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## Special Education Co-Teachers' Perceptions: Collaboration, Involvement in Instruction, and Satisfaction

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Special Education Co-Teachers' Perceptions:  
Collaboration, Involvement in Instruction,  
And Satisfaction

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in  
Special Education  
Early Intervention

by

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B.F.A. University of Texas, 1987  
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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to Mary B. Marshall.  
Her enduring love and tenacious spirit are a constant source of inspiration.

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## Abstract

Co-teaching is an approach that is frequently used by schools when students both with and without disabilities are taught in an inclusive classroom. With co-teaching, a general education teacher and a special education teacher share the responsibility of planning and teaching students. This study examined the perceptions of elementary special education co-teachers (n=81) regarding their collaboration with the general educator and their involvement in instruction in the inclusive classroom. In addition, the special education teachers' satisfaction with the co-teaching assignment was investigated. Findings showed that special education co-teachers shared an average of 30 minutes of co-planning a week, teachers who volunteered to co-teach were more likely to plan more often than teachers who were assigned to co-teach, teachers in their first 3 years of the co-teaching relationship tended to have scheduled planning time compared to the spontaneous planning time of co-teachers with long-term relationships. Co-teachers shared the management of the behaviors of all of the students in the classroom. The primary role of the co-teacher was "floating and assisting" with all students rather than focusing solely on the students with disabilities. However, many co-teachers taught small groups of students comprised of students

both with and without disabilities. Overall, co-teachers were satisfied with their assignment and career.

Keywords: collaboration; inclusive practices; special education; general education; planning time

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Abstract .....                                | iv |
| Chapter I .....                               | 1  |
| Introduction .....                            | 1  |
| Overview of Collaboration .....               | 1  |
| Evolution of Co-Teaching .....                | 3  |
| Definition of Co-Teaching .....               | 3  |
| Definitions of Key Terms .....                | 4  |
| Rationale for Co-Teaching .....               | 5  |
| Efficacy of Co-Teaching .....                 | 6  |
| Lack of Elementary Co-Teaching Research ..... | 8  |
| Significance of the Study .....               | 10 |
| Summary .....                                 | 12 |
| Chapter II .....                              | 14 |
| Literature Review .....                       | 14 |
| History of Inclusive Practices .....          | 14 |
| Collaborative Teaching Models .....           | 17 |
| Attitudes about Co-Teaching .....             | 20 |
| Critical Factors in Co-Teaching .....         | 21 |
| Co-Planning Time .....                        | 24 |
| Special Education Teachers' Use of Time ..... | 27 |
| Categories and Models of Co-Teaching .....    | 29 |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Three Models of Co-Teachin: Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989) ..... | 29 |
| Five Models of Co-Teaching: Cook and Friend (1995).....                | 30 |
| Seven Models of Co-Teaching: Vaughn, Schumm, and Arguelles (1999)..... | 32 |
| Co-Teaching Models Observed by Dieker (2001) .....                     | 35 |
| Issues with Co-Teaching .....  | 36 |
| Issues with One Teach One Assist.....                                  | 37 |
| Stages of Co-Teaching.....   | 41 |
| Special Education Teachers' Responsibilities .....                     | 42 |
| Responsibilities Outside of Instruction.....                           | 42 |
| Teacher Satisfaction.....  | 43 |
| Conceptual Framework .....   | 44 |
| Summary .....  | 45 |
| Chapter III .....  | 48 |
| Research Methods .....   | 48 |
| Purpose of the Study .....   | 48 |
| Research Questions.....  | 50 |
| Participants .....   | 50 |
| Survey Instrument .....  | 51 |
| Validity.....  | 52 |
| Survey Instrument .....  | 53 |
| Data Collection and Procedures.....                                    | 60 |
| Analysis of Data .....   | 61 |
| Descriptive Statistics .....   | 62 |



|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Cramer’s V .....   | 63  |
| Summary .....  | 66  |
| Chapter IV .....   | 68  |
| Participants .....   | 68  |
| Survey Results .....   | 72  |
| Collaboration with Co-Teachers .....   | 72  |
| Involvement in Instruction.....  | 79  |
| Satisfaction.....  | 85  |
| Participants’ Comments .....   | 88  |
| Positive Co-Teaching Experiences with General Education Co-Teachers .....                                | 89  |
| Negative Experiences with Co-Teaching in Elementary Classrooms .....                                     | 90  |
| Cramer’s V .....   | 92  |
| Collaboration with Co-Teacher .....  | 93  |
| Involvement in Instruction.....  | 95  |
| Satisfaction, Collaboration with Satisfaction, and Involvement with Instruction and<br>Satisfaction..... | 96  |
| Conclusions.....   | 97  |
| Summary .....  | 98  |
| Chapter V .....  | 100 |
| Discussion .....   | 100 |
| Overview of the Study .....  | 100 |
| Discussion of the Findings .....   | 100 |
| Collaboration with Co-Teacher .....  | 100 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Planning Time .....   | 100 |
| Belief System .....   | 103 |
| Accommodations and Modifications .....  | 103 |
| Behavior .....  | 103 |
| Volunteering .....  | 106 |
| Complementary Skills.....   | 106 |
| Involvement in Instruction.....   | 106 |
| Length of Relationship.....   | 107 |
| Models of Co-Teaching .....   | 108 |
| Satisfaction.....   | 112 |
| Choice .....  | 112 |
| Appropriate Placement.....  | 112 |
| Multiple-Relationships .....  | 114 |
| Limitations .....   | 115 |
| Study Implications .....  | 116 |
| Suggestions for Future Research.....  | 117 |
| Conclusion .....  | 119 |
| Appendices .....  | 129 |
| IRB Approval Letter.....  | 130 |
| Appendix B: Email from Researcher to Elementary Special Education Teachers... | 131 |
| Appendix C: Follow-up Email .....   | 132 |
| Appendix D: Final Email Request.....  | 133 |
| Appendix E: Special Education Co-Teacher Survey- SECTS .....                  | 134 |

Vita .....139

## **CHAPTER I**

### Introduction

#### *Overview of Collaboration*

The education of children with disabilities has evolved over the years. In 1975, PL 94-142 (The Education of all Handicapped Children Act) was passed. This law required that children be educated with typical, same-aged peers, in their local schools to the largest extent possible. This law later evolved into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which received significant amendments in 1997 and again in 2004, becoming IDEIA (both IDEA and IDEIA will be referred to as IDEA in this document). IDEA reinforced the requirement that children are educated with typical peers as much as possible and that the IEP for the child with special needs must document any modifications to the general education curriculum and justify any time spent in placements outside general education.

Special education has a long history of professionals communicating with each other and working together for the benefit of a child. For many decades special education teachers have worked with other professionals, in teams, to develop the best educational plan to meet the needs of the student (Friend et al., 2010). Teams include all professionals who are involved in providing services to a student in special education, typically including, but not limited to, speech therapists, occupational therapists, general education teachers, special educators, physical therapists, and school psychologists. The coordination of services is critical to the success of students in special education.

Students with disabilities have a continuum of placement options that may be used as needed. However, any time spent outside of the general education setting into a self-contained classroom or resource room must be clearly defined in the Individualized Education Program (IEP), as well as a plan and timeline for the student to rejoin the general education classroom. Over the years, schools have developed more support for students in special education within the general education classroom. As students with disabilities have moved into general education classrooms, special education teachers have moved with them. According to the National Center on Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) co-teaching is the most often used collaborative model in schools when teaching students with and without disabilities in the general education classroom. In 2008 Kloo and Zigmond referenced the 1995 National Center on Restructuring and Inclusion data and stated “Now, more than a decade later, its popularity (co-teaching) has only increased- and for good reason” (p. 12). In 2006 Cramer and Nevin state “Although there is no specific data to describe how widespread co-teaching is ...” (p. 261) the trend of co-teaching continues today with special education teachers being asked to collaborate, especially using co-teaching, in general education classrooms (Spencer, 2005). The US Department of Education in 2010 states “Today, 57 percent of students with disabilities are in general education classrooms for 80 percent or more of their school day” (p. 11). Co-teaching continues to be in the forefront of service delivery because it (a) addresses the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Harbort et al., 2007), and (b) provides the mandated assistance for students with disabilities in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEAA; 2007; Murawski & Dieker, 2004).

### *Evolution of Co-Teaching*

Co-teaching in itself is not a new service delivery model. It is an evolution of the team-teaching model from the 1960's (Luckner, 1999). In 1963, Alexander examined the needs of adolescents and began to design the middle school concept. Junior high schools began to evolve into middle schools and teaming was a vital part of this change (Alexander, 1995).

Team-teaching was practiced in a variety of ways during the transition from the junior high school model to the middle school model. One common variation was two to four classroom teachers combining their classes in order for the teacher, who was the expert on a subject, teach that lesson. Later, a partner teacher would take over the lessons in his or her area of expertise. For example, the language arts teacher would discuss the novel *Number the Stars* that takes place during the Holocaust, and the history teacher would discuss factors that lead up to World War II. Team-teaching expanded into upper elementary grades to take advantage of teacher's strengths and help transition students from one classroom teacher all day in elementary school to changing classes for each subject in middle school (Wallace, 2007). The team-teaching model that began in middle schools has maintained some of the original characteristics, but has evolved into a co-teaching model.

### *Definition of Co-Teaching*

Co-teaching is defined according to Cook and Friend (1995) as "two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space." In other words, two teachers are both responsible for the education and well-being of all the students, special and general education, in

their shared classroom. Ideally, the teachers collaborate on all facets of implementing a curriculum. To be successful, co-teaching requires that both teachers share similar beliefs and have a similar vision for the culture of the classroom. Also best practice dictates that the co-teachers share planning time. This planning time permits the teachers to plan together about how to best implement the curriculum and how to optimally share the responsibility of managing student learning and behaviors. (Cook & Friend, 1995, Dieker, 2001). Collaboration is critical to the success of co-teaching.

*Definitions of Key Terms.* For the purpose of this study, key terms are defined. The following significant definitions are presented to clarify key concepts that are integral to this study.

#### *Beliefs*

Beliefs are teachers thoughts and feelings about education, educating students with disabilities, and teaching practice.

#### *Co-teaching*

Co-teaching is a general education teacher and a special education teacher sharing a classroom and instruction of a heterogeneous group of students, both general education and special education. Ideally, the co-teachers share responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction.

#### *Elementary*

Elementary schools in this district are typically comprised of kindergarten through fifth grade. A number of schools also contain pre-kindergarten classes. A few school continue through sixth grade.

### *Partnership*

The special education co-teacher and the general education co-teacher are involved in an educational partnership. This is also referred to as a relationship.

### *Rationale for Co-Teaching*

Co-teaching has become a viable option for supporting all students in the general education classroom. The rationale for co-teaching includes: increased instructional options for students with disabilities, increased rigor and continuity in content for students with disabilities, reduced stigma for students with disabilities, and additional support for teachers (Cook & Friend, 1995). Previously, students with disabilities who needed support were placed where the special education support was available, such as in a resource classroom. For example, a student with a learning disability in math would be removed from the general education classroom during math time and sent to a resource room where a special education teacher would teach a math lesson that was often completely unrelated to the math lesson the general education class was receiving. Co-teaching is a system which offers special education support in the general education classroom; the special education teacher is one of the classroom teachers. Ideally, students in special education receive the same grade level standards and rigorous education as their peers, with needed modifications and adaptations to support their learning.

General education and special education teachers bring complementary skills into the shared classroom. General education teachers have the content knowledge and special education teachers have the skills to make the curriculum accessible through accommodations and modifications, as well as through assisting individual students



(Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

### *Efficacy of Co-Teaching*

The measure of success of co-teaching for students with disabilities is mixed. Many studies have found that participants involved with co-teaching have positive feelings about the experience (Dieker, 2001; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). However, definitive data regarding benefits for students are limited. One criticism is that students in special education who are included in a co-taught general education classroom may be receiving additional assistance from a second teacher, but the assistance is not particularly specialized or individualized (Magiera et al., 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). The student with disabilities may benefit from having concepts clarified, and one-on-one or small group instruction from the second teacher in the general education classroom. However, that same one-on-one and small group assistance may be provided to a typical student in the same class who is struggling with the lesson. Both students may benefit from the addition of a second adult in the classroom, but is the student with disabilities receiving targeted and individualized intervention? Friend and Cook (2003) recommend that co-teachers “review their practices to ensure that their instructional strategies do indeed lead to more engaged time and participation for all students in co-taught classes while meeting the individualized needs of students with identified disabilities” (p. 174).

The 2007 metasynthesis of Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie confirmed Baker and Zigmond’s (1994) earlier concern that “...students with special needs are receiving good general education instruction, with assistance— but are they receiving a *special*

education? Results of the analysis suggest they are not” (p. 412). However the same metasynthesis found benefits to teachers from sharing support and expertise as well as benefits to typically developing students and special education students in the form of extra attention from the two teachers.

The benefit of two teachers in one classroom was also seen in a study by McDuffie, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2009). They found that students with and without disabilities who were in a co-taught class performed better on tests than did students who were in a non-co-taught class. Although the improvement in scores was small, this improvement was seen for both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. However, two teachers in one classroom did not appear to have an additive effect on the quantity of time spent by teachers interacting with students with disabilities in a co-taught class. In other words, students with and without disabilities demonstrated a small improvement on test scores, but the students with disabilities did not receive additional individualized teacher interactions with the addition of the second teacher. The students with disabilities received the same amount of time in interacting with a teacher as all of the other students.

Magiera and Zigmond (2005) observed in a co-taught class that students with disabilities received more one-to-one interactions with both the teachers than they did from one teacher in a non-co-taught class. However, the student with disabilities received fewer interactions with the general education teacher in the co-taught class than they would have received in a non co-taught class. The general education teacher tended to interact less with students with disabilities when the special education teacher was present. Overall, Magiera and Zigmond determined this difference was not of

practical significance. However, an important consideration in several studies was the teacher's feelings about the co-teaching experience (Idol, 2006; Smith & Leonard, 2005).

Welch (2000) conducted formative experiments, in which two elementary classes enacted co-teaching with training, and conducted formative and summative evaluation to assess student outcomes, teaching procedures, and teacher impressions. Measures suggested gains in reading and spelling for all students, general education and special education in both classes. While several studies on co-teaching in middle and high school exist, in reality, the number in elementary settings is relatively small.

#### *Lack of Elementary Co-Teaching Research*

Studies involving co-teaching often focus on the middle school and secondary school setting, including the high school science classroom, (Harbort, et al. 2007), a middle or high school setting (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003), or a secondary mathematics classes (Magiera et al., 2005). The effectiveness of co-teaching was examined in 11 middle school classrooms (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). Additionally, teacher roles and responsibilities both inside and outside of the classroom of high school teachers of students with learning disabilities were investigated (Washburn-Moses, 2005). The characteristics of effective middle and high school co-teaching teams were determined (Dieker, 2001). Teacher time use was examined in high school classrooms that included students with disabilities (Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, and Hupp 2002).

The minimum number of studies that examined the co-teaching classroom in an elementary setting has often focused on unique populations such as Luckner's 1999 study of two co-teaching classrooms that included deaf students. Co-teaching was

found to be an effective service delivery model to educate students, both deaf and hearing. Specific challenges to the co-teaching model were discovered. Planning time was identified as a critical component.

Another study (Damore & Murray, 2009) surveyed urban elementary general education and special education teachers about their perspective regarding collaborative teaching. Findings indicated that 92% of teachers thought that collaboration between general education teachers and special education teachers was happening at their school. However, only 57% of the respondents reported using collaboration, to any degree, in their classroom. Collaboration was defined as including the consultation model (the special education teachers serves as a consultant to the general education teacher), the co-teaching model (a special education teacher works within the general education classroom, providing direct service for part of the school day), and the team teaching model (special education teacher and general education teacher participate equally in planning and delivering all instruction) (p. 235).

Tobin (2005) designed a participant observer project to identify developmental stages of co-teaching in a sixth grade language arts class taught three days a week. In the Tobin study, co-teachers progressed from the first stage of co-teaching, the developmental stage, to the second stage, the compromising stage. The co-teachers however, did not achieve the third and final stage of co-teaching, collaboration. Thus, relationships between the general education co-teacher and the special education co-teacher are critical at multiple grade levels.

Mastropieri et al. (2005) discovered three themes that made an impact on co-teaching in all three grade levels studied (fourth grade, middle school and high school).

The themes were academic content knowledge, high-stakes testing, and co-teacher compatibility. They concluded that when co-teachers are getting along, students with disabilities are more likely to be successful. Conversely, when co-teachers experience conflict within their co-teaching relationship, the inclusive experience is less beneficial for the students with disabilities (p. 268).

In 2010, Vannest and Hagan-Burke examined the use of time of 36 teachers who work with students with high incidence disabilities. Only 8 teachers out of 36 teachers in the study taught in an elementary school setting, the other 28 were in middle and high school.

The majority of studies on co-teaching have focused on middle and high school settings. Studies focusing on the unique benefits and challenges of co-teaching in the elementary school setting are relatively few and often focus on a specific population.

#### *Significance of the Study*

Research has established the prevalence of co-teaching as a delivery model and examined the practice of co-teaching in the classroom. However, the vast majority of the literature (Austin, 2001; Harbort, Gunter, Hull, Brown, Venn, Wiley, & Wiley, 2007; Mageria et al., 2005; Masteropieri et al., 2005; Noonan, McCormick, & Heck, 2003; Salend et al, 1997; Tobin, 2005; Zigmond & Matta, 2004) has examined the co-teaching relationship within one classroom between one special education teacher and one general education teacher (Cook & Friend, 1995; Gately & Gately, 2001; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1995; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). A few studies have indicated that special education teachers may team with two general education teachers, or may co-teach two subjects (Dieker, 2001;

Dieker & Murowski, 2003; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Rarely has a study investigated the multiple co-teaching settings and relationships within which a special education teacher may routinely teach. Weiss and Lloyd (2003) found that six middle and high school co-teachers taught anywhere from one to four different subjects routinely with different general education teachers. Only one study examined the complex team structures utilized by schools (Dieker, 2001). However, the Dieker study was limited to seven successful middle school and two successful high school co-teaching teams.

Early childhood and elementary classrooms often include children with disabilities along with their typically developing peers. Co-teaching is one of the most prevalent models utilized nationally in elementary classrooms (Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; National Center on Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995). Despite the ubiquitous implementation of co-teaching in the elementary setting, very few studies have gathered data in this setting. The need for co-teachers to collaborate and plan together is well documented (Friend, 2007; Kloo and Zigmond, 2006; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). However, the practice of co-teaching in the elementary classroom has not been fully explored.

Thus, co-teaching has not been rigorously investigated in elementary schools where the special education co-teachers have more than one classroom and more than one general education teacher. Due to the critical nature of co-teaching relationships, an investigation will be conducted to explore current practices and issues. Given the imperative of shared planning time, according to research, for co-teachers and the limited time and multiple roles a special education teacher must fulfill; the following research question will be addressed:

- 1- To what extent do co-teachers collaborate?
- 2- To what extent are co-teachers involved in instruction in the co-taught classroom?
- 3- To what extent are co-teachers satisfied with their co-teaching assignment?

Elementary co-teaching relationships have not been extensively explored.

Moreover, the demands on a special education teacher who is co-teaching in multiple classrooms with more than one general education teacher have rarely been examined.

### Summary

Effective co-teaching increases instructional opportunities for students with disabilities, increases the rigor and continuity in content for students with disabilities, and reduces stigma for these students (Cook & Friend, 1995). Successful co-teaching also provides support for the general education classroom teacher (Cook & Friend, 1995). Additionally, successful co-teaching combines the strengths of the general education teacher, teaching content knowledge, with the strengths of the special education teacher, making the curriculum accessible to all students (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

The ubiquitous application of co-teaching nationally has created a need for researchers and teachers to learn more about current practices. Studies have examined co-teaching in a middle or high school setting (Harbort, et al., 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Elementary co-teaching classrooms have focused on specific and unique populations (eg. Luckner, 1999), or included both elementary and middle school, and in some cases, high school settings (eg. Mastropieri et al., 2005). In

addition, studies have not examined the perception of the special educators who co-teach in multiple classrooms. This study will add to the current body of literature.



