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The Collaboration Experiences of Elementary School Intervention Specialists in Inclusive Classroom Settings

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Donisha N. Bailey-Franklin

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

The Collaboration Experiences of Elementary School Intervention Specialists in

Inclusive Classroom Settings

by

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MA, Notre Dame College, 2016

BS, Case Western Reserve University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education Leadership, Policy, and Management

Walden University

May 2019

Abstract

Collaboration is one of the most significant components of inclusive education, according to professional literature. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration with general education teachers in elementary school inclusive classrooms and administrative support of collaboration. The collaboration and the community of practice theories were used for the conceptual framework in this study to understand how collaboration is an ongoing interaction between people to achieve a common goal. Research questions were designed to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists who work in inclusive classrooms regarding collaboration and administrative support by documenting their experiences through interviews. In this basic qualitative study, 9 intervention specialists were interviewed. Interview data were analyzed using thematic coding. The results of this study indicated that each participant was a part of a weekly collaboration meeting with teachers, an administrator, and an instructional coach. Most participants reported that they had to complete a 5-step form, and it was not a good source of time because it did not directly focus on students' needs. Most participants also reported that they did not receive training in college or professional development at work on how to collaborate or work in inclusive classroom settings. Participants reported that their administrators were supportive, but some classroom teachers were not. The implications of social change for this study include insight on the importance of collaboration in inclusive classrooms and insight on how administrators can create training programs for the collaboration of all teachers who work in inclusive classrooms.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Angela Bailey, and my grandmother, Donna Pulley, who raised me and instilled a strong work ethic and self-motivation in me at a young age. This dissertation is also dedicated to my wonderful husband, Milton Franklin, III, and my beautiful daughter, Anya Marie Franklin, for loving me and being patient with me throughout this process.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Collaboration is one of the most significant components of inclusion education (Florian, 2017). Educational professionals have to work together to successfully teach in inclusive education classrooms. Students have a variety of needs, and, therefore, general and special education teachers must work together to build an inclusive pedagogy that benefits all students (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018). In inclusion classrooms, collaboration between general and special education teachers and student achievement are related (Gebhardt, Schwab, Krammer, & Gegenfurtner, 2015; Khairuddin, Dally, & Foggett, 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). While there are laws in the United States to protect the rights of students with disabilities, there are also laws in many places throughout the world to protect the rights of students with disabilities, by providing them with equal access to general education curriculum. Administrative support, teacher preparation programs, and professional development play major roles in teaching effective strategies in inclusive classroom settings. These supports as well as collaboration help reduce teacher burnout (Fluijt, Bakker, & Struyf, 2016; Hedgaard-Soerensen, Jensen, & Tofteng, 2018).

Teachers feel more supported when they collaborate and share the workload with other educational professionals, which in turn reduces teacher burnout because they do not feel overworked (Fluijt et al., 2016). When some teachers become burned out, they leave the field of education, and they never become tenured teachers. A lack of experts leads to low student achievement in inclusive classroom settings (Andrews & Brown,

2015). Teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy affect how they perform in the classroom. Coteaching is a collaborative strategy that is used often in inclusion classrooms to support teachers (Ruppar, Neepser, & Dalsen, 2016). The more supported teachers feel, the more positive their attitudes are towards inclusion education, which leads to positive self-efficacy. When educators are confident in their field, they teach more effectively in the classroom (Ruppar et al., 2016).

Background

Inclusion education is when students with disabilities and students who do not have disabilities are educated in the same classroom (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Lindeman & Anderson, 2018). Inclusion education reduces barriers that can exist in education between students with and without disabilities because it allows all students to have access to the same general education curriculum (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Gooderham, 2017). According to Florian (2017), collaboration is the heart of inclusion. Educators who collaborate have to be on the same page with the same end goal in mind so that they can work collaboratively and effectively in inclusion classrooms (Baines, Blatchford, & Webster, 2015; Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016). Researchers have shown that there is a relationship between the collaboration between general and special education teachers in inclusive classroom settings and student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015; Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016).

According to Fuchs et al. (2015), Weiss, Pellegrino and Regan (2015), and Lakkala, Uusiautti, and Maatta (2016), inclusion is a dominant part of education reform.

There have been laws made throughout the world to protect the rights of students with disabilities by providing them with equal access to general education curriculum. Some of these countries include but are not limited to The United States of America, Canada, Zanzibar, Israel, Malaysia, Jordan, Greece, China, and South Africa (Ballard & Dymond, 2017; Juma, Lehtomaki, & Naukkarinen, 2017; Makhalemele & Nel, 2016; Morfidi & Samaras, 2015; Petersen, 2016; Pesonen et al., 2015; Shani & Ram, 2015; Shephard et al., 2016; Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). Part of this international education reform is administrators being responsible for training teachers through professional development opportunities (Thorius, 2016).

Part of the role of administrators in education is being responsible for the growth of their staff members as well as student achievement. Principals and other administrative leaders are the pedagogical leaders of a school (Shani & Ram, 2015). These leaders are responsible for the professional growth of staff, which includes collaboration methods and effective inclusive practices (Alila, Maatta, & Uusiautti, 2016).

Teacher preparation programs may not always prepare teachers to work in inclusive classroom settings, so professional development on how to collaborate and work in inclusion classrooms is important. Many novice teachers do not feel prepared after they complete their teacher preparation program (Driver & Murphy, 2018). Because of this teacher education, reform is needed so that programs are reflecting the practical needs of students who learn in inclusive classroom environments (Blanton, Boveda, Munoz, & Pugach, 2017; Juma et al., 2017). Professional development is also needed. Professional development is needed for education reform and so that teachers can learn

how to collaborate and execute inclusive practices (Hannes, Petry, & Heyvaert, 2018; Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Kontofryou, 2015). Ongoing professional development is vital to student success in inclusive classroom settings (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Hannes et al., 2018; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015).

Collaboration helps reduce teacher burnout (Caputo & Langher, 2015). There is less of a workload when education professionals collaborate because they share responsibility for preparing for and educating students. According to Nilsen (2017), the central issue of teacher burnout in inclusive classroom settings is the limited collaboration between special and general education teachers. Researchers have also indicated that administrative support helps reduce teacher burnout because the need for strong leadership is important to reduce the challenges of collaboration and effective inclusive practices so that teachers feel comfortable carrying out inclusive practices in inclusion classrooms (Al-Natour, Amr, Al-Zboon, & Alkhamra, 2015; Andrews & Brown, 2015; Day & Prunty, 2015).

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion education and their self-efficacy regarding carrying out inclusive practices plays a role in how effective their instruction is executed (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). When teachers have positive attitudes towards inclusion education, they are more likely to have high self-efficacy in terms of their ability to teach in inclusive classroom environments and perform well while teaching students in inclusion classrooms (Besic, Paleczek, Krammer, & Gasteiger-Kilcpera, 2017; Shani & Hebel, 2016). The Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale is one way to measure self-efficacy, which includes efficacy in executing inclusive instruction, efficacy in

collaboration, and efficacy in managing behavior (Park, Dimitrov, Das, & Gichuru, 2016). According to Pearson, Clavenna-Deane, and Carter (2015), the more teachers involved in inclusion education, the more positive their attitudes and self-efficacy, and the greater experiences they have.

Coteaching is used often in inclusion education (Chandler-Olcott & Nieroda, 2016). Coteaching models in inclusion education consist of the general and special education teachers sharing responsibility of instruction in the classroom (Tzivinigkou, 2015). Coteaching is one form of collaboration and has a clear known focus (Morgan, 2016). Coteaching is used to improve inclusive education practices because it helps meet the needs of all students (Panscofar & Petroff, 2016).

Problem Statement

To improve student achievement in inclusive settings, there is a need for improved collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers, who work directly with students who have been diagnosed with disabilities (Gebhardt et al., 2015; Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). Collaboration is an ongoing process that requires educators to interact and share unique knowledge in order to increase student achievement (Al-Natour et al., 2015). Some of the factors that can cause a lack of effective collaboration between educational professionals are a lack of training for general education teachers in the area of special education and inclusive practices, a lack of awareness of the importance of collaboration, and a lack of time due to the work loads of intervention specialists and general education teachers (Al-Natour et al., 2015). Moreover, teamwork between

intervention specialists and general education teachers can be considered one of the most important factors for student achievement in inclusion classroom settings (Gebhardt et al., 2015).

The purpose of inclusive education is for schools to provide all students with a quality education (Florian, 2017). When students are in inclusive classroom settings, the general education teacher has the responsibility of meeting all of the needs of the students in the classroom, students with and without disabilities (Ruppar et al., 2016; Yada & Savolainen, 2017). The teacher must differentiate his/her instruction so that all students are productive and learning. The special education teacher, or intervention specialist, is charged with carrying out interventions to help students with disabilities become successful when they are accessing the general education curriculum (Ruppar et al., 2016; Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Because of this, collaboration is critical for educators in inclusive classroom settings because collaboration has been directly linked to student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015). The changing field of education, especially education reform based on inclusive education, causes the role of the special education professional to continuously change.

The purpose of inclusive education is to increase participation and learning for all students to provide them with a quality education (Florian, 2017). Intervention specialists and general education teachers help students with disabilities by providing modifications and accommodations to these students so that they are able to participate in a general education classroom with their same aged peers. All educators involved in inclusion classroom settings should possess competence in collaborating with other educational

professionals because a range of support may be needed from educators who possess different areas expertise (Florian, 2017).

In order for students with disabilities to be successful in elementary inclusion classroom settings, there needs to be effective collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers. Effective collaboration includes proper training on collaboration and inclusive practices, awareness of the importance of such collaboration, and time to successfully execute an effective inclusion classroom setting (Caputo & Langher, 2015).

There is not much research on the training programs provided by administrators for teachers and how teachers are trained for collaboration (Khairuddin et al., 2016). An elementary inclusive classroom consists of both the intervention specialist and the general education teacher giving instruction and working with all students in the classroom; however, the intervention specialist works closely with students with disabilities during work time after instruction. Teacher learning can be improved by collaborating with other professional educators (Shakenova, 2017). There is a need for collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers because some intervention specialists are not as well versed in some content areas as general education teachers, and some general education teachers are not as well-versed in implementing modifications and accommodations in inclusive settings as intervention specialist are (Shin, Lee, & McKenna, 2015). Teacher training should be a priority for administrators because teachers need to be equipped with the right tools in order to collaborate effectively (Marin, 2016). What is not known about this topic is the

perceptions of intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings regarding their collaboration experience with general education teachers and administrative support in regard to the collaboration between these education professionals.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration with general education teachers in an elementary school inclusion classroom setting, as well as their perceptions on the actions taken at the administrative level in order to ensure effective collaboration is taking place between intervention specialists and general education teachers. The gap in the research in this area was understanding the perspectives of intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings, regarding collaboration and administrative support.

Research Questions

Research Question (RQ)1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings regarding their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?

