could do in certain instances where if you feel you are being bullied.”

Many of the participants reported they have gained experience in how to address bullying via trial and error. For example, after observation of a bullying incident, they collaborated about how they were going to address the incident. Then they followed through on the pedagogy, and if it did not work, they collaborated more until they found a strategy that does work. What they described is what Brittany, a counselor, reported to be *plug and chug*. Some participants mentioned that because their population is so unique, they have to apply different strategies to different situations. They reported there are instances when they can apply some uniform discipline rules.

***The bullying initiative.*** The bullying initiative aligns with the second research question. In this second subtheme related to the fifth theme, I will describe the responses

I received when I queried them about what initiative they implemented in their school. Afterwards, I will provide quotes from participants describing the initiative in more detail, as well as describing implementation of the initiative.

The students get to participate in after school games as an incentive for good behavior. In the incentive-based approach, Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) is the initiative the school was implementing to reduce bullying. In this model, participants immediately address the bullying problem by following the bully protocol. Eight out of the 12 participants were aware of the name of the initiative and provided a description of the PBIS initiative. Two participants were able to describe the initiative, but they did not know the name of the initiative. However, two participants did not identify the name or provide a description of the PBIS initiative. they were implementing the PBIS initiative. Nine out of the 12 participants indicated they needed to take quick action as a result of a bullying incident because it was the most effective way to stop bullying behaviors. Although the other three participants did not report that, that does not mean they did not act. David, a counselor, explained that they make reports about students' behaviors on a daily basis. Each report is called a "write up."

Buddy, a teacher, explained that PBIS is a program the staff uses to make reports about daily student behaviors. Buddy described a behavior a student could get a write up for is not following directions. I was informed this behavior "is always going to end up in a report." Buddy reported after identifying the behaviors, one of the counselors will eventually inform the bully that the staff is aware of his actions. Buddy said they:

Always identify what the behaviors are exactly... We get a lot of bullying, and a lot of...types of behaviors are consistent... We can step in to let the student know that we know what they are doing and we are watching. There is a record of all student behaviors available for review over time. The reports show the number of incidents, what the incident entailed and the consequences for the incident. An incident is reported to the principal by email ... counselors follow up with the teachers and address the problem.

Tee, who is a counselor, described a way student he believed students could earn incentives and stop bullying. Tee felt if the teachers would implement this idea, they would assist students in stopping the bullying because the students would get something they like. Tee said:

[The teachers] need to identify exact behaviors. Once the behavior is identified, the teachers and counselors cooperate...to establish a consequence. This is followed by making sure the student is accountable...Bullying is definitely not being on task...Food...especially a pizza party for the kids who don't feed into this negative culture is a big motivator...When they adopt the positive culture as opposed to a negative culture...they start to step up as peers.

Some teachers reported students who do not bully or are not behavior problems receive incentives such as trips, and allowance to participate on sports teams like soccer, or baseball teams. Many participants reported having bullying incidents daily. One teacher acknowledged having minimal write ups. Nicky discussed having bullying incidents "constantly." When asked what type of bullying participants had collaborated

about, the participants responded readily. However, many of the responses were different. Cyberbullying was mentioned twice, overt bullying, i.e. hitting, grabbing, and fighting, was mentioned five times and covert bullying, i.e. sneaky, mean-spirited, assaults, teasing, name calling, intimidation, antagonizing, throwing jabs, gender bullying, demeaning, hurtful, and negative words was mentioned 15 times.

Teacher Otto felt empathetic about one of his students as he reflected on the covert bullying this student encounters on a daily occurrence. Otto said he was wondering how to help a kid have a decent day because one child was being bullied daily. Otto felt empathy for the student. This covert type of bullying Otto discussed coincided with what the other participants said which was:

Verbal stuff...where there's verbal assault. Where kids calling another one gay.

And fag...Walking past the kid's desk and telling him he's a faggot... in the past, there's been even some physical bullying. But not so much anymore...the physical stuff has manifested to verbal.

***Making teacher-student connections.*** Another subtheme aligned with the second research question is *making teacher-student connections*. This subtheme is related to the fifth theme. Most participants said they learned to reduce bullying by making connections with students. Participants say they achieve this bullying reduction by collaborating with the students, building relationships with students, making connections with students, and engaging in conversation with one another, as well as with students

Tee, a counselor, discussed “catching problems by being proactive.” One example he gave was a scenario of a very sensitive student getting angry when something is being said by one of her classmates about her. Tee said:

We’re just trying to figure out where to keep our eyes on [the bullies] and kind of judge what her mood is...We work together in conjunction...to gauge where a kid’s head is when they come in the door...So they can get their thoughts together and then kind of ease them in class...because sometimes they had bad mornings at home. Stuff we don’t even see or know about, or social media... There’s a lot of online bullying...kids saying things, threatening behavior that will send certain students over the edge; maybe prevent them from coming to school altogether. They feel like they’re being ganged up on, so trying to teach some of these students how to use social media... and how to not have people that they feel threatened by as friends on social media.

While many teachers elaborated on trust among each other, Blue, a teacher, elaborated about trust when making teacher-student connections. Blue talked about his rationale for believing students trust him and why he believes it is an ongoing battle to continue to maintain their trust., “Blue said:

I am very transparent...honest...they can see that I care...and [am] invested in them. I go to their games...show a true interest. I am very consistent...a positive example...[I] have proven that...I am a person they can trust...I listen to them...[I] have seen some students change.