## CHAPTER II

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

This chapter provides a description of co-teaching and the issues involved in a co-teaching relationship. A brief review of the progression from early inclusion of children with disabilities to the wide-spread use of co-teaching is described. Methods of co-teaching are included, as well as stages of co-teaching and the roles of the general education and special education teachers are included. The conceptual framework for the research is discussed.

#### History of Inclusive Practices

The Education of All Handicapped Children, P.L. 94-142 was passed in 1975. This law stated that children should be educated in their local school with typical peers to the largest extent possible, in the “least restrictive environment”. This was the first landmark legislation for inclusive education for children with disabilities.

One trend in education was to serve children with disabilities in a segregated placement (i.e. resource room) only for the area of disability or need. This model was established to target the specific educational needs of a student. For example, if a student eligible for special education had a learning disability in reading, that student would attend a resource room reading class taught by the special education reading teacher. If the student was in third grade but struggling with phonics, the resource teacher would target learning phonics and reading material on the student’s academic level. So, the third grader may be receiving reading instruction on a kindergarten level. Then, although the student was removed for specialized reading instruction, the student

would return to the general education class with typical peers for other content areas.

The resource model was in limited practice in the 1950's and 1960's, however it gained prominence in the 1970's and 1980's (Weiderholt & Chamberlain, 1989).

The rationale for segregation of special education students in a separate special education classroom or the resource room for one or more subjects was the belief that students with disabilities would best be served in classes with a small number of students, by teachers with special education expertise, with specialized materials and curriculum. Moreover, these special education settings were thought to build the social skills and self esteem of the students with disabilities (Madden & Slavin, 1983).

Time away from general education has been called "pull-out" (Willrodt & Claybrook, 1995). Pull out means that a special education teacher removes the student in special education from the general education classroom for separate, specialized instruction. The pull-out approach provides exposure to slices of general education for some students with disabilities. However, this often results in what Wang, Reynolds and Walberg (1986) described as a "disjointed" and "inconsistent" education (p. 1).

In a metasynthesis of studies that compared social and academic growth of students with disabilities, Madden and Slavin (1983) did not find that special education classrooms produced consistent benefits or outcomes, academically, socially, emotionally or in the area of self-esteem, when compared to students in special education who were included in the general education classroom. An additional study (Willrodt, 1995) confirmed pull-out programs to be no more effective than inclusive programs. Inclusive programs are programs in which students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom for instruction and classroom activities. A

special education teacher does not remove them to receive the same or an alternate lesson. Appl, Troha, and Rowell (2001) discovered that teaching teams reported that most students in their school did not benefit from pull-out programs. The two major drawbacks reported were the possibility that students may receive duplicated, omitted or contradicting instruction in the two settings and the loss of instruction time with the transitions from one setting to another.

Given the lack of clear benefit to removing students, inclusive classrooms were recommended (Willrodt, 1995). This was echoed in a study by Vaughn, Elbaum and Schumm (1996) that examined students with learning disabilities who were included in general education elementary classes. The students with learning disabilities were less well-liked and more frequently rejected than their high achieving peers. However, these findings are similar to studies of students with learning disabilities who were in pull-out programs. If the social pressures are the same for students who are pulled out from general education and placed in a resource class, the least restrictive environment would be preferred.

Madeline Will, as Assistant Secretary of Education in 1986, made a call for breaking down the barriers between special education and regular education. Along with the integration of children with disabilities into the general education classroom, she described a future in which people with disabilities would be integrated into society. Her vision for the future of people with disabilities started in public schools, with the inclusion of all children in general education classrooms, and then continued into work and community.

Other leaders in the field of special education made a case for inclusion (Stainback et al., 1985). Stainback et al. argued that special education was traditionally designed in an attempt to *fix* children with special needs in order to *fit* them back into the rigid public school program (p. 148). Many times students spent their educational careers in the special education classroom and were never able to fit into the general education setting, never quite fitting in. Instead, Stainback et al. argued that special educators could go into the general education classes to help the classroom teacher gain the skills they needed to teach students with disabilities. Around the same time Wang et al. (1986) suggested that general education and special education join together forming one “coordinated system” (p. 28). From these movements, the concept of collaboration between general education and special education evolved.

#### Collaborative Teaching Models

Students who received special education services moved in increasing numbers into general education. As a response to the mandate that students in special education be educated in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE) possible, students with disabilities began to be included in classes and activities with typical peers. Schools began to answer the call for LRE with mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom in a selective manner. In mainstreaming, students with disabilities “earned” the opportunity to be included with typical peers, by demonstrating appropriate behavior and the ability to “keep up” academically (Rodgers, 1993). Partially as a result of additional legislation such the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools began to move to a more inclusive model of education with students being include in the school and classroom

with typical peers, to the maximum extent appropriate. This involved bringing needed support services to the child (Rodgers, 1993).

With the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, general education teachers now shared responsibility for the education of students with special needs. These general education teachers required support from special education teachers, in order to best teach the students with disabilities who were placed into their classes.

A variety of service delivery models exist to support general education teachers and the students receiving special education. Idol, 2006, describes four collaborative teaching models: consulting teacher model, supportive resource program, the use of instructional assistants, cooperative teaching, or co-teaching.

The consulting teacher is a model that provides indirect support to students with disabilities. The special education teacher or therapist serves as a consultant to the general education classroom teacher by answering questions, helping to problem solve, and possibly modifying assignments or tests. The special education teacher provides support to the students with disabilities indirectly by interacting only with the general education teacher, and the general education teacher works with all the students in the class, including the students with disabilities (Idol, 2006).

Supportive resource program model is the collaboration between the resource room teacher and the general education teacher to ensure the resource room teacher supports the general education classroom teacher by having an aligned curriculum. This alignment is critical for assisting the student with gaining the knowledge and skills of the

general education classroom (Idol, 2006) through individualized instruction and necessary modifications and accommodations.

The paraprofessional support model, instructional assistants often accompany a specific student or group of students with disabilities to provide support to that student or students in their general education classes. These paraprofessional positions are often funded entirely by special education monies (Idol, 2006). Paraprofessionals support the general education teacher in a variety of ways. Paraprofessionals often support individual students in special education who need support with social situations, academic skills, or behavior management. Ideally, when not assisting specific students, paraprofessionals float around the classroom while the general education teacher is teaching, and support both general education students as well as special education students.

The final model of cooperative teaching is co-teaching. In 1989, Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend suggested that cooperative teaching, or co-teaching, would be an efficient and effective way to deliver needed special education support to students while in the general education classroom. Co-taught classes should contain a majority of general education students, along with a small number of students with special needs in the classroom. Some states have specific maximum percentages of students that may have disabilities and/or a maximum number of students with disabilities that may be included in a co-taught class. New York state, for example, has a maximum of 40 percent of any class that can be students with special needs with a maximum of 12 students in any one class. (United Federation of Teachers State Regulations: 8NYCRR

§ 200.6(g)(1). Regardless of the presence of a state law many schools have developed specific policies or “rules of thumb” for the make-up of a co-taught classroom.

### *Attitudes about Co-Teaching*

Teachers, both general education and special education, often report that they believe co-teaching is beneficial overall (Dieker, 2001, Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007) and to students (Keefe & Moore, 2004, Kohler-Evans, 2006, Luckner, 1999) and to teachers (Kohler-Evans, 2006, Luckner, 1999). However, co-teaching is not embraced by all. In some instances, or early in a co-teaching relationship, teachers may report concerns. General education teachers may be concerned about having students with disabilities in their class and not being prepared to meet the needs of students with special needs, or having to slow down for the students in special education, while the rest of the students lose valuable instructional time (Mastropieri et al. 2005). Special educators, on the other hand, may not embrace floating to different classrooms, or being “...homeless, having their room taken from them” (Kohler-Evans, 2006, p. 260).

Idol, in 2006, found that elementary special education teachers, para professionals, and administrators reported positive attitudes about inclusion of students with disabilities. Four elementary schools were studied that included some students with special needs for most of the day. One school in particular included all special education students in general education 100% of the time (p.80). General education teachers at this school reported differing levels of confidence about their ability to accommodate and modify instruction and assignments for students with disabilities and students at risk for failure. Most elementary general education teachers felt they were

very good collaborators and open to working with other teachers. In Idol's study, less than 1% of elementary teachers reported preferring to work alone (p. 84).

In another study, urban general and special education elementary teachers reported that 92% of teachers believed collaboration was occurring in their school, however, only 57% of respondents reported being involved with collaborative teaching (Damore & Murray, 2009). These teachers reported that the interpersonal factors of positive attitudes about collaboration and communication were the most important.

### *Critical Factors in Co-Teaching*

The recipe for successful co-teaching requires several key ingredients in order to add value to students and teachers. Co-teachers need skills and training in the art of collaborating with other adults. Collaborative skills include communication (Friend, 2000; Gately & Gately, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Luckner, 1999) and compatibility (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Collaborative skills are important for creating a positive classroom environment for the students and the partnering co-teacher (Dieker, 2001; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). The roles of both teachers must be clearly defined, both in general and specifically for each lesson, in order to maximize parity between the co-teachers (Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Harbort et al., 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005). By understanding the roles and responsibilities of special education co-teachers, the impact of two teachers in one classroom can be maximized. Understanding the current responsibilities of co-teacher may alter or influence personal preparation programs. Students in personnel preparation programs must understand the multiple



roles required by special education teachers in co-teaching situations to be successful as classroom teachers. Developing collaborative student teaching experiences is an avenue professional preparation programs may want to explore. Kamens (2007) paired general education and special education prospective teachers together for part of their student teaching experience.

Administrative support is another important factor for successful co-teaching (Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). Typically, the administration is responsible for assigning students to the co-teaching classroom. The balanced placement of students with and without disabilities is fundamental to a successful start. A class with too many students with special needs can become more of a resource room than a true co-teaching setting.

Administrators are also crucial in providing a supportive presentation to parents. The message that the school administrators are supportive of co-teaching is important for parents of students with disabilities who may be concerned that their children will not have their education and behavioral needs met in a heterogeneous classroom. The parents of general education children may be concerned about the rigor of the co-teaching classroom and worry about behavior issues. The administration of a school can do a lot to ease parent's concerns and educate them about co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). Administrators also play a role in designing a schedule that maximizes opportunities for the teachers to meet and plan together (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000; Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al. 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Administrators are instrumental in selecting teachers for co-teaching assignments. Providing an opportunity for teachers to volunteer for co-teaching, instead of being assigned to co-teaching

situation, is a critical component of effective teaming (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000). Furthermore, teacher teams benefit from having a common belief system and common work ethic (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000).

Administrators can provide or encourage training about co-teaching either before embarking on co-teaching, or during the experience (Austin, 2001; Friend, 2000; Scruggs et al.; 2007; Spencer, 2005). As Friend (2000) points out, “We can’t assume that interacting effectively with students requires the same skills as interacting well with adults” (p. 132). In other words, working well with students does not always translate to working well with adults.

Parity can also be encouraged by administrators. Murawski and Lochner (2011) suggest that administrators can ask for copies of letters and information that go home to parents. The administrator can check to see if both teacher’s names are on the material, and if both teachers had input in creating it.

Another critical factor for effective co-teaching is joint planning time. One study examined the co-teaching relationship at the secondary level. Kohler-Evans (2006) discovered that common planning time and a positive working relationship were the number one and two priorities, in order, reported by secondary teachers involved in co-teaching.

Administrators can ask for items that co-teachers can provide to document that they are co-planning. Murawski & Lochner (2011) recommend four items that demonstrate shared planning. (1) Administrators ask teachers to provide lesson plans. The administrator should ask “Do I see the impact of the special educator? Are lessons tiered, scaffolded, and/or differentiated? Is the role of each teacher clear? (p. 178). (2)

An example of assignments that have been differentiated to support individualized learning should be submitted. (3) A copy of a letter to parents or class syllabi can be requested. Are both teachers' names on it? Is it clear that both teachers had input and are acting as a team? (4) A specific (SHARE) worksheet, showing teachers communicated their preferences and expectations can be provided by co-teachers.

Critical factors include elements under the teacher's purview, such as time spent collaborating with their co-teaching partner, compatibility with their partner, as well as clearly defined roles within lessons. Additional critical factors that are outside the co-teacher's immediate control are administrative support in selective scheduling of students with and without disabilities into the co-taught classroom, providing co-teachers with an opportunity for shared planning, and supporting the co-teachers to obtain training. One of the important elements, co-planning time, has received a significant amount of attention from researchers (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000; Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Cook & Friend, 1995; Dieker, 2009, Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Murray, 2004; Scruggs et. al, 2007).

### *Co-Planning Time*

Planning time is integral, yet often difficult, to schedule in a co-teaching setting. In fact, the very definition of co-teaching described by Kloo and Zigmond (2006) includes planning in its definition. "Co-teaching involves 2 certified teachers: 1 general educator and 1 special educator. They share responsibility for *planning* [italics added], delivering, and evaluating instruction for a diverse group of students, some of whom are students with disabilities (p. 12). The importance of shared planning time is a recurrent theme in the literature (Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Friend, 2007; Kohler-

Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). Murawski and Lochner (2011) state that “(w)ithout co-planning, teachers are at best working together in a parallel or reactive manner” (p. 175).

In a 2006 study of secondary co-teachers, Kohler-Evans found that teachers reported shared planning time as the most important feature in a co-teaching relationship, followed by having a positive working relationship with their co-teaching partner. In one situation, a middle school social studies team scheduled joint planning time. However, as the teachers’ relationship became strained, the shared planning dissipated.

Welch (2000) studied two elementary co-teaching teams. One team averaged almost twice the planning time of the other team; 76 minutes at one school on average weekly compared to 38 minutes on average weekly at the other. Both teams reported student academic gains and overall satisfaction with co-teaching. The only negative comment consistently made was both teams reporting they did not have enough shared planning time. Welch states that the minimum amount of planning time recommended is 30 minutes per week.

Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Garizi and McDuffie (2005) conducted several long-term qualitative studies of co-teaching in elementary, middle and high schools. A team of fourth-grade co-teachers and a team of seventh grade co-teachers were observed teaching science units on ecosystems. A team of eighth grade social studies co-teachers was observed for an entire academic year. In the high school setting, three different teams of 10<sup>th</sup> grade world history co-teachers were observed. In each of these schools, class size ranged from 22 to 30 students, with 7 to 9 students

per class being identified with a disability. Typically, the disabilities were learning disabilities or emotional disturbance. However, intellectual disabilities, physical disabilities and hearing loss were reported in the elementary setting. The elementary and the middle school science teams studied, demonstrated a successful partnership. Both teams were described as having an outstanding working relationship (p. 263). Several factors were listed as important to the success of the relationship, including shared planning time, strengths as motivators, effective instructional skills, appropriate curriculum, expertise in the content area and disability-specific teaching adaptations. The elementary teachers did not have an official planning time; they met before or after school, or at lunch. The teachers reported that planning time scheduled during normal work hours would have been easier.

Magiera and Zigmond (2005) observed middle school classrooms with and without a special education co-teacher, in order to determine if the additional teacher provided an “additive effect” for students with disabilities. They discovered that students in special education did not receive any additional teacher assistance or interaction in a co-taught classroom than in a general education classroom. Students with disabilities received more attention from the general education teacher when a special education teacher was not present. In the co-taught classrooms, the students with disabilities received more individual instruction from the special education teacher. However, these differences were of limited practical significance. For example, in a co-taught situation students with disabilities received 2 contacts for every 6.6 class periods, whereas in the solo-taught class the students with disabilities received 1 contact every 6.6 class periods. The researchers noted that the co-teaching teams did not have a shared

planning time. Magiera and Zigmond reflected that interactions with students with disabilities might improve if the co-teachers were provided training about their roles and given shared planning time.

### *Special Education Teacher's Use of Time*

The use of time in schools is coming under increased scrutiny. The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act cites efficient use of time in the school day as an avenue for improving learning for all students. Schools and school districts are examining many reforms and programs in order to maximize student learning (Metzker, 2003). Increased efficiency and effectiveness in the school day could positively impact both general education and special education students.

Special education teachers have a variety of required responsibilities. These responsibilities often include: designing student specific instructional interventions, teaching learning strategies, providing accommodations, assessing and monitoring student progress, collaborating and problem solving with other teachers, and completing paperwork (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry & McGinley, 2010). Responsibilities such as paperwork take teacher time that then cannot be used for student instruction.

Research has examined teacher's instructional time during a class, as opposed to managing behavior or engaging in non-teaching tasks such as taking attendance. Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay and Hupp (2002) studied both general education teachers with inclusive classes and inclusive classes staffed with more than one teacher, including co-teachers, paraprofessionals, or other professionals in high schools with successful inclusive programs. They discovered that teachers were involved with instructing, managing, and interacting with their students 75% of the time, with minimal

time spent disciplining students. In this case, non-teaching tasks took 25% of the professional's time.

Vannest and Hagan-Burk (2009) examined the details of special education teacher's use of time in a typical school day. Thirty-six teachers participated in the study, eight were in an elementary setting, with the remaining in middle and high school settings. The teachers studied were in one of three roles: (1) teachers who worked with students in a self-contained classroom that mainly focused on adaptive behavior (typically students identified with emotional disturbance), (2) resource room teachers, or (3) special education teachers who supported students in a general education setting (content mastery teachers and special education co-teachers who teamed with a general education teacher). Activities of the three types of teachers were recorded by the teachers themselves as well as observed by researchers. The special education teachers who co-taught with a general education teacher spent 19.2% of their day on instructional support of the general education teacher, 14.8% on academic instruction, and 11.3% on paperwork. On average, all three groups of special education teachers spent only 8% of their time on consulting and collaborating with other adults, including parents, other teachers, and co-teaching partners. Surprisingly, special education co-teachers spent less time collaborating than the self-contained, resource, or content mastery teachers did. This was despite the fact that the special education co-teachers shared teaching with another teacher, as opposed to the more independent nature of the self-contained, resource, or even the content mastery teacher's job descriptions. According to Wallace et al. (2002) teachers' use of time in the classroom was predominately spent instructing, managing, and interacting with their students.

## Categories and Models of Co-Teaching

Once a classroom has two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher, these teachers may work together in a variety of combinations. The roles and responsibilities of each teacher vary across co-teaching models.

### *Three Models of Co-Teaching: Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1989)*

To better understand co-teaching, Bauwens et al. (1989) proposed three models of co-teaching: the complementary model, the team teaching model, and the supportive model. In all cases, the general education teacher has primary responsibility for the content instruction for all students, while the role of the special education teacher varies according to the model.

The complementary model consists of the general education teacher having the responsibility for teaching the subject matter. While the special education teacher has the responsibility for teaching “critical academic survival skills” such as note taking, identifying the main idea of a reading passage, and study skills to the class. If a group of students already has mastered the academic survival skill, the general education teacher might monitor enrichment activities at this time (Bouwens et al., 1989).

In the team teaching model of co-teaching, the general education and special education teacher plan and implement instruction together. The special education teacher might present new vocabulary to the class at the start of a science lesson. The general education teacher presenting the remainder of the science lesson with the special education teacher monitoring student progress might follow this.

The supportive model is another version of co-teaching where both the general education and special education teacher are responsible for developing and delivering



instruction to the entire class. The general education teacher maintains responsibility for delivering the essential content of the classroom instruction, while the special education teacher is responsible for developing and implementing supplementary and supportive learning activities for the entire class (Bowens et al., 1989), with both teachers monitoring both types of activities. The general education teacher introduces the academic content of the lesson and the special education teacher develops supplementary activities designed to enrich and supplement the specific academic content presented by the general education teacher.