RQ2: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings regarding administrative support of the collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on a combination of the collaboration theory and the community of practice theory. The collaboration theory is a

theory that states that collaboration is an ongoing interaction between people with the purpose of achieving common goals (Colbry, Hurwitz, & Adair, 2014). In this study, I investigated the collaboration experiences of intervention specialists in elementary inclusive classroom settings, and the common goal was student achievement. In order for inclusion to be successful, there needs to be a collaborative and caring community present inside of the inclusive classroom setting (Collier & Wix, 2017). The communities of practice theory is a theory that states that people interact on a regular basis based on their passion for a common goal (Wenger, 1998). As collaborative practices are needed for effective inclusion classrooms, teacher collaboration can foster communities of practice by enhancing the learning outcomes of elementary school students who are a part of inclusive classes (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016). Communities of practice as inclusion models involve collaboration through sharing information, skills, experiences, and responsibilities amongst intervention specialists and other educational professionals (Avery, 2017; Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). All professionals who work in inclusive environments are owners of the inclusion process (Sanahuja-Gavalda, Olmos-Rueda, & Moron-Velasco, 2016).

Nature of Study

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative research study. A strength of qualitative research is being able to interact directly with participants through face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to describe and discover narrative reporting so that I can understand how people experience, see, view, and approach the world and how they create meaning from these experiences (see

Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research aligned to my purpose statement and research questions because I used interviews to understand the phenomenon of the perceptions of elementary intervention specialists in inclusion classroom settings in terms of collaboration and how administrators take action to ensure proper collaboration is taking place. These intervention specialists who work in elementary inclusion classroom settings were the participants for my study.

Definitions

Collaboration: The act of working with someone to produce or create something (Emmons & Zager, 2017).

Coteaching: When two educators work together in the same classroom and they are both responsible for planning, organization, and instruction (Fluijt et al., 2016; Hedgaard-Soerensen et al., 2018).

Inclusion: Being included with a group or structure (Pearson et al., 2015).

Inclusive education: When students with and without disabilities are educated in the same classroom environment (Ruppar et al., 2016; Yada & Savolainen, 2017).

Inclusive pedagogy: The act of teaching together to educate students with and without disabilities in the same classroom (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018).

Intervention specialist: An educator who is responsible for planning and educating students who have been diagnosed with a disability (Langher, Caputo, & Ricci, 2017).

Least restrictive environment: When students who have been diagnosed with a disability have the same opportunity to be educated with their same aged peers to the greatest extent that is appropriate (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Kozleski et al., 2015).

Self-efficacy: The belief in one's own preparedness to complete a task (Ruppar et al., 2016).

Assumptions

In this study, I assumed that (a) this basic qualitative study was subjective to intervention specialists and that actual experiences were reported during interviews, not generalizations, (b) the frameworks that I have identified as the basis of this study influenced the research that I conducted in this study, and (c) participants in the study honestly answered the interview questions that they were asked.

Scope and Delimitations

In this study, I learned about the experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings regarding collaboration and administrative support. It was important to focus on these experiences to understand the learning environment of students who were a part of inclusive classroom settings. The study sample was limited to elementary intervention specialists who taught in inclusion classrooms. As a result, my findings are specific to primary grade experiences only.

The collaboration of special and general education teachers who teach in inclusive classroom settings is directly linked to student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015). However, I did not seek to examine the collaboration experiences of general education

teachers who taught in inclusion classrooms or administrators who were responsible for policies and procedures that promoted collaboration and inclusive classroom settings.

Limitations

This study was limited because of data collection and educational laws. The data collected were limited to elementary intervention specialists who work/have worked in inclusive classroom settings. The data collected were limited to elementary classrooms in a specific public school district. Laws that were enacted in support of collaboration and inclusive classroom settings did not require educators to receive formal training on how to teach in inclusive classroom settings.

Significance

This research can help fill the gap in understanding the collaboration experiences of elementary intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings. This study was unique because it addressed an issue that is present in elementary school education, a lack of effective collaboration between general and special education teachers (see Al-Natour et al., 2015). The results of this study may affect social change because it provides insight on how intervention specialists collaborate with general education teachers in inclusion classrooms, and what takes place during that process. Insights from this study may also effect social change because it can aid intervention specialists in what strategies to use in inclusion classroom settings when collaborating with general education teachers, and it can aid elementary school administrators in creating proper training programs for collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers who work in inclusion classroom environments. Inclusion classroom settings are places where

general and special education teachers can collaborate to increase student achievement. Because inclusion classroom settings are common in elementary schools, it is important to maximize the information that students are getting through the collaboration of educational professionals.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced collaboration and inclusive education and focused on the purpose and intent of this study. A complete understanding of the experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings regarding collaboration and administrative support and how it relates to student achievement was displayed. In Chapter 2, I discuss the vast amounts of research and other information found about inclusive education, collaboration, student achievement, teacher preparedness, and self-efficacy.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Each year, more students with disabilities become a part of inclusive classroom settings in which they are educated in general education classrooms with their same aged peers who are nondisabled (Florian, 2017). Collaboration is critical for educators in inclusive classroom settings because it is directly linked to student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015). The diverse needs of all students cause the role of the special education professional to continuously change. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration in elementary school inclusion classroom settings as well as their perceptions regarding administrative support.

In my review of literature, I found literature that indicated that collaboration is directly linked to student achievement in inclusive classroom settings (see Gebhardt et al., 2015). There have been acts and laws, on a national and international level, created to protect the rights of students with disabilities so that they can have access to curriculum in the general education classroom setting (Fuchs et al., 2015; Pugach, 2017). Administrators have the responsibility of making sure that these laws are being followed and supporting educators to equip them with the skills needed to teach in inclusive classroom settings (Alila et al., 2016; Hagaman & Casey, 2017; Kozleski et al., 2015; Shani & Ram, 2015; Van Boxtel, 2017; Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). In addition, teacher preparation programs are not equipping novice general and special education teachers, and ongoing professional development is needed for general and special

education teachers for them to successfully meet the needs of students who are a part of inclusion classroom settings (Marin, 2016; Paju, Raty, Pirttimaa, & Kontu, 2016; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015; Zagona, Kurth, & MacFarland, 2017). Collaboration is not always taught in these programs, so professional development and collaboration with educational professionals with more experience can help these novice educational professionals grow and learn.

There are also constraints to collaboration such as time (Cosier, Gomex, McKee, & Maghzi, 2015; Day & Prunty, 2015; Shakenova, 2017), but collaboration can reduce teacher burnout (Andrews & Brown, 2015; Caputo & Langher 2015; Langher et al., 2017). Furthermore, teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy towards collaboration and inclusion affects how successful inclusive practices are executed (Malki & Einat, 2018; Suc, Bukovec, & Karpljuk, 2017; Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Researchers have demonstrated that coteaching is one way that general and special education teachers collaborate in inclusive classroom settings (Chandler-Olcott & Nieroda, 2016; Fluijt et al., 2016; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Shin et al., 2016).

I have organized this literature review of research relevant to collaboration and inclusive classroom settings into the following topic areas: (a) a description of the literature search strategy that I completed, (b) the conceptual foundation, (c) a review of literature with key variables and related concepts, and (d) a summary of the literature that I have discussed in this chapter. Looking at inclusion and collaboration between education professionals and how it is related to student achievement, acts, laws, and

administrative support for collaboration and inclusive education, teacher preparation programs and professional development, constraints to collaboration and teacher burnout, teachers' attitudes and self-efficacy, and coteaching allowed me to understand how collaboration relates to inclusion and student achievement in inclusive classroom settings.

Literature Search Strategy

I obtained literature relevant to collaboration and inclusive classroom settings from Walden University's online library publication journal databases. Specifically, I used the following library databases: Education Source, ERIC, and SAGES. I used the following keywords and terms to identify relevant literature: *inclusion, inclusive education, inclusion and collaboration, collaboration, collaboration of general and special education teachers, special education, students with disabilities, intervention specialists and inclusion, intervention specialists and collaboration, teacher burnout, collaboration constraints, special education laws, students with disabilities, teacher attitudes towards inclusion, teacher self-efficacy and inclusion, coteaching, inclusive practices, inclusive pedagogy, inclusion and teacher education programs, administrators and inclusion, administrators and collaboration, national special education laws, international special education laws, least restrictive environment, professional development and collaboration, professional development and inclusion education, inclusion and best practices, collaboration and best practices, preservice general education teachers and inclusive education, and preservice special education teachers and inclusive education.*

I focused my primary literature search on publications from 2015 to 2018 so that my research would be current. I limited my initial search to inclusion and collaboration between general and special education teachers. Through this research, I found that there were other subcategories that pertained to my study, such as teacher preparation programs, professional development, and special education laws. The primary sources used to support this study were peer-reviewed journal articles.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on a combination of the collaboration theory and the community of practice theory. The collaboration theory is a theory that states that collaboration is an ongoing interaction between people with the purpose of achieving common goals (Colbry et al., 2014). For inclusive practices to be successful, there needs to be a collaborative and caring community present inside of the inclusive classroom setting (Collier & Wix, 2017). In this study, the collaboration experiences of intervention specialists in elementary inclusive classroom settings are being studied, and the common goal was student achievement. When intervention specialists are working in inclusive classroom settings, they are collaborating with general education teachers, and their goal is to educate students so that they can be successful in the classroom (Florian, 2017). For the purpose of this study, I learned about the aspects of collaboration based on the perspectives of intervention specialists who collaborated with general education teachers in inclusive classroom settings.

The community of practice theory is a theory that states that people interact on a regular basis based on their passion for a common goal (Wenger, 1998). As collaborative

practices are needed for effective inclusion classrooms, teacher collaboration can foster communities of practice by enhancing the learning outcomes of elementary school students who are a part of inclusive classes (Mulholland & O'Connor, 2016).

Communities of practice as inclusion models involve collaboration through sharing information, skills, experiences, and responsibilities amongst intervention specialists and other educational professionals (Avery, 2017; Botha & Kourkoutas, 2016). All professionals who work in inclusive environments are owners of the inclusion process (Sanahuja-Gavalda et al., 2016). This includes intervention specialists and general education teachers who work in inclusive classroom settings and administrators.

Intervention specialists and general education teachers need to collaborate to identify ways to meet the needs of all students. Administrators are also tasked with the responsibility of working with intervention specialists and general education teachers to provide professional development trainings as needed and to make sure students' needs are being met in inclusive classroom settings.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables/Concepts

Inclusion, Collaboration, and Student Achievement

Inclusion education means that students who have been identified as having disabilities are no longer in separate placement because they are placed in the general education setting with appropriate supports inside of the classroom (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016; Lindeman & Anderson, 2018). This placement ensures that all students have the same access to the general education curriculum, and it also promotes participation in class for all students (Budd, 2016). As a result, collaboration is needed

amongst general and special education teachers for successful inclusive practices to take place. This collaboration gives more support to students who are in inclusive classroom settings. Inclusive practices help prevent barriers of special education students who are trying to be successful in general education classroom settings (DaFonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; Gooderham, 2017). While inclusion education varies (Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016), according to Florian (2017), collaboration is the heart of inclusive education, and it is executed through multidimensional interaction between intervention specialists and general education teachers. Sharing knowledge and experiences not only helps students but educators as well because they are learning from one another. Identifying best practices for inclusion education and collaborating is the best way to facilitate inclusive teaching (Collier & Wix, 2017; Korinek & deFur, 2016). Inclusion classrooms can create a problem for general education teachers who are trying to meet the needs of all students in inclusive classroom settings.

