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Collaborative Experiences of Teacher Candidates in a Dual, Mild/ Moderate and General Education Program

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Collaborative Experiences of Teacher Candidates in a Dual, Mild/Moderate and General
Education Program

A Dissertation

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
Mild/Moderate

by

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May, 2018

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father, Robert P. Geiring, and parents, Mitchell and Christine Cauley, whose guidance towards the pursuit of higher education has remained always in my thoughts. I did it!

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Abstract

Before they enter the classroom, teacher candidates must acquire the knowledge, dispositions, and instructional strategies necessary to succeed in educating students with a variety of learning abilities. The educational roles and responsibilities required of teacher candidates have changed from a general education classroom without students with disabilities to an inclusive setting for all learners. Now students with disabilities spend more time in the general education classroom to be educated at least 80% of their time with their same-aged peers. Therefore, this qualitative study, through the use of one-on-one interviews, sought to expand the existing research by identifying and analyzing the experiences of nine teacher candidates who were enrolled in a teacher preparation program for dual certification in general and mild/moderate disabilities. Candidates responded to interview questions about their preparation programs regarding coursework, practicum, and student teaching/internship requirements.

While virtually all teacher candidates described their experiences as positive, candidates were prepared to collaborate (work together toward a common goal) with university faculty, special and general education mentors, principals, other educators in the schools. The pairing of teacher candidates with their peers, practicum mentors, and mentors during student teaching/internships, has been shown to provide a more supportive and collaborative environment than the traditional model of teachers who typically worked in silos or autonomously. In these instances, it appeared that not all mentors promoted collaboration, were familiar with co-teaching models or were not able to spend a sufficient amount of time to implement these models, and co-teaching models were lacking and limited time was the contributing factor. Concerns were voiced by candidates who experienced challenges that

pertained to the act or perceived value of collaboration in practice when they were mentored particularly by the assigned general education mentor teachers.

Keywords: Collaboration, co-teaching, teacher preparation, special and general education

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Special education in the United States has seen much change. Prior to 1975, students with disabilities had been isolated from the general education classroom. Since the implementation of Public Law 94-142, the field of education has acknowledged the needs of students with disabilities. P.L. 94-142 is considered a revolutionary piece of legislation that developed from the need to address how students with disabilities were educated in the United States. This law suggested K-12 public schools provided students with disabilities educational opportunities within the general education classroom as their same-aged peers in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Therefore, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1990 and subsequent reauthorizations, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) 2004, attempted to narrow those broad interpretations. Each reauthorization supported the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom with their same-aged, non-disabled peers.

The LRE component of IDEIA (2004) was the primary legal mandate established for the creation of inclusive classrooms. With the focus on inclusion, special and general education teachers have had to adjust their practices. The typical special education classroom, prior to inclusion, consisted of special education teachers delivering instruction within resource rooms or self-contained classrooms. The establishment of inclusive classrooms provided students with disabilities access to the general education classroom, curriculum, and extracurricular activities with their same-aged, non-disabled peers, to the maximum extent possible (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013).

Teacher Attrition

The shift from self-contained or resource room, to an inclusive classroom model prompted changes in the educational staffing for special education instruction. School systems experienced a significant number of special education teachers' departing from their jobs for another type of teaching job or leaving the profession altogether. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) reported that 430,000 special education teachers were employed in U.S. public schools during the 2012-2013 school year. Of the 430,000 special education teachers employed, 73,700 decided to either move to another school or depart the field of education. This turnover was greater than that of general education teachers. Of the 1,077,000 general education teachers employed during the 2012-2013 school year, 147,900 moved to another school or left the field of education. Special education teachers moved or left the field at a rate of 11%, in comparison to the rate of 8% for general education teachers. The U.S. Department of Education (2016) documented special education teachers as one of the nation's greatest areas of shortage in education.

Why are special education teachers leaving the K- 12 classroom?

The shortage of special education teachers prompted researchers to investigate the reasons for this exodus (NEA, 2008; Smith, DeSimone, Porter, McGarner, & Haynes, 2012). Special education teachers reported role ambiguity and feelings of isolation as a rationale for their departure from K-12 classrooms (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Wilburn, Hou, & Garvan, 2009; Long, 2004, Stansbury & Zimmerman, 2002). Researchers suggested that retention rates would increase if general education teachers and administrators acknowledged special education teachers as valuable contributors to the general education inclusive classrooms as they could provide resources, support, and nurture collaborative environments (Haynes, 2014; DeAngelis,

Wall, & Che, 2013; Hudson, 2012; Smith et al., 2012).