Bowens et al. (1989), specify that the three co-teaching models are not mutually exclusive. The complementary, team teaching, and supportive models might be “used simultaneously” within a classroom and “evolve naturally out of the close planning and professional working relationship” (p. 19) between the general and special education teacher.

#### *Five Models of Co-Teaching: Cook and Friend (1995)*

Other researchers have described multiple ways that co-teachers can deliver instruction to the class. Cook and Friend (1995) divide the instructional implementation of co-teaching into five categories:

1. One teach and one assist. In this model, one teacher takes the lead in leading the lesson and the other teacher floats and assists students as needed. This delivery category has the advantages of providing minimal, but required, support to the special education students without requiring much, if any, shared planning. Support can be provided to any students who need it, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. Disadvantages to this method include the students viewing the teacher who is

floating as a teaching assistant and not a “real” teacher. This is especially problematic when it is always the same teacher floating, typically the special education teacher. In addition, the support provided to students by the floating teacher is mostly a “drive by” and not organized or specialized.

2. Stations. In station teaching, the teachers each take a portion of the class and teach part of the lesson, then switch groups of students. The teachers may add one or more independent work stations for the students as well. Advantages to this model include smaller student groups, which can seamlessly include students with disabilities and equal teacher status. Disadvantages include noise level and potential disruptive transitions between activities. The teachers must do some lesson planning together in order to divide the material as well as practice good time management at their station so the lessons or activities end at the same time for rotations.

3. Parallel. In parallel teaching the students are split into heterogeneous groups. One smaller group is usually comprised of the students who are predicted to have more of a challenge learning the material and another group of students who are learners that are more typical. The parallel method is beneficial for students to practice skills and have support in a small group. This method requires both teachers to assist the students as they practice skills and the ability to tolerate the volume of two groups working simultaneously. Parallel teaching can also include the two teachers presenting two sides to an issue or two methods for solving a problem. For example, one teacher could present the point of view of the North in the Civil War and the other teacher could represent the South in a debate. Disadvantages of parallel teaching include the need for

planning time to coordinate the dual teaching roles, and the potential for less confident teachers to be concerned about “being compared” by the students to the other teacher.

4. Alternative. Alternative teaching is often a version of “pull-out” teaching. A small group of students is moved to a different room or area for separate instruction or practice. These students may be in special education, or can include any of the students who need additional practice with a skill. Alternative grouping may also work for students who would benefit from enrichment or delving deeper into the topic. Disadvantages of alternative teaching is the separation of students by label or ability, which creates a risk of social stigmatizing, especially if the groups remain stagnant and are used routinely for struggling learners.

5. Team teaching. In team teaching both teachers equally share the instruction. For example, one teacher may explain regrouping in subtraction with math manipulatives while the other teacher illustrates how to do the paper and pencil problems. One teacher may teach the lesson while the other teacher models how to do it and how “not to do it”. A disadvantage of team teaching is that it requires both shared planning time and mutual trust. Trust may need to develop over time.

All of the five methods are valuable teaching strategies and can be used effectively and fluidly. However, as with any co-teaching, teachers need to feel comfortable with the model used, while not over-relying on the one teach one model. Individual and groups of children may require adjustments in the model used.

*Seven Models of Co-Teaching: Vaughn, Schumm, and Arguelles (1999)*

Another group of researchers proposed similar models of co-teaching but with a set of 7 teaching models (Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles,1999). Five methods are

recommended by the authors as providing “more effective and efficient uses of teachers’ time and skills”. The 5 preferred methods are:

1. One Group: One Lead, One ‘Teach on Purpose’. One teacher presents material to the entire class, and the second teacher provides mini-lessons or reviews to single students or small groups. These mini lessons may be a minute to five minutes. The “teach on purpose” teacher approaches a student and checks for understanding and provides a mini-lesson if needed.

2. Two Groups: Two teachers teach the same content. This model involves dividing the students into two heterogeneous groups. The students benefit from being in smaller groups with more opportunities to interact and have their responses monitored by a teacher. This model is similar to the Cook and Friend (1995) Parallel method.

3. Two Groups: One Teacher Re-teaches, One Teacher Teaches Alternative Information. In this model the students are divided based on their knowledge and skills related to the lesson. The student grouping is fluid, with the assignment to the re-teach group based on needed skill mastery. Baughn, et al. recommend alternating the teachers so that the general education teacher leads the alternative lesson on some occasions and the re-teach on other occasions, and vice versa for the special education teacher. The method is similar to the Cook and Friend (1995) Alternative model

4. Multiple Groups: Two Teachers Monitor/Teach Content May Vary. This method utilizes learning centers or cooperative learning groups. Teachers can monitor students throughout the room, provide mini-lessons to individuals or groups, or work with one group the entire lesson. This method is similar to the Cook and Friend (1995) Stations model.

5. One Group: Two Teachers Teach the Same Content. This method is described as challenging, especially for new co-teachers (p. 9). Both teachers are directing a whole class cooperatively. One teacher might present the lesson and the other teacher may interject with meaningful examples and strategies to remember or organize the ideas.

The two less preferred methods of co-teaching according to Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles (1999) are grazing and tag teaching. The two methods are viable, but less preferred.

6. Grazing is similar to One Teach and One Assist (Cook & Friend, 1995). In grazing one teacher presents the material and the other teacher moves around the classroom, checking to see if students are on task.

7. Tag-Team-Teaching. This method has one teacher presenting a lesson at the front of the class, while the other teacher either stands at the back of the classroom or works at a desk on an unrelated activity. When the first teacher completes their portion of the lesson, the first presenter moves to the back of the classroom, or to the desk, and the second teacher takes over.

While grazing and tag-team-teaching are described by Vaughn, Schumm and Arguelles, they do not recommend these methods, as there are other methods that are “provide more effective and efficient uses of teachers’ time and skills” (p. 5). Instead, of the other five methods, they recommend, one lead- one teach on purpose. This also involves a whole group lesson with one teacher teaching in front of the classroom. The second teacher floats and teaches on purpose.

### *Co-Teaching Models Observed by Dieker (2001)*

Dieker (2001) observed 9 effective co-teaching teams in middle and high school settings. The five models identified by Friend et al., 1993 were observed, and an additional 4 models were discovered. The new models observed were: the shared support, equal support, cross-family support, alternating support, and the limited support models.

The shared support model had one special education teacher teaching in two general education classrooms. The subjects and grade levels of the two general education classrooms might be similar, or might not. Another model the equal support model had the general education and special education teachers sharing the same classroom and the same students all day.

The cross-family support model had a special education teacher who worked with students labeled emotionally disturbed. Each day of the week, Monday through Thursday, a core academic teacher would bring all of her classes to the special education classroom where both teachers would co-teach interdisciplinary hands-on activities. The students served by special education were included in all classes.

A general education teacher and a special education teacher who were across the hall from each other used the alternating support model. Some days they would team teach in one classroom, other days they would split the class and the content and the students would travel between the rooms, and other days the teachers would co-teach the lesson and then divide the students for independent learning activities. The final model Dieker observed was the limited support model. This model had the general

education teacher and the special education teacher sharing one class period for co-teaching.

### Issues with Co-Teaching

Harbort, et al. (2007) found that special education teachers were underutilized in co-teaching classrooms. Harbort et al. observed co-teaching in a high school science classroom, and discovered that the general education teacher presented information to students 30% of the time, whereas the special education teacher presented information only 1% of the time. In fact, 45% of the special education teacher's time was described as drifting, which can also be called assisting, in the one teach one assist method (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Dieker (2001) observed that the lack of planning time resulted in the special education teacher being unfamiliar with the material when it was presented to the class. Dieker determined that although true team teaching was not possible without shared planning time, the special education teacher was learning the material simultaneously with the students in class. Dieker proposed that observing a teacher engaged in learning may be a positive example for the students. This leads one to question if a certified teacher's time is usefully employed by solely modeling learning along with the students. If that is a beneficial teaching strategy, then perhaps teaching assistants or parent volunteers could model parallel learning.

Another study (Weiss and Lloyd, 2003) found that teachers employed teaching methods not defined in the co-teaching models. These researchers found a team of middle school science co-teachers and a pair of high school English co-teachers teaching the same content in different rooms. The special education teacher pulled the

students with disabilities into a separate classroom for the lesson. The teachers defaulted to this model because of behavior problems in the co-teaching classroom. This routine separation became more like a content mastery pull-out model than co-teaching. Friend and Cook (2003) caution that overuse of pulling-out students with special needs from the co-taught classroom can increase stigmatization of the students and moreover is an inappropriate underuse of a qualified professional, the special education teacher.

Middle and high school special education co-teacher's roles were found to vary from supporting the general education teacher in more of an instructional aide role, to more equally sharing instructional time in front of the class (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). According to the special education teachers, their level of participation depended on their level of content knowledge in the subject they were co-teaching, the attitude of the general education teacher in sharing the instruction, and scheduling issues. The special education teachers noted a lack of support from administration as well as no formal training regarding co-teaching as additional challenges faced with actually co-teaching.

#### *Issues with One Teach One Assist*

According to Scruggs, Mastropieri and McDuffie (2007) who did a metasynthesis of thirty-two qualitative studies, one teach and one assist was the predominant model used by co-teaching teams. Reasons for this may include the teacher's lack of needed planning time or the special education teacher's lack of content knowledge. Weiss and Lloyd (2003) also stated that the attitude of the general education teacher and scheduling were factors in limiting the role of the special education co-teacher. As a



result of scheduling and attitudes the special education teacher often fills the role of a glorified teaching assistant rather than a true co-teacher.

One teach and one assist was observed to be the predominant method of teaching in a study of secondary math classes by Magiera, Smith, Zigmond and Gebauer (2005). In fact, Magiera et al. suggested that *co-assignment* would be a better description of the support provided by special education co-teacher, rather than true co-teaching. Due to the lack of both planning time and subject specific knowledge, the special education teacher provided support to students by floating around the room, not providing specific instructional strategies. Magiera et al. recommend small group instruction in those situations to best utilize both the general education and the special education teacher. In other words, the second teacher would reteach a small group of students, as opposed to floating and waiting for a student to ask a question, or simply work directly with one student. Ideally, co-teaching teams would vary the teaching strategy used to match the lesson taught and the student's needs. Co-teachers would utilize the different models throughout the day and the year, selecting the model that best meets the needs of the students and complements the material being taught.

However, over reliance on one model, especially the one teach and one assist, can be problematic. If the general education teacher typically presents the material, and the special education teacher usually floats, then in practice the rationale for co-teaching becomes diluted. In essence, if a special education teacher simply assists in a classroom, wouldn't simply hiring a teaching assistant be a more cost effective manner to provide support to the classroom (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003)? Weiss and Lloyd (2003) caution that "...by acting as aides, special education teachers jeopardize their positions

as professionals and equal partners” (p. 39). Moreover, the students receiving services in middle and high school special education co-teachers observed by Weiss and Lloyd (2003) often did not receive specialized instruction or intervention in the co-taught classroom, in large part due to the over reliance of the one teach one assist, whole group delivery of instruction.

Harbort et al. (2007) observed three secondary co-taught classrooms. The vast majority of instruction was whole class instruction with the special education teacher floating/assisting. The authors caution that it is very unlikely that differentiated instruction was being planned for, or provided to students in special education, with the dependence upon the one teach one assist model. In addition, Harbort et al. argued that monitoring students is important, but not the best use of a “highly trained special educator” (p. 21). In summary, having a special education teacher float or assist in a co-taught classroom the majority of the time is a “less than effective model for supporting students in special education in general education classrooms and for maximizing personnel resources, particularly the expertise of the special education teachers” (p. 22).

Staffing a classroom with two certified professionals should have both professionals utilizing their skills and training. With an over dependence on one teach and one assist, the general educator presents the content knowledge, their area of expertise, but the special educator may be underutilized if he or she does not have an opportunity to directly provide alternate methods, or additional practice to students in the class. As a result, a special education teacher who simply floats through the classroom is hard pressed to provide targeted, specialized, or individualized intervention

to students with disabilities (Harbort, et al. 2007; Weiss & Lloyd 2003) . The jeopardy being, students with disabilities are placed in a general education classroom without being provided meaningful support. Without thoughtful co-teaching, simply placing a special education teacher in the classroom may not constitute quality co-teaching (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008).

Kloo and Zigmond (2008) prescribe that co-teaching should maximize the opportunities for students to respond and engage. Two teachers make it possible to create two groups of students by using stations, parallel lessons, or the alternative model. Two groups of students provide smaller teacher-students ratios, provide more opportunities for students to respond, and receive faster feedback than whole group instruction with a special education teacher assisting.

Friend and Cook (2003) state that one teach one drift is “fraught with problems and should be used only occasionally” (p. 179). There are three major concerns with the one teach one drift model. First, the drifting teacher, usually the special education teacher, may find their credibility with the students undermined. This is especially a concern with older students. Second a drifting teacher may be a distraction to the students, both visually and auditorally, when whispering to other students. Thirdly, and most problematic, this co-teaching model can encourage students to become dependent learners.

Overall, many co-teaching teams rely on the one teach one assist model. This model has the advantages of not requiring shared planning time and not necessitating the special education teacher be an expert in the specific subject matter. The disadvantages of an overreliance of the one teach one assist model include the

potential that students with disabilities do not receive specialized instruction with the dependence on whole class instruction and an underutilization of the certified special education teacher, who is predominately floating around the classroom assisting students when they have questions.

### Stages of Co-Teaching

Gately and Gately, in 2001, proposed that co-teaching relationships evolve through three stages over time and that equitable teaching between the co-teachers does not start on the first day. The first stage in a co-teaching relationship is the beginning stage. In the beginning stage, teachers engage in guarded and careful conversation. In a classroom of co-teachers at the beginning stage, it may appear that the classroom is divided by “invisible walls” and the co-teachers are restricted to their own space.

The second stage is the compromising stage and a spirit of give-and-take develops between the co-teachers. Gately and Gately describe this stage as teachers having to “give up something” in order to “get something.” For example, the general education teacher may need to “give up” the expectation that they are the only person in the classroom who can “hold the chalk” and lead the lesson, and the special education teacher is the “helper”. The special education teacher may need to initially “give up” the singular focus on individual student’s behavior for more concern with the expectations for whole group behavior management.

The final stage in the co-teaching relationship is the collaborating stage. This stage is marked by open communication and interaction. Gately and Gately describe the final stage as one of mutual admiration. Co-teaching teams progress at different

rates through the stages and some teaching teams do not reach the final stage. For example, in a study by Tobin (2005) the co-teachers in a sixth-grade language arts classroom progressed from the beginning stage of co-teaching, as defined by Gately and Gately (2001), but struggled to effectively move to the third stage, mutual admiration.

Using the concept of stages of a co-teaching relationship, one would not expect to see parallel teaching or team teaching initially with a co-teaching team. One teach and one assist or alternative teaching would be expected in the early stage of the relationship, when the “invisible walls” separate the teachers, and the special education students are considered belonging to the special education teacher. As teachers become more accepting of and more confident in their co-teacher, a productive relationship evolves.

In addition to co-teaching, special educators have responsibilities outside of the general education classroom. These additional responsibilities impact the daily tasks of the special educator.

### Special Education Teachers’ Responsibilities

#### *Responsibilities Outside of Instruction*

Special education teachers have many responsibilities that extend beyond direct instruction of students. Other responsibilities include: designing instructional interventions; providing accommodations and modifying student work; assessing and monitoring student progress; collaborating with other teachers, administrators, specialists, and parents; and managing the IEP process and the required paperwork (Eisenman, et al. 2011).

Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) investigated special education teachers in two school districts. The researchers directly observed 36 teachers over 2200 hours, and asked teachers to record their use of time. Three activities accounted for nearly half of a special education teacher's day, which included academic instruction, instructional support, and paperwork. The extent of time special education teachers spent on paperwork varied dramatically, with some teachers spending half of their working day completing paperwork.

In a study by Vannest and Hagean-Burke (2010) special education teachers spent about 8% of their day collaborating with other professionals (Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010). Surprisingly, co-teachers averaged less time collaborating than did resource, content mastery, or adaptive behavior teachers, despite sharing classroom responsibilities with their co-teacher.

### Teacher Satisfaction

Middle and high school teachers were asked to respond to questions about their overall level of job satisfaction (Mertler, 2002). Twenty-three percent of teachers reported being dissatisfied. Teachers in the middle of their careers were more likely to be dissatisfied; as opposed to teachers early in their careers as well as nearing the end of their careers, who indicated a higher level of satisfaction. Males reported a higher level of job satisfaction than did females, although not to a statistically significant level. This finding was similar in a study of Jamaican and Bahamian teachers (Griffin, 2010). Clearly, teacher satisfaction with the profession of teaching is an important component in the satisfaction of a co-teacher with their role as a co-teacher and profession overall.

Satisfaction with the co-teaching relationship helps reduce teacher burnout and promotes a successful co-teaching experience (Danmore & Murray, 2009). Griffin (2010) states that the level of satisfaction a person experiences as a result of his or her job can “have a significant effect not only on the individual, but on those he or she interacts with as well” (p. 55). This is especially important for teachers who work not only with other professionals, but with students as well.

Co-teaching is often referred to as a “professional marriage” (eg. Mastropieri et al., 2005). It is not unreasonable to assume that as in the case of a household, if the “parents” in the co-taught classroom are unhappy, that stress and tension will impact the atmosphere and learning environment of the classroom.

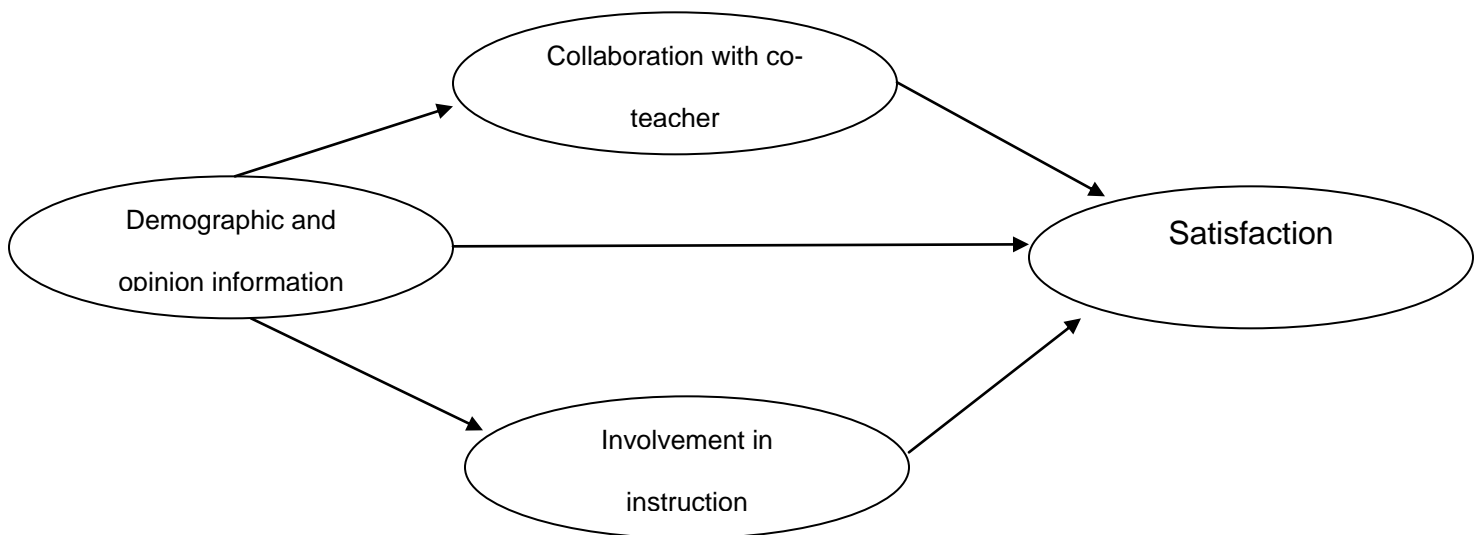
Working within an “integrated educational setting” in which both the general education teacher and the special education teacher can frequently use their strengths may enhance job satisfaction and stability (Bauwens, Hourcade & Friend, 1989).