When general education teachers lack expertise in the area of inclusion education and inclusive practices, collaborating with special education teachers or intervention specialists can help general education teachers learn how to meet the needs of all students through modification of lessons, making accommodations for students, and differentiating the lesson as a whole (Buli-Holmberg & Jeyaprabhan, 2016). Collaboration between general and special education teachers in inclusive classroom settings leads directly to student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015; Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). Within this collaboration, there needs to be a clear plan and approach to how inclusive practices will be implemented by

general and special education teachers so that students with disabilities can have a successful education experience (Baines et al., 2015; Douglas et al., 2016). When collaboration does not take place prior to class instruction, educators will not only feel and be unprepared, they will begin to feel overwhelmed, and they will waste time with ineffective, ill-prepared instruction. Inclusion is also a way to create rigor for students with disabilities because students who are below grade level may have the chance to be exposed to grade level materials (Makel et al., 2016).

Laws and Administrative Support

The dominant education reform for students with disabilities is inclusion in order to provide them with relevant learning experiences so that there are successful in inclusive classroom settings (Fuchs et al., 2015; Weiss et al., 2015, Lakkala et al., 2016). As inclusion has become dominant in education reform, there have been laws and education policies, on a national and international level, put in place to protect the rights of students with disabilities. The purpose of the education reform is to improve public education for all students in the United States because of low academic performances. On a national level, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is about 50%, compared to 75% of their same aged peers, and dropout rates have increased from 0 to 45% over the past several years (Flowers et al., 2018). The National Framework for Inclusion was created to support teachers to work in inclusive classroom settings so that all learners have meaningful experiences (Barrett et al., 2015).

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was created and renamed the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, it was amended

in 1997, and in 2004 there was a reauthorization of the IDEA (Shepherd et al., 2016). In 2004 the IDEA was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (Petersen, 2016). This act protects the rights of students who have disabilities, and their parents. It also requires public schools that are accepting federal funding to provide equal access to general education curriculum for all students. It also states that students should be placed in least restrictive environments. A least restrictive environment (LRE) is when students with disabilities have the opportunity to be educated with their same aged peers, who are non-disabled, to the greatest degree that is appropriate (Kozleski et al, 2015; Glowacki & Hackman, 2016). Inclusion education supports the least restrictive environment for students who have disabilities because it is an opportunity to expose them to the general education curriculum. This was part of increased legislation to support inclusive education and collaboration (Scorgie, 2015).

In 2001, under the Presidency of George W. Bush, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was created (Petersen, 2016). This act also required educators to ensure that students with disabilities had appropriate access to the general education curriculum. This act was the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 that was passed by the U.S. Congress. This act states that specific instruction needs to be provided to students with disabilities in order to meet their educational needs (Shepherd et al, 2016). ESEA was reauthorized again in 2015, under the Presidency of Barack Obama called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Ballard & Dymond, 2017). The purpose of these acts is to ensure that students with disabilities have the same learning opportunities as students who are non-disabled.

The worldwide interest to increase the development of inclusive education, so that educational equity is taking place for all students, has caused education reform on an international level (Juma, Lehtomaki, & Naukkarinen, 2017). China has supported mainstreaming, or inclusive education, since the 1980s (Xiaoli & Olli-Pekka, 2015). In 1981, Greece created Law 1143, the first piece of legislation here to support inclusion for students with disabilities (Morfidi & Samaras, 2015). The Basic Education Act was passed in Finland in 1997 in an effort to improve education for all students (Pesonen et al., 2015). In 2005, South Africa created the Conceptual and Operational Guidelines for Implementation of Inclusive Education: District-Based Teams (DBSTs) (Makhalemele & Nel, 2016). In 2006, there were education policy reforms in Zanzibar to support inclusive education (Juma et al., 2017). The Inclusion Act of 2012 was created in Israel where there was a focus on the administrative responsibility to ensure professional development and collaboration about inclusive education takes place (Shani & Ram, 2015). Part of this international inclusive education movement is training teachers so that they equipped with the proper experiences to successfully teach in inclusion classroom settings (Thorius, 2016).

In the field of special education there is a teacher shortage that is prevalent. Special education teachers leave the field within the first couple of years of teaching, and because of this these teachers never become experts (Hagaman & Casey, 2017). When these teachers never become experts, students are exposed to ineffective teaching practices because of this lack of teaching experience, and student achievement is less likely to occur. When this occurs school leaders are charged with the responsibility of

creating collaboration experiences so that staff members continue growing, and student achievement takes place. Collaboration is important because of the change in standards based instruction that applies to all students (Van Boxtel, 2017). Principals are the pedagogical leaders who plan the educational goals in the school and who establishes a school community in which professional knowledge is shared (Shani & Ram, 2015). The guidance that is offered to teachers by administrators to support their professional growth helps strengthen collaboration and inclusive practices (Alila et al., 2016). Professional development is important in the field of education not only because education is constantly changing, but because all teachers are not prepared through their teacher preparation programs in college to teach in inclusive classroom settings.

Teacher Prep Programs and Professional Development

When individuals go to school to become general education teachers they are not being fully prepared or equipped with the knowledge and tools needed to teach in inclusive classroom settings. As a result, teacher education reform is needed so that successful inclusion can take place (Blanton et al., 2017; Juma et al., 2017). More and more pre-service teachers are reporting that they do not feel prepared to make accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings (Driver & Murphy, 2018). Part of promoting school inclusion is collaboration and training teachers (Marin, 2016). Working collaboratively not only promotes inclusion, but it also allows educational professionals to work together so that they can create rigor in the classroom according to the diverse needs of students. Effective instruction is created through collaboration, and teachers need to be held accountable in

order to meet the diverse needs of all students (Weiss et al., 2015). Part of this effective instruction is being able to equalize educational expectations and goals for all students (Murphy & Marshall, 2015). Programs for teachers at the university level need to prepare teachers for inclusive educational practices so that they are prepared when they graduate and join the workforce (Zundans-Fraser & Bain, 2016).

Students who have disabilities need to work with professionals who are experts of inclusive practices so that they can advance students and prepare them to be successful in general education classroom setting (Zagona et al., 2017). Disabilities studies programs and teacher education programs do contain interdisciplinary content that supports information about collaborating and inclusion education, and this is part of the reason that teacher preparation programs are not equipping teachers with the skills they need to work successfully in inclusive classroom setting (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). In Spain there was a committee formed for teacher training that trained teachers on how to work in inclusive classroom settings (Saiz Linares, Susinos Rada, & Ceballos Lopez, 2016). In Austria, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year an inclusive education specialty began being offered (Pickl, Holzinger, & Kopp-Sixt, 2016). All over the world general education teachers have struggles to educate students with disabilities since IDEA in 1975 (Pugach, 2017). Because of this, professional development in the constant changing field of education is imperative to lead a successful inclusion classroom.

Inclusive education is supported by school improvement and part of this is staff development (Florian, 2017). The professional development of teachers is important because there is always something new in the field of education to learn so there is a

constant need for professional development to keep educators current on information and educational practices (Paju et al., 2016; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015). The collaboration that takes place during this time is an opportunity for educational professionals to share the knowledge that they have amongst one another. Teacher professional development is needed in order to promote inclusive education practices (Hannes et al., 2018; Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Kontofryou, 2015). Some teachers complain that the information that is given during professional development sessions do not mirror real life scenarios (Rose & Doveston, 2015). Students who are a part of inclusive classroom settings need a range of support from diverse educational professionals. On-going professional development is needed for general and special education teachers because it is vital to the success of students who are learning in inclusive classrooms (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Hannes et al., 2018; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015).

Part of the ongoing professional development is adopting an inclusive pedagogy. Inclusive pedagogy not only increases the focus of adopting inclusive practices, but it also enables teachers to deliver curriculum in a way that meets the needs of all students (Mintz & Wyse, 2015). An inclusive pedagogy approach means that instructional practices should be planned in advance, via collaboration, and each child is valued equally. The collaboration of teachers and other educational professionals for the sake of creating an inclusive pedagogy for inclusive practices is done not only to improve student achievement, but to ensure social justice is taking place in the field of education for students who are in inclusive classroom settings (Pantic & Florian, 2015). This

specialized pedagogy increases teacher competency and effectiveness of educators who work in inclusive classroom settings (Woolf, 2015). However, inclusive pedagogy is underdeveloped (Nind & Lewthwaite, 2018). Ineffective teacher education programs and professional development are constraints to collaboration can cause teacher burnout.

Collaboration and Teacher Burnout

Not only does collaboration among educators who teach in inclusive classroom settings increase student achievement, but it also reduces teacher burnout (Caputo & Langher, 2015). When educators collaborate there is less of a workload on each individual, educators feel supported, and information is being shared on both sides. When educators are having a less ideal experience than they expected and they feel unsupported it causes a high turnover rate and then new educators are hired who have less experience (Andrews & Brown, 2015).

Some novice special and general education teachers have workloads to the extent in which they feel that they need support from other educational professionals so that they do not become over-whelmed and leave the field of education (Bettini et al., 2017). Part of this issue is planning separately. If these novice educators plan individually and then try to work together in an inclusive classroom setting instruction will be ineffective because collaboration did not take place, and teacher workloads begin to feel overwhelming. The central issue of teacher burnout in inclusive classroom settings is the limited collaboration between special and general education teachers (Nilsen, 2017). Collaboration is the central element for the professional development of educators who teach in inclusive classroom settings (Shakenova, 2017).

Time is one constraint to teacher collaboration. There is a lack of common time with colleagues, a lack of designated time to share, and a lack of discretionary time to learn (Shakenova, 2017). Because of educational reform teachers have more responsibilities, but they have less time to handle these responsibilities. While teacher collaboration is essential for inclusive education, the lack of time that is available for collaboration amongst educational professionals causes a barrier to collaboration (Cosier et al., 2015). This is how teachers become over-whelmed, burned out, and under supported. Time and workloads are the two main constraints to teacher burnout.

Workloads become over-whelming when classes are over-crowded and schedules are busy (Al-Natour et al., 2015). When classes are over-crowded there are less opportunities to provide individual supports and small groups are larger. When general and special education teacher workloads are heavy they do not have enough time in the day to have regular collaboration meetings because they have other responsibilities and they are meeting other deadlines, such as administrative duties (Al-Natour et al., 2015). A high number of classes also hinders collaboration. Heavy workloads, over-crowded classrooms, and a high number of classes are all factors that constrain collaboration.

Just as there are factors that constrain collaboration, there are also factors that promote collaboration. Some of these factors include personal and professional factors, the team social atmosphere, and organizational factors (Shakenova, 2017). Personal and professional factors include, but are not limited to, owning a sense of responsibility, having a relationship with colleagues, and being open to diverse opinions. The social atmosphere of the team includes sharing common goals, respecting and listening to one

another. Organizational factors include having the proper resources, teacher schedules that enable collaboration, and support from administration.