Some confusion existed about the roles of special education teachers, particularly in inclusive classrooms. Their roles once solely consisted of self-contained or resource room settings, but critical reforms of IDEIA (2004) emphasized the need for students with disabilities to receive their education in the general education classroom. Hedin (2014) and Conderman (2014) found that special education teachers understood the importance of collaboration and brought with them the strategies for task analysis, behavior management techniques, and study skills. However, Schmalzried and Harvey (2014) found that special education teachers lack an understanding of their roles and how to effectively implement collaborative practices with general education teachers.

Another area of concern voiced by special education teachers was the level of involvement in the responsibility for academic subjects (English, mathematics, science, and social studies) and the modifications typically required for students with disabilities to access the curriculum. In addition, special education teachers were required to monitor, plan annual IEP meetings, organize student evaluations every three years for continued special education services, and monitor paraprofessionals in the classroom. As a result, some special education teachers were overwhelmed by the list of responsibilities. These and other reasons such as excessive paperwork (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010; Mehrenberg, 2013) and unmanageable caseloads (Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007; Castro et al., 2010) contributed to special education teachers' departure.

Paperwork. Castro et al. (2010), conducted a qualitative study with 15 special education teachers to better understand their perspectives. Teachers reported challenges with non-instructional demands of paperwork, grading, and meetings. Mehrenberg (2013) interviewed 20

special education teachers with five or fewer years of experience about their opinions regarding paperwork. One special education teacher reported paperwork as a useful tool to assist with curriculum and assessment. However, the clear majority of respondents noted special education paperwork as lengthy, time consuming, and not of much value.

Caseloads. Given the complex set of challenges confronted by special education teachers, researchers have noted issues related to unmanageable student caseloads (Fall & Billingsley, 2011; Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). Fall and Billingsley (2011) interviewed special education teachers with five or fewer years of experience about their opinions regarding their work. Special education teachers reported caseloads of students with a variety of disabilities as a challenge. They also noted other undesirable conditions, such as the lack of necessary materials for instructional purposes and inadequate administrative support. The lack of materials was said to have negatively impacted student achievement and compromised teachers' work satisfaction, thus leading to their potential departure from the K-12 classroom.

Defining Collaboration in Education

Research has focused on collaboration as a way to stem the tide of teachers' departure. A variety of researchers had defined collaboration in different ways. Parkay and Stanford (2010) defined collaboration as a commitment by teachers to develop and nurture professional relationships with their colleagues. Carter, Parter, Jackson, and Marchant (2009) defined collaboration as both special and general education teachers joined together to determine the most appropriate curriculum decisions for students with disabilities.

Friend and Cook (2007) initially defined collaboration as professionals voluntarily co-planning to achieve a common goal. Later, Friend (2010) defined collaboration as "teams who have made decisions about the most appropriate educational goals for students with disabilities

and close working relationships with parents” (pp. 10). With her most recent work, Friend (2013) defined collaboration as “a style of interaction between co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work towards a common goal” (pp. 7).

Other researchers have further classified collaboration as either informal or formal. At times, informal collaboration is appropriate between special and general education teachers because it allows for sporadic, unplanned discussions about student needs, abilities, and progress within the general education classroom (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, Wilburn, Hou, & Garvan, 2008; Magiera, Brown, Bloomquist, Foster, Figuera, Glatz, Heppler, & Rodriguez, 2006; Strogilos, Nikolarazi, & Tragoulia, 2012). Through structured meetings, formal collaboration meetings were considered an appropriate means of communication for special and general education teachers to share ideas about students’ strengths, challenges, and potential resources for the general education classroom (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Anrig, 2015; and Hallam, Hite, Hite, and Wilcox, 2015). These formal meetings between special and general education teachers increased collaborative efforts and improved student achievement.

Whether informal or formal collaboration, the same objective was emphasized: collaborative practices among teachers, administrators, and families were critical for the ease in which students with disabilities accessed peers the general education curriculum and extra-curricular activities with their same-aged, non-disabled peers without disabilities. While several similar, but different, definitions defined collaborative practices, there is general agreement on most of the major descriptors. For this study the definition of collaboration from Friend (2013) who defined collaboration as “a style of interaction between co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work towards a common goal” (pp. 7) will be used.