#### Conceptual Framework

Teacher demographics. Characteristics about teachers, such as their age, years of teaching experience, length of time co-teaching, and other factors may affect co-teacher’s Collaboration, Involvement in Instruction, and Satisfaction. Additional demographic factors about the co-teacher’s position, such as the number of co-teaching classrooms and partnerships may affect Collaboration, Involvement in Instruction, and Satisfaction as well. For example, co-teachers who are co-teaching in multiple classrooms may have fewer opportunities to plan with a particular partner and thus may have less Involvement in the Instruction in the classroom.

Co-teacher's perception of their Collaboration and Involvement in the co-taught classroom may also affect their level of Satisfaction. Co-teachers who are not actively Involved in Instruction in the co-taught classroom, who mainly float and assist, may be less Satisfied with their job than co-teachers who are actively involved in instruction.

Figure 1



### Summary

The education of students with disabilities has evolved over the years, moving toward a more inclusive environment. As the students receiving special education services moved into the general education setting, special education teachers moved into the general education setting to support them. A variety of inclusion models exist to support student with disabilities included in general education. Currently co-teaching is the most common model for including students with disabilities (Kloo & Zigmond, 2008).

Overall, research finds that co-teachers report positive feelings about the co-teaching experience (Dieker, 2001; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Luckner, 1999) Scruggs, et al.,



2007). In addition, co-teaching has been found to be modestly beneficial for all students with the addition of a second teacher (McDuffie, et al., 2009; Scruggs et al., 2007). However, research is mixed on the success of meeting the special needs of students with disabilities included in general education classes (Baker & Zigmond, 1994; Scruggs, et al., 2007).

Successful co-teaching includes collaboration between the co-teachers. Collaboration includes communication and compatibility (Friend, 2000; Gately & Gately, 2001; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Luckner, 1999; Mastropieri et al., 2005). The co-taught classroom roles of both teachers must be clearly defined, both in general and specifically for each lesson (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Harbort et al., 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005). Administrative support is also critical for effective co-teaching (Austin, 2001; Scruggs et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Another vital piece of successful co-teaching is shared planning.

Shared planning time is important for effective co-teaching (Friend, 2007; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, et al., 2007). The shared planning time provides an opportunity for co-teacher to develop lessons, discuss their roles, and build their relationship.

Once a classroom has two teachers there are a variety of ways the two teachers can provide instruction to the students. Various co-teaching models exist. The one teach one assist method is the most frequently utilized co-teaching method (Scruggs et al. 2007, Weiss & Lloyd, 2003) and also the least effective method (Magiera et al., 2005). The special education teacher is often underutilized in co-teaching classrooms (Harbort et al., 2007). If one teach one assist is the predominant instructional method

and other methods are not explored, then students with disabilities often do not receive the instructional support and opportunities needed to be successful (Harbort, et al. 2007; Weiss & Lloyd 2003).

Co-teachers go through stages as their relationship develops. Gately and Gately (2001) describe three stages of the co-teaching relationship. The final stage is where open communication and fluid interactions. Some co-teaching teams do not progress to the final collaborating stage.

Special education teachers who co-teach may have other responsibilities as well as being a co-teacher. The special education teacher may teach special education resource classes or behavior classes or they may have multiple co-teaching assignments.

The roles and responsibilities of special education co-teachers must be understood in order to create an effective co-teaching classroom, to provide needed services and opportunities to students with disabilities who are included in the co-taught classroom.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Research Methods**

This chapter describes the methodology that was used in this study. It incorporates the purpose of the study, research questions, participants, instrumentation, procedures, data collection plan, methods of data analysis, and limitations.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

Co-teaching is a widely practiced service delivery model to support the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classroom. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997 and 2004) requires that children be educated with typical, same-aged peers, in their local community to the largest extent possible. Additionally, any modifications to the general education curriculum or any time spent in placement outside of general education must be documented in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for the child. The requirement for inclusion of students with disabilities brought about the challenge of how to best provide needed services to children with exceptionalities in general education classrooms. Co-teaching is defined according to Cook and Friend (1995) as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space.” Co-teaching is a very common method of service delivery. Since the mid 1990’s co-teaching has been the most common collaborative method used in public schools (Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; National Center on Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995).

The rationale for co-teaching includes increased rigor and continuity for students with disabilities, as well as reduced stigma (Cook & Friend, 1995). Teachers often report the benefits of a second teacher with whom to collaborate and share the responsibilities of managing the classroom (Kohler-Evens, 2006, Luckner, 1999). Ideally, the two teachers in a co-teaching classroom bring complementary skills to the classroom arena. Generally, the general education teacher brings the content knowledge and the special education teacher contributes skills to make the curriculum accessible for students with disabilities by providing accommodations, modifications, and assistance (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003).

The relationship between two co-teachers is often referred to as a *professional marriage* (eg. Luckner, 1999; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). A successful *marriage* or collaboration between co-teachers is important for creating a positive classroom environment for the students and the co-teachers (Dieker, 2001; Kohler-Evens, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). In addition, the roles of each teacher must be clearly defined, both in general for the classroom and specifically for each lesson, in order to maximize parity between the co-teachers (Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evens, 2006; Harbort et al., 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005).

In order for co-teachers to meaningfully collaborate and/or specify their unique roles within the classroom and lesson, they must have time to meet and plan. The importance of shared planning time is a recurrent theme in the literature (Friend, 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri & Mcduffie, 2007). They must construct an effective collaborative relationship and must feel satisfied with co-teaching.

### *Research Questions*

This study is based on the fact that co-teaching is a much practiced model for providing special education support to students with disabilities who are included in general education classes. There are multiple team strategies utilized to deliver co-teaching. Some special education teachers work with one general education teacher for most of the day; others may work with three or more general education teachers for a specified time during the week. The role of the special education teacher varies across classrooms, schools, and school districts. A review of the literature indicated that little is known about the impact of the special education teacher's role on collaboration. Thus, the following research questions were posited.

What is the impact for special education co-teachers who have one vs. multiple co-teaching partnerships?

- 1- To what extent do co-teachers collaborate?
- 2- To what extent are co-teachers involved in instruction in the co-taught classroom?
- 3- To what extent are co-teachers satisfied with their co-teaching assignment?

### Participants

The criteria for participation was as follows: Participants were (1) certified special education teachers (2) teaching in an elementary school with students in kindergarten through sixth grade, and (3) working regularly within a classroom with at least one general education teacher per class. Teachers self determined if they met the criteria. Several teachers responded who taught pre-kindergarten or sixth grade as part of their teaching responsibilities. All elementary special education teachers were sent an

invitation to participate in the survey as well as four reminder invitations. Participation was voluntary.

School District. The teachers were all employed by a single school district. This school district is in a southern urban city in the United States. Approximately five years ago, this school district formally implemented an initiative to enable co-teaching district wide. Every school in the district was required and enabled to send a group of professionals, teachers and/or administrators to co-teaching training. Training varied from one half day to two days. Prior to this district initiative, training in co-teaching varied on a school-by-school basis.

### Survey Instrument

Research studies have identified co-teaching as a common model to support students with disabilities who are included in general education classes (Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; National Center on Restructuring and Inclusion, 1995). For this study a survey was designed to explore the roles and experiences of elementary special education co-teachers who teach with one or more general education teachers. (See Appendix E for survey). The items created for this survey were developed from a review of the literature, as well as Friend and Cook's Assessment for Co-Teaching Readiness (2003) survey, and the Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction Survey (Mertler, 2002). In addition, experiences of the researcher assisted in forming survey questions.

The Special Education Co-Teacher Survey, (SECTS) was specifically created by the author for this study and was self-administered to special education elementary co-teachers. Respondents tend to be more candid on a self-administered questionnaire

than during an interview (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). The questions contained in the survey explored the experiences of elementary special education co-teachers who teach with a general education teacher in one or more classrooms. The impact of the partnership(s) on the practices of co-teachers were included in the survey. For example, were co-teachers who had multiple partnerships less likely to collaborate than teachers who only worked with one partner.

The SECTS consists of a set of questions about each co-teaching relationship in which the special education teacher was involved. For example, if a teacher works in two co-teaching classrooms, then he/she completed the survey twice. In addition, questions were asked about demographic information and opinions about co-teaching. This information assisted in the analysis of the data and interpretation of the findings.

### *Validity*

The survey was assessed for face validity by a panel of current special education co-teachers. The panel consisted of seven middle school special education co-teachers and three elementary special education co-teachers. Changes to the survey were made in response to the feedback from the panel. The survey items were evaluated for (a) understanding, (b) applicability to the elementary co-teaching setting, and (c) readability or wording. A criteria of 50% or more was used to determine if an item should be reworded. The criteria of 50% or more was utilized in a social validation study by McLean, Snyder, Smith and Sandall (2002). In that study 250 practices were presented to respondents and if 50% of the respondents rated strongly agree or agree to the question it became a recommended practice. In addition, Deris, DiCarlo, Flynn, and O'Hanlon (2012) used the measure 50% as social validity of items to be included in the

Q-sort study. The 50% measure was used as criteria for items to be reworded, added, or deleted. Thus, the content of the SECTS was validated and adjustments were made, as needed. Clarification was made in fonts and formatting to clarify which questions would be repeated for each co-teaching partnership. In addition, questions that contained similar wording had formatting such as italics added.

### *Survey Instrument*

Survey questions were generated from a review of the literature and other co-teacher surveys. Table 1 displays the relationship of each question to the literature. Questions 1 and 6 address elements of team structure, as described by Dieker (2001). These questions describe the amount of time the two teachers work together, and the type and number of subjects they co-teach together. Question 2 describes the grade level taught and question 3 inquires about the length of time that the co-teachers have taught together. Some co-teaching teams struggle in the early stages of their co-teaching (Gately & Gately, 2001; Kohler-Evans, 2006, Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Item 5 describes the number of special education students in that co-taught class as compared to the average for that school. Co-taught classes should contain a majority of general education students with students with special needs included into the typical classroom (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Questions 7-9 addresses the amount and the scheduled vs. unscheduled nature of planning time the co-teachers typically share each week, and what topics are discussed, such as lesson planning, behavior, and reflection on past lessons (Friend, 2007; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). Questions 10, 11, and 12 inquire about the amount of time the special education



co-teacher directly teaches the whole class or groups of students (Friend, 2000; Gately & Gately, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Luckner, 1999) and compatibility (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005

Questions 13 and 14 address the extent to which co-teachers share responsibility for managing student behavior of both, the entire class and the behavior of students served by special education. Optimally, co-teachers should share the responsibility of managing student behaviors (Cook & Friend, 1995; Dieker, 2001).

Question 31 inquires if the special education co-teacher has attended co-teaching training or workshops. Receiving training about co-teaching has been found to be helpful, or is cited by teachers as a priority (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Danmore & Murray, 2009; Friend, 2000, 2007; Idol, 2006; Scruggs et al. 2007).

The following table was created to connect the survey questions to the research literature.

Table 1

| Research Question                               | Survey Question  | Literature  | Literature summary   |
|---|--|---|--|
| Involvement in Instruction                      | Q1: What subject do you co-teach with this general education teacher?        | Dieker & Murawski (2003)<br>Masteropieri et al. (2005)<br>Washburn-Moses (2005) | Being spread between multiple subjects/contents can be challenging as reported at secondary level.   |
| Demographics<br>( <i>per shared classroom</i> ) | Q2: What grade level do you co-teach with this general education co-teacher? |   | The demands of on a special education co-teacher to master several subjects in secondary settings have been addressed, but the demands of teaching |

table continued

| Research Question                               | Survey Question   | Literature   | Literature summary   |
|---|---|--|--|
|   |   |  | across multiple grade levels and subjects in elementary has not been explored.   |
| Collaboration                                   | Q3: How long have you co-taught with this general education teacher?  | Gately & Gately, (2001)<br>Kohler-Evans(2006)<br>Mastropieri et al. (2005)   | Some co-teaching teams struggle in the beginning stages.   |
| Demographics<br>( <i>per shared classroom</i> ) | Q5: How many students are in this co-taught class?<br>How many students are identified with a disability?<br>How many students are identified as 504? | Dieker & Murawski (2003)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)   | A manageable class size and a balance of general education and special education students are important to a successful co-taught class. |
| Involvement in Instruction                      | Q6: How much time, on average do you co-teach with this general education teacher each week?  | Gately & Gately, (2001)<br>Kohler-Evans(2006)<br>Mastropieri et al. (2005)   | Some co-teaching teams struggle in the beginning stages. Co-teaching infrequently may prolong the beginning stage (my thoughts)          |
| Collaboration                                   | Q7: How much time do you typically plan with this general education co-teacher?   | Austin (2001)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Dieker (2001)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kohler-Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | Shared planning time is a critical component for a successful co-teaching relationship.  |
| Collaboration                                   | Q8: Is your planning time spontaneous or scheduled?   | Austin (2001)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Dieker (2001)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kohler-Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | Shared planning time is a critical component for a successful co-teaching relationship.  |
| Collaboration                                   | Q9: If you plan together, do you  | Cook & Friend (1995)   | Ideally co-teacher should share in managing  |

table continued

| Research Question          | Survey Question   | Literature  | Literature summary  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
|                            | create lesson plans, discuss how to measure mastery, accommodations and modifications, reflect on lessons, student behavior and grouping            | Dieker (2001)<br>Eisenman et al. (2011)<br>Murawski & Lochner (2011)  | behavior, planning lessons, discussing accommodations and modifications, and assessments.   |
| Involvement in Instruction | Q10: When you are co-teaching with this general education co-teacher how often do you present material to the whole class?                          | Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kloo & Zigmond (2008)<br>Kohler-Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | In order to maximize the impact of two certified teachers sharing a class, both the general education and the special education co-teacher must take an active and meaningful role in the classroom.  |
| Involvement in Instruction | Q11: How often do you teach small groups of students with this general educator?<br>If you work with small groups what is the make-up of the group? | Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kloo & Zigmond (2008)<br>Kohler-Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | In order to maximize the impact of two certified teachers sharing a class, both the general education and the special education co-teacher must take an active and meaningful role in the classroom.  |
| Collaboration              | Q12: This general education teacher and I create flexible small groups of students.   | Assessment for Co-Teaching Readiness (Friend & Cook, 2003)<br>Dieker & Murawski (2003)                                | Routinely pulling-out students in special education for small group instruction with the special education teacher can be stigmatizing. Exclusively teaching the whole class without creating groups underutilizes the special education teacher. |
| Collaboration              | Q13: Do you and this general education teacher share responsibility for managing behavior of <i>all</i>   | Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm (2000)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Dieker, (2001)  | Teachers should optimally share the responsibility of student behaviors.  |

table continued

| Research Question | Survey Question   | Literature   | Literature summary   |
|-------------------|---|--|--|
|                   | <i>children</i> in the classroom?   |  |  |
| Collaboration     | Q14: Do you and the general education teacher share responsibility for managing the behavior of the <i>students who are identified as special education</i> in the classroom? | Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm (2000)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Dieker, (2001)                               | Teachers should optimally share the responsibility of student behaviors.   |
| Collaboration     | Q15: How supportive is the general education teacher to accommodations and modifications you suggest providing to students?   | Eisenman et al. (2011)<br>Idol (2006)<br>Murawski & Lochner (2011)   | Special education teachers should provide specialized instruction, including accommodations and modification.  |
| Satisfaction      | Q16: I think this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach.  | Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kohler & Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007)      | Permitting teachers to volunteer for co-teaching vs. assigning teachers to co-teach can be beneficial.   |
| Satisfaction      | Q17: If given the choice I would or would not rather co-teach in this classroom. Or I don't care either way.  | Danmore & Murray (2009)<br>Dieker (2001)<br>Kohler-Evans (2006)  | Positive feelings about co-teaching relationships and satisfaction with co-teaching assignments are important to successful co-teaching teams according to teachers. |
| Collaboration     | Q18: The general education teacher and I have discussed our beliefs about effective teaching and learning.  | Allen-Mally & Bishop(2000)<br>Assessment for Co-Teaching Readiness (Friend & Cook, 2003)<br>Spencer (2005) | Co-teachers report that having a shared teaching philosophy is beneficial in a successful co-teaching relationship.  |

table continued

| Research Question          | Survey Question   | Literature  | Literature summary  |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|
| Involvement in Instruction | Q19: To what extent are your roles in the classroom established?  | Austin (2001)<br>Harbort et al. (2007)<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Washburn-Moses (2005)<br>Weiss & Lloyd (2003)   | Successful teams enable both teachers to maximize each other's contributions. Sp. Ed teachers are often underutilized.  |
| Involvement in Instruction | Q20: Please select all that apply: The general education teacher has taught a lesson and I have floated, we have each taught in different parts of the room, I have taken students out, I have taught a lesson and the general education teacher has floated. | Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Magiera et al. (2005)<br>Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1999)   | Two teachers can teach in a variety of models. Co-teaching is less effective with an overreliance on one model, especially one teach one assist   |
|                            | Q21: comments   |   |   |
|                            | Q22: Likert scale question ranging from I believe that co-teaching is not appropriate for students in special education to I believe co-teaching is appropriate for all special education students.   | Idol (2006)   | Teacher attitude about inclusion is an important factor in the success of inclusion of students with disabilities.  |
| Satisfaction               | Q23: What is your overall level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher?   | (Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction Survey, Mertler, 2002)<br>Danmore & Murray (2009)<br>Griffin (2010)<br>Hurbort et al. (2003)<br>Spencer (2005) | Teacher's satisfaction can have a significant effect not only on the individual teacher, but on those he or she interacts with as well (Griffin, 2010)<br>Teachers who are dissatisfied with teaching |

table continued

| Research Question | Survey Question  | Literature   | Literature summary  |
|-------------------|--|--|---|
|                   |  |  | overall, may report negative feelings about co-teaching (my thoughts)   |
| Satisfaction      | Q24: If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher?       | (Teacher Motivation and Job Satisfaction Survey, Mertler, 2002)<br>Danmore & Murray (2009)<br>Griffin (2010)<br>Hurbort et al. (2003)<br>Spencer (2005)    | Teacher's satisfaction can have a significant effect not only on the individual teacher, but on those he or she interacts with as well (Griffin, 2010)<br>Teachers who are dissatisfied with teaching overall, may report negative feelings about co-teaching (my thoughts) |
| Demographics      | Q25-33 demographics of elementary special education co-teachers and their classrooms and opinion questions |  |   |
| Demographics      | Q31: Demographics: Have you attended a co-teacher training or workshop?                                    | Austin (2001)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Cramer & Nevin (2006)<br>Danmore & Murray (2009)<br>Friend, (2000) (2007)<br>Idol (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | Receiving training about co-teaching has been helpful or is needed.   |
| Demographics      | Q32:Demographics: My principal supports co-teaching at my school   | Austin (2001)<br>Cook & Friend (1995)<br>Idol (2006)<br>Murawski & Lochner (2011)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007)   | Administrative support is critical for successful co-teaching programs.   |
| Satisfaction      | Q33: I volunteered   | Allen-Malley &   | Permitting teachers to  |

table continued

| Research Question | Survey Question           | Literature   | Literature summary  |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--|---|
|                   | to co-teach at my school. | Bishop, 2000<br>Keefe & Moore (2004)<br>Kohler & Evans (2006)<br>Scruggs et al. (2007) | volunteer for co-teaching vs. assigning teachers to co-teach can be beneficial. |

### Data Collection and Procedures

The External Research Coordinator at the Department of Research and Evaluation at the urban school district was contacted regarding sending the SECTS survey to elementary special education teachers. Verbal permission was granted to conduct the survey with elementary teachers in the school district. All data collection procedures and protocols utilized in this study were reviewed by the University of New Orleans Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB). (See Appendix A).