Blue recalled a time when he made a teacher-student connection. This took place when he attended the sports games afterschool. Blue elaborated on the kids seeing him and colleagues care about them. Blue shared the students see he is invested when they see him at their afterschool sports games. Blue said he continues to attend the games. Blue determined that as a result of his connections, students trust him and tell him about bullying incidents. Blue concluded that “when they go home, they live in a wild situation.” Blue explained that this separation from the school makes it difficult to regain the students trust.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 described the emerging themes from the data analysis. Data were analyzed from face-to-face interviews and telephone interviews with special education teachers and counselors. In Chapter 4, I provided an explanation of the setting, demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and results, as well as presented the findings in each research question.

The findings of this data analysis related to the dynamics of collaboration special education teachers and counselors participate in when they collaborate about bullying. The findings indicated the participants ‘understanding of the process special education teachers use when they engage in collaboration on the reduction of the bullying problem. In response to RQ 1, the findings indicated most of the participants perceived they collaborated about bullying daily and found ways to address bullying by following a process. The collaboration tends to follow a cyclical social process. All participants

reported they do not tolerate bullying and collaborate about it in an informal meeting immediately to ensure it stops.

In relation to RQ 2, the findings indicated knowledge was influenced by a cycle of reflection, a supportive culture, trust for one another, and most of all, working together; and while dealing with the bullying encounter, staying calm. The pedagogy was influenced by the types of bullying behaviors students displayed in the moment. The major type of bullying consisted of mostly covert bullying. Teachers perceived their own experiences and collaboration with colleagues as the most effective way to choose pedagogy to stop bullying. Taking quick action to address the bullying behaviors was also presented as an influential factor in choosing pedagogy. Additionally, teachers discussed pedagogy as being influenced by counselor presentations and collaborations with all staff. While the PBIS initiative was implemented, the curriculum was most influenced by collaboration around the bully awareness month because teachers and or counselors collaborate about bullying curriculum more at this time of the year. Additionally, curriculum was also influenced by special education teacher and counselor interest.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the research findings. I will provide a conclusion of the study. Additionally, I will conclude the chapter with recommendations for action.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the process 12 special education teachers and counselors used when they collaborated on reducing the bullying problem in their small school for special education students. The key findings of this study emerged from participants' descriptions of collaboration and the influence of collaboration on their knowledge, the pedagogy they used, and their use of the curricula.

Here are the findings related to RQ1: How do special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying indicated participants described collaboration as a process. Participants who described collaboration as the process, tended to use a cyclical process until the appropriate pedagogy was reached in order to eliminate or decrease the undesirable behaviors. Each collaboration about the process resulted in an agreement to follow through on the participants' decision to try a pedagogy and observe whether it worked or not. Synergy was evident when the participants continued to hold meetings until an agreed upon solution to deal with the bullying issue(s) was found.

Here are the findings related to RQ 2: How does special education teachers' collaboration regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum? All of the participants gained knowledge about how to engage with students involved via collaboration and how to implement effective pedagogy; they also gained experience in how to choose appropriate curricula. All of the participants reported they were calm when they encountered bullying incidents and addressed the incidents as soon as they were brought to their attention.

In this chapter, I present the interpretation of the findings and describe limitations of the study. I discuss recommendations for future research and recommendations for action. Additionally, I present implications for social change.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

In this section I interpreted the findings of this research from two perspectives. I looked at each of the five themes from the perspective of my conceptual framework. I also reviewed the empirical literature analyzed in Chapter 2 as they pertain to both RQs.

#### **Interpretation of Themes Relating to RQ 1**

The purpose of RQ1 was to understand how the participants describe the process they use when they collaborate about bullying. I will interpret each theme, first through the lens of the conceptual framework and then in the context of the related empirical literature.

**Value of collaboration in special education.** The findings of my study and related empirical literature, as well as theory suggest the key values of collaboration in special education include reduced bullying and academic achievement. In this section, I will interpret the participants rationale in regard to the value collaboration was perceived to have among the special education participants and in the special education setting. The majority of participants' descriptions of their collaboration about bullying were either describing collaboration as a purpose and or process and were ubiquitous. This finding is similar to Montiel-Overall's (2005) claim that collaboration is a ubiquitous term. Montiel-Overall defined collaboration as a process in which two or more teachers work together to integrate information to enhance student learning, and my findings validate

that definition (Montiel-Overall, 2005). Additionally, the participants described their collaboration as purposeful collaboration, as in Harris' (2014) reference to collaboration as one way of ensuring coherence or consistency. Collaboration had a value for these special education teachers because they perceived it was, in part, effective in ensuring consistency.