Importance of Collaboration

Based on the literature, collaboration involves a voluntary partnership and commitment between educators to promote positive educational change. Collaboration is important in education as it connects to many aspects of special and general education teachers' daily routines. Brown (2014) noted influence of relationships among administrators, teachers, and other professionals, on teachers' ability to model instructional practices via team teaching. Team teaching was noted to maximize professional collaborative efforts and increase students' achievement. Collaboration is also an underlying component to the educational reform of IDEIA (2004) and LRE. Researchers emphasized the importance of professional development to promote collaboration between and among teachers. Also when joint special and general education worked together in the development of curriculum and instruction, special education teachers were alleviated from functioning in isolation and were able to achieve their goal of maximum student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Moran, 2007; Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Griffin et al., 2008; Proctor, Zibulsky, & Comerchero, 2011). Therefore, the use of collaborative practices was considered a critical component.

General education teachers and collaboration. Conderman and Hedin (2014), Howard and Potts (2009), and Meadan and Amaya (2008) found that general education teachers who sought assistance from special education teachers received additional collaborative experiences, instructional strategies, and renewed self-confidence. However, not all general education teachers welcomed collaboration with special education teachers as they may have felt unprepared to do so (Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Magiera et al., 2006). In addition, Fuchs (2010) noted the hesitation of general education teachers to ask for assistance from special education teachers. Some general education teachers preferred to collaborate with other general

education teachers (in the same content area) regarding ways to increase student achievement (Swanson & Bianchini, 2015).

Special education teachers and collaboration. Research has provided some rather conflicting perspectives among special education teachers and collaborative practices. For instance, Griffin et al. (2008) found that special education teachers who sought collaborative experiences with general education teachers who prioritized student achievement would be more likely to stay in the profession. However, Jones et al. (2013) noted that special education teachers at times were poorly positioned to implement collaborative relationships with general education teachers due to their large diverse caseloads, responsibility of numerous grade level curricula, creation of modifications, and navigation of relationships among other educators.

Other studies found that special education teachers felt unsupported, isolated, and did not necessarily understand the importance of collaboration (Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Griffin et al., 2008; Strogilos et al., 2012; Zetlin, MacLeod, & Kimm, 2012). Furthermore, special education teachers reported collaborative practices were important in providing students access to the general education curriculum, but were often confused about their instructional roles and needed clarity (Damore & Murray, 2009).

Because of the current issues with special education teachers, the literature suggested a need to consider the university preparation of those teachers. Specifically, a need existed to understand their experiences in university coursework, field experiences, student teaching or internships, and the extent to which future special education teachers were prepared for collaboration in K-12 school settings.

Teacher Candidates and collaboration. Teacher candidates were those who were student teaching or interning in an assigned K-12 classroom within a teacher preparation program.

A dearth of studies had investigated teacher candidates' collaborative experiences before transitioning into the role as special education teachers (Moses, 2009; Parks, 2009). Parks (2009) interviewed and examined interactions, experiences, and collaborative practices of three candidates who were nearing the completion of their year-long internship for certification. Participants were asked to make instructional decisions for their students within a higher education course setting. Lessons were planned and implemented over a four-week period with their students and interviews were then conducted regarding their experiences. Those teachers reported that they worked additional hours outside the university classroom to complete instructional plans and viewed the collaborative process with others as beneficial to their instructional practices. The researcher noted instructional plans completed during university coursework hours were discussed among teacher candidates. Shared ideas and supplementary work were prepared beyond the assigned task, but deep explorations or decision-making about content indicated only simplistic exchanges. For example, candidates only minimally challenged one another's decisions or questioned each other's beliefs.

Moses (2009) surveyed 184 teacher candidates and 133 teachers to study their expectations of their roles as a teacher and the value of collaboration. The roles considered by participants included: paperwork compliance, reading and writing instruction, other content instruction, study skills instruction, and parental, administrative, and general education teachers relationships. His study reported that teacher candidates predicted that 1-2 hours per day would be dedicated to collaboration with general education teachers to develop instructional content.

Teacher candidates also predicted that most of their time would be spent co-teaching in inclusive settings and providing some instruction in resource rooms. These teachers predicted that they would spend the least amount of time collaborating with parents and administrators.