Administrative support also helps reduce teacher burnout (Andrews & Brown, 2015). When teachers are supported by administrators they are provided with adequate opportunities for professional growth and interactions so that collaboration is not difficult to engage in. When teachers are supported by administrators they experience greater personal accomplishments and participation when collaborating (Langher et al., 2017). When educators are supported by administrators and collaboration takes place in inclusive classroom settings, teachers are able to provide quality services that gives all students equal opportunities to access the general education curriculum.

Another way for administrators to support teachers in order to reduce burnout is by creating policies that support flexible time for collaboration so that educational professionals have the time to collaborate and teach effective strategies to students in order to increase student achievement and give all students access to a quality education (Riggleman & Buchter, 2017). The need for strong leadership is important to reduce the challenges of collaboration and effective inclusive practices (Day & Prunty, 2015; Al-Natour et al., 2015).

Teacher Attitudes and Self-Efficacy

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion education and their sense of self-efficacy can be directly affected by how inclusive practices are executed (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). If general education teachers have negative attitudes towards inclusion education then they will be resistant and they will try to find reasons not to implement inclusive

education practices. Positive teacher attitudes, of general and special education teachers, are crucial to the success of inclusive classrooms (Besic et al., 2017; Shani & Hebel, 2016). Teachers must be committed to implementing inclusive education practices and they need to be consistent. Teacher attitudes can promote or hinder inclusion classroom settings. Because inclusion implementation is a major challenge in education, teachers' attitudes may become negative because of their lack of training which causes a lack of self-esteem, and it then lowers teachers' self-efficacy (Suc et al., 2017). Administrative support and collaboration leads to more positive attitudes of teachers in regard to inclusive education (Odongo & Davidson, 2016). The more teachers are involved in inclusive practices, which included collaboration, the more positive their attitudes will be in regard to the aspects of their jobs (Pearson et al., 2015). When there is a resistance by teachers of implementing inclusive practices in the classroom, students become less included and equal educational opportunities are not taking place.

Successful policies pertaining to inclusive education also helps increase the positivity of teacher attitudes (Besic et al., 2017; Malki & Einat, 2018;). When teachers realize that inclusive practices play a role in social justice because they are providing a quality education in which all students have equal access, there attitudes become more positive and they seem to be more motivated. Policies that are set in place for inclusion and collaboration helps with these attitudes because if teachers are prepared for inclusion, or they are training in hopes of increasing their skills of inclusive practices they feel more confident in their abilities which also increase self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy is how people feel about their abilities to achieve goals (Emmons & Zager, 2017; Ruppar et al., 2016). If teachers have a low sense of self-efficacy in regard to their skills to run an inclusive classroom, then they will be less successful in meeting the needs of all of the students who are in that class. Some general education teachers feel that they are less prepared to execute inclusive educational practices which is a strong predictor of low self-efficacy (Ruppar et al., 2016). These teachers may feel this way because of a lack of training, a lack of collaboration, and a lack of experience all together.

One way to measure teacher self-efficacy is the Teacher Efficacy for Inclusive Practices scale. The three factors that make up this scale is efficacy in executing inclusive instruction, efficacy in collaboration, and efficacy in managing behavior (Park et al., 2016). This scale is important because it can provide insight on where teachers think their skills lie and where they need support. This scale not only helps teachers become self-reflective, but it can provide insight to administrators and other educational leaders so that they can provide the proper supports to teachers working in inclusive classroom environments. This enables educators to provide the proper supports to students who are a part of inclusive classroom settings.

Self-efficacy of teachers is not only related to inclusive classroom practices in the United States, but in other countries around the world as well. In Japan and Kenya the teachers have created a high demand for in-service training of collaboration and inclusive practices to promote greater self-efficacy of educators who work in inclusive classroom settings (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Song, 2016). In Canada there is a recommendation

for greater teacher education to promote high self-efficacy (Specht et al, 2016). In Turkey and Israel there needs to be a curriculum developed for both special and general education teachers so that they are more aware of how to meet the needs of each learner, which improves self-efficacy (Malki & Einat, 2018; Ozcan & Uzunboylu, 2017). In-service trainings of collaboration and inclusive practices for teachers, greater teacher education in inclusive education, and curriculum development for general and special education teachers are all factors that can promote positive self-efficacy amongst teachers who are a part of inclusive classroom settings.

Coteaching

Coteaching is frequently used in inclusive education (Chandler-Olcott & Nieroda, 2016). Coteaching is when two or more educational professionals instruct students in a shared space. In inclusion classroom settings coteaching is made up of the general and special education teachers (Tzivnikou, 2015). When teachers are a part of a coteaching model they have the same lunch and planning period, and they are both responsible for the planning and instruction of students. Coteaching is a strategy that is used to improve inclusive education because it helps meet the needs of all students (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016).

Coteaching is one type of collaboration. Effective coteaching has a clear known focus (Morgan, 2016). Pre-service special education teachers have reported that they have a lack of content knowledge, and pre-service general education teachers reported that they have a lack of knowledge on how to implement accommodations and modifications (Shin et al., 2016). Coteaching with other educational professionals can

help these pre-service teachers gain experience from more experienced teachers. Coteaching causes a close collaboration between general and special education teachers, and their shared responsibilities allows them to work closely and plan their lessons in advance to be more effective (Hedgaard-Soerensen et al., 2018; Fluijt et al., 2016).

Summary

Students who have been diagnosed with disabilities have had their rights protected since 1975 when Congress created the IDEA (Petersen, 2016). This law protects the educational rights of students with disabilities by addressing how they are educated. Being true to the least restricted environment for many students means that students with disabilities are educated in a classroom with their same aged peers who have not been diagnosed with a disability. This is called inclusion education. In order for educators to be successful in teaching in inclusive classroom settings collaboration needs to take place between general and special education teachers. Not only is collaboration needed for successful inclusion pedagogy to take place, collaboration between educational professionals have been directly linked to student achievement (Gebhardt et al., 2015; Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016).

All educators who teach in inclusive classroom settings should have the proper training. When general and special education teachers have the proper training in inclusive practices they are then able to provide a high-quality education to all students who are a part of inclusive classroom settings (Marin, 2016). Additional professional development training is sometimes needed when novice educators begin working because

they were not fully prepared by their teacher preparation programs to work in inclusion classrooms (Driver & Murphy, 2018).

Administrative support and collaboration help reduce teacher burnout because educators are less overwhelmed because they are able to share the workload (Caputo & Langher, 2015). Educators need to feel supported and prepared in order to work effectively in inclusion classrooms. Teachers' attitudes and sense of self-efficacy affects how they teach as well (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). If they have a negative attitude towards inclusion education then they are less likely to teach effectively because they do not have confidence in their abilities.

This study examined the experiences of elementary intervention specialists in regard to collaboration and administrative support. This study contributes to the field of education because it gives insight to education administrators on being advocates for policies that support inclusive classroom settings so that all students have access to a quality education. This study may also help general and special education teachers who work in inclusion classrooms understand the importance of collaboration whether it is in the form of coteaching or not.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration in an elementary school inclusion classroom setting, as well as their perceptions on the actions taken at the administrative level to ensure effective collaboration is taking place. In the previous chapter, I analyzed research pertaining to inclusive education, teacher collaboration, laws that protect the rights of students with disabilities, teacher preparedness, teacher attitudes and self-efficacy towards inclusion education, and coteaching as a form of collaboration in my literature review. In this chapter, I discuss the research design and rationale, and the methodology that I used for the study. I also discuss the potential threats to the validity of the study, and I conclude with a brief summary of the chapter.

Collaboration between general and special education teachers who work in inclusive classroom settings is important because these educational professionals can learn from one another to use inclusive practices to accommodate the needs of all learners in inclusion classrooms (Cosier et al., 2015). Inclusive pedagogy is when there is an increase in these inclusive practices, and instructional practices occur through collaboration so that all students have equal educational opportunities in inclusive classroom settings (Pantic & Florian, 2015). Inclusion education is a dominant part of education reform, and there have been many laws and policies created around the world to increase inclusion education and protect the rights of students with disabilities (Fuchs et al., 2015; Lakkala et al., 2016; Weiss et al., 2015).

In this study, intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings were interviewed in order to understand their perspectives on their collaboration experiences and administrative support. The independent variable in this study was intervention specialists, and the dependent variables were their experiences and perspectives of collaboration and administration support regarding inclusion education.

Research Design and Rationale

I conducted a basic qualitative research study to explore and understand the perspectives and experiences of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusion classrooms in terms of collaboration and administrative support. I considered whether intervention specialists were a part of a coteaching model, how many students were in the classroom, how much collaboration, if any, took place among educated professionals, and support of the administration in terms of collaboration, or lack thereof. I only focused on inclusion classrooms in elementary schools.

A basic qualitative research study was more appropriate for this study because it was a type of scientific research that was used to answer questions that provided information on the human side of an issue, while a quantitative approach would be more concerned with statistics than anecdotal information (see Lewis, 2015). A basic qualitative research study allows researchers a chance to gain a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon through answers to open-ended questions. The method used for this qualitative study was in-depth face-to-face interviews in which data were collected from individuals' personal experiences, perspectives, and histories (see Lewis, 2015).

A basic qualitative design was appropriate for this study because my main goal was to uncover the experiences of the participants who were interviewed in the study and to learn the meaning of these experiences (see Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa, & Varpio, 2015). In this case, the experiences were from elementary intervention specialists and their experiences and perspectives about collaboration with general education teachers in inclusive classrooms and administrative support regarding this collaboration. This approach was a series of logical steps that led to the perspectives of these individuals.

Role of the Researcher

A purposeful sampling strategy was used for this study because I specifically wanted to interview elementary intervention specialists who worked in inclusive classroom settings in Grades 3, 4, and 5. Consent was obtained from all participants of this study. I conducted face-to-face interviews with the participants of this study. I recorded each interview, transcribed the recordings, and then I coded the data to find common themes of the information that I obtained from the interviews. Participants had the option of remaining anonymous. I had no relationship with the participants of this study. While the participants and I work for the same school district, I did not interview anyone from the building that I work in to prevent a conflict of interest.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

I used a purposeful sampling strategy for this study because only intervention specialists who work in inclusion elementary classroom settings were interviewed.

Participants had certification in special education. Gender, age, or race was not considered when selecting participants; only their credentials affected the selection process. I obtained the study sample from several elementary schools in Cleveland, Ohio. The criteria participants had to meet to be a part of this study were they had to be an intervention specialist and they had to work in elementary inclusive classroom settings in the school district that agreed to be a part of the study. I emailed one of the directors of special education from the school district to obtain a list of all of the intervention specialists who worked in each elementary school in the district. Some intervention specialists worked in self-contained environments. To determine which intervention specialists worked in inclusive classroom settings, a letter of invitation was emailed to potential participants that informed them of the criteria needed for this study. The intervention specialists who agreed to be a part of the study were emailed a letter of consent, and a time and date was set for interviews. In-depth interviews were used to collect data from participants. I used an audio recorder to record the interviews, and then I transcribed the interviews.