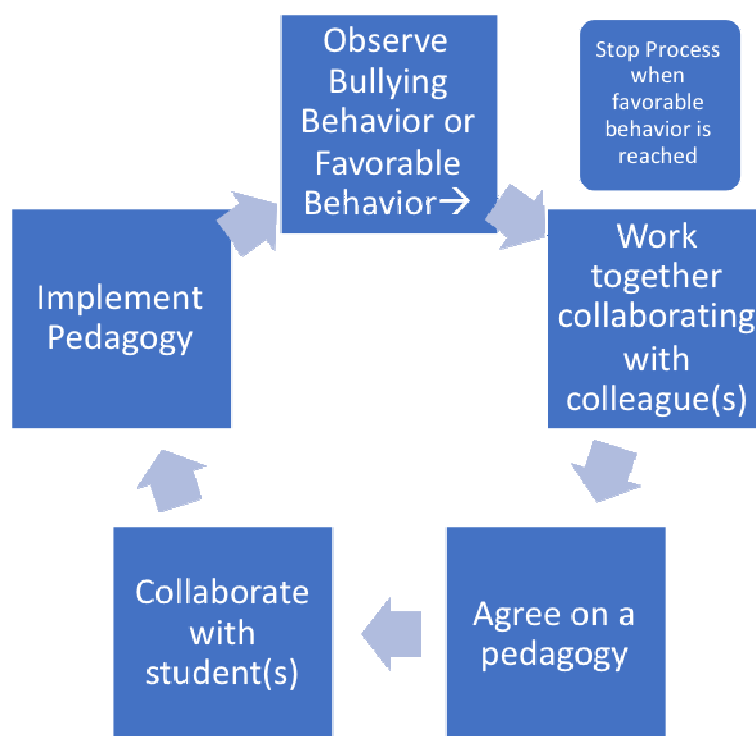
Results of the research show collaboration at this school is similar to Montiel-Overall's four models, especially, Model B-cooperation/partnership model. In this model, as in my research, teachers and or counselors consistently collaborate in a cooperative manner. Similar to Murphy's (2015) study, the participants found their learning about bullying and their special education students unfolded as a process among cooperative partners. About half of the participants in my study elaborated about the process of collaboration as the most vital means of achieving their objective(s).

I have found two types of processes the participants engaged in: social and cyclical processes. The social process, having to do with working together, can be equivalent to high-quality collegial communication as defined by Richard (2012). The results demonstrated the togetherness and mutual respect expected among a group of teachers who depend on each other to help one another understand presented ideas among each other, as in the Richard (2012) study, when he elaborated about high-quality collegial communication. Additionally, the cyclic process that participants from the academy elaborated about in response to the interview questions confirmed various steps participants continuously used until they received satisfactory behavioral outcomes. If the

last step was reached and the outcome was not satisfactorily, the participants reported they would follow the steps all over again.

In this cyclic process the participants collaborated about solving the bullying issue in a social manner. Both the social and cyclic processes helped them reach a favorable outcome, which I have captured in the collaborative cyclical social process. For example, as illustrated by the findings in Chapter 4, the first step consists of the teacher or counselor observing the unfavorable behavior(s). In the second step, the observant works together collaborating with colleagues in a social setting. Step three consists of colleagues making an agreement to implement a pedagogy they believe may work to solve the bullying issue(s). After an agreement has been made, at least one of the colleagues will collaborate with the student to ensure the student understands what pedagogy and or behavior(s) he or she is expected to implement to solve the bullying problem. This is step four. The next step is crucial because in this step five, the student is expected to follow through on the implementation of the pedagogy he or she was instructed to perform. If there is a good teacher-student relationship, and the student trusts the teacher and or counselor who is relaying the message to the student, then it is expected the student will comply. If the relationship has not been built, there is a possibility the student may not follow through. The final step is step six, where the student is observed in compliance of the pedagogy, he or she was expected to follow through on. After carefully reviewing the process the participants reported they used when they collaborated about bullying, I studied their processes and combined the similarities into a workable cycle. Then, I realized I could combine the social process that

Richard (2012) elaborated about and the cyclical process to create the collaborative cyclical social process. The realization caused a revelation that this collaborative cyclical social process are the dynamics of special education teacher's collaboration about bullying (see Figure 1). The collaborative cyclical social process can make provisions for special education teachers and counselors to collaborate regarding their knowledge gained throughout the school.



*Figure 1.* Collaborative cyclical social process.

\*Social process and collaboration process based on the academy's participant responses.

Understanding why students bully one another helps special education teachers to collaborate more effectively. Habashy-Hussein's (2013) findings indicated that the school climate should be an environment conducive to teaching and learning, which allow students to learn academically and teachers to teach in a safe environment. One participant noted the school environment was fluid, which contained some angry kids who may sometimes use bullying as a defense mechanism. According to Lam (2015), students who bully because they are angry are said to have been bullied themselves. Lam's (2015) study also indicated victims may have externalizing problems such as truancy. The participants in my study demonstrated such awareness of students' behavior, as when Tee cited lack of structure at home, lack of supervision, and the inability to make sensible decisions as reasons for kids attending school angry and ready to bully.

While Schneider (2012) stated that incidents of bullying raise concerns about what impact bullying may have on student academic outcomes, Lam's (2015) study found where externalized problems existed, victims may also experience poor academic performance. However, Grumm and Hein's (2013) study pointed out the effectiveness of collaboration helped achievement and reduced bullying. Ronfeldt's (2015) study argued that reformers have encouraged teacher collaboration to increase student achievement. Ronfeldt's study also argued that teacher collaboration correlates with student achievement. Most of the participants in my study indicated bullying decreased when they collaborated about it, citing consistency, structure, and immediacy as attributes for effective outcomes in their collaborations and teaching style. Veenstra's (2015) study



also concluded that teachers who experienced high effectiveness also had minimal bullying in their classrooms. Teachers in my study emphasized the effectiveness of their collaboration when they used collaboration as a strategy with students to reduce bullying.

Veenstra (2015) also pointed to the comfortability of teachers' collaboration as contributing to students' academic progress. Participants in my study show similarities to Veenstra (2015) finding on teacher comfortability in collaboration with others.