Significance of the Study

Researchers and legislation had established the importance of collaborative practices between special and general education teachers, as a way to promote positive outcomes for students in inclusive settings (Anrig, 2015; Brown, 2014; Friend, Cook, & Chamberlain, 2010; Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Friend et al., 2010; Goddard et al., 2015; Hallam et al., 2015; IDEIA, 2004; Tzivinikou, 2015). However, only a few studies had investigated special and general education teachers' implementation of collaborative practices resulting in effective instructional practices and increased student achievement (Magiera et al., 2006; Hallam et al., 2015; Jones & Vail, 2014). Most research indicated a lack of collaborative practices implemented between special and general education teachers (Brinkman & Twiford, 2012; Caputo & Langher, 2015; Damore & Murray, 2009; Griffin et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2013; Strogilos et al., 2012).

The research indicated that it is was important to study special education teachers' collaborative experiences in school-based programs and to gain their perspective of their preparation for working with other professionals, what they actually spent their time doing, in particular, with special and general educators. The direction this study has taken focuses on candidates' experiences that appear inherently critical, complicated, and dependent based on working with a mentor teacher, paraprofessionals, other professionals, and families. Special education teachers experienced an increased sense of self-assurance and confidence by learning about and practicing collaborative models within inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, they

benefited from those collaborative experiences by providing efficiency of services to students with disabilities prior to transitioning. This would hopefully lead to future decreased turnover rates, increased job satisfaction, and an improvement in student achievement for special education teachers. The results of this study lead to the creation of additional professional development, and improved curricula for both special and general education teachers in university teacher preparation programs, and ongoing in-service training once they have entered the profession.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the understanding of the collaborative experiences of teacher candidates' during their program of study, including coursework, field experiences, student teaching or internship. Little is known about how teacher candidates perceived their collaborative roles and responsibilities with respect to supporting students with disabilities in inclusive environments. This study investigates their perception of their abilities and experiences related to collaboration. This investigation was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent are teacher candidates' confident in their collaborative efforts?
2. To what extent does university course work promote collaboration between special and general education teachers?
3. What collaborative factors influence teacher candidates' knowledge and skills during their student teaching or internship?

Summary

Special education in U.S. classrooms have experienced numerous changes with the reauthorizations of Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004). Students with

disabilities were required through these reauthorizations to receive access to the general education classroom, curriculum, and extra-curricular activities as their same-aged, non-disabled peers. However, these changes impacted the departure of special education teachers from K-12 classrooms and challenged those that stayed in the field.

Literature reported that special and general education teachers were challenged by collaborative practices and left the classroom for a variety of reasons. General education teachers reported that they felt ill-equipped to navigate a collaborative role with special education teachers and preferred to focus their attention on their assigned curriculum. Special education teachers understood the importance of collaboration, but not necessarily the implementation process. Often times their efforts were focused on role ambiguity, feelings of isolation, monitoring paraprofessionals, preparing and maintaining academic modifications, paperwork, and caseloads.

Although researchers defined collaboration in a variety of ways, collaboration for this study was defined as the interaction between co-equal parties who voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they worked towards shared goals. Collaboration was important as it linked many aspects of K-12 education. Some general education teachers may at times sought out collaboration with special education teachers, while others preferred to devote their time to general education teachers in their content areas. Special education teachers viewed collaboration as a benefit to their instructional practices, while others placed little importance collaboration and preferred to function in isolation. Though teacher preparation programs provided collaboration experiences via course assignments, teacher candidates did not always understand its importance or how it could enhance of instructional practices when working with students.

Research has established the importance of collaboration. Research suggests special and general education teachers who enter the field of K-12 education unprepared to implement collaborative practices are at a significant disadvantage. Therefore, a future exploration of the development of knowledge, skills, and practices of collaboration in preparation programs would contribute to the literature.

Glossary

The following keywords are defined and provided to clarify concepts that are significant in this study.

Integrated/Merged Program -Teacher candidates complete a program that includes coursework, field experiences, and clinical experiences in both mild/moderate and general education.

College Coordinator -Student teachers and interns are assigned college coordinators who act as a liaison between the school site and the university, supervise the teacher candidates in their capstone experience, observe classroom instruction, and provide feedback and direction during the 15 week semester. Source: Student Teaching Handbook (2015-2016).