Ten intervention specialists from three elementary schools were interviewed for this qualitative study, but only nine interviews were used because one interview was from an intervention specialist who was in a self-contained environment, not an inclusive classroom setting. This number was based on the number of intervention specialists who worked in each school in the primary grades and who responded to the invitation letter. As the data analysis from the interviews was completed, some of the same information

from the participants was being received, and saturation was achieved, so I decided not to interview additional participants.

Instrumentation

This study included open-ended interview questions that I asked participants face-to-face, based on the experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusion classrooms regarding collaboration and administrative support. These questions were focused on teacher preparation programs, collaboration with other educational professionals, credentials, experiences, professional development, and administrative support. Open-ended questions such as *what* and *how* were used during the interviews for this study because interviews were a qualitative instrument (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, & Morales, 2007; Lewis, 2015). These questions helped me gain rich data from participants that helped me answer my research questions about the experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings regarding collaboration and administrative support. Improving the quality of education for students with disabilities who are a part of inclusion classrooms is important for student achievement and success.

The interview questions were designed to answer the research questions. The research questions were: What are the perceptions of elementary intervention specialists in inclusive classrooms settings regarding their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?, and What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings regarding administrative support of the collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers? The

interview questions were: What certification do you have as an intervention specialist?, Do you have any endorsements or additional degrees/certifications?, What do you love most about your job?, In what ways, if any, has your teacher preparation program prepared you to collaborate with other educational professionals?, In what ways, if any, has this program prepared you to work in inclusive classroom settings?, What are your experiences in regard to administrative support and collaboration?, What collaborations are you involved in, if any?, What professional developments trainings are available in regard to collaboration and inclusive education, if any?, What would you like to change in regard to collaboration?, What would you like to change in regard to collaboration and administrative supports?, What would you like to keep the same in regard to collaboration?, and what would you like to keep the same in regard to collaboration and administrative support?

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

First, approval was obtained from Walden's institution review board (IRB). Then, an email was sent to one of the directors of special education from the school district to obtain a list of all of the intervention specialists who worked in each elementary school in the district. Next, a letter of invitation was emailed to potential participants that informed them of the criteria needed for this study. A letter of consent was then sent to participants who agreed to be a part of the study, and a time and date was set for interviews. Follow-up questions were asked so that there were rich data collected from participants. Each interview took place one-on-one either in my office or in the office of the intervention specialist, and each interview lasted between 10 and 20 minutes. All interviews took

place in a 2-week time period. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. These interviews were also coded to find common themes amongst the interviewees' responses. Additionally, I used saturation to determine when to stop interviewing participants. Once I kept obtaining common themes and no new information was occurring, I decided that I had enough data to analyze.

Participants exited the study through a debriefing procedure. Participants were told that if they had additional questions after the interview to email or call me, and that once interviews were transcribed, participants would be emailed a summary of the information they provided to make sure that their information was accurately interpreted. Participants were also told that if they had any objection to the information that was sent to them, to email me as well. Other than member checking, there were no additional follow-up procedures that were necessary for this study because saturation was reached after data were collected from the nine participants interviewed. If too few participants had committed to the study, there would have been a second email sent out to participants who did not respond to the first email. If this had not worked, the committee would have been consulted as well as the IRB to consider opening the study to intervention specialists who worked in middle school inclusive classroom settings as well.

Data Analysis Plan

Qualitative data were obtained by interviews that were audio recorded. The recordings were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically. A code can be a short phrase or word that is a symbol obtained from data such as interviews, videos, and/or transcripts, and coding itself is an interpretive act primarily (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is a

way to analyze qualitative data. A sense of thematic organization took place during the second round of coding in which common themes arose from the data (Saldaña, 2016).

Common themes were found by coding the data through the qualitative data analysis software NVivo 12. Transcriptions from the interviews were uploaded into NVivo12, and codes were created based on common information that was found in the data. Categories were then created based off of the codes. Once thematic coding took place this information was used to explain how the results from the interviews related to the research that was conducted for the study so that conclusions could be made based on my research questions.

Issues of Trustworthiness

I ensured the credibility of my qualitative research by making sure that the trustworthiness, dependability and confirmability were accurate. In terms of trustworthiness I used a relational approach to my research by building rapport and setting boundaries so that participants could trust me and in return they may have felt that they could be honest in their responses to questions. Having a relational approach to research includes paying attention to relational aspects of inquiry that can help me learn from and with research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also built rapport with the participants who took part in my research study. This was a way to build trust with participants by cultivating a relationship. Also, having research boundaries was important when building trust and rapport in order to maintain professionalism so that the participants trusted me enough to disclose true and accurate information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

I also used member checking as a technique to improve the credibility of the data in my study. Member checking is when the researcher shares the summary of information collected with the participant who is involved, and if they affirm the summary then the study is said to be credible (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, and Walter, 2016).

In terms of dependability I showed that it is possible for similar results to occur under similar circumstances (Shenton, 2004). I used inquiry audits to establish that the study's findings were repeatable and consistent by having a researcher who is not a part of the study inquire about the data analysis, collections, and the results of the study (Carcary, 2009). The strategies that I used to make sure the results of my study were confirmable was journaling and self-assessing throughout the data collection and data analysis process (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Ethical Procedures

To gain access to participants to conduct this study the IRB application had to approve the proposal of the study. The IRB Approval number is 10-30-18-0668451. Part of this approval included taking online courses on how to work with human participants, an approved letter of cooperation, an approved invitation, and an approved consent form. Then the superintendent of the school district in which the study was conducted signed a letter of cooperation. Once permission was received from the superintendent, the signed cooperation letter was sent to the IRB for official approval.

A list of elementary intervention specialists from the district were emailed to the researcher, then the researcher sent an invitation letter to potential participants. The participants of the study were informed that participation in the study was voluntary.

They were also informed that there would be confidentiality in regard to participants and responses. To ensure protections of confidential data, data on the audio recorder were stored in a locked file cabinet, and transcriptions were located in a locked computer, which was also in a locked file cabinet when unattended. Participants were also informed of the purpose of the study. All of this information was included in the invitation letter.

There was also a determination of the limits of the research. Self-evaluations were used, conflicting cases were discovered, and peer debriefing was used in order to raise the quality of the qualitative research and to reduce ethical concerns (Yildirim, 2010).

Saturation is the decision that is made by researchers that no more research needs to be done (Saldaña, 2016). Saturation was used to determine the limit of research that the study needed. When the same themes reoccurred in both the research and the data collected from the interviews, and no new information was found, this meant that no more research needed to be done and no more interviews needed to be given.

Self-evaluation was also used and peers were debriefed to make sure that bias did not occur in this study. However, if conflicting situation would have been found the researcher would have been removed from the situation, self-evaluated, consulted with a peer, then decided the next step to take.

Summary

The purpose of the present study was to understand the perceptions and experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to collaboration with general education teachers and administrative support in regard to this collaboration. The nature of this study was a basic qualitative

research design. Open-ended questions were used to collect data from participants. The information obtained from data was coded and a thematic analysis took place. This study also contained a purposeful sampling strategy, IRB approval from Walden University, and consent from participants who were a part of the study. Ethical concerns were also addressed as well. Chapter 4 discusses the purpose and results of the study. The setting, and demographics are also discussed, as well as how data were collected, analyzed, and how the findings were trustworthy.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration with general education teachers in an elementary school inclusion classroom setting as well as their perceptions on the actions taken at the administrative level to ensure effective collaboration is taking place between intervention specialists and general education teachers. The gap in the research in this area was understanding the perspectives of intervention specialists who worked in inclusive classroom settings, regarding collaboration and administrative support. The research questions in this study were as follows:

- What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings regarding their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?
- What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists in inclusive classroom settings regarding administrative support of the collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?

In this chapter, I discuss the setting of the interviews I conducted, the demographics of the participants I interviewed, how data were collected and analyzed, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of my study.

Setting

This study took place in a school district in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. While I am an employee of the same school district, I did not recruit participants in my building,

and I continued to hold the role of a researcher instead of an educational professional. There were no personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study that could influence the interpretation of the study results.

Demographics

Each participant interviewed in this study was an intervention specialist in the same school district in a suburb of Cleveland, Ohio. Participants' experiences as intervention specialists ranged from 2 to 35 years. This information was relevant to this study because intervention specialists' experiences differ based on when they went to school because some teacher preparation programs may have not trained teachers on how to collaborate or work in inclusive classroom settings because there were no inclusive classroom setting at the time.

Data Collection

I interviewed a total of 10 participants for this study. However, I was only able to use nine of the interviews because one of the participants taught in a self-contained environment instead of in an inclusive classroom setting. I offered to conduct each interview in a private room inside of the library, but each participant felt more comfortable conducting the interview in their office. Each interview was face-to-face and lasted between 10 and 23 minutes. I audio recorded the interviews, and I took notes simultaneously.

Data Analysis

After I recorded each interview, I downloaded the recordings on my computer, and I used a transcription service to transcribe my interviews. The service was not 100% accurate, so I had to edit each transcription. Once all of the transcriptions were edited, I began searching for qualitative data analysis software. The qualitative data analysis software chosen was NVivo.

I used NVivo, which is the qualitative data analysis software, to help code my data. First, I tried to code each interview simultaneously by coding the response to the same question of each interview. This was confusing and ineffective, so I coded each interview separately. NVivo has nodes that are used to code data. After I coded the first interview, I had about 10 nodes. As I coded the next eight interviews, some data were grouped under the same node, and new nodes were created for other data. After I finished my first round of coding, I had 27 nodes. During my second round of coding, I found eight themes amongst the codes, and I grouped them the codes in that manner.

The first theme was weekly collaboration. Under this theme were the codes Collab, GET, IS ADMIN CCH, Collab Responsibilities, Admin & Collab Weekly, and Collab 5 Step Form. The second theme was pros collaboration. Under this theme were the codes In Sync with GET, Coteaching, and Informal Collaboration. The third theme was professional development. Under this theme were the codes No PD Training, Distant PD, Little Training Inclusive, More Training/Coteaching, and More Training/Students' Needs. The fourth theme was a code in itself: good administration. The fifth theme was pros teacher prep program. Under this theme were the codes Prep Program Field

Experience, Prep Program Class 4 Inclusion, and Prep Program 4 Collab. The sixth theme was cons teacher prep program. Under this theme were the codes Prep Program No Collab and Pre Program No Inclusion. The seventh theme was a code in itself, SPED collab. The last theme was needs/issues. Under this theme were the codes More Time to Collab, Different Routes, IS Taken Seriously, GET Involve IS More, Disconnect in Collab, and End of Day Collab.

After these codes and themes emerged, I grouped the themes with the research questions that they pertained to. The first research question about the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experience with collaboration with general education teachers was answered by the data that were within the themes weekly collab, pros to collab, needs and issues, pros to teacher prep program, and cons to teacher prep program. The second research question about the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers was answered by the data that were within the themes weekly collab, good admin support, professional development, and SPED collab. Table 1 is the themes, codes, and research questions.