Veenstra concluded that two prerequisites are needed to cause students to more likely report bullying to teachers. One is when teachers show they are comfortable with collaborating about the topic. The second prerequisite is when teachers have prioritized the reduction of bullying just as the participants in my study elaborated about how they handle bullying incidents with immediacy. In essence, as participants feel more comfortable about collaborating about bullying, the students are more academically successful because the bullying is kept to a minimal. Comparison of my findings with the existing empirical literature and the conceptual framework of Montiel's model of collaboration supports my conclusion that collaboration is valuable in special education because: (a) it is a purposeful, (b) helps to understand why bullies bully, (c) and when teachers feel comfortable in collaborating, it may be more effective in increased student achievement and bully reduction.

**A school's collaborative culture.** Regarding this theme, I will interpret the collaborative culture the participants portrayed. One place the culture of a school is evident is in meetings and the participants reported most informal meetings were in regard to bullying. The teachers revealed that after school they collaborate about how the

outcome of the day unfolded. Montiel-Overall's (2005) four models encompassing different types of collaboration, which she stated, is needed to produce synergy. Synergy may be an aspect of a supportive culture in a school. The meetings described by participants reflected synergy, as well as the informal collaborative meetings held at various times in the school. The types of collaboration that the teachers participated in are reflective of all four of Montiel's model. This collaborative model was portrayed in the school during the month the anti-bully theme is implemented, which is similar to Montiel-Overall's (2005) four models. Model A is demonstrated when the meetings are held by the counselor who coordinates meetings for the anti-bully month theme. The collaborative efforts demonstrated in both formal and informal meetings participants attend are aligned with Model B, which produces synergy among collaborators. Model C is illustrated in the collaboration participants elaborated about when they determine the type of integrated pedagogy they will implement in the lessons. Model D is indicated in the integrated curriculum the participants collaborate about in regard to the anti-bully theme. Aspects of all four of Montiel-Overall's models contribute to the collaborative culture in the school.

Similar to Swearer and Espelage's (2011) study when they emphasized that people must get involved to reduce bullying, my study showed all of the participants were involved in several types of meetings, which most participants reported helped to reduce bullying. The formal meetings they participated in consisted of the 5-minute morning meetings, interdisciplinary IEP meetings held periodically, study groups and professional development. Some of the participants explained that some meetings are led

by the principal or some other people in authority such as counselors similar to the anti-bully month meetings aligned with Montiel-Overall's model A. As in this model, the coordinator plans the meetings. Participants also claimed teachers and or counselors may hold informal meetings similar to Murphy's (2015) study, which emphasized collaboration as a topic to gain positive results. Although the meetings in Murphy's (2015) study were not informal, the way the meetings were held the group followed a social format.

While Murphy's (2015) qualitative research study showed progressive results in teacher collaboration about teaching literacy to special education students, the participants in my study claimed progressive results in their collaborative efforts in regard to the subject of bullying. When informal meetings took place, they reported they were conducted as planned or a spur of the moment. These types of meetings, which are similar to those found in Murphy's study, demonstrate a collaborative and supportive culture where challenges have also shown professional and personal growth.

Growth can be evident when trust and respect are an essential part of the school culture. My research suggests trust is an attribute to working together, which participants reported as an attribute to also reduce bullying. O'Brennan (2014), reported that fostering support and trust among staff members, including teachers, may reduce bullying rates. Angie said that trust was based on a history of working together and it went across everything they do. She interjected that trust does not only bring forth respect, but it also brings forth relationships. Trust and respect were contributing factors in the school's culture, which participants reported encouraged them to work together and come up with

pedagogy to try. While participants were collaborating about how to reduce bullying, they respected and trusted “each other to get things done.”

### **Interpretation of Themes Relating to RQ2**

In regard to RQ2 my aim was to explore if changes had occurred in the aspects of knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and curricular knowledge based on collaboration about bullying. I wanted to see that if changes were made, if such changes were influenced by collaboration, and if so, were the influences beneficial in a way to reduce or eliminate bullying. The themes for this section are pedagogy influenced by collaboration, knowledge influenced by collaboration, and the school bullying curriculum and initiative. I will interpret the results first, in light of Shulman’s (1987) work and Montiel-Overall’s (2005) work as part of my conceptual framework, and then in the context of my empirical research.

**Pedagogy influenced by collaboration.** My research findings parallel with Shulman’s (1987) model in regard to pedagogical knowledge, which is the second type of knowledge Shulman discussed in his research. Regarding this theme, I will interpret how the participants utilized their pedagogical knowledge to reduce or eliminate bullying through the lens of Shulman’s framework. All but one participant gave an example of the pedagogy they used after having collaborated about a bullying incident. Within Shulman’s framework, pedagogy has to do with an exchange of thoughts to affirm experiences when teachers collaborate to obtain applicable information. Similar to Shulman’s concept of pedagogical knowledge, my study is demonstrative of participants exchanging their thoughts as they collaborated about how to reduce or eliminate bullying.

Just as Shulman (1987) argued that pedagogical knowledge goes beyond the subject matter, the results of my research show how teachers presented their understanding of what they knew by not only illustrating it, but by obtaining positive results because the illustration was “comprehensible to the students” (Shulman, 1987, p. 9). While Shulman (1987) indicated some examples of pedagogical knowledge could include using visuals, charts, analogies, illustrations, demonstrations, or explanations, participants in my study elaborated about also using (visual) videos, explanations, illustrations and room arrangements as ways to get students to understand the lesson. Participants reported their strategies came from their wisdom, experiences, observations, which were gained from collaboration and helped to reduce bullying.