General and Special Education Mentors -A teacher must be recommended by the principal to serve as a cooperating teacher, be fully certified, and have full time teaching responsibilities in his/her area of certification.

Practicum -Candidates spend one day a week shadowing a special education teacher who provides instruction for students who have mild/moderate disabilities in general education as well as the special education settings.

Student Teaching -During a 15 week semester, the student teacher participates in classroom observations, part-time teaching, planning and debriefing parent/guardian conferences, leading to a full-time role during half of the semester.

Internship -Teacher candidates seeking a Masters of Arts in Teaching (MAT) from the integrated/merged certification (special and general education) must be

- hired to teach general education with inclusions; or,
- hired to teach mild/moderate special education

Reflection Practices -Each candidate reflects on his or her instruction and student learning in order to improve their own teaching practices. Some specific example are as follows:

- Select the learning goal where your students were the most successful. Provide two or more possible reasons for this success. Consider your goals, instruction and assessing along with student characteristics and other contextual factors under your control.
- Select the learning goal where your students were the least successful. Provide two or more possible reasons for this lack of success. Consider your goals, instruction and assessment along with your students' characteristics and other contextual factors under your control. Discuss what you could do differently or better in the future to improve your students' performance.
- Reflection on possibilities of professional development. Describe at least two professional learning goals that emerged from your insights and experiences from the Teacher Work Sample (TWS). Identify two specific steps you will take to improve your performance in the critical area you identified (College of Education, Student Teaching Handbook, 2015-2016).

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The roles and responsibilities of special and general education teachers have changed over the years regarding services they have provided to students with disabilities. The inclusive movement for students with disabilities requires academic and social supports from both special and general education teachers. Inclusive education has the potential to assist students with disabilities as they navigate through life. Collaborative practices among special and general education teachers have become critical when supporting students with disabilities academically and socially. Specifically, special education teacher candidates were the critical foundation when preparing students with disabilities. The following literature review discusses the historical background of special education, special education student enrollment, inclusion, collaborative models, components of collaboration, expert consultation, team models, elements influencing collaboration, collaboration challenges, and the connection to teacher preparation programs.

Historical Background of Special Education

The benchmark federal legislation of P.L. 94-142 surfaced because of the education or lack thereof provided to students with disabilities in the United States K-12 public schools. The implementation of P.L. 94-142 was considered revolutionary legislation that developed from the need to address how students with disabilities were educated. This mandate sent the message for inclusive education in schools. P.L. 94-142 mandated that K-12 public schools provided students with disabilities educational opportunities with their same-aged, non-disabled peers in a general education classroom, to the maximum extent possible (ideally 80% or more of the school day as per LRE). P.L. 94-142 was then reauthorized as IDEA (1990, 1991, and 1997). With the numerous reauthorizations, IDEIA (2004) evolved and was rooted in cultural and social contexts.

The legislation provided inclusive clarity to U.S. K-12 schools. Each reauthorization supported inclusive education for students with disabilities in general education classrooms with their same-aged, non-disabled peers.

As an educational reform, IDEIA (2004) provides federal funds for students with disabilities once eligibility criteria have been determined. IDEIA provides rights to students with disabilities and their parents and/or guardians. IDEIA also acknowledges the requirement, much like the 14th amendment, of equality for students with disabilities. Equality refers to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). IDEIA requires that students with disabilities receive physical, mental, vocational, academic and/or social support instruction through the IEP process. Within the original IDEA and the reauthorized IDEIA, identified mandates for FAPE in the LRE were enacted, regardless of a K-12 schools' financial status. The LRE is the primary legal mandate for establishing inclusion within schools to meet the needs of students with disabilities. IDEA established and encouraged procedures for parental and/or guardian involvement, created the awareness of student and parental rights, and challenged school personnel to make team decisions. To capture these mandates, consistent documentation of these team decisions for students with disabilities are recorded in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), typically via IEP meetings and discussions.

An IEP is utilized to document inclusive, academic, and social skills determinations for students who qualify for special education and/or related services. The written document includes where, when, and how often special education and related services are provided. A team of relevant individuals including administrators, special and general education teachers, parents, school counselors, psychologists, social workers, and the student, when appropriate, make decisions about instruction, classroom management, and supportive services required to meet the

needs of each student with a disability collaboratively. The collaborative team must be solution-orientated to provide the most effective goals within the students' plan in the least restrictive environment, which support the idea of inclusive classroom placements.