Table 1

Themes, Codes, and Research Questions

Themes	Codes	Research questions
Weekly collab	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Collab, -GET, IS, ADMIN, CCH (stand for general education teachers, intervention specialists, administration, and instructional coaches) -Collab Responsibilities -Admin and Collab Weekly -5 Step Form 	<p>RQ1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?</p> <p>RQ2: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?</p>
Pros collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -In Sync with GET -Coteaching -Informal Collaboration 	<p>RQ1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?</p>

(table continues)

Themes	Codes	Research questions
Professional development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -No PD Training -Distant PD -Little Training Inclusive -More Training/Coteaching -More Training/Student Needs 	RQ2: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?
Good administration	-Good Administration	RQ2: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?
Pros teacher preparation program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Prep Program Field Experience -Prep Program Class 4 Inclusion -Prep Program 4 Collab 	RQ1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?

(table continues)

Themes	Codes	Research questions
Cons teacher preparation program	-Prep Program No Collab -Prep Program No Inclusion	RQ1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?
SPED collab	-SPED Collab	RQ2: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers?
Needs/issues	-More Time to Collab -Different Routes -IS Taken Seriously -GET Involve IS More -Disconnect in Collab -End of Day Collab	RQ1: What are the perceptions of elementary school intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to their experiences with collaboration with general education teachers?

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Member checking was a technique that I used to improve the credibility of the data in my study. Member checking is when the researcher shares the summary of information collected with the participant who is involved, and if they affirm the summary, then the study is said to be credible (Birt et al., 2016). I sent transcriptions to participants to make sure that I gathered their information and edited the transcriptions accurately.

This study had no transferability because it could not be transferred to other contexts or situations. This study cannot be generalized for a self-contained environment, a general education environment that is not inclusive, or the experiences of general education teachers. This study is specific to inclusive classroom settings and the experiences of intervention specialists regarding collaboration and administrative support of that collaboration.

In terms of dependability, in order to verify that the findings of this study were consistent with the raw data, I used inquiry audits to show that the research findings were repeatable and consistent (see Shenton, 2004). I had a researcher who was not a part of the study inquire about the data analysis, collections, and the results of the study (see Carcary, 2009). The strategies I used to make sure the results of my study were confirmable were journaling and self-assessing throughout the data collection and data analysis process (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question was as follows: What are the perceptions of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to collaboration with general education teachers? This question was answered from the themes that I found in the data of Weekly Collaboration, Pros 2 Collaboration, Pros to Teacher Prep Programs, Cons to Teacher Prep Programs, and Needs and Issues.

Weekly Collaboration

Data showed that each intervention specialist who was interviewed had a weekly, morning collaboration session called Teacher Bases Teams (TBT). This collaboration session was with the general education teachers that the intervention specialists work with, an administrator, and at least one instructional coach. The general education teachers were responsible for bringing data, and the intervention specialists suggested interventions for teachers to use to help students become successful in inclusive classroom settings. The intervention specialists and the general education teachers also discussed the assessment data and how students performed from pre-assessments to post-assessments. The administrators and instructional coaches were the facilitators of the collaboration, and they helped keep the collaborations on topic. The administrators and instructional coaches were also responsible for making sure that the five-step process forms were completed during collaboration sessions.

The five-step process form is a form that seven out of nine participants reported using during TBT sessions. The general education teachers and intervention specialists

completed this form during collaboration in which a five-step plan was created based on the Ohio Content Standards. This form also showed how students were moving towards meeting these standards, and the activities that were done in the classroom. Of the seven participants who reported that they used this form during collaboration, six of them reported that the form was not a useful source of time.

One participant stated,

We have a five step planning form...it's nice to see that data, but it's not always the data that we're looking for... I wish we could use our time differently. I like the times we're meeting and we're just talking about what works in our classroom, and what doesn't work instead of doing the forms honestly.

A second participant stated, "I like that we meet once a week at the same time...I just think that the time with the general education grade level collaboration needs to be more structured and guided than a five-step process". A third participant stated that in collaboration they should spend "...maybe less time on the form, more time on what kids need because sometimes you're all wrapped up in that form." A fourth participant stated that "It's kind of like a check in because the TBT is so directed on just that task on the form". A fifth participant stated,

I find that because we're doing the five step-by-step process, and all of the requirements that we have, we often have to have those conversations about individual students on a side bar, you know passing each other in the hallway, stopping in during a planning session, lunchtime. It's not a part of collaboration as its set up.

The sixth participant stated,

It's filling up TBT forms, which I think is a complete waste of everyone's time.

So I participate, I come up with ideas, or I add what I can...But mostly it's filling out the form. That doesn't really help any of us, and I know a lot of gen ed teachers agree with me.

Despite the strong fillings against the five-step process form, participants did report that there were positive aspects to collaboration that take place.

Pros to Collaboration

Some of the positive aspects of collaboration that three of the nine participants reported were informal meetings that happened between intervention specialists and general education teachers daily throughout the day. These informal meetings took place in the hallway, during a planning period, and during lunch times. One intervention specialist reported that she sends out emails every Sunday night to communicate with the general education teachers that she works with the entities that are taking place the week ahead.

In addition to informal meetings throughout the day, two of the nine participants mentioned above, and another participant reported that they are a part of a coteaching model with a general education teacher. There was a three-day training that the school district provided the year prior to coteaching models began. These participants stated that they like being in a coteaching setting they would work on goals that did not align with their classroom work. One participant stated,

I like how we're coteaching now, it's really nice. I used to just do pull outs all day, and I did not know that the teachers were working on. I would pull out my students, work on their goals, and it was never really aligned with what they were doing, and now I see the need that teachers really do need to collaborate and talk about the students...it helps a lot and I love coteaching.

Now that they are in a coteaching setting they are aware of that is going on in the inclusive classroom setting, so they can align the goals that they are working on with their students, to what is being taught in class.

Another positive aspect of collaboration in addition to coteaching is intervention specialists feeling as if they are in sync with the general education teachers. Seven out of nine participants reported that collaboration sessions made them feel in sync with the general education teachers that they worked with. One participant reported that, "Most of the teachers here, we've been working together for many years and we respect one another and we use positive language towards one another, but I think it's a positive experience". Another participant reported that intervention specialists get to understand how general education teachers perceive students and content during collaboration sessions. There was also data that showed the intervention specialists know what standards are being worked on for the week in the inclusive classroom setting, and this is a time for intervention specialists and general education teachers to learn from one another. It was also reported that collaboration between these educational professionals really reinforced that they were a team. During the review of literature it was discovered that collaboration was important because not all teacher preparation programs prepared

educational professional on how to collaborate with other educational professionals, or how to work in inclusive classroom settings (Driver & Murphy, 2018; Zundans-Fraser & Bain, 2016).

Pros and Cons of Teacher Preparation Programs

Regarding the pros of teacher preparation programs preparing college students to work in inclusive classroom settings, three of the nine participants reported that they were trained to work in inclusive classroom settings when they went to college, two of which were involved in direct field experience. One intervention specialist stated that she learned a lot about modifications, accommodations, and how to meet the needs of every student in inclusive classroom settings during the courses of her Master's degree.

Another intervention specialists reported that in college she was trained on how to create and conduct small groups in inclusive classroom settings. Another intervention specialist also said that in college she learned how to identify the knowledge of the student, what they may need in the general education classroom, and how to advocate for students.

In regard to the pros of teacher preparation programs preparing college students to collaborate with other educational professionals, three out of nine participants stated that they learned how to collaborate with general education teachers in college. One participant reported that her Master's program stressed the importance of collaboration, and how important communication is for the sake of the students. Another participant reported that her training in college in regard to collaboration was spot on and most of their work was done as a group so collaboration was a part of their training in a hands-on

environment. Another participant reported that she took at least two courses based on collaboration during her teacher preparation program in college.

In regard to the cons of teacher preparation programs preparing college students to work in inclusive classroom settings, five of the nine participants reported that they were not trained to work in inclusive classroom settings when they went to college. They stated that they were taught to test kids and get them out because that was “what was best”. One participant reported that during the time she went to school there were no inclusive classroom environments, only resource rooms so she was not trained on this when she attended college. Another teacher reported that collaboration was touched upon lightly during her program, but there was nothing about working in inclusive classroom settings.

Regarding the cons of teacher preparation programs preparing college students to collaborate with other educational professionals, five of the nine participants reported that they were not trained to collaborate when they went to college. One participant stated that they were trained to work collaborate with educational professionals like speech and language pathologists, not general education teachers. Another participant stated that she was not prepared because there were no inclusive classroom settings at the time, so there was no need to be trained for collaboration. Another participant stated that collaboration was mentioned in the form of being respectful to other peoples’ ideas, but not actual classes or trainings on how to collaborate.

Needs and Issues

Six out of nine participants expressed concerns and issues that they had in regard to collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers. Three intervention specialists reported that they would like more time to collaborate. One of these intervention specialists reported that,

Time...that's the biggest issue...Now my caseload is much larger so trying to meet the needs of all the students, their objectives on their IEPs, and help them to meet the needs of the general education classroom...I want to be able to meet the needs of both the IEP and the general education needs, but it's just time, I just wish we had more time.

Another intervention specialist reported that,

I wish we had more time. I personally am pretty much on an island by myself here right now...I have kids who have greater needs, but still need to be in the regular classroom. I don't have time to connect as much as I would like to with the regular ed teachers...U have K through 5, so I have every level possible. Keeping up with what they're doing is virtually impossible for me.

The third intervention specialist shared that,

I feel like most of the collaboration that I do with the gen ed teachers is in the hallways, ya know, on the spot. I feel like that would be a better time then when we are in there for an hour, but there's no time. Sometimes I don't know that this is what we have to have for collaboration, and then four teachers will hand me something and I have two hours to get it done with a bunch of kids.

Of those three participants one participant reported that she would like for the weekly collaboration sessions to be at the end of the day instead of the morning because it causes a disruption to morning routines in a population of students where routine is important.

Two other intervention specialists reported that general education teachers should involve the intervention specialists. Of these two intervention specialists, one participant stated, “I think in the gen ed collaboration I’d like to see them involve us more and when I come into the classroom...I push into six classroom, and I have about three that are ready for me”. The other participant stated,

I can tell you that I always feel like an outsider no matter what grade level...I feel like I do have a lot of information that I could help with, but you’re not necessarily seen as part of the team...I feel like I don’t know what the plans are. I don’t even know what the lesson plans look like, not that I need a detailed plan, but I don’t even know where the focus is headed...so that we can look at what supports need to go in place...I would also like to be seen as an equal part of the team...I would like to get more involved at some point...I’m not really a part of the process.

This participant also added that general education teachers really don’t understand what intervention specialists do, and when she gives suggestions the teachers do not try the interventions, and they do not take her seriously. She stated,

I really wish that the gen ed teachers would take the special ed teachers a little bit more seriously...I don’t think the gen ed teachers really understand what special

ed does...so therefore they don't use us appropriately, or to their best interest...how we could be more helpful to them.