First, special education elementary teachers were emailed an invitation to participate in the study. Teachers in this school district have been issued laptop computers and are provided with district email accounts. The electronic version of the letter included a brief description of the criteria to participate (special education certification, regular co-teaching of an elementary class with a general education teacher) and direct link to the survey. Teachers self determined if they qualified to take the survey. Thus a number of teachers responded who teach pre-kindergarten as part of their responsibilities. The invitation explained to teachers that they would not be identified by name in the study and their responses would be confidential. They were also be informed that by submitting the survey they will be entered into a drawing for

one of two \$50 gift cards to Target. One week later, after the initial invitation, a second reminder/invitation was emailed to elementary special education teachers who did not respond to the survey, followed by a third email request three weeks later, and a fourth and final request after five weeks. Four contacts yielded the highest response rate to email surveys (Schaefer & Dillman, 1998). A total of 81 individuals appropriately responded to the survey. It is unknown how many of the 349 elementary special education teachers were assigned to co-teaching, however, 23% of invited teachers completed the survey.

### Analysis of Data

The unit of observation for this study was both the special education teacher, as well as the co-teacher's perception of each partnership. Quantitative descriptive analyses for this study were based on responses gathered from the surveys. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, such as central tendencies, and correlational analysis.

Research question 1, Collaboration data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In addition, teacher demographic data was used as an independent variable with Collaboration as a dependent variable.

Research question 2, Involvement in Instruction data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. In addition, teacher demographic data was used as an independent variable with Involvement in Instruction as a dependent variable.

Research question 3, Demographic data, Collaboration, and Involvement in Instruction were used as independent variables with the dependent variable of Satisfaction.



Question responses were realigned as needed, with stronger positive responses having higher numbers and stronger negative responses having lower numbers. Question responses were combined or collapsed when appropriate throughout the survey in order. For example, in a question addressing the special education co-teachers involvement with teaching the whole class, responses “I don’t teach the whole class” and “I rarely teach the whole class” were combined together. In addition, the positive responses, “I teach the whole class more than half the time” and “most of my teaching is of the whole class” were combined. Another example, in years of teaching experiences, the categories of 16 – 20 years and over 20 years of teaching were collapsed into a 16 or more years of teaching. These adjustments were made for ease of analysis of data and clarity of categories.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

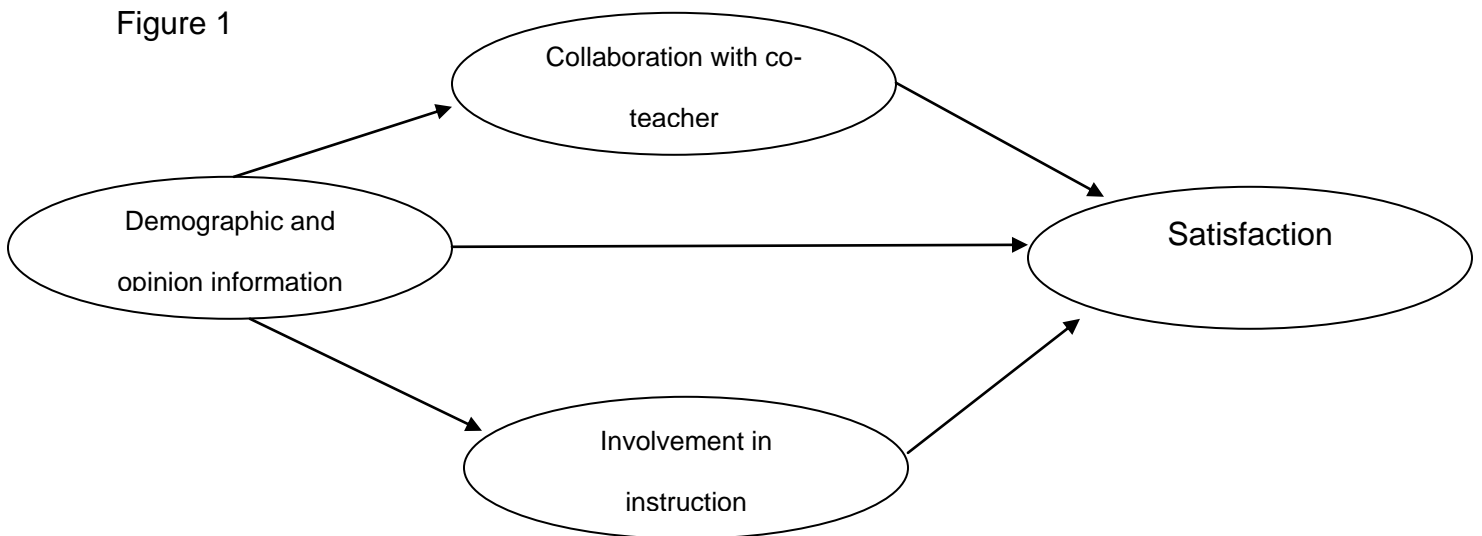
Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic data to aid the interpretation of the results of the study. Descriptive statistics were run on the demographic data and the rating of the items. This analysis included items involving the special education co-teachers age and ethnicity. An analysis of their formal training and years of teaching experience, as well as specific training for co-teaching and disabilities served in the co-taught classroom was completed. Descriptive statistics were also used to address the research questions presented in this study.

Correlation between variables was determined. The correlation method best suited to the data was Cramer’s V, because it is a symmetrical analysis that works with data which is nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. These tests assisted in examining the

association between factors assessed in the SECTS and the demographic data, including number of co-teaching relationships.

Cramer's V provides correlations between variables. For example, the number of years teachers co-taught together (demographic data) was evaluated with frequency of shared planning time (Collaboration) reported per co-teacher relationship. This was repeated for number of years teachers co-taught together and each area: Involvement in Instruction, Collaboration with Co-teacher, and Satisfaction (See Figure 1 and Table 2). Cramer's V results were considered significant or not, and the results that were significant determined to have an effect size. The effect size was interpreted using the criteria recommended by Volker (2006).

Figure 1



*Cramer's V.* Cramer's V was performed on the demographic data, opinion questions, and the core areas: Involvement in Instruction, Collaboration, and Satisfaction.

Additionally, the Core areas of Involvement in Instruction and Collaboration was compared to Satisfaction. Volker's 2006 criteria was utilized to determine the effect size.

A Cramer's V less than or equal to 0.10 was determined to be a small effect size. A

value of 0.11 to 0.30 was determined to be a medium effect size, and an effect of 0.31 to 0.50 was large, and over 0.51 was very large.

Demographic data (such as if the co-teacher had training in co-teaching) was examined with Cramer’s V analysis to determine if training in co-teaching (special education teachers who have had training compared to those who did not) was equivalently involved in Involvement in the classrooms, Collaboration, and Satisfaction. This was repeated for the demographic data: sex, age, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, level of education, experience in co-teaching, training in co-teaching, support of school administration, and if the teacher volunteered.

Questions related to the core areas of Involvement in Instruction and Collaboration also were analyzed using Cramer’s V to determine if questions in the areas of Involvement in Instruction and Collaboration had relationship tendencies with Satisfaction with co-teaching relationships and Satisfaction with teaching. Did a co-teaching relationship in which the special education co-teacher had high involvement in the instruction have a higher reported satisfaction than a teacher with a low involvement in the instruction? (See Figure 1 and Table 2).

Table 2

|                         | <b>Questions</b>                       | <b>Compared to</b>         | <b>Questions</b>                         |
|-------------------------|--|----------------------------|--|
| Demographic information | Q25 –Q23, how many co-teach classrooms | Involvement in Instruction | Q1 nominal<br>Q19 nominal<br>Q20 nominal |
| Demographic information | Q25 –Q23, how many co-teach            | Involvement in Instruction | Q6 interval<br>Q10 interval              |

table continued

|                            | <b>Questions</b>                         | <b>Compared to</b>            | <b>Questions</b>   |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------------------|--|
|                            | classrooms                               |                               | Q11 interval   |
| Demographic information    | Q25 –Q23, how many co-teach classrooms   | Collaboration with Co-Teacher | Q8 nominal<br>Q9 nominal<br>Q12 nominal<br>Q18 nominal                     |
| Demographic information    | Q25 –Q23, how many co-teach classrooms   | Collaboration with Co-Teacher | Q3 interval<br>Q7 interval<br>Q13 interval<br>Q14 interval<br>Q15 interval |
| Demographic information    | Q25 –Q23, how many co-teach classrooms   | Satisfaction                  | Q16 nominal<br>Q17 nominal<br>Q23 nominal<br>Q24 nominal<br>Q33 nominal    |
| Involvement in Instruction | Q1 nominal<br>Q19 nominal<br>Q20 nominal | Satisfaction                  | Q16 nominal<br>Q17 nominal<br>Q23 nominal<br>Q24 nominal<br>Q33 nominal    |
| Involvement in Instruction | Q6 interval<br>Q10 interval              | Satisfaction                  | Q16 nominal<br>Q17 nominal   |

table continued

|                                  | <b>Questions</b>   | <b>Compared to</b> | <b>Questions</b>  |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|---|
|                                  | Q11 interval   |                    | Q23 nominal<br>Q24 nominal<br>Q33 nominal                               |
| Collaboration with<br>Co-Teacher | Q8 nominal<br>Q9 nominal<br>Q12 nominal<br>Q18 nominal                     | Satisfaction       | Q16 nominal<br>Q17 nominal<br>Q23 nominal<br>Q24 nominal<br>Q33 nominal |
| Collaboration with<br>Co-Teacher | Q3 interval<br>Q7 interval<br>Q13 interval<br>Q14 interval<br>Q15 interval | Satisfaction       | Q16 nominal<br>Q17 nominal<br>Q23 nominal<br>Q24 nominal<br>Q33 nominal |

*Teacher comments*

A final opened ended elicited any additional comments respondents might have had about co-teaching. The qualitative responses from this question were used to augment and illustrate the quantitative finding in the SECTS survey.

**Summary**

Quantitative methods were used to gather research data. A researcher-designed survey, SECTS, was used to collect data for this study. Data analysis included the use of descriptive statistics to determine the measure of central tendencies regarding

characteristics of elementary special education teachers who participated in the study. In addition, a correlation analysis test, Cramer's V, was utilized to determine correlation levels between the variables, and with selected co-teacher variables on the three areas of the questionnaire: Collaboration, Involvement with Instruction, and Satisfaction. Additionally, the areas of Collaboration and Involvement with Instruction was examined with Satisfaction.

## Chapter IV

### Results

This chapter examines the experiences of elementary special education co-teachers. First, the co-teachers' experiences in the core areas of Collaborating with their general education co-teacher and the special education co-teacher's Involvement in the Instruction in the co-taught classroom were explored. Then, the elementary special education co-teacher's Satisfaction with their co-teaching partnerships and career were examined. A survey, The Special Education Co-Teacher Survey (SECTS) was specifically created for this study.

#### *Participants*

The SECTS was sent via district email to all 349 elementary special education teachers in a southern urban city. An introduction to the survey requested that teachers who were (1) certified special education teacher and (2) co-teaching in an elementary classroom complete the survey.

Ninety-three (n=93) surveys were initially started by participants. Eleven (n=11) of those surveys were not used due to the respondent not meeting one or both of the two required criteria listed above. Eighty-one (n=81) teachers provided complete data for at least one co-teaching relationship. Within the survey directions, teachers were asked to complete the co-teaching questions for each co-teaching assignment they had. Of those 81, six completed the questions fully for one co-teaching relationship, but did not fully complete the survey for all of their co-teaching relationships. For example, a teacher would state she co-taught with three general education elementary teachers,

and completed the survey for one relationship, but not complete the survey for the remaining two relationships. Of the 81 respondents, 37 completed the survey more than once for a total of 140 surveys completed. The demographics of the subjects are described in Table 3. One participant did not answer all of the demographic questions, so a total of 80 responses are reported in those categories.

Teachers were predominately white and female (see Table 3). Their ages ranged from early twenties to over sixty years old, with the mode of 30–39 years of age. Teachers had a range of years of teaching, though 62% of teachers had between 6-15 years of experience. Fifty-eight percent of teachers reported having earned a bachelor’s degree and 43% had a master’s degree or higher. The teachers had a range of co-teaching experience from one year to over 10 years of co-teaching experience, with a mode of 6-10 years co-teaching experience. The majority of teachers (67%) had attended at least one training on co-teaching and 64% had volunteered to co-teach.

Table 3

|                              | <b>Variables</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Sex                          |                  |                  |                   |
|                              | Male             | 6                | 8%                |
|                              | Female           | 74               | 93%               |
|                              | Total            | 80               |                   |
| Age                          |                  |                  |                   |
|                              | 20 – 29          | 8                | 10%               |
|                              | 30 – 39          | 30               | 37%               |
|                              | 40 – 49          | 19               | 23%               |
|                              | 50 – 59          | 22               | 27%               |
|                              | 60+              | 2                | 2%                |
|                              | Total            | 81               |                   |
| Years of Teaching Experience |                  |                  |                   |
|                              | 0 – 5            | 14               | 18%               |



table continued

|   |                           |    |     |
|---|---------------------------|----|-----|
|   | 6 – 10                    | 25 | 31% |
|   | 11 – 15                   | 25 | 31% |
|   | 16 – 20                   | 7  | 9%  |
|   | 21+                       | 9  | 11% |
|   | Total                     | 80 |     |
| Ethnicity                                   |                           |    |     |
|   | White non-Hispanic        | 50 | 63% |
|   | White Hispanic            | 22 | 28% |
|   | Black or African American | 3  | 4%  |
|   | Native American           | 3  | 4%  |
|   | Other                     | 2  | 3%  |
|   | Total                     | 80 |     |
| Level of Education                          |                           |    |     |
|   | Bachelor’s Degree         | 46 | 58% |
|   | Master’s Degree or higher | 34 | 43% |
|   | Total                     | 80 |     |
| Years Experience Co-Teaching                |                           |    |     |
|   | 1                         | 9  | 11% |
|   | 2 – 3                     | 19 | 23% |
|   | 4 – 5                     | 14 | 17% |
|   | 6 – 10                    | 22 | 27% |
|   | 10+                       | 17 | 21% |
|   | Total                     | 81 |     |
| Attended a Co-Teaching Training or Workshop |                           |    |     |
|   | Yes                       | 54 | 67% |
|   | No                        | 27 | 33% |
|   | Total                     | 81 |     |
| Volunteered to Co-Teach                     |                           |    |     |
|   | Yes                       | 51 | 64% |
|   | No                        | 29 | 36% |
|   | Total                     | 80 |     |

Elementary special education co-teachers reported a range of co-teaching responsibilities (see Table 4). Thirty-eight percent of the teachers co-taught in one classroom only. The number of teachers who co-taught in two and three classrooms was similar. Special education co-teachers taught with an average of two general

education co-teachers. Grade levels co-taught spanned from pre-kindergarten to sixth-grade, with the largest concentration being in fourth and fifth-grade. Special education co-teachers supported students in all core subjects: reading, writing, math, social studies, and science. The most frequent co-taught subjects were reading (n=86) and math (n=87) followed by writing (n=69).

Table 4

| Variable                           | Frequency |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Number of General Ed. Partnerships |           |
| 1 Class                            | 38        |
| 2 Classes                          | 18        |
| 3 Classes                          | 19        |
| 4 Classes                          | 4         |
| 5 Classes                          | 2         |
| Total                              | 81        |

| Grade Level Taught |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| Pre K              | 23  |
| Kindergarten       | 22  |
| First              | 11  |
| Second             | 19  |
| Third              | 17  |
| Fourth             | 36  |
| Fifth              | 34  |
| Sixth              | 4   |
| Total              | 166 |

| Subjects Co-Taught |    |
|--------------------|----|
| Reading            | 86 |
| Writing            | 69 |
| Math               | 87 |
| Social Studies     | 29 |
| Science            | 37 |

table continued

|       |     |
|-------|-----|
| Other | 12  |
| Total | 320 |

## Survey Results

Special education co-teachers answered questions about their experience with each general education co-teacher with whom they worked. Eighty-one teachers had up to 140 reported experiences. Special education co-teachers did not answer all questions. Some teachers declined to answer certain questions, and other questions were follow-ups to previous questions. For example, a question about the students included in small groups would only appear for teachers who reported they worked with small groups. Thus, the number of responses varies, and is reported for each question. Each pairing with a general education co-teacher is referred to a partnership, a pairing, and/or a relationship.

### *Collaboration with Co-teacher*

Items on the SECTS focused upon about the elementary special education co-teacher's experiences collaborating with their general education co-teachers. These questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Almost half (49%) of the co-teaching relationships were almost finished with their initial year of co-teaching partnership (See Table 5). Data was collected during the months of April and May. The next largest cohort of relationships was 2-3 year partnerships, with a few relationships spanning over ten years. Of the 81 teachers completing the survey, 79 answered the question about how long they have co-taught with at least one co-teacher.

Table 5

*Years of co-teaching with this general education teacher*

Frequency Percentage  
 table continued Teachers/138 Relationships

| How long have you co-taught with this general education co-teacher? |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| 0-1 year  | 68 | 49% |
| 2-3 years   | 42 | 30% |
| 4-5 years   | 15 | 11% |
| 6-10 years  | 9  | 7%  |
| Over 10 years   | 4  | 3%  |

Special education co-teachers reported a range of the amount of typical shared planning time (See Table 6). The mode of planning time was “less than half an hour a week” (36%), followed by about an hour of planning time weekly (30%). Eighteen percent (18%) of special education co-teacher’s reported more than an hour a week, with almost as many teachers (16%) lacking any routine planning time at all.

Table 6

*Time spent planning with general education teacher*

Frequency Percentage  
 n= 80 Teachers/140  
 Relationships

| How much time do you typically plan with this general education co-teacher? |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| We do not plan together   | 23 | 16% |

table continued

|                               |    |     |
|-------------------------------|----|-----|
| Less than half an hour a week | 50 | 36% |
| An hour a week                | 42 | 30% |
| More than an hour a week      | 25 | 18% |

Table 7, illustrates how planning time was achieved. Teachers who routinely shared planning time (n=71) were involved with a total of 114 general education teachers, and these teams were evenly divided between having a scheduled meeting time (50%) and those who reported that their planning time was spontaneous, such as in the hallway or at lunch (50%).

Table 7

*Planning time: Spontaneous or scheduled*

Frequency  
Percentage  
n= 71 Teachers/114  
Relationships

|   |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| Is your planning time usually spontaneous (for example at lunch or in the hallway) versus a pre-set time? |    |     |
| Our planning time is usually spontaneous  | 57 | 50% |
| Our planning time is usually scheduled  | 57 | 50% |

During shared planning time special education teachers reported participating in varied activities (see Table 8). Seventy-one teachers participated in one or more activities during their shared planning time. Activities most frequently described were: discussing accommodations and modification for students in special education (n=96),

student behavior (n= 89), student grouping (n=78), and creating lesson plans (n= 69). Other activities reported were prevalent, but to a lesser degree.

Table 8

*Activities occurring during shared planning time*

Frequency

n= 71 teachers/144 relationships

| In your planning time (please select all that apply)                             |    |
|--|----|
| Create lesson plans  | 69 |
| Discuss how to measure mastery   | 55 |
| Discuss accommodations and modifications   | 96 |
| Evaluate and reflect on past lessons (what went well, what could go differently) | 59 |
| Decide on roles (who will do what in a lesson)                                   | 52 |
| Student behavior   | 89 |
| Student groupings  | 78 |

Within the shared classrooms, special education teachers reported equally sharing responsibility for managing the behavior of all of the students in the class by a large margin (62%). See Table 9. A small percent of teachers reported managing most of the behavior themselves (2%) or the general education teacher managing most of the behaviors (6%).