This demonstration of pedagogical knowledge can be seen in two ways. First, understanding students’ misconceptions of what is being taught to them and secondly, understanding how to transform those misconceptions to instruct students in such a way that students overcome and change their initial concepts. These strategies of Shulman’s (1987) framework are reflected in the results of my study. Results suggested pedagogy was understood by my participants’ students, first, when the participants collaborated with the students about how to implement the pedagogy, then by implementation of the pedagogy to reduce bullying. However, the participants reflected about bullying encounters amongst themselves several times before they collaborated about pedagogy with students. My findings are similar to Shulman’s model because my findings imply that special education teachers may reflect on what pedagogy is necessary to use in order

to educate their special education students in getting along with one another. This implication is similar to Shulman's elaboration about reflection.

As reflected in Murphy's (2015) study found that over time, teachers were able to re-conceptualize their understanding of their special education students, which is similar to the same understandings as the participants in my study. The participants were also able to re-conceptualize their understandings of themselves in their roles by using self-reflection. Blue appeared to implement a cycle of reflection when collaborated about bullying with his colleague. After going home to reflect on the situation, Blue returned to the school and collaborated more and if necessary, he reflected more until he thought of a solution he felt might work. Additionally, reconceptualization was evident in my study when participants pointed out that not only did the students get emotional, but the participants got emotional also. The participants elaborated that at times when they collaborated or implemented pedagogy, they especially got emotional when they heard about or encountered bullying incidents. Participants in the study reported they had learned to stay calm when implementing pedagogy in relation to bullying, even when they felt hurt. This form of reconceptualization took place when participants reflected in their mind how they would react before they took action. One participant indicated she allows God to guide her in reference to her feelings.

Similar to the Murphy study, where collaborative learning communities' strategies were implemented to gain knowledge and an understanding of students, my study's participants implemented strategies for the same reasons. Other rationales that parallel with Murphy's participants' rationales for implementing pedagogy were

compassion, motivation, and a willingness to learn. In this section I have presented my interpretation about how pedagogical knowledge was influenced by collaboration to help reduce bullying.

**Knowledge influenced by collaboration.** Regarding this theme, I will interpret how the participants' knowledge about bullying has been influenced by collaboration. In the Shulman (1987) study, the first type of knowledge is content knowledge, which he explained is the amount of knowledge and the organization of knowledge in the teacher's mind. Shulman emphasized that pedagogical knowledge was built on professional knowledge. Hence, the participants in my study gained professional knowledge to implement pedagogy several ways; however, collaboration was most influential in participants gaining pedagogical knowledge, in addition to knowledge about bullying.

In my framework, I discussed Shulman's (1987) argument that a teacher must provide a rationale for why knowledge is warranted in a content area. Shulman stressed that pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge may combine into one field, which he termed pedagogical content knowledge. Similar to Shulman's postulation, my research found participants had reasons to collaborate about bullying, reflect on their experiences, and collaborate about how to change pedagogy until they found the right one to reduce or eliminate bullying. Professional knowledge was gained via collaboration as evident by my study when participants reported their knowledge was influenced by knowledge gained while in collaboration with one another.

Shulman's (1987) first type of knowledge is content knowledge. In my study, knowledge is influenced by collaboration, which is similar to Montiel-Overall's (2005)

Model B-partnership/cooperation. For instance, Dominic expounded on how she got a bully to stop kicking other students while sitting in a cooperative learning style classroom environment, demonstrating her attempt to assimilate and extrapolate new knowledge gained by collaboration. This example shows her rationale for why she needed to gain knowledge in the content area, which was to reduce bullying by using pedagogical knowledge, as Shulman argued in his research. By implementing new skills, she learned when she had collaborated about them, her knowledge was influenced by collaboration.

Duy (2013) reported teachers were not fully aware of the ramifications of bullying and tended to have a low level of intervention. Duy also elaborated about how teachers have difficulty in making decisions about whether students are experiencing bullying problems or not (Duy, 2013). On the contrary, most of the participants in my study reported knowledge they gained about bullying made them knowledgeable about what signs to look for when students bully one another. Similar to Murphy's (2015) study, my results showed most teachers and counselors became aware of bullying via collaboration amongst themselves.

Gaining knowledge about bullying was shown when participants reporting they had learned to use a common language and to incorporate it into the classroom. This new gained knowledge participants elaborated about they believed helped kids get the message to stop bullying. Murphy emphasized the collaborative learning communities study group taught the supportive strategies her participants learned to their special education students, after they engaged in collaboration (Murphy, 2015). While participants in this research did not follow any specific guideline to collaborate about



bullying, the research showed the participants gained knowledge via collaboration. This gained knowledge influenced how participants determined what to teach about bullying to reduce it. Fuller (2010) suggested that when teachers collaborate, they share knowledge gained from such collaboration with one another. Fuller also inserted that as a result of these collaborations, there is an increase in collective capacity of the overall organization.

**The school curriculum and initiative.** In this theme, the last theme in my findings, I interpret the results of the study based on implementation of the school curriculum and initiative. The bullying initiative the school implemented was the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports program (PBIS). Curricular knowledge is the third type of knowledge which Shulman (1987) argued was necessary for instruction. Shulman also emphasized the importance of teachers being able to decide if it was required to use a set of characteristics for a specific curriculum or program materials for specific topics. Shulman described is the necessity for the curriculum to have “a representation of a full range of programs designed for teachers to teach particular subjects at the appropriate developmental levels” (Shulman, 1987, pg. 10). Shulman (1987) emphasized in his study that teachers should be knowledgeable about the characteristics of the curriculum or program material.