Special Education Student Enrollment

Enrollment, like the reauthorizations of special education law, has changed drastically over the years. The National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES, 2016) documented that as many as 4.7 million students required special education services from 1991-2004. However, in 2011 through 2012, 6.7 million students received services. This increase in the identification of students with disabilities within U.S. K-12 public schools has created a challenge for schools faced with providing services (U.S. Dept. Of Justice, 2012). Also, the increase of students with disabilities placed within the general education classroom since 2001 is a major consideration. Today, special and general education teachers are no longer able to work in isolation, but are encouraged to partner together in the classroom and provide an inclusive educational experience for students with disabilities with their same-aged, non-disabled peers.

Inclusion

Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954 determined segregation was not an appropriate means of education for students from minority populations or those with disabilities (U.S. Dept. Of Justice, 2012). Schools were charged with decreasing or eliminating self-contained settings for students with disabilities and including students in general education classes. Full inclusion and mainstreaming were two terms that surfaced from inclusive mandates. Full inclusion, according to Fuchs and Fuchs (1998), refers to education provided to students all day long within general education classrooms, along with supports and services in the general education classroom. Mainstream education, according to Wang (2009), refers to programs where students

with disabilities were provided education within the general education setting during times when students' skill set were appropriately matched to the classes instruction, lunch, recess and/or physical education.

The placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is considered the LRE service delivery model, but the physical placement within general education classrooms is not sufficient to ensure and improve students' learning. To ensure optimal learning, special and general educators need to embark on a collaborative relationship that identifies individual roles and responsibilities, agreed-upon goals, and access to curriculum (Friend & Cook, 2000; Hernandez, 2013). Consideration should focus on the identification of student abilities, strengths, and other needs. Students need to be provided access to the general education curriculum with accommodations and modifications that may require supplemental materials, adaptations, additional teacher training, and professional development (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013; Jones et al., 2013).

Culturally diverse groups of students, typical students, and students with disabilities within general education classrooms often provide the impetus for collaboration between special and general education teachers (DeAngelis et al., 2013; Hallam et al., 2015; Haynes, 2014; Hudson, 2012). Special education teachers often experience role confusion, but when they seek out collaborative experiences with general education teachers who view student achievement as important, they are more likely to have positive experiences with identifying their roles. Research indicates that teachers who have positive, collaborative experiences are more likely to stay in the profession. (Damore & Murray, 2009; Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Griffin et al., 2009; Jones et al, 2013; Zetlin et al., 2012).

Collaboration Models

Although collaboration is a vital component used to provide effective inclusive practices for students with disabilities, most schools do not implement structured collaborative models (Jones et al., 2013; Crater et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2008). Teachers tend to utilize formal and informal approaches of collaboration by sharing their expertise, resources, and students' abilities and progress (Griffin et al., 2008; Magiera et al., 2006; Strogilos et al., 2012). However, researchers have suggested that implementation of consistent collaborative models within K-12 schools would establish cooperative teacher relationships, build teacher self-assurance, and provide effective instructional practices for all students (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Friend et al., 2010).

Co-teaching models. Along with formal and informal collaboration between teachers, co-teaching has been utilized in K-12 public schools to provide partnerships between special and general education teachers for the inclusion of student with disabilities. Researchers have described co-teaching as a combination of special and general education teachers who continuously strived to communicate, problem solve, plan, locate materials and resources, manage classroom behaviors, and implement strategies for students with disabilities within general education classrooms (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Griffin et al., 2008). Researchers have also described the role of general education teachers as the primary instructional leaders, while special education teachers are considered more as an academic and behavioral support person (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Damore & Murray, 2009).

Friend et al. (2010) described co-teaching as special and general education teachers who together delivered instruction to all students within general education classrooms. They believed that the implementation of collaborative models was critical in providing an inclusive academic

and social skills experience. Friend and Cook (2000) provided several potential models of co-teaching including one teach-one observe, one teach-one drift, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. See table 1 for a summary of these models.

Table 1.