Table 9

*Management of all student behavior in the co-taught classroom*

Frequency

Percentage









evenly divided between co-teachers who had scheduled meeting times and teachers who met spontaneously as the opportunity presented. Accommodations and modifications for students, student behavior, and student grouping were common topics of discussion during shared planning. The co-teaching partners shared managing behavior both of the entire class and students with disabilities equally. However, the special education teacher shouldered the responsibility for the behavior of the students with disabilities “most of the time” in 22% of the classrooms.

**Involvement in Instruction.** The SECTS contained questions about the special education teacher’s activities in the co-taught classroom with questions focused on their involvement in instruction. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

The vast majority of special education co-teachers (84%) spent less than half a day co-teaching with any one general education teacher (see Table 13).

Table 13

*Time co-teaching with general education teacher*

Frequency  
 n= 80 Teachers/140  
 Relationships

| How much time, on average do you co-teach with this general education co-teacher every day? |     |     |
|---|-----|-----|
| Less than half a day  | 117 | 84% |
| More than half a day  | 23  | 16% |

Within the classroom, the most common role for the special education teacher was “inserting information, asking questions, or restating something when students seem confused or unclear (54%).” (See Table 14). The next most frequently reported roles were: “not really teaching the whole class” (15%), “I regularly teach the whole class half the time(15%)”, and “teaching the whole class occasionally, less than once a week (14%)”.

Table 14

*Time special education teacher spends teaching the entire class*

Frequency Percentage

n= 78 Teachers/135

Relationships

| When you are co-teaching with this general education teacher how often do you present material (teach) the whole class? |           |            |
|---|-----------|------------|
|   | Frequency | Percentage |
| I don't really teach the whole class  | 20        | 15%        |
| I insert information, ask questions, or restate something when students seem confused or unclear                        | 73        | 54%        |
| I teach the whole class occasionally, less than once a week   | 19        | 14%        |
| I regularly teach the whole class half the time   | 20        | 15%        |

table continued

|  |   |    |
|--|---|----|
| I do most of the teaching to the whole class | 3 | 2% |
|--|---|----|

The majority of special education teacher’s teaching was instructing small groups of students (56%). See Table 15. Special education co-teachers also reported teaching small groups of students once or twice a week (23%).

Table 15

*Time spent teaching small groups*

Frequency  
Percentage  
n= 78 Teachers/135  
Relationships

| How often do you teach small groups of students in the classroom?    |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| I don't regularly teach small groups                                 | 13 | 10% |
| I occasionally teach small groups of students, less than once a week | 15 | 11% |
| I teach small groups of students once or twice a week                | 31 | 23% |
| Most of my teaching is with small groups of students                 | 76 | 56% |

Membership in the small groups varied, with teachers reporting different make-ups of the small groups (see Table 16). The most common grouping consisted of low

performing students, both general education and special education (n=67), followed by a mix of general education and special education students who were not specifically low performing (n=47). Grouping made exclusively of students with disabilities (n=19) and students who were behavior concerns (n=9) were less frequently practiced.

Table 16

*Make up of small groups*

Frequency  
 n= 67 Teachers/115  
 experiences with small  
 groups

|   |    |
|---|----|
| All special education students  | 19 |
| Low performing students, both general education and special education | 67 |
| Usually students who are behavior concerns                            | 9  |
| Usually a mix of students, general education and special education    | 47 |

Most special education teachers stated they discussed what roles they would perform and what roles the general education teacher would do. Forty-seven percent of special education teachers said they discussed their roles in the classroom with their general education partner and they had flexibility in their roles (see Table 17). Thirty-five percent described they had established roles in the classroom that were have discussed. Only 18% of special education teachers reported they had not discussed roles with a general education teacher.

Table 17

*Discussed roles in the classroom*

Frequency Percentage

n= 73

Teachers/128

Relationships

|  |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| This general education teacher and I have discussed our beliefs about our roles in the classroom                                     |    |     |
| This general education teacher and I have discussed our roles in the classroom and we have flexibility in our roles in the classroom | 60 | 47% |
| This general education teacher and I both have established roles in the classroom that we have discussed                             | 45 | 35% |
| This general education teacher and I have not talked about our roles in the classroom much at all                                    | 23 | 18% |

When co-teaching, special education teachers reported most of their time was spent in two teaching combinations (see Table 18): the general education teacher teaching a lesson to the whole class and the co-teacher floating and assisting students as needed (n=114) and taking a group of students out of the room to practice skills (n=68). Teachers (n=39) reported teaching a lesson together least frequently.

Table 18

*Roles within the classroom for special education and general education co-teachers*

Frequency

n= Teachers 75

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| This general education teacher has taught a lesson to the whole class and I have floated and assisted students as they need it during the lesson                      | 114 |
| We have each taught a lesson or supervised an activity in different parts of the room (maybe stations) and the students have switched between teachers and activities | 68  |
| I have taken a group of students out of the room to practice skills or have reteach   | 93  |
| The general education teacher and I have taught a lesson together sharing the lesson equally  | 39  |

In summary, special education co-teachers typically taught less than half a day with any general education teacher. During lessons, special education co-teachers usually inserted information, asked questions, and helped clarify material for students, while the general education teacher provided instruction. Special education teachers confirmed that most of their time was spent floating and assisting students as needed while the general education teacher taught the lesson. Special education teachers worked with small groups of students. These small groups usually consisted of both

general education students and students with disabilities, either low performing students or simply a small group of students from the class. Most special education teachers stated they discussed classroom roles with their general education partner.

### Satisfaction

Special education co-teachers answered questions about their satisfaction with co-teaching on the SECTS. Teacher’s responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Special education co-teachers (43%) stated that they thought a specific general education co-teacher volunteered to co-teach 43% (see Table 19). An equal proportion of special education teachers felt they either did not know if the general education teacher volunteered to co-teach (29%), or the general education teacher did not volunteer to co-teacher (28%).

Table 19

*I think this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach*

Frequency  
Percentage  
n= 75 Teachers/131 Relationships

| I think this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach          |           |            |
|---|-----------|------------|
|   | Frequency | Percentage |
| I think this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach          | 56        | 43%        |
| I do not know if this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach | 38        | 29%        |
| I don't think this general education teacher volunteered to co-teach    | 37        | 28%        |



The majority of special education co-teachers (67%) would choose to co-teach again with a specific general education co-teacher if given a choice (see Table 20). Twenty-three percent of special education co-teachers did not care either way if they co-taught with that general education teacher again, and 10% would prefer not to co-teach with that teacher again.

Table 20

*If given the choice about co-teaching with this general education teacher*

Frequency Percentage  
n= 74 Teachers/ 130 Relationships

| If given the choice                                      |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| I would rather co-teach in this classroom                | 87 | 67% |
| I do not care either way if I co-teach in this classroom | 30 | 23% |
| I would rather not co-teach in this classroom            | 13 | 10% |

Seventy-seven percent of special education co-teachers stated they were very satisfied or satisfied with their job as a teacher (see Table 21). However, 8% felt very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their job. Special education co-teachers (66%) thought they would choose to be a teacher again if given a choice of careers, with 11% stating they would not choose to be a teacher again if offered a choice. See table 22.

Table 21

Level of satisfaction with teaching career

Frequency

Percentage

n= 81 Teachers

| What is your level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher? |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| Very dissatisfied  | 5  | 6%  |
| Dissatisfied   | 2  | 2%  |
| Neutral  | 12 | 15% |
| Satisfied  | 30 | 37% |
| Very satisfied   | 32 | 40% |

Table 22

*Choice of career*

n= 80 Teachers

| If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher? |    |     |
|---|----|-----|
| Yes   | 53 | 66% |
| No  | 9  | 11% |
| I am not sure   | 18 | 23% |

Special education co-teachers believed that the co-teaching setting is appropriate for most special education students in their school (60%). See Table 23. None of the 81 special education co-teachers felt that co-teaching was inappropriate for students with disabilities.

Table 23

*Belief in co-teaching*

Frequency                      Percentage  
n= 81 Teachers

| I believe co-teaching is   |    |     |
|--|----|-----|
| Not appropriate for students in special education                                | 0  | 0%  |
| Not appropriate for most students in special education, but appropriate for some | 5  | 6%  |
| Appropriate for most students in special education at my school                  | 49 | 60% |
| Appropriate for all students in special education at my school                   | 27 | 33% |

Participants' Comments

The SECTS contained a space for special education co-teachers to comment about their co-teaching experiences. Of the 81 special education co-teachers who completed the SECTS, 55 voluntarily wrote additional comments about 78 co-teaching partnerships. The co-teacher's comments were divided into two major themes utilizing

the method for analyzing qualitative data designed by Creswell (2007). Participants' comments were categorized and grouped into two major themes: positive co-teaching experiences and negative co-teaching experiences. Comments that did not fit into the two major themes were considered separately.

### *Positive Co-Teaching Experiences with General Education Co-Teachers*

In the comment section, 43 positive comments were written describing the co-teaching experience.

Eight (n=8) comments described the complementary strengths the two co-teachers brought to the classroom. Teachers appreciated different skills and approaches within the classroom. Several teachers described it:

This co-teaching relationship involves respect for each other skills and we don't take offense if the other teacher jumps in to add to a lesson.

We have a strong partnership and balance each other. The general education teacher is in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and brings energy and enthusiasm to the classroom. I bring knowledge of special needs and past experience to the classroom.

Another positive thread was special education co-teachers explaining their similar teaching philosophy with the general education co-teacher (n=7). Two teacher described it:

Two teacher(s), one classroom with the very same goal...teach each student regardless of disability. That motto presents itself in a variety of teaching methods—whole group, co teach, small groups, stations, independent/enrichment, etc.

This relationship is a good arrangement for our students and for us as teachers. We have strengths that complement each other, with similar philosophies about education, so things work well.

Many co-teachers described their co-teaching partnership as flexible. Seven (n=7) comments stressed the flexibility within the co-taught classroom. Descriptions included:

This teacher and I have open communication about teaching our students and are very flexible with each others' teaching beliefs and styles.

Flexible according to situation, student need

great friends, strong teacher, flexible, but she direct teaches for the entire class

Five special education co-teachers expressed that they felt their partnership with the general education co-teacher was getting better over time (n=5). Co-teachers may or may not have immediately enjoyed or felt effective with a partner, but their camaraderie grew. Comments included:

It took about 4 months for her to accept me in the classroom and to understand that I am there to help and to help our children grow academically and socially...but now we are amazing! It's been great not just for me personally but for the kids to see us more united.

This teacher and I have taught together for several years (lost track of time) and really have our routine down well. We are very comfortable with one another and share the class responsibilities seamlessly. We have taken extensive math training together and enjoy using the specialized activities with our class.

### *Negative Experiences with Co-Teaching in Elementary Classrooms*

Special education co-teachers reported being dissatisfied with their co-teaching experience for a variety of reasons.

Nine (n=9) co-teachers described situations in which they were in a secondary supporting role in the classroom, not a true co-teaching partnership, and thus, a lack of collaboration.

Teacher has his own lessons, I insert other strategies to solve math problems and sometimes show things on the board. I also help a great deal with student behavior, both gen ed and sped kids.

I have had both experiences of truly "co" teaching (sharing the class, lessons, responsibilities, etc), but am currently in a situation where I feel more a paraprofessional role in someone else's class.

A lack of common planning time was a concern for eight special education co-teachers (n=8).

I think the general education teacher would share more of the responsibilities if we were able to plan together.

I have taught for many years with this teacher, but she likes to do planning and teaching on her own. She discusses lessons with me before/after writing them to keep me in the loop.

One challenge faced by several special education co-teachers was the myriad of responsibilities they manage. Eight (n=8) teachers were very frustrated with being spread too thin, descriptions included:

the paperwork and testing for sped students has become unmanageable, causing conflict between myself and the gen ed teacher when arguments of fair-share of responsibilities come up.

The most difficult part of co-teaching this year is my lack of ability to plan with this grade level, get lesson plans and/or assessments in time to make accommodations and modifications, AND co-teach in a prek classroom with 5 other students.

Being spread too thin caused some special education co-teachers to describe their support in the general education classroom as not co-teaching. One commented:

mostly pull-out of students according to need; scheduling prohibits much time in this class

Special education co-teachers described some co-teaching relationships as very challenging. Concerns included a lack of trust (n=4). Teachers commented:

The gen ed teacher seems to think I am there judging her. She and I have completely different teaching styles. It is not pleasant for either of us.

I was involved in planning in a passive role, and subsequently the teacher didn't trust me to teach the class as a true co-teacher.

I generally follow the gen ed teacher's plans and assist where I can. This particular teacher and I have a history of conflicts regarding special ed students in her classes, and I do not particularly trust her to implement accommodations and modifications on her own.

#### Cramer's V

Questions from the SECTS were then analyzed using Cramer's V in SPSS. Cramer's V is a statistical measure of the strength of association or dependency between two nominal, categorical variables. Many of the items in the SECTS were nominal, which made Cramer's V an appropriate tool. A significance of  $p < .05$  was assumed. All criteria for Cramer's V were met, such as no cells containing 0 responses, and no cells less than 5. Question responses were combined where appropriate, for example, for question (3) *Year of teaching experience: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21+ years*, the answers 16-20 and 21+ were combined to a category "over 16 years". Another example was question (13) *What is your level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher: very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, neutral, satisfied, very satisfied*. These categories were combined with very dissatisfied and dissatisfied into dissatisfied. In addition, satisfied and very satisfied were combined into satisfied.

The unit of measure was co-teacher relationship, as opposed to individual special education co-teacher. So, if a specific teacher worked with three general education partners, they would have responded to questions regarding collaboration three times, one for each relationship, and each relationship was a unit of observation for statistical examination.

Results were examined by comparing the core areas of collaboration with co-teacher, involvement in instruction, and satisfaction. Finally, the areas of collaboration with co-teacher and involvement in instruction were compared to satisfaction.

#### *Collaboration with Co-Teacher*

In the area of collaboration with co-teacher, statistically significant differences were found between the special education co-teachers who volunteered for co-teaching or those who did not compared with planning time ( $\chi^2=10.014$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=139$ ). Using Volker's 2006, criteria the Cramer's V showed a small effect size (.268). Of the eighty-six ( $n=86$ ), partnerships with a special education co-teacher who volunteered to co-teach, 52% ( $n=45$ ) planned an hour or more, 40% ( $n=34$ ) planned less than half an hour, and only 8% ( $n=7$ ) did not plan. On the other hand, the 53 special education co-teachers who did not volunteer to co-teach, 42% ( $n=22$ ) planned an hour or more, 30% ( $n=16$ ) planned less than half an hour, and 28% ( $n=15$ ) did not plan at all. Another way to see this is that of the 22 special education co-teachers who do not plan with their general education partner, 68% ( $n=15$ ) did not volunteer to co-teach and 32% ( $n=7$ ) did volunteer to co-teach. However, of the 67 co-teaching partnerships that planned an hour or more each week, 33% ( $n=22$ ) of the special education co-teachers did not volunteer to co-teach compared with 67% ( $n=45$ ) who did volunteer.



A statistically significant difference was also found for teachers' years of experience with co-teaching and if their shared planning time was spontaneous or scheduled ( $\chi^2=10.052$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=114$ ). The Cramer's V suggested the effect (.243) was small. Of the 29 co-teacher's with 0-3 years of co-teaching experience, 72% ( $n=21$ ) had scheduled planning time, and 28% ( $n=8$ ) had spontaneous planning time. Whereas, the 55 special education co-teachers with 4-10 years of experience, 36% ( $n=20$ ) had scheduled planning time and 64% ( $n=34$ ) had spontaneous planning. The 30 co-teachers with over ten years of experience were fairly evenly divided, 53% ( $n=16$ ) scheduled planning and 47% ( $n=14$ ) spontaneous planning.

A statistically significant difference was found for special education co-teachers' management of behavior of the entire class and special education co-teachers who had received training in co-teaching ( $\chi^2=8.715$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=130$ , SPSS output states "1 cell [16.7%] have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.15"). However, the smallest cell reported was "special education co-teacher who managed the classroom behavior more than the general education co-teacher" who "had received training" with a cell count of 5, not less than 5, so the results are presented here. The Cramer's V shows a small effect size (2.59). Of the 18 special education co-teachers' relationships who manage most of the behavior of the entire class in the co-taught classroom, 28% ( $n=5$ ) had received training and 72% ( $n=13$ ) had not received training. Also, of the special education co-teachers relationships who reported equally sharing the managing of classroom behavior of the entire class ( $n=80$ ), 15% ( $n=12$ ) had received training and 85% ( $n=68$ ) had not received training.

Special education co-teachers who did not discuss their roles in the co-taught classroom as well as those that discuss their roles frequently and had flexibility were statistically different depending on if they reported the general education teacher volunteering to co-teach ( $\chi^2=19.512$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=127$ ). The effect size was small (Cramer's  $V .277$ ). Of the special education co-teachers relationships ( $n=28$ ) who did not discuss their roles in the classroom with the general education co-teacher, 57% ( $n=13$ ) did not think the general education teacher volunteered to co-teach, 30% ( $n=7$ ) did not know if the teacher volunteered, and only 13% ( $n=3$ ) felt the general education co-teacher volunteered. Additionally, of the special education co-teachers relationships ( $n=59$ ) who regularly discussed their roles and had flexibility in the classroom 15% ( $n=9$ ) of the special education teachers thought the general education teachers did not volunteer to co-teach, 25% ( $n=15$ ) of the special education teachers did not know if they volunteered, and 60% ( $n=35$ ) believed the general education volunteered to co-teach.

#### *Involvement in instruction*

Special education co-teachers who had training in co-teaching showed differences from teachers who had not had training regarding being involved with teaching the whole class ( $\chi^2=6.217$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=134$ ). The effect size was small (Cramer's  $V .215$ ). Of the special education co-teachers' relationships ( $n=32$ ) who have had training in co-teaching, 28% ( $n=9$ ) did not teach the whole class weekly or at all, 41% ( $n=13$ ) inserted information providing clarification, and 31% ( $n=10$ ) taught the whole class equally or more than the general education teacher. On the other hand, of the special education co-teachers' relationships ( $n=102$ ) who had not received training, 30% ( $n=30$ ) did not teach the whole class weekly or at all, 58% ( $n=59$ ) inserted information for clarification,

and only 13% (n=13) taught the whole class equally or more than the general education co-teacher.

Special education co-teachers who volunteered for co-teaching had a statistically significant difference in frequency of teaching the whole class ( $\chi^2=8.217$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=133$ ). The Cramer's V effect size was small (.249). Of the special education co-teachers' relationships (n=82) who volunteered, 32% (n=26) did not teach the whole class much or at all, 45% (n=37) inserted information, and 23% (n=19) taught the whole class equally or more than the general education co-teacher. Of the special education co-teachers' relationships (n=51) who did not volunteer to co-teach, 24% (n=12) did not teach the whole class much or at all, 69% (n=35) inserted information when the general education co-teacher was instructing, and only 8% (n=4) taught the whole class equally or more than their partner.

Of 117 special education partnerships in which the special education co-teacher co-taught less than half a day with a general education partner, 20% (n=23) received training in co-teaching, but 80% (n=94) had not received training ( $\chi^2=8.294$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $n=140$ ). Cramer's V shows this effect size to be small (.243).

#### *Satisfaction, Collaboration with Satisfaction, and Involvement with Instruction and Satisfaction*

No statistically significant differences were found in the core area of satisfaction using Cramer's V. Overall teachers were satisfied and no significant differences were found with length of co-teaching experience, time in a particular classroom, or any other teacher demographics.

Additionally, the examination of the area of collaboration was compared with satisfaction and no statistically significant results were found. Co-teachers who had less planning time were not statistically different from teachers who had more planning time in their level of satisfaction.

Nor were any statistically significant results discovered in the area of involvement with instruction and satisfaction. Teachers who shared co-teaching the whole class with a general education partner were not statistically more satisfied than co-teachers who primarily floated and assisted in the classroom.

### Conclusions

Research Question 1: To what extent do co-teachers collaborate?