Regarding bullying curriculum, participants indicated they were not privy to any specialized antibullying curriculum. However, they did indicate they collaborated about materials to use when they executed a month-long thematic unit on bullying during the anti-bullying month. Out of the 12 participants, a handful of teachers had indicated their

bullying curriculum had been developed by collaboration, but on a small scale.

Participants indicated it was necessary to provide ongoing awareness of the bullying problem throughout the academic year.

According to Montiel-Overall (2005), the experience of synergy will assist teachers in feeling like they want to develop curriculum together rather than developing it alone. In addition to Shulman's (1987) theory indicative of teachers having to be knowledgeable about curriculum, Montiel-Overall's theory encourages teachers to develop curriculum together. Although both theories were applicable in this study; teachers did not develop anti-bullying curriculum as a whole group, however, teachers were knowledgeable about the curriculum they taught their students because they were in-serviced on how to use the curriculum before they taught it.

Allen (2010) proposed an argument in favor of such school-wide initiatives. While Morgan (2012) and Espelage et al. (2014) contended that teacher intervention, as supported by such initiatives is a necessity, Eckes and Russo (2012) also argued that such programs and interventions have to be implemented with fidelity. Parallel to Eckes and Russo's (2012) and Morgan's (2012) argument that the teacher's role appears to be the most significant factor in ensuring that any bullying-reduction program works, a few participants indicated that they implemented the PBIS program initiative appropriately.

Eckes and Russo (2012) cited issues with the PBIS program's reliability of the office discipline referral measurement of the program and the limited research methodology in regard to the PBIS initiatives. While a few participants pointed out that as soon as an incident happens, it is recorded via write ups, and reported via email

immediately, everyone point out swift action was taken to stop the unfavorable behavior(s). A few participants indicated the overt bullying had decreased, however, my research showed the covert bullying had become more noticeable and cyberbullying had become continuous.

In regard to teacher-student connections, a web-based and telephone survey to staff and teachers conducted by O'Brennan, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) found staff connectedness increased with special education students and when teachers felt comfortable they intervened in bullying encounters. The findings of this research also found the same rationale for teacher connectedness with their students in this school.

The findings of my research found that when students are truant, they return to school angry. This anger may hinder the trusting relationship, making it difficult to regain trust again. Students surveyed reported that if teachers took an active role in intervening, students would report more times than they had in the past (Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2014). Most participants indicated they learned to reduce bullying by making connections with students by reducing overt bullying. These connections were achieved by collaborating with students, building relationships, as well as showing empathy when providing incentives for good behavior. One participant indicated that when students recognize teachers are invested in them, students begin to trust teachers. Consequently, students report to teachers about other students who bully.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While the purpose of my study was attained there were a couple of limitations. The first limitation consisted of conducting research with in a small school with a special

education population. The population of this school varies from time to time because some students attend the school for long and short periods of time. Therefore, the attendance of the students leaves the school's environment fluid as noted by Angie, one of the participants. The results of this study may not be applicable to schools which educate students who do not have learning difficulties or behavior problems in a special education school setting.

Another limitation was the collaborative school culture's approach may be different from those at other schools. At this school, the staff consistently collaborate throughout the day, especially regarding bullying. This school is committed to educating only special education students. Therefore, in order to manage the classroom, it may be incumbent on the educators at this school to seek various ways to create a solution to their bullying problems. Additionally, I chose to restrict my research to one school to explore the bullying problem on a small scale. This decision allowed me as the researcher to interview participants in a "supportive, nonconfrontational and gentle manner" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012) when the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee became personal the obligations are reciprocal.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

Following my review of this study's findings, the limitations of this study, and the literature review in Chapter 2, I have several recommendations for future research. First, I would endorse future studies to conduct research in regard to what impact collaboration could have on academic success. Although academic success was not a factor in this research, it was perceived by teachers that academics was not impacted to the point

where students were failing because of their collaborative efforts. It would be interesting to become knowledgeable about what influence collaboration about bullying has on academic success because the results of such research could play a vital role to help determine the reduction rate of bullying.

Next, I recommend future researchers extend the qualitative research design to include conducting this study at various types of schools. External validity was limited because I conducted the research at one school. The findings of this study suggested collaboration in these settings helped to reduce bullying. To further explore the specificity of collaboration and how collaboration can help teachers and or counselors reduce bullying, I recommend taking into consideration observation of special education teachers and or counselors collaborating, as well as observations of implementation of pedagogy in the classrooms. Findings of a study inclusive of observations could be beneficial to the special education population because it could help teachers gain pedagogical knowledge.

Originally, it was not clear how comfortable teachers were in collaborating about bullying. Findings from this study confirmed that special education teachers were comfortable in describing the process they use when they collaborate. Participants were also comfortable in collaborating about the pedagogy and curriculum they use to reduce bullying of special education students. I recommend that future studies compare the comfortability of special education teachers, as explored in Veenstra's (2015) study, to general education teachers' collaboration about bullying in regard to these topics. The

results of this study could provide additional findings on both types of teachers' collaborative dynamics and the reduction or elimination of bullying.