A separate participant also complained about not being taken seriously by the general education teacher. She reported that administration was able to understand and support her, but general education teachers did not value her professional opinion, and it is her job to educate the general education teachers on certain aspects of special education because they do not have the training, but they will not accept the help or take the intervention specialist seriously. This participant stated,

I was thinking actually with the teachers, I feel like we need to be taken seriously. We as special educators need to be taken seriously when giving suggestions...mostly to the teachers not with administration because I think administration understands us a lot of the time, but sometimes if you give them a teacher that doesn't have a special ed background then I feel like its my job to kind of educate them on some things, and just give them suggestions on what to do.

Research Question 2

The second research question was as follows: What are the perceptions of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings in regard to administrative support of collaboration with general education teachers? The themes from the data that addressed the second research question, were Good Administrative Support, Weekly Collaboration, SPED Collaboration, and PD (professional development).

Administrative Support and Weekly Collaboration

In regard to administrative support, seven out of nine participants stated that they had great administrative support. One participant stated that,

I think we have really good support with our collaboration...coteaching collaboration has been going on for two years now, and basically it's worked really well...one of the good things that I think is really good for us is that if it's not working, if it's not going to be a good situation then they will switch it, or see if we can do something a little different...you've got to work together, and I think administration has taken that into consideration.

Another participant stated, "Administrators are very supportive. They're always there...my group we meet on Tuesday mornings and there's always two administrators every week with an agenda and they require certain materials. They seem very on top of those things". A third participant stated that she would not change anything in regard to administrative support of collaboration because "It's very impressive the amount of knowledge that she has, she has a great memory".

An additional participant stated, "Administrative support is excellent here. If I need something my administrators are more than willing to talk, to listen, to discuss whether it's feasible or not, but it's been excellent here". Other participants reported that if intervention specialists have concerns, or they feel like their role is being diminished then administrators are not only open to sitting down and having a conversation, but they are good at trying to find problems to solutions. All participants stated that administrators

set the expectation that there will be weekly collaboration, and that there is at least one administrator in each collaboration session who takes on the role of facilitator.

One participant shed a different light on administrative support and collaboration and stated that,

“I would like to see administrators to be as consistent as they are about just general collaboration as far as the importance of it, especially with our high numbers of special education students, and low performing students where everybody can benefit...maybe having some guideline as to what it looks like”.

Special Education Collaboration

While all participants reported that they were a part of a weekly collaboration session in which intervention specialists, teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches are present, five out of nine participants reported that they were also a part of a second weekly collaboration that only involved members of the special education department. During these collaborations intervention specialists, administrators, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists were present. Social workers were present in some instances as well. These collaborations were led by administrators and the content of these meetings were upcoming meetings and deadlines, students who are being tested, and students whose parents' have requested testing for them. There are also conversations of compliance issues when new laws are passed, or new forms are introduced.

One participant reported, “What we do every week is the school psych will start out with the list the never ending IEP ETR list...we go over all the meetings first, then often we will discuss any particularly difficult children”. Another participant states,

It seems more of an administrative meeting more than anything else...we’re always checking dates...that’s what it mostly is, date checking. Compliance issues versus, there’s not a whole lot of strategies, or just seems very administrative. Checks and balances.

A different participant revealed,

Our principal, she leads the meeting along with our school psychologist...we always start going over the list of students who were testing, who parents request testing basically, so we’re all on the same page...our assistant principal she goes over any other special ed concerns, issues, questions we have.

A fourth participant shared, “We can talk about things that maybe were mentioned at our district meetings...are we implementing this, are we doing this the right way, or we talk about different interventions that we tried, or if you needed ideas for a kid”. The fifth intervention specialist who stated that she was a part of an additional collaboration with only members of the special education department that work in the school building shared that, “We’ll problem solve some strategies what to do, or strategies to work with the teachers on how to get these kids to show appropriate behavior or work on their academics”.

Professional Development

The data that was collected showed that six out of nine participants have had no professional development training from the district or the schools that they worked in regard to how to collaborate with general education teachers, or how to work in inclusive classroom settings. The data also revealed that three out of nine participants were involved in a district wide professional development training more than five years ago. Two participants reported that they received training six years ago, and the topic was coteaching. Another participant reported that they received training on how to be a part of TBT (Teacher Based Team) sessions, and how to complete the five-step process form about eight years ago. This participant stated,

That's when we talked about what the meetings should look like. That's when they said that there should be a recorder, everybody should have a role. We went through the template of what we had to talk about, just everything that had to be recorded...but I'm trying to remember, it had to be eight years ago.

One participant also reported that she would like more training on coteaching. She stated that there were trainings years ago when their coteaching model began, but nothing since then. She reported that when new educational professionals began teaching in this environment there is a disconnection because all roles and processes in regard to coteaching and collaboration are not clear. This participant stated,

Even though I've co-taught every year for my entire career pretty much, and the people I worked with this and last year have never co-taught before, they don't really know anything about it, and they don't know what the expectations

are...It's hard on intervention specialists because it takes a while, I feel like, for us to really gain who we are in the classroom. When you don't have that and when general education teachers don't have that training to know exactly what is the role of the intervention specialist.

This participant also shared that there should be refresher courses for people who are currently working in coteaching environment because these educational professionals may become "comfortable" and the refresher course would be helpful.

Another participant reported that there should be professional development trainings specific to students' needs. This participant reported that knowing how to accommodate students in inclusive classroom settings is not known to many educational professionals, and because of this some students get "lost in the shuffle". The participant stated,

I think more training on the needs of students because I feel like special ed sometimes gets lost in the shuffle, and I feel like teachers sometimes don't have adequate training to deal with the needs of the students, so I feel we definitely need more training on that, and more trainings on how to accommodate the students in the classroom...Sometimes those students get lost in the shuffle and the teacher doesn't sometimes know what to do, or doesn't have the strategies to deal with it. So I really feel like we need to learn about the extended standards, and even just grading the students like thinking about what you're giving them as a grade, does it align with the IEP?.

Summary

Throughout the data analysis stage in regard to elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings experiences' in regard to collaboration with general education teachers, it was revealed that each participant that was interviewed was a part of a weekly collaboration session. These weekly collaboration sessions were called TBT, or Teacher Based Teams Sessions, in which intervention specialists, general education teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches are present. Seven out of nine participants reported that they completed a five-step process form during TBT, and six of those participants reported that the form was a "complete waste of time", and that they "wish we could spend more time on what students need". However, seven out of nine teachers also reported that when they discuss entities that are not part of the five-step process they feel in sync with general education teachers because they know what is going on in the classroom. Participants reported that they could align the goals that they were working on with their students with the content that was being taught in the inclusive classroom setting. Also, three out of nine participants were a part of a coteaching model that they enjoyed working in.

This study also showed that three out of nine participants met daily informally in passing, during planning periods, and lunchtime to discuss students strengths and weaknesses and strategies that could be used to assist students. This was done because there was not enough time to discuss this during TBT sessions because they were, "wrapped up in the form".

Data from this study also showed that six out of nine participants had concerns with their collaboration experiences. Some participants would like more time to collaborate, while other participants would like to be taken more seriously by general education teachers, and to be more involved in the general education classroom. These participants reported that there was a disconnect between general education teachers and intervention specialists during collaboration and in general, and that there should be more of a focus on students' needs instead of data discussions during collaboration sessions.

Through data analysis, in regard to elementary intervention specialists' experiences in regard to administrative support of collaboration, it was discovered that seven out of nine participants reported that they had supportive and amazing administrators, and that they were the facilitators of the weekly TBT collaboration sessions. Five out of nine participants also had an additional weekly collaboration session with only the special education department in which intervention specialists, administrators, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists were a part of. These meetings were also facilitated by administrators, and were "more administrative than anything".

In regard to professional development six out of nine participants had never had professional development trainings on how to work in inclusive classroom settings, or how to collaborate with general education teachers. Two out of nine participants were trained on coteaching more than five years ago, and one participant was trained on how to be a part of TBT sessions more than eight years ago. Some participants would like more

training on collaboration, coteaching, and how to specifically meet the needs of all students.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perceptions of intervention specialists in terms of collaboration with general education teachers in an elementary school inclusion classroom setting, as well as their perceptions on the actions taken at the administrative level in order to ensure effective collaboration is taking place between intervention specialists and general education teachers. The gap in the research in this area was understanding the perspectives of intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings, regarding collaboration and administrative support.

The nature of this study was a basic qualitative research study. A strength of qualitative research is being able to interact directly with participants through face-to-face interviews. The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to describe and discover narrative reporting to understand how people experience, see, view, and approach the world, and how they create meaning from these experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Qualitative research aligned to my purpose statement and research questions because I used interviews to understand the phenomenon of the perceptions of elementary intervention specialists in inclusion classroom settings in terms of collaboration and how administrators take action to ensure proper collaboration is taking place. These intervention specialists who work in elementary inclusion classroom settings were the participants for my study.

Through data analysis, I discovered that each participant who was interviewed was a part of a weekly collaboration session. These weekly collaboration sessions are

called TBT, in which intervention specialists, general education teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches are present. Seven out of nine participants reported that they completed a 5-step process form during TBT, and six of those participants reported that the form is a “complete waste of time,” and that they “wish they could spend more time on what students need.” However, seven out of nine teachers also reported that when they discuss entities that are not a part of the 5-step process, they feel in sync with general education teachers because they know what is going on in the classroom. Participants reported that they could align the goals that they were working on with their students with the content being taught in the inclusive classroom setting. In addition, three out of nine participants were a part of a coteaching model that they enjoyed working in.

Three out of nine participants meet informally daily in passing, during planning periods, and at lunchtime to discuss students’ strengths and weaknesses and strategies that can be used to assist students. This is done because there is not enough time to discuss this during TBT sessions because educators are busy working on the 5-step form.

Through my data, I discovered that six out of nine participants had issues with their collaboration experiences. Some participants would like more time to collaborate, while other participants would like to be taken more seriously by general education teachers and to be more involved in the general education classroom. These participants reported that they would offer advice and interventions that general education teachers could use with struggling students and/or students with disabilities, and the advice and interventions were not put in place. These participants also reported that there was a disconnect between general education teachers and intervention specialists during

collaboration and in general and that there should be more of a focus on students' needs instead of data during collaboration sessions.

Through data analysis, regarding elementary intervention specialists' experiences concerning administrative support of collaboration, I discovered that seven out of nine participants reported that they have "amazing administrators" and that they were the facilitators of the weekly TBT collaboration sessions. Five out of nine participants also had an additional weekly collaboration session with only the special education department that intervention specialists, administrators, speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, and school psychologists were a part of. These meetings were also facilitated by administrators and involved administrative duties like times and dates of upcoming meetings for students with disabilities.

Regarding professional development, six out of nine participants never had professional development trainings on how to work in inclusive classroom settings or how to collaborate with general education teachers. Two out of nine participants were trained on coteaching 6 years ago, and one participant was trained on how to be a part of TBT sessions 8 to 10 years ago. Some participants wanted more training on collaboration, coteaching, and how to specifically meet the needs of all students.

Interpretation of the Findings

Inclusion, Collaboration, and Student Achievement

The findings of this study confirm what was found during the review of literature in regard to collaboration, and how it is needed amongst general education teachers and intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings to increase student

achievement (Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterley, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). Some of the intervention specialists interviewed reported that they wished they had more time to collaborate with general education teachers and that they would like more training specific to meeting the needs of students who learn in inclusive classroom settings. Most of the intervention specialists that I interviewed reported that they wished they could spend less time on the 5-step process form and more time to collaborate about how to meet the needs of students.