Collaboration Models for Inclusion

Models	Instructional Characteristics
One teach-one observe	One teacher teaches while the other one observes and both collect and analyze data.
One teach-one drift	One teacher leads. The other teacher supports students. Minimal collaborative efforts are utilized and it is the most frequently used model.
Parallel teaching	Instructional practices are established together. Both teachers instruct students with the same information, but students are divided into smaller groups.
Station teaching	Different stations are created, while both teachers circulate to the stations to deliver instruction.
Alternative teaching	Teachers decide who will lead instruction to a large group of students, while the other provides small group instruction.
Team teaching	Both teachers plan and deliver their instruction at the same time.

Although there seems to be many similarities between the models, an in-depth review and further discussion provided advantages and disadvantages (Friend & Cook, 2000).

one teach–one observe. This model provides the advantages of descriptive observation and information about student learning with potential progress. One teacher provides the instruction and lesson planning, while the other was tasked with monitoring their colleagues' instructional practices and observing all students. Collaboration meetings are limited. Disagreements between teachers may surface about observations and understanding of students' behavior and learning.

one teach–one drift. One teach-one drift identifies a teacher as an expert for lesson instruction, while the other teacher supports students. This model could cause the teacher who circulated in the classroom to be viewed as a support person only, (almost like a paraprofessional) and sometimes as a distraction to students. Literature reports that disagreements between teachers were often caused due to the expert teachers instructional practices. This model consists of minimal to no collaborative efforts by teachers, but is the most frequently used.

parallel teaching. Teachers jointly collaborate and ensure they implement established goals. Pre-planning provides better instructional practices. Both teachers work with students in small groups. Misinterpretation quite often resulted from one teachers' instructional approach compared to the other. Teachers need to collaborate to ensure the smooth delivery of the lesson.

station teaching. This model requires both teachers to repeat their instruction to a group of students at a station location in the class. Each teacher is responsible for planning and teaching a part of the lesson. Station teaching allowed teachers to circulate between stations to teach

complicated concepts. The fast pace of this model could become a disadvantage for learners who required additional support.

alternative teaching. Planning and goal setting is by special and general education teachers who provided alternative teaching. Collaborative lesson planning is required daily to provide instruction to a large group of students, while a smaller group of other students receives more focused instruction. Mastery of the instructional material is expected from most students. However, students with disabilities with IEP related goals do not necessarily require mastery of every lesson within the general education curriculum. This discrepancy could possibly be a disadvantage to some students with disabilities.

team teaching. Team teaching allows for more interaction between teachers and students. This approach is especially collaborative. Both teachers work regularly and cooperatively to provide all students' academic instruction through conversation, not lecture. Teachers collaborate to set goals, lesson planned, taught, and evaluate.

The co-teaching models provided by Friend and Cook (2000) are options for special and general educators. Educators' roles and responsibilities are negotiated within the variety of models presented. The models can be utilized for only one class period or for a part of the school day.

Hernandez' Components of Collaboration

Other factors were considered when collaborative practices were implemented. Hernandez (2013) reviewed factors noted by Friend and Cook (2000), but adapted them into different components. He reviewed collaborative models and the experiences of special and general education teachers, and expressed his general agreement of Friend and Cook's collaborative descriptors and models. The components within his review consisted of the efforts

involved in collaborative practices and emphasized growth among educators. These components are as follows:

1. Perspectives, attitudes, and preparation;
2. Competence in teaching;
3. Organizational setting;

Perspectives, attitudes, and preparation. Hernandez (2013) described that teachers are individuals whose perceptions and attitudes have been influenced by their experiences in their personal lives and teacher preparation programs. He believed teachers began their preparation programs with the idea of providing effective instructional practices to students and had believed their goal was to simply increase their students' achievement levels. However, once their teacher preparation programs were completed, and they were certified teachers, Hernandez identified some uncertainty about collaboration and special education teachers feeling of inadequacy to meet the needs of students. Therefore, collaborative skill development and lack of training at the teacher candidate level was indicated as the root cause for collaborative and instructional unpreparedness.

Competence in teaching. Hernandez (2013) recognized that competency in teaching was a necessary characteristic for a teacher and essential part to be successful in the collaborative process. He believed competence in teaching was achievable when relationships and expertise were combined by voluntary parties. Teachers who willingly shared their knowledge and were open to others' knowledge served as an avenue to an environment that nurtured competence. This environment essentially contributed to interpersonal skills, increased awareness of self and other professionals, and enhanced the implementation of effective instructional practices.