### **Recommendations for Action**

Schools in general are charged with preparing their students to succeed in life, academically and socially. To some, the task may be difficult, however, the charge is doable. The task at hand can be less difficult and achievable when all change agents collaborate for the betterment of the students. If the collaborative cyclical social process I suggested in Figure 1 would be implemented to reduce or eliminate bullying, favorable behavioral outcomes can occur. For this to occur, I propose the following recommendations from the findings of this research for others to consider when utilizing this research:

1. In addition to professional development for teachers, allocate specific times for all staff to collaborate about bullying incidents on site. As in the school, allocation of one hour daily, teachers can collaborate about pedagogical knowledge and implementation of pedagogy. I have learned that such meetings provide synergy to help teachers and or counselors build relationships, establish trust, and become comfortable with helping their students eliminate or reduce bullying.
2. Determine a common cyclical process while synthesizing the social process to follow when collaborating about bullying incidents (See Figure 1). What I have learned is that my data has shown that choosing to cycle through an

unfavorable behavior can help create a common language amongst teachers and or counselors and help to eliminate or reduce bullying behaviors.

3. Establish collaborative learning networks so participants can collaborate about bullying; whether it is online, via skype, or in person. An online site can help those who need to collaborate when school is dismissed. Participant Brittany elaborated about the chug and plug approach, which participants can use to try pedagogy and methods they want to implement. However, a site that is readily available when a teacher or counselor is ready to bounce their ideas off of each other as Brittany has also elaborated about can help teachers and or counselors think through their thoughts.
4. Collect a menu of pedagogical strategies staff could learn to utilize immediately when they encounter particular bullying incidents. In my research, I learned participants had gained knowledge about how to prevent bullying in various ways: through trial and error, trainings via workshops or professional development, observation and collaboration. Helping a teacher stay organized by placing the menu of strategies into a portfolio or binder would be a tremendous organizing tool. Therefore, I recommend that the coordinator of meetings or a volunteer combine the pedagogy which has been collaborated on and rendered a successful outcome get placed into a binder or into a file on the common drive of the computer. This binder or common drive could be readily available for teachers or counselors to consult.

5. Finally, whether an anti-bullying curriculum is developed or purchased by teachers and or counselors, I recommend that a curriculum is available for utilization by teachers and counselors on a consistent basis. I learned via my research that participants felt a consistent curriculum could help them eliminate some bullying encounters if they had curriculum readily available. According Shulman (1987) curriculum should be available for teachers to use if they need it. Teachers should also get trained to use curriculum (Shulman, 1987). Therefore, I am also recommending that everyone is trained to implement curriculum throughout the entire academic year.

### **Implications for Social Change**

The implications for positive social change include a clearer direction for special education teachers' and counselors' collaboration to reduce or prevent bullying as change agents. While the rise of bullying has encouraged new vigor to prevent it, teachers and counselors can contribute to a peaceful and inclusive society tolerating differences by teaching students to treat others appropriately. Since teachers and counselors work directly with students, they can directly address the bullying problems firsthand. The results of this study could be used as a guideline in formative evaluations about the dynamics of collaboration amongst special education teachers and counselors in regard to collaboration about the reduction or elimination of bullying. The collaborative cyclical social process could possibly become valuable to teachers and counselors I train to implement it.



The benefits of this study may contribute to the existing knowledge of special education teachers who focus on how teachers describe their collaboration about bullying. The results suggested that most of the participants perceived they collaborate about bullying daily and find ways to address bullying by following a cyclic process. The study suggested that none of the participants tolerated bullying. However, all of the participants were comfortable when collaborating about bullying in informal meetings to ensure the bullying stopped immediately. Additionally, the study suggested special education teachers and counselors may enhance their knowledge in regard to reducing bullying in their schools, as well as what to do in terms of pedagogy and what to use in terms of curriculum.

The results also recommended the participants' knowledge, pedagogy, and applied curriculum was influenced by the collaboration they engaged in on a consistent basis. Although academic achievement was not the focus of this research, the research suggested that collaboration about bullying could influence academic achievement. The research suggested the participants perceived that collaboration played a role in the reduction of overt bullying of special education students. The study suggested that knowledge was influenced by a cycle of reflection, a supportive culture, and trust for one another. The study suggested that working together was paramount to collaboration and while dealing with the bullying incidents everyone should stay calm.

The study suggested pedagogy was influenced by the types of bullying students displayed in the moment. In this study, the bullying consisted mostly of covert bullying. Additionally, some teachers perceived their own experiences and collaboration with

colleagues were an effective way to choose pedagogy to stop bullying. The study recommends that taking quick action to address the bullying behaviors was an influential factor in choosing pedagogy. The study suggests the PBIS initiative was implemented with fidelity and the curriculum was influenced by participants, in addition to collaboration around the bully awareness month. This research helps to fill a gap in regard to the process special education teachers' and counselors' use when they collaborate about bullying. The results of the study could be used to demonstrate how changes can occur in the areas of knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum to reduce or eliminate bullying amongst special education students when staff is comfortable in collaborating about bullying.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored what process special education teachers and counselors use when they collaborate about bullying. This study also investigated the influence collaboration has on the special education teachers' and counselors' knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum. The results of this study indicated that most of the participants perceived they collaborate about bullying daily and find ways to address bullying by following a process. The results of this study indicated the collaborative cyclical social process could be used as a guideline to delineate the dynamics of collaboration amongst special education teachers and counselors in regard to collaboration about the reduction or elimination of bullying. The results of this study indicate it can make provisions for special education teachers and counselors to collaborate about knowledge gained through the school. The literature review indicated that understanding responses to bullying

contributes to reducing bullying. The results of this study may contribute to the existing knowledge of special education teachers who focus on using descriptive collaborative efforts to help delineate bullying. The results indicated participants were invested in their efforts to reduce and or eliminate bullying.