The mode of shared planning time for co-teaching partnerships was less than a half an hour a week. Co-teaching partners were meeting together, but, it was for a brief time on average. Teachers who regularly shared planning time were evenly divided between teaching teams who met routinely at scheduled times (50%), and teams who met spontaneously, such as in the hallway or at lunch (50%). Scheduled vs. spontaneous planning times varied according to the length of co-teaching experience of the co-teacher.

During planning time, teaching teams discussed a variety of topics. The most frequently reported were accommodations and modifications for students, student behavior, and student grouping. Teachers discussed their beliefs about teaching at least a few times with their partner.

Research Question 2: To what extent are co-teachers involved in instruction in the co-taught classroom?

Special education co-teachers reported their most frequent role in the classroom was “inserting information, asking questions, or restating something when students seemed confused or unclear”. This describes the role of floating and assisting or one-teaches-and-one-floats. Teaching the whole class equally was the role reported the least frequently. Co-teachers who received training in co-teaching were more likely to teach the whole class frequently than were teachers who had not received training.

Teachers frequently taught small groups of students. These small groups were usually comprised of a heterogeneous mix of low performing general education students and students with disabilities.

Research Questions 3: To what extent are co-teachers satisfied with their co-teaching assignments?

Teachers in this study were satisfied with their career of being a teacher. Moreover, most co-teachers would elect to pursue teaching as a career again. Most co-teachers would elect to co-teach with their current partner if given the opportunity to choose.

### Summary

In this study, special education co-teachers taught with an average of two general education co-teachers. A few co-teachers (n=6) reported having four or more partnerships. Special education co-teachers almost always taught with a specific general education teacher less than half of the school day.

In this study, almost half of the co-teaching relationships (49%) were in their first year of partnership. An additional 30% of the co-teaching relationships were in their 2-3 years of collaboration as partners.

Special education co-teachers shared planning time on average less than half an hour a week with any specific co-teaching partner. For the most part, planning time was specifically and routinely scheduled when special education co-teachers had 1-3 years of teaching experience, and was more likely to be spontaneous planning for co-teachers with 4-5 years of teaching experience. Special education co-teachers were more likely to share planning if they had volunteered to co-teach.

Co-teachers affirmed that they shared managing behaviors in the co-taught classroom. If a special education co-teacher had received training in co-teaching, he or she was more likely to have responsibility for managing student behavior of all students in the classroom, and less likely to share management of behavior equally.

Special education co-teachers stated that most of their direct teaching was with small groups of students, both general education and special education. Special education co-teachers often floated and assisted in the co-taught classroom while the general education teacher taught. Special education teachers who had received training in co-teaching were more likely to teach the whole class. They were also more likely to instruct the whole class if they had volunteered to co-teach. They were more likely to have had discussions about classroom roles and responsibilities with general education co-teachers they perceived had volunteered to co-teach.

Special education co-teachers believed co-teaching was appropriate for most or all students with disabilities. Teachers were also satisfied or very satisfied with their chosen career as a teacher.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion

#### *Overview of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of elementary special education co-teachers and to identify to what extent the co-teachers collaborated with their general education co-teacher, to what extent the special education co-teacher is involved in classroom, and how satisfied the co-teacher was with their co-teaching assignment. The Special Education Co-Teacher Survey, (SECTS) was specifically created for this study. A request to participate in this study was sent to all 349 elementary special education teachers via district email. Eighty-one teachers completed the SECTS for a total of 140 co-teaching relationships.

#### Discussion of the Findings

##### *Collaboration with Co-Teacher*

*Planning Time.* The need for co-teachers to collaborate and plan together is well documented (Friend, 2007; Kloo and Zigmond, 2006; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). In this study special education co-teachers reported a range of “typical planning times”. The mode of planning time reported was “less than a half an hour a week”, this was reported in 36% of the relationships, with an additional 30% of relationships reporting about an hour of planning time each week. Welch (2000) found that 30 minutes a week was the minimum amount of planning time recommended. So, the majority of co-teaching teams were satisfying the minimum planning time according to Welch. On the other hand, Kohler-Evans (2006) recommends 45 minutes as the weekly minimum planning time, which

most co-teaching teams did not achieve. Moreover, it is worth noting that 16% percent of the co-teaching relationships did not have any routine planning time at all. The mean planning time of 30 minutes a week is most likely insufficient to thoroughly plan lessons, reflect over past lessons, discuss student progress, design and modify assessments, among other co-teaching responsibilities. This “bare minimum” of 30 minutes may help co-teachers build and maintain a connection, but true shared planning may not be able to occur.

Previous studies have found that co-teaching teams use shared planning time for a variety of activities, such as lesson planning, discussing behavior, and reflections on past lessons (Arguelles et al., 2000). In this study, special education co-teachers described using shared planning time doing a variety of activities, similarly to previous studies. Most frequent activities described were: discussing accommodations and modifications of students with disabilities, student behavior, student grouping, and creating lesson plans.

Shared planning time is a known to be an important factor in successful co-teaching teams, while at the same time often being difficult to achieve. Many scheduling issues and other responsibilities challenge both the school administration and teachers to prioritize shared planning. Respondents in the comments section reported wanting additional shared planning time, yet perhaps because most co-teaching teams met together for planning at least 30 minutes a week, most special education co-teachers reported being satisfied with their co-teaching partnership.

In this study, special education co-teachers who were new to co-teaching (1-3 years experience with co-teaching) were more likely to have a scheduled planning time



with their general education partner. Special education teachers with 4-10 years of co-teaching experience were more likely to have spontaneous planning times, and special education teachers with more than ten years of co-teaching experience who shared planning time were equally likely to have either scheduled or spontaneous planning. The differences may be due to special education co-teachers who are new to co-teaching make planning with their general education co-teacher a priority. An established set planning time maximized the likelihood that the planning would occur. Special education teachers who have more experience with co-teaching, 4-10 years, may be more comfortable with planning spontaneously. Special education teachers with more than ten years of co-teaching experience may be flexible with matching planning time to the preferences of their partners and their partner's level of experience.

This study found that the majority of elementary special education co-teachers shared planning time regularly, with the planning time being a half an hour or less. Additionally, special education co-teachers most frequently voiced comment in the open response section, was the lack of shared planning time. This study confirms special education co-teacher's belief that planning time is a priority. Arguelles et al. (2000) described planning time as an opportunity to share what is going on in the classroom when the other teacher is not there (for example, when a special education co-teacher is co-teaching in another general education classroom), an opportunity to suggest accommodations and modifications, provide a time to reflect on daily lessons, plan future lessons, and define both teacher's roles. This study confirmed that shared planning time is utilized for the aforementioned activities, with the most frequent

activities being discussing accommodations and modifications, student behavior, student grouping, and creating lesson plans.

*Belief System.* Successful co-teaching teams in previous studies emphasized the need for a common belief system (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000; Friend & Cook, 2003; Spencer, 2005). The majority of special education co-teachers in this study reported discussing their beliefs about teaching regularly or at least a few times with their co-teaching partners. In the comments sections, seven co-teachers commented that they shared a similar teaching philosophy with their general education partner. Since most of the special education co-teachers in this study responded positively about their co-teaching experience, perhaps the common belief system facilitated this attitude.

Mastropieri et al. (2005) discovered three themes that made an impact on co-teaching in all three grade levels studied (fourth grade, middle school and high school). The themes were academic content knowledge, high-stakes testing, and co-teacher compatibility. Elementary special education co-teachers in the comments portion of this study mentioned all three themes reported by Mastropieri, et al.. Thus, similarities exist between elementary grade teachers utilized in this study and teachers in upper grade levels. Therefore, similar challenges face all grade levels related to co-teaching.

*Accommodations and Modifications.* An important responsibility of the special education co-teacher is providing accommodations and modifications to students with disabilities (Eisenman et al., 2011; Idol, 2006; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Mastropieri, et al. 2005; Murawski & Lochner, 2011). A large majority of special education co-teachers in this study affirmed that their general education co-teaching partners were receptive to suggestions about accommodations and modifications for

students with disabilities. Typically, a special education teacher would have received training in accommodation and modifications for students with disabilities. Therefore, the general education partners were receptive to the prescribed assistance for students with disabilities. Ideally in a co-teaching partnership, both teachers use their strengths. General education teachers bring their subject expertise and special education teachers make the curriculum accessible to all students through accommodations and modifications. The respondents in this study felt their expertise in accommodations and modifications were valued through implementation.

*Behavior.* Cook and Friend (1995), Dieker (2001), and Arguelles, Hughes, and Schumm (2000) advocate that best practice for general education and special education co-teachers is to share classroom behavior management. Elementary special education co-teachers (62%) described sharing responsibility for managing behavior of all of the students in the co-taught classroom. Less than ten percent (6%) of the special education co-teachers described the general education teacher managing most of the classroom behavior and fewer special education co-teachers (2%) manage most of the classroom behavior themselves. A special education co-teacher described the behavior management in a co-taught classroom “We are lucky to have similar discipline styles which allows us to fluidly manage student behavior. We confer about expectations and update as needed throughout the year.” Clearly, teachers view the value of both co-teachers involved in managing the behavior of all of the students in the shared classroom and are implementing recommended practices.

Similarly, managing the behavior of students with disabilities was also reported as shared in 59% of the relationships. But, the special education co-teacher shouldered

the responsibility for managing most of the behavior of students with disabilities in 22% of the partnerships. This may show that the students with disabilities are viewed as more the responsibility of the special education teachers in those classrooms. One special education co-teacher commented, “The general education teacher has had an attitude that special education students are less her responsibility.” Special education teachers typically receive more preservice training on behavior, such as positive behavior support. Thus, many special education teachers are more comfortable and have more experience with challenging behavior. In some co-teaching partnerships the modeling of the special education co-teacher in managing behavior of students with disabilities does not transfer to the general education partner, who relinquishes the responsibility for managing more specific behaviors or implementing behavior plans. One of the most challenging aspects of being a teacher is the management of behaviors. When difficult behaviors interfere with teaching a lesson, it is credible that general education teachers would pass that responsibility on to the special educator.

In this study, special education co-teachers who equally share the management of the behaviors in the entire classroom and the respondents who manage most of the behavior of all students in the classroom had not received training on co-teaching. Providing training in co-teaching has been reported in the literature as being important and necessary (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Danmore & Murray, 2009; Friend, 2000, 2007; Idol, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). The special education teachers who did not receive training in co-teaching may be in the role of managing behavior and policing the classroom as part of their floating and assisting role. Someone who floats around the room would have more opportunities to observe

off-task behaviors. However, having said that, for the most part, special education co-teachers equally shared classroom management of behavior even though they did not receive training in co-teaching. In addition, only special education co-teachers were asked about their training in this study. The co-teaching training of general education partners was not included in this study.

*Volunteering.* Previous research advocated for permitting both general education and special education teachers to volunteer for co-teaching (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler & Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). Teachers who are allowed choice in co-teaching “increase the chance of creating a compatible and successful relationship” (Keefe & Moore, 2004, p. 87). This study showed that elementary special education co-teachers who volunteered to co-teach planned more than the co-teachers who did not volunteer. Volunteering increased the likelihood of shared planning time. In addition, when the special education co-teacher reported that the general education co-teacher volunteered to co-teach, the partners were more likely to discuss their roles in the classroom more frequently and report more flexibility in the roles each teacher performed. Clearly, the benefits of teachers being able to volunteer are apparent. Administrators who assign co-teaching classrooms, rather than seeking volunteers, may foster less successful co-teaching experiences in their schools.

*Complementary Skills.* Previous research described special education co-teachers and general education co-teachers as bringing complementary skills into the shared classroom (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Mastropieri, et al., 2005; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Eight special education co-teachers in this study mentioned complementary strengths with their general education co-teacher. As one teacher

described it “We have a strong partnership and balance each other. The general education teacher is in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of teaching and brings energy and enthusiasm to the classroom. I bring knowledge of special needs and past experience to the classroom.” Administrators who make thoughtful decisions about the pairing of general and special education teaching partners are more likely to facilitate positive and successful teaching relationships.

### *Involvement in Instruction*

*Length of relationships.* Almost half (49%) of the elementary special education co-teachers’ relationships were in their first year of partnership. The second largest cohort of partnerships were in their second and third year of teaming. This study found several teachers described their co-teaching partnership as “getting better over time”. This growth could happen during the first year, as the special education co-teacher who described, “It took about 4 months for her to accept me in the classroom and to understand that I am there to help and to help our children grow academically and socially...but now we are amazing!” Alternatively, over years, as illustrated by the comment, “This teacher and I have taught together for several years (lost track of time) and really have our routine down well.” Teachers who co-teach over time are more likely to figure out how to “work out the kinks” and maximize their effectiveness. Even though half of the co-teachers were in the beginning year of co-teaching, they reported feeling positive about the experience.

Since, 49% of co-teaching teams were in their first year of partnership, and an additional 30% in their second or third year, the expectation of true team teaching may be unreasonable. The school district studied has offered training and workshops on co-

teaching for over ten years. The vast majority of partnerships were in the early years of teaming, but the district was is not new to co-teaching. This may be due, in some small part, to rotation of special education/general education partnerships. It is possible that the same teachers are not always partnered together year after year, although they may be co-teaching with someone else. Then, even though the teachers are not new to co-teaching they may be new to the partnership. This new partners but not new to co-teaching, may describe some of the relationships, however, it would not explain the magnitude of the newer partnerships.

*Models of Co-teaching.* Gately and Gately emphasize that effective co-teaching takes time. Some co-teaching teams struggle in the early stages of their relationship (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri, et al., 2005). As a result, one would not expect to see more advanced and collaborative co-teaching models, such as, parallel teaching or team teaching with new teams.

In order to maximize the impact of two certified teachers in a classroom, it is imperative that both the general education teacher and the special education teacher take active and meaningful roles in the classroom instruction. Parity is a critical component in a successful co-teaching classroom (Arguelles, Hughes, & Schumm, 2000; Austin, 2001; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Harbort et al., 2007; Magiera et al., 2005; Washburn-Moses, 2005). Understanding the roles and responsibilities of special education co-teachers can have a positive impact on the co-teaching experience. Most special education co-teachers in this study reported discussing their roles in the classroom with the general education partner. These discussions may contribute to special education co-teachers reporting being satisfied

with the co-teaching experience, being utilized in sharing management of all student's behavior, and teaching small groups of students.

Many previous studies found that special education co-teachers spend most of their instructional time floating and assisting students while the general education co-teacher teaches (Harbort et al., 2007; Magiera, et al., 2005; Scruggs, et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). In this study, special education co-teachers confirmed that "inserting information, asking questions, or restating something when students seem confused or unclear" was their most common role in the classroom. This was followed by "not really teaching the whole class", "I regularly teach the whole class half the time", and "teaching the whole class occasionally, less than once a week", in order of frequency.

A teacher reported in the comments "The general education teacher usually teaches the lesson and I float around and assist students as they need it during the lesson" described the common co-teaching model of one-teach-one assist. Another special education co-teacher stated, "I have had both experiences of truly "co" teaching (sharing the class, lessons, responsibilities, etc), but am currently in a situation where I feel more a paraprofessional role in someone else's class." This feeling of being underutilized in the classroom is well documented in previous research (Friend & Cook, 2003; Harbort, et al., 2007; Magiera et al. 2005; Scruggs et al., 2007; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). The one-teach-one assist model requires the least shared planning time, as well as minimal disruption to the usual routine of the general education co-teacher. In addition, teams that are in their first year of co-teaching as in this study, may still be building their trust levels with each other.



Previous research advocated for permitting both general education and special education teachers to volunteer for co-teaching (Allen-Malley & Bishop, 2000; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kohler & Evans, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). In this study, special education co-teachers who volunteered for co-teaching were more likely to be involved in co-teaching the entire class than special education teachers who did not volunteer to co-teach. The fact that the special education co-teachers volunteered to co-teach makes it likely that they are invested in the process and willing to implement a model that reflects equity in teaching. Although special education co-teachers who volunteered were more likely to be involved in teaching the whole class, special education teachers usually floated and assisted students while the general education partner taught the whole class.

The majority of elementary co-teachers classroom instruction was teaching small groups of students. Small groups varied, with teachers reporting different make-ups of the groups. The most common grouping consisted of low performing students, both general education and special education. Teaching small groups of students is a recommended co-teaching model, particularly when the small groups are not routinely and exclusively students with disabilities (Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Cook & Friend, 1995; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Magiera et al., 2005; Scruggs et al., 2007). Clustering a small group of students is an effective model to make use of both teachers. Additionally, it does not necessarily require a large amount of shared planning to implement. Special education co-teachers may be more familiar with teaching small groups of students, which would make it comfortable for

them and helpful for the general education teacher who then has fewer students to instruct when the small group is removed.

Too many demands on the time of a special education co-teacher can ultimately result in, as one teacher stated, “Our model is not the true co-teach model because sped teachers are spread to(o) thin.” The time it takes to collaborate and plan makes the one-teach-one assist the most common model used by the majority of participants.

*Training.* Special education co-teachers in this study who received training in co-teaching were more likely to teach the whole class equally with the general education co-teacher, and less likely to not teach the whole class at all. The effect size was small. Providing training for co-teachers has been reported in the literature as being important, or needed when teachers had not previously received training (Austin, 2001; Cook & Friend, 1995; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Danmore & Murray , 2009; Friend, 2000, 2007; Idol, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). When the content of co-teaching training focuses on maximizing equity between the teachers, the result would likely be shared instruction of the whole class. Additionally, special education co-teachers who taught less than half a day with a general education partner generally did not receive training in co-teaching. Perhaps, administrators of the elementary schools were less motivated to send “part-time” co-teachers to training. It is also possible that the special education co-teachers themselves are less likely to seek out training for only one part of their job responsibilities. In other words, training in co-teaching has to compete for the teacher’s limited professional development time with other trainings, such as reading intervention or training in teaching math. Also, perhaps special education teachers are relieved to

not be responsible for direct teaching. Co-teaching may be a chance to take a break from the other demands of teaching in special education.

### *Satisfaction*

*Choice.* The majority of special education co-teachers, if given a choice, would choose to continue to co-teach with their general education partners. Clearly, teachers feel positive about the overall experience since co-teaching is a practice they would choose to continue.

*Appropriate Placement.* Previous research shows that teachers often believe co-teaching to be beneficial overall (Dieker, 2001, Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007) and to students (Keefe & Moore, 2004, Kohler-Evans, 2006, Luckner, 1999) and to teachers (Kohler-Evans, 2006, Luckner, 1999). In this study, special education co-teachers also believed that the co-teaching setting was appropriate for most special education students in their school. None of the 81 special education co-teachers felt that co-teaching was inappropriate for students with disabilities. Special education teachers receive preservice training about legislation and benefits of least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. For many students, co-teaching in general education is the least restrictive setting and was believed to be appropriate by all co-teacher in this study. In addition, with grade level standards being utilized in IEP's, the placement of students in general education classrooms can help facilitate achievement of state standards.

Teacher satisfaction can have a significant effect not only on the individual teacher, but also on those who he or she interacts with as well (Griffin, 2010). In the case of co-teaching, those most impacted by a teacher's satisfaction would be the co-

teaching partner and the students in the co-taught classroom. Mertler, 2002, found 23% of middle and high school teachers were dissatisfied. On the other hand, this study found only 8% of special education co-teachers felt dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their job. Moreover, only 11% stated they would not choose to be a teacher again if offered a choice. Although the number of elementary special education co-teachers in this study who reported being dissatisfied with their job and career was relatively small, eight co-teachers shared feelings of frustration. A teacher described it thusly,

“The last couple of years have been harder due to increase in number and severity of disabilities in the sped caseload...” “(T)he paperwork and testing for sped students in prek and kinder has become unmanageable, causing conflict between myself and the gen ed teacher when arguments of fair-share of responsibilities come up.”