Researchers have also shown that while collaborating, there should be a clear plan and approach as to which inclusive strategies and interventions need to be used based on the needs of students (Baines et al., 2015; Douglas et al., 2016). Most of the participants I interviewed reported that they have to meet informally with the general education teachers they work with in the hallway, during planning periods, and during lunchtimes to discuss what strategies and interventions need to be used for individual students because they are unable to do so during collaboration sessions because educators are working on the 5-step process form that does not involve strategies and interventions needed for individual students.

Laws and Administrative Support

Laws have been enacted to protect the rights of students who learn in inclusive classroom settings on a national and international level because inclusion is a dominant part of education reform (Fuchs et al., 2015; Weiss et al., 2015). Some participants in this study reported that their teacher preparation program did not prepare them to collaborate with general education teachers or how to work in inclusive classroom settings because

there were no inclusive classroom settings at the time. Mainstreaming, the beginning of inclusive education, did not occur until later.

Professional development and collaboration are important because there are always changes in education; most recently, there has been a shift to standards-based education. Data from this study revealed that while intervention specialists did not like using the 5-step process form during collaboration, there was a focus of standards mastery when completing the form. The issue was that data were being discussed and standards were not being mastered, but there was no information pertaining to how to help meet the needs of students. Thus, these educational professionals met informally to achieve this goal.

While it is the responsibility of administrators to make sure that systems are in place for staff members to grow professionally and for students to achieve progress, it is also their job to support staff members. Most of the participants I interviewed stated that they felt very supported by their administrators. All participants said that their administrators expected weekly collaboration sessions to occur with intervention specialists, general education teachers, instructional coaches, and their administrators as the facilitators. However, most participants stated that there had been no professional development trainings on how to work in inclusive classroom settings or how to collaborate with general education teachers. Two participants stated that they had a training 8 to 10 years ago on how to fill out the 5-step process form that was a part of collaboration sessions. One participant stated that they had a training on how to coteach with general education teachers 6 years ago. Professional development is important

because there is a gap in education from teacher preparation programs to actually working in inclusive classroom settings with general education teachers.

Teacher Preparation Programs and Professional Development

During the review of literature, it was revealed that when individuals go to college to become general education teachers or intervention specialists, they are not being prepared to collaborate or work in inclusive classroom settings (Driver & Murphy, 2018). This coincides with data collected during this study because most of the intervention specialists interviewed reported that they did not take courses on how to work in inclusive classroom settings or how to collaborate with general education teachers when they went to college. This gap from teachers' education to actually working in the classroom means that professional development is needed to close this gap so that students are receiving quality instruction. The professional development of teachers is important to keep educators current on information and educational practices (Paju et al., 2016; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015).

Research from this study also revealed that on-going professional development is needed for general education teachers and intervention specialists, regarding collaboration and how to work in inclusive classroom settings, because it is vital to the success of students who are learning in inclusive classrooms (Glowacki & Hackmann, 2016; Hannes et al., 2018; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown 2015). Data from this study also revealed that there have been no professional development trainings provided by the district for collaboration between general education teachers and intervention specialists. Two participants stated that they had a training 8 to 10 years ago on how to fill out the 5-

step process form and how to be a part of collaboration sessions. One participant stated that she had one training about coteaching with general education teachers 6 years ago.

Collaboration and Teacher Burnout

Not only does collaboration among educators who teach in inclusive classroom settings increase student achievement, it also reduces teacher burnout (Caputo & Langher, 2015). When educators collaborate, there is less of a workload on each individual on how to meet the needs of students, make educators feel supported, and be sure that information is being shared on both sides. Most of the intervention specialists interviewed reported that they felt fully supported by their administration.

According to Shakenova (2017) and participants from the study, one of the issues with collaboration is a lack of time. Not only do intervention specialists and general education teachers not have time to discuss specific students and their needs during collaboration because they are completing a 5-step process form, but they would like more time to collaborate in general.

Teacher Attitudes and Self-Efficacy

Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion education and their sense of self-efficacy can be directly affected by how inclusive practices are executed (Yada & Savolainen, 2017). Educators who have positive attitudes towards inclusive education and a higher sense of self-efficacy tend to work well in inclusive settings. Educators who have negative attitudes towards inclusive education and a lower sense of self-efficacy are less effective in the classroom.

Teacher's must also be committed to and consistent on implementing inclusive education practices, and administrative support and collaboration leads to more positive attitudes of teachers in regard to inclusive education (Odongo & Davidson, 2016).

Through data it was discovered that the intervention specialists who said that they felt fully supported by their administrators had a positive attitude towards inclusive classroom settings. Also, intervention specialists who reported that they were supported by their administrators felt a disconnect in collaboration, they felt that they were not taken seriously by the general education teachers that they work with, and they felt that they wished that general education teachers involved them more in the inclusive classroom.

Coteaching

While coteaching is frequently used in inclusive education (Chandler-Olcott & Nieroda, 2016), only one third of the intervention specialist who work in inclusive classroom settings reported that they were a part of a coteaching model with general education teachers. Coteaching is a strategy that is used to improve inclusive education because it helps meet the needs of all students (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). Regarding professional development sessions there have been no trainings in over five years on how to co-teach, and there have been new teachers in the school district since the change to a coteaching model occurred. New educators learn how to co-teach from other educational professionals who were experienced. This coincides with literature from research that coteaching with other educational professionals can help teachers gain experience from more experienced teachers (Fluijt et al., 2016; Hedgaard-Soerense et al., 2018).

Participants also reported that once they than began working in a coteaching environment, in an inclusive classroom setting, they began to understand the need for collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited because of data collection and educational laws. The data that was collected was limited to elementary intervention specialists who worked in inclusive classroom settings. The data collected was limited to elementary classrooms in a specific public school district. Laws that were enacted in support of collaboration and inclusive classroom settings did not require educators to receive formal training on how to teach in inclusive classroom settings.

Recommendations

There is a recommendation that further research is conducted to address the experiences of general education teachers who work in inclusive classroom settings. This research study explained that collaboration is one of the most significant components of inclusion education (Florian, 2017). I also found that in inclusion classrooms, collaboration between general and special education teachers, and student achievement are related (Khairuddin et al., 2016; Satterly, 2015; Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016; Gebhardt et al., 2015). This study examined the experiences of elementary intervention specialists who work in inclusive classroom settings. However, the experiences of elementary general education teachers who work in inclusive classroom settings was not examined so this would be a topic that could be researched as well.

I would also recommend that further research is conducted to address the experiences of administrators in regard to their support of collaboration, and the types of trainings and professional development that they have provided for staff members in regard to collaboration and working in inclusive classroom settings. During the review of literature it was revealed that administrators are responsible for the growth of staff members and student achievement, and they are the pedagogical leaders of a school (Shani & Ram, 2015). During this research study it was discovered that while most participants felt that they had amazing administrators, there was also a lack of training provided by administrators in regard to collaboration and working in inclusive classroom settings. I recommend that more research is conducted on this topic so that the perspectives of administrators are examined.

In regard to recommendations for future practices, intervention specialists and general education teachers can use the information from this study to make sure that they understand the importance of meaningful collaboration sessions, and how collaboration is directly related to student success. There is also recommendation that specific interventions and strategies are tailored to students because all students have different needs, and these needs should be addressed individually based on these needs.

In regard to recommendations for future practices, it is recommended that administrators provide trainings in their school buildings for educators on how to collaborate with other educational professionals to help students' progress academically. Administrators should also not restrict educators to a form to complete during

collaboration. It is also recommended to provide trainings to educators on how to work in inclusive classroom environments in order to meet the needs of all students.

Implications

The results of this study may affect social change because it provides insight on how intervention specialists collaborate with general education teachers in inclusion classrooms, and what takes place during that process. Insights from this study may also effect social change because it can aid intervention specialists in what strategies to use in inclusive classroom settings when collaborating with general education teachers. Insights from this study may also aid elementary school administrators in creating proper training programs for collaboration between intervention specialists and general education teachers who work in inclusive classroom environments. Inclusive classroom settings are places that general and special education teachers can collaborate to increase student achievement. Being that inclusive classroom settings are common in elementary schools it is important to maximize the information that students are getting through the collaboration of educational professionals.

Conclusion

The experiences of intervention specialist who work in elementary inclusive classroom settings in regard to their collaboration with general education teachers, and administrative support of collaboration was revealed in this study. All of the participants that were interviewed reported that they were a part of a weekly, morning collaboration session in which intervention specialists, general education teachers, instructional coaches and administrators were present. The administrators facilitate this collaboration

and educators are expected to complete a five-step process form on how students are meeting specific state standards.

Seven out of nine participants reported that the five-step form was a waste of time. While the five-step process form addresses how students are (or are not) meeting the Ohio state standards, it does not address the educational needs of specific individual students. Three out of nine participants stated that they have to meet with the general education teachers that they work with informally so that they can discuss how to meet the needs of students.

Five out of nine participants reported that their teacher preparation program did not prepare them to work in inclusive classroom settings. These participants also reported that they did not take classes pertaining to collaboration with general education teachers. Only two of these participants were involved in field experience. Some participants did not have courses on inclusion while they were in college because inclusive education had not begun yet.

Seven out of nine participants reported that they had amazing administrators that supported them, and promoted collaboration. However, no intervention specialist was provided with any professional development trainings on how to collaborate with general education teachers, or how to work in inclusive classroom settings.

Three out of nine participants stated that they were a part of a coteaching model, and they realized the importance of the collaboration between general education teachers and intervention specialists after they became a part of the coteaching model, but there had not been a professional development session on coteaching in over five years.

Six out of nine participants had concerns with collaboration. These intervention specialists reported that they were not taken seriously by the general education teachers, they feel a disconnect during collaboration sessions, they would like for general education teachers to involve them more in the classroom. They also reported that they would like more time to collaborate, more trainings on how to co-teach, and more trainings specific to meeting the needs of all students.

Inclusion education is a dominant reform in education. It is important for administrators provide professional development opportunities for educators on how to work in inclusive classroom settings, and collaborate with general education teachers because some teacher preparation programs are not provided classes on this. Collaboration is the central element for the professional development of educators who teach in inclusive classroom settings.

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Appendix A: Open-Ended Interview Questions

- What certification do you have as an intervention specialist?
- Do you have any endorsements or additional degrees/certifications?
- What is the best part of your job?
- In what ways, if any, has your teacher preparation program prepared you to collaborate with other educational professionals?
- In what ways, if any, has this program prepared you to work in inclusion classrooms?
- How long have you been an intervention specialist?
- What are your experiences in regard to administrative support and collaboration?
- What collaboration are you involved in, if any?
- What professional development trainings are available in regard to collaboration and inclusion education, if any?
- What would you change in regard to collaboration?
- What would you change in regard to collaboration and administrative support?
- What would you keep the same in regard to collaboration?
- What would you keep the same in regard to collaboration and administrative support?