Although academic achievement was not the focus of this research, the results of this research suggested that such collaboration could result in academic success. The results of this research also suggested the participants perceived that collaboration played a role in the reduction of overt bullying of special education students. The results of this study suggested pedagogy was influenced by the types of bullying students displayed in the moment consisted mostly of covert bullying. The results of this study revealed cyberbullying was evident in the school.

The literature review indicated collaboration amongst special education teachers and counselors helped participants to make connections with their students. The results of this study suggested that none of the participants tolerated bullying and collaborated about it in informal meetings immediately to ensure it stops. The results of this study suggested that working together was paramount to collaboration and while dealing with the bullying incidents everyone should stay calm. The results of the study could be used to demonstrate how changes can occur in the areas of content knowledge, pedagogy, and curriculum to reduce or eliminate bullying amongst special education students when staff collaborates about bullying. Additionally, the results of this study suggested special education teachers and counselors may enhance their knowledge in regard to reducing bullying in their schools, as well as what to do in terms of pedagogy and curriculum. The

results of this study also recommended the participants' pedagogy and applied curriculum was influenced by the collaboration they engaged in on a consistent basis.

The results of this study recommended that taking quick action to address the bullying behaviors was an influential factor in choosing pedagogy. The results of this study suggested the PBIS initiative was implemented with fidelity and the curriculum was influenced by participants and collaboration around the bully awareness month. This research helps to fill the gap in regard to the contribution special education teachers' and counselors' collaboration can provide to the educational field in regard to bullying. Implications for further practice should continue to study the dynamics of special education teachers' and counselors' collaboration about bullying in regard to special education students.

Overall, I hope this research will make society a better place because it may encourage people, particularly teachers and counselors at school, to collaborate more about greater civility. When teachers and counselors as change agents for the transmission of civility from generation to generation encourage students to begin to reflect on their behaviors, collaboration can be further empowering. By implementing the dynamics of collaboration, this encouragement of students can begin to set the path for social change inspiring students to contribute to a peaceful and inclusive society by preventing bullying. Such changes can be directly addressed collaboratively at the school level and as students transition into society, the favorable behaviors can continue to flourish into society leading to social change.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol and Questions

### Research Question 1: How do special education teachers describe their collaboration about bullying?

#### Interview Questions:

1. How would you describe one of your meetings or one of the situations you have collaborated regarding bullying with another colleague? Possible Probe:
  - a. What type of bullying have you collaborated about?
  
2. Can you explain what types of collaboration you may have participated in and how it worked for you?
 

Possible Probes:

  - a. Can you describe what was going on to lead to this collaboration?
  - b. Can you describe the outcome of this collaboration?
  
3. (if they can't think of a type) There are different types of collaborations teachers participate in. What type have you participated in? or
 

Possible Probe:

  - a. Would you describe how it worked for you? or
  - b. (if can't identify a type) Some teachers have participated in collaborations such as:
    - **Professional Learning Communities** (professionals meeting to discuss effective learning and teaching strategies),
    - **Collaborative Learning Communities** (teachers meeting in a social setting to inquire about specific topics), and
    - **Study Groups** (teachers meeting in a social setting to collaborate about topics they want to specifically learn about).
  
4. Have you participated in any of these types of collaborations, while working with special education students? If so, would you describe how it has worked for you?
  
5. How has your collaboration with other teachers regarding bullying changed over time or since school started?
 

Possible Probes:

  - a. Can you describe the change?
  - b. In hindsight, can you describe any changes you have made and what they were? c. Why did you make the changes?
  - d. Can you describe how you have implemented the changes?
  
6. Overall, how effective do you feel the collaboration(s) you've described been?
 

Possible Probes:

Regarding better teacher and staff collaboration? Regarding reducing bullying? Regarding student academic successes)?

**Research Question 2: How does special education teachers' collaboration regarding reducing bullying amongst special education students influence their knowledge about bullying, pedagogy, and curriculum?**

**Interview questions:**

7. Can you describe a time when you had to improvise an academic lesson or change your routine to deal with a bullying issue that occurred in the spur of a moment?  
Possible Probe:
  - a. Can you describe your thoughts, emotions, actions, and reactions?
  - b. Can you describe how you knew what to do?
  - c. Can you describe what methods you used?
  - d. How would you describe the outcome of your revised lesson or work with students as a result of your collaboration with colleagues?
  - e. What pedagogy did you use and why?
  - f. What curriculum or activities did you use or collaborate about and why?
  
8. Have you implemented an anti-bullying program before? If so, which one?  
Possible Probe:
  - a. If you used any resources/curriculum/initiatives can you describe which ones you used and why?
  - b. There are different initiatives teachers have implemented to help reduce bullying such as:
    - the **Philosophy for Children** (an approach where children are encouraged to collaborate about bullying without teacher input),
    - **Olewis Bullying Prevention Program** (a program used to analyze the school climate and safety, which shows that bullying has decreased),
    - **Positive Behavior Intervention Supports** (to determine if bullying has decreased by analyzing discipline referral data), and
    - the **Expect Respect** (purpose of program is to teach children to distinguish between respectful behavior and disrespectful behavior).
  - c. Have you tried any of these initiatives? If so, describe how they have worked for you?
  
9. How has collaborating about bullying helped you to reduce it?  
Possible Probe:
  - a. How has collaborating about bullying influenced your knowledge about it?
  - b. How has collaborating about bullying influenced your pedagogy about bullying?
  - c. How has collaborating about bullying influenced the bullying curriculum you teach?
  
10. Is there anything else you would like to share in regard to collaborating about bullying?