This study confirmed that most special education co-teachers were satisfied with their job and would choose to become a teacher again. This study was limited to special education co-teachers in a single school district. Perhaps administrators in this school district support special education co-teachers more than in other school districts. Perhaps the type of children who are placed in the co-teaching setting are more likely to be successful in a general education classroom. Additionally, perhaps parents of children in elementary co-teaching classrooms are invested in their children’s education and support teachers. This study did not find any statistically significant differences in regards to collaboration and involvement in instruction and satisfaction, but most special education co- teachers were satisfied. Teachers may have complaints, concerns, and aspects of their jobs and co-teaching that they would like to improve, but remain satisfied with their position and career.

*Multiple Relationships.* The vast majority of previous research examined the co-teaching relationship within one classroom between one special education teacher and one general education teacher (Cook & Friend, 1995; Gately & Gately, 2001; Kloo & Zigmond, 2008; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1995; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). A few studies indicated that one special education teacher partnered with two general education teachers, or co-taught two subjects (Dieker, 2001; Dieker & Murowski, 2003; Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). Rarely has a study investigated the multiple co-teaching settings and relationships within which one special education teacher may routinely teach. This study found that elementary special education co-teachers co-taught in an average of almost two classrooms, with some co-teachers working with four or more partners. The scheduling challenges increase as additional classrooms and partnerships are added to a special education teacher's plate. Co-teaching classrooms ranged from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade, with the most of the teaching taking place in fourth and fifth grade. Subjects co-taught varied, with math, reading, and writing being most common. This study found that co-teaching with more than one partner in more than one setting was the norm. Other studies documented occasional co-teachers partnering with more than one teacher, but that appeared to be a rarity. Most likely, administrators were trying to "get the most from the least" by assigning one special education co-teacher to multiple general education classrooms. Multiple partnerships permitted more students to be supported via co-teaching. While this study had unique features, it also had several limitations.

## Limitations

A major limitation of this study was the examination of the experiences of the special education co-teachers and not the experiences of the general education co-teacher. This does not discount what was discovered in this study, but one must keep in mind that it only contains the opinions of half of the teaching team.

All special education teachers in the school district were contacted via district email. This study relied on self-selected volunteers, and may not be representative of the population overall (Creswell, 2007). And as with all survey results, there is a possibility that participants provided responses that they believed to be socially desirable, not necessarily their actual views (Vogt, 2007).

Participants were from a single urban school district in Texas. Results from this study may not generalize to other settings, such as rural areas, or school districts in other parts of the country.

Another limitation of this study was the data was collected through a researcher-created instrument that is unique to this study. The SECTS, as a unique instrument, has limits to its validity.

This survey also contained questions that were not specific enough, or included two questions combined into one. For example, the question “This co-teacher and I have discussed our roles in the classroom...” Answer choices: “This co-teacher and I have established roles in the classroom that we have discussed” and “this co-teacher and I have discussed our roles in the classroom and have flexibility in our roles” combine questions about discussing roles with co-teaching partners AND flexibility or

established roles in the classroom. Thus, this study addressed a current issue in education (co-teaching) but has limitations.

### Study Implications

Administrators and co-teachers need to work together creatively in order to carve out as much scheduled shared planning time as possible with each partner. Personnel preparation programs would better serve teachers, both special education and general education, by providing them with awareness and tools for potentially managing multiple teaching partnerships.

Personnel preparation programs, co-teaching training, and administrators should continue to emphasize the importance of sharing classroom behavior management. Special emphasis should be placed on the shared responsibility of the behavior of students with disabilities in the classroom. Administrators may also want to focus on providing shared planning time for all co-teachers because planning time is an opportunity for the co-teachers to discuss behavior management. Additionally, planning time will provide a platform so that teachers can communicate and transition from one stage of co-teaching to the next.

Special education co-teachers in this study confirmed that “inserting information, asking questions, or restating something when students seem confused or unclear” was their most common role in the classroom. This floating and assisting during whole class instruction is potentially an underuse of the special education teacher. In addition, this floating and assisting may not provide the most effective intervention and support for students with disabilities. Personnel preparation programs and teacher inservice

trainings should emphasize how to best function as equal partners in the co-teaching arena.

Special education co-teachers who teach less than half a day with a general education co-teaching partner are less likely to have received training. Therefore, administrators at elementary schools can support and encourage all of their special education co-teachers to attend training in co-teaching.

This study found the vast majority of co-teaching partnerships to be in their first year of partnership, or in their second and third year of partnership. Because co-teaching goes through stages (Gately & Gately, 2001) and some co-teaching teams struggle in the beginning of their relationship (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri, et al., 2005), it is imperative that administrators enable effective and satisfied co-teaching teams to continue their relationship. Supporting and nurturing the continuity and success of co-teaching teams should be a priority.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

The pros and cons of co-teaching over time with the same person needs to be explored. The assumption is made that more years together is better, but additional data needs to be gathered and analyzed.

The results from this study suggest a need to complete a series of investigations to increase our understanding of the multiple factors that affect co-teachers' experiences. Future studies should be expanded to include the general education co-teacher. The experiences of the general education co-teachers may vary in fundamental and important facets, which should be studied in order to understand the relationship between the two teachers better.



This study could be expanded in the future to include both special education co-teachers and general education co-teachers from middle and high school as well. Co-teachers in other school settings may have different experiences than their elementary counterparts.

This study relied on the special education co-teacher's responses on a survey. Future studies could include interviews with both the special education and general education co-teachers. In addition, studies could include observations of the co-teaching teams. Through observations of practice, data can be gathered that goes beyond the teachers' perspectives.

This study showed that almost half of the co-teaching relationships were in their first year of partnerships. The next largest group of co-teachers had been co-teaching together for two or three years. Future research should more clearly examine the factors that contribute to the longevity of co-teaching relations. In addition, a better understanding is needed regarding why teachers choose to co-teach or not.

Collaboration is a critical factor to successful co-teaching. Collaboration involves a complex mix of skills and experiences. The fields of nursing (Henneman, Lee, and Cohen, 1995) recognizes that collaboration is a process, and personal readiness and openness impact the success of any collaborative relationship. The personal antecedents for collaboration, such as readiness and acceptance of their own roles, could be examined in both general education and special education teachers.

Understanding the factors that influence co-teachers' experiences with co-teaching is a necessary step in understanding how co-teaching is occurring in practice. Exploring special education co-teachers' experiences with co-teaching could provide

personnel preparation programs and school administrators with further insight into how to best educate and support co-teachers to become effective teaching teams. Ongoing research on this topic will expand our knowledge and influence the skills of co-teachers.

### Conclusion

This study added to the body of knowledge concerning the experiences of elementary special education co-teachers. Findings show that co-teachers partner with more than one general education co-teacher for less than half a day each. The majority of co-teaching relationships were recently-formed. Almost half of co-teaching relationships were in their first year of partnership, with an additional 30% being in their second or third year of partnership.

Special education co-teachers shared planning with their general education partner for about 30 minutes each week. Planning time was used to discuss accommodations and modifications of students with disabilities, student behavior, student grouping, and creating lesson plans. Special education co-teachers shared in management of behavior in the classroom. Additionally, special educators shared management of student with disabilities' behavior, however, 22% reported bearing the responsibility for managing most of the behavior of students served by special education.

During whole class instruction, the special education co-teacher was most likely to float around the classroom and assist students as needed. Floating and assisting often does not provide specialized support to students with disabilities. Most of the special education co-teacher's actual teaching was with small groups of both special education and general education students.

Special education co-teachers were satisfied with their choice of career and current teaching position. They reported that they would prefer to co-teach with their current co-teaching partner if given a choice.

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## **APPENDICES**

**Appendix A**  
IRB Approval Letter

***University Committee for the Protection  
of Human Subjects in Research  
University of New Orleans***

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*Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: Linda Flynn-Wilson

Co-Investigator: Eden Hagelman

Date: February 15, 2013

Protocol Title: "Elementary Special Education Co-Teacher's Experiences"

IRB#: 03Feb13

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures described in this protocol application are exempt from federal regulations under 45 CFR 46.101 category 2, due to the fact that any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Exempt protocols do not have an expiration date; however, if there are any changes made to this protocol that may cause it to be no longer exempt from CFR 46, the IRB requires another standard application from the investigator(s) which should provide the same information that is in this application with changes that may have changed the exempt status.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project.  
Sincerely,



Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair  
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

## Appendix B

### Email from Researcher to Elementary Special Education Teachers

Dear Fellow Teachers,

I am a special education teacher at Clint Small Middle School in AISD. I am also a graduate student in the Special Education and Habilitative Services at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting research into co-teaching relationships in elementary schools. This study will contribute important information about elementary special education co-teacher's experiences and satisfaction with their co-teaching situations. I would like to invite you to participate in this study by completing an on-line survey. **This is an anonymous survey and you will not be identified by name.** Please complete the survey if you are:

- (1) A certified special education teacher and
- (2) You regularly co-teach with a general education teacher

By completing this survey you will be automatically entered in a drawing for one of two **\$50 Target gift cards**. Participation in this survey is completely voluntary and you may decide not to complete this survey at any time, without penalty. The survey contains 33 items and needs to be completed for **EACH** co-teaching assignment you have. The duration of the survey will be approximately thirty minutes. By completing this survey you are giving your consent to participate in the above study.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact me, Eden Hagelman, [ehagelman@yahoo.com](mailto:ehagelman@yahoo.com)

Thank you so much,

Eden Hagelman

## Appendix C

### Follow-up Email

Hello Fellow Teachers!

You still have an opportunity to assist a fellow AISD teacher with research AND have a chance to win one of two \$50 Target gift cards!

I need your input and insight if you are:

- 1) A certified special education teacher
- 2) You regularly co-teach with a general education teacher

By completing this survey you will be automatically entered into a drawing on May 30, for one of two Target gift cards. The survey contains 33 items and needs to be completed for **EACH** co-teaching assignment you have. The duration of the survey will take less than thirty minutes.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact me, Eden Hagelman, [emhagelm@uno.edu](mailto:emhagelm@uno.edu)

Thank you so much,

Eden Hagelman  
AISD Teacher  
Doctoral student at University of New Orleans



## Appendix D

### Final Email Request

Hello Fellow Teachers!

This is your last opportunity to assist a fellow AISD teacher with research AND have a chance to win one of two \$50 Target gift cards!

I need your input and insight if you are:

- 1) A certified special education teacher
- 2) You regularly co-teach with a general education teacher

By completing this survey you will be automatically entered into a drawing on May 30, for one of two Target gift cards. The survey contains 33 items and needs to be completed for **EACH** co-teaching assignment you have. The duration of the survey will take less than thirty minutes.

If you have any questions, or would like additional information, please contact me, Eden

Hagelman, [emhagelm@uno.edu](mailto:emhagelm@uno.edu)

Thank you so much,

Eden Hagelman  
AISD Teacher  
Doctoral student at University of New Orleans

## Appendix E

### Special Education Co-Teacher Survey- SECTS

This survey was created to gather information about co-teaching. If you are (1) a certified teacher and (2) co-teach, you are eligible to complete this survey and be entered in a drawing for one of 2 \$50 Target gift cards. Your name will not be used and your information will be kept confidential. Please fill out the survey for EACH general education classroom in which you teach.

Are you a general education teacher?

Are you a special education teacher?

If you are a special education teacher:

In how many general education classrooms do you co-teach? 1 – 2 – 3 – 4 – 5  
or more

1. What subjects do you co-teach with a co- teacher (please select all that apply)?

Reading \_\_\_\_\_

Writing \_\_\_\_\_

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Social Studies \_\_\_\_\_

Science \_\_\_\_\_

All \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. What grade level do you co-teach with this general education co-teacher?

Prekindergarten \_\_\_\_\_

Seventh \_\_\_\_\_

Kindergarten \_\_\_\_\_

Eighth \_\_\_\_\_

First grade \_\_\_\_\_

Ninth \_\_\_\_\_

Second grade \_\_\_\_\_

Tenth \_\_\_\_\_

Third grade \_\_\_\_\_

Eleventh \_\_\_\_\_

Fourth grade \_\_\_\_\_ Twelfth \_\_\_\_\_

Fifth grade \_\_\_\_\_

Sixth grade \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long have you co-taught with this teacher?

0-1 year \_\_\_\_\_

2-3 years \_\_\_\_\_

4-5 years \_\_\_\_\_

6-10 years \_\_\_\_\_

Over 10 years \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are the disabilities of students served in the co-taught classroom

Learning Disabilities \_\_\_\_\_

Autism \_\_\_\_\_

Emotional Disturbance \_\_\_\_\_

Physical Disability \_\_\_\_\_

Intellectual Disability \_\_\_\_\_

Students with multiple disabilities \_\_\_\_\_

5. How many students are in this co-taught class? \_\_\_\_\_

How many students are identified with a disability? \_\_\_\_\_

How many students are identified as 504? \_\_\_\_\_

6. How much time, on average, do you co-teach with this co-teacher each week?

Less than half a day \_\_\_\_\_

More than half a day \_\_\_\_\_

7. How much time do you typically plan with this general education co-teacher?

We do not plan together \_\_\_\_\_

Less than half an hour a week \_\_\_\_\_

An hour a week \_\_\_\_\_

Over an hour a week \_\_\_\_\_

8. Is your planning usually spontaneous (for example at lunch or in the hallway) versus a pre-set time?

Our planning is usually spontaneous \_\_\_\_\_

Our planning is scheduled \_\_\_\_\_

We don't plan together \_\_\_\_\_

9. If you plan together, please check all that apply

Create lesson plans \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss how to measure mastery \_\_\_\_\_

Discuss accommodations and modifications if needed \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluate and reflect on past lessons (what went well, what we could do differently) \_\_\_\_\_

Student behavior \_\_\_\_\_

Student grouping \_\_\_\_\_

10. When you are co-teaching with this co-teacher how often do you present material (teach) the whole class?
- I don't really teach the whole class \_\_\_\_\_
- I insert information, ask questions, or restate something when students seem confused or unclear \_\_\_\_\_
- I regularly teach the whole class half the time \_\_\_\_\_
- I do most of the teaching to the whole class \_\_\_\_\_
11. How often do you teach small groups of students in this classroom?
- I don't regularly teach small groups \_\_\_\_\_
- I occasionally teach small groups of students, less than once a week \_\_\_\_\_
- I teach small groups of students once or twice a week \_\_\_\_\_
- Most of my teaching is with small groups of students \_\_\_\_\_
12. If you work with small groups of students the student groups are usually:
- All special education students \_\_\_\_\_
- Low performing students, both general education and special education \_\_\_\_\_
- Usually students who are behavior concerns \_\_\_\_\_
- Usually a mix of students, general education and special education \_\_\_\_\_
13. When I co-teach in this classroom, the co- teacher and I share responsibility managing the behavior of *all of the students* in the classroom
- Not really, I usually manage student behavior \_\_\_\_\_
- Not really, the co-teacher usually manages student behavior \_\_\_\_\_
- We both handle student behavior, but the co-teacher handles most behavior issues \_\_\_\_\_
- We both handle student behavior, but I usually handle most of the behavior issues \_\_\_\_\_
- We share handling of behavior issues equally \_\_\_\_\_
14. When I co-teach in this classroom, the co-teacher and I share responsibility for managing the behavior of *students who are identified as special education*
- Not really, I usually manage students with disabilities behavior \_\_\_\_\_
- Not really, the co-teacher usually manages students with disabilities behavior \_\_\_\_\_
- We both handle students with disabilities behavior, but the co-teacher handles most of these behavior issues \_\_\_\_\_
- We both handle students with disabilities behavior, but I usually handle most of these behavior issues \_\_\_\_\_
- We share handling of behavior issues equally \_\_\_\_\_
15. How supportive is the co-teacher to accommodations and modifications you suggest providing for students (for SPED)
- Very supportive \_\_\_\_\_
- Neither supportive or not supportive \_\_\_\_\_
- Very supportive \_\_\_\_\_
16. I think this co-teacher volunteered to co-teach \_\_\_\_\_
- I do not think this general education co-teacher volunteered to co-teach \_\_\_\_\_

- I do not know if this teacher volunteered to co-teach \_\_\_\_\_
17. If given the choice  
 I would rather co-teach in this class \_\_\_\_\_  
 I do not care either way \_\_\_\_\_  
 I would rather not co-teach in this class \_\_\_\_\_
18. The co-teacher and I have discussed our beliefs about effective teaching and learning  
 We discuss our beliefs regularly \_\_\_\_\_  
 We discussed our beliefs a few times \_\_\_\_\_  
 We have not discussed our beliefs at all \_\_\_\_\_
19. This co-teacher and I have discussed our roles in the classroom and we have flexibility in our roles in the classroom \_\_\_\_\_  
 This co-teacher and I both have established roles in the classroom that we have discussed \_\_\_\_\_  
 This co-teacher and I have not talked about our roles in the classroom much at all \_\_\_\_\_
20. Please select all that apply to your co-teaching with this co-teacher  
 The co-teacher has taught a lesson to the whole class and I have floated and assisted students as they need it during the lesson \_\_\_\_\_  
 We have each taught a lesson or supervised an activity in different parts of the room (maybe stations) and the students have switched between teachers and activities \_\_\_\_\_  
 I have taken a group of students out of the room to practice skills or have reteach \_\_\_\_\_  
 The co-teacher and I have taught a lesson together, sharing the lesson equally \_\_\_\_\_  
 I have taught a lesson and the co-teacher has floated and assisted students as they need it during the lesson \_\_\_\_\_
21. In your own words please describe this co-teaching relationship.
- 

**Please complete the information below (complete only one time regardless of how many co-teaching classrooms you work in.**

22. I believe that co-teaching is:  
 Not appropriate for students in special education \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not appropriate for most students in special education, but some can manage \_\_\_\_\_  
 Appropriate for most students in special education at my school \_\_\_\_\_  
 Appropriate for all students in special education at my school \_\_\_\_\_
23. What is your overall level of satisfaction with your job as a teacher?  
 Very dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_  
 Dissatisfied \_\_\_\_\_  
 Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied \_\_\_\_\_  
 Satisfied \_\_\_\_\_  
 Very satisfied \_\_\_\_\_

24. If you had the opportunity to start over in a new career, would you choose to become a teacher?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 I am not sure \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_
25. Your sex: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_
26. Your age: \_\_\_\_\_
27. Ethnicity (please select the category/ies that apply to you)  
 White non-Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
 White Hispanic \_\_\_\_\_  
 Black or African American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Native American \_\_\_\_\_  
 Asian \_\_\_\_\_  
 Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_
28. Years of teaching experience  
 0-5 years teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
 6 – 10 years teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
 11 – 20 years teaching \_\_\_\_\_  
 21 + years teaching \_\_\_\_\_
29. Bachelor’s Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
 Master’s Degree or higher \_\_\_\_\_
30. Experience in co-teaching  
 0 – 1 year \_\_\_\_\_  
 2 – 3 years \_\_\_\_\_  
 4 -5 years \_\_\_\_\_  
 6 – 10 years \_\_\_\_\_  
 10+ \_\_\_\_\_
31. Co-teacher training/workshops  
 Have you attended a co-teacher training or workshop?  
 Yes \_\_\_\_\_  
 No \_\_\_\_\_
32. My principal supports co-teaching at my school (likert scale)  
 Not at all \_\_\_\_\_  
 Not very supportive \_\_\_\_\_  
 Neither supportive or not supportive \_\_\_\_\_  
 A little supportive \_\_\_\_\_  
 Very supportive \_\_\_\_\_
33. I volunteered to co-teach at my school \_\_\_\_\_  
 I did not volunteer to co-teach, I was just assigned \_\_\_\_\_

## Vita

The author earned a Master's of Education and a Bachelors' of Fine Arts from the University of Texas in Austin, Texas. She enrolled in the University of New Orleans in the Early Intervention Program. She received a graduate assistantship in the Interdisciplinary Leadership Program: Preparing Personnel to be Cross-Competent, and Project Rebuild with Dr. Flynn. She is currently employed in the Austin Independent School District as the special education department chair at Clint Small Middle School.