Organizational setting. Hernandez credited the influence of third component, organizational settings (K-12 school environment), on the growth of teachers. He explained that the organizational settings included collaborative efforts with manageable caseloads, physical location of classrooms, administrative support, and most of all open relationships within a collaborative group. Group discussions and administrative support were mentioned as essential to the success of collaborative practices. Administrators who promoted structured team engagement and collaborative practices within their school contributed to best practices. In addition, he noted training and continuous constructive feedback must be accompanied as additional supports for teachers to build professional relationships and increase student achievement.

Elements Influencing Collaboration

Having discussed collaboration previously as the combined efforts of teachers to create the most effective instructional practices for students with disabilities, it was quite evident that a combination of factors need to be considered. The elements that influenced collaborative practices established by Friend and Cook (2000) assisted with the idea of norming collaborative experiences. The factors that were elements of their model on collaboration were: parity, voluntary efforts, shared goals, shared responsibility and decision-making, shared resources, and accountability.

Parity involved equality among all members of a collaborative team. The team acknowledges and considers individuals' contributions equal in value and each member recognizes their influential role. When members felt equally valued, decision-making is an open process. Shared experiences also lay the foundation for a sense of community that is to be established.

Another element of collaboration is *voluntary efforts*. Team members must demonstrate a sense of willingness to work with others for the benefit of their instructional practices and student achievement. Team members could be required to attend meetings, for example, but it would be difficult to mandate true collaboration.

Shared goals among team members is another critical factor to consider within collaborative practices. Shared goals motivate the team to create effective goals and instill ownership of the process and outcomes. If a goal remains undefined within the team, effective collaborative practices are at risk.

The element of *shared responsibility* requires cooperation and trust among team members. Team members make decisions about which member is best suited for which task. Decisions among team members require consensus when determining shared responsibility.

Accountability was critical to the collaborative process. Team members were accountable to one another and to the resulting outcomes. If a goal is or is not met, each team member claims responsibility.

Shared resources involves connecting members as a team and building their relationships. Shared resources consists of materials, time, and knowledge provided by team members within the collaborative relationship. Connections with other service agencies were considered another form of potential shared resources. When resources are shared, the outcome is a win-win for everyone.

Collaboration Challenges

General education teachers. Inclusive practices from IDEIA (2004) for students with disabilities changed the roles of general education teachers. The placement of students with disabilities within general education classrooms for instruction posed many challenges for

unprepared general education teachers. Loiacono and Valenti (2010) reported that general education teachers were considered curriculum experts, and were often challenged by instructional practices for students with disabilities (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Magiera et al., 2006). Specifically, general education teachers may have felt ill-prepared to implement curriculum modifications for students with disabilities (Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Magiera, et al., 2006) and often unsupported by their administrators (Fuchs, 2010). They generally preferred to collaborate with other general education teachers who specialized in the same content area and discussed ways to increase the likelihood of their general education students' achievement. (Swanson & Bianchini, 2015). Fuchs (2010) also noted the hesitation of general education teachers to ask for assistance when providing instruction to students with disabilities. However, Conderman and Hedin (2014), Howard and Potts (2009) and Meadan and Amaya, (2008) found that general education teachers who sought out collaborative experiences with special education teachers received additional opportunities to have their instructional strategies affirmed and renewed. In addition, general education teachers often learned new strategies and techniques to incorporate with students.

Special education teachers. The special education teachers' roles changed in response to critical reforms of IDEIA (2004) due to the focus of educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom to the maximum extent possible. Special education teachers were responsible for understanding general education curriculum, creating modifications, and navigating relationships with general education teachers (Jones et al., 2013).

Damore and Murray (2009) and Conderman and Hedin (2014) found that special education teachers understood the importance of collaboration, but viewed themselves as a consultant or paraprofessional, rather than an equal team member. When the opportunity

presented itself, special education teachers thrived on collaborative practices with general education teachers because they felt more supported (Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Griffin et al., 2008; Zetlin et al., 2012) and it allowed them to easily access those teachers and further develop their roles, (Jones et al., 2013; Strogilos et al., 2012; Schmalzried & Harvey, 2014). Appl (2006) found that even though special education teachers may have felt like a competent equal team member with other teachers, they did not feel as adequate in the task of overseeing and monitoring paraprofessionals.

Teacher Candidates

A few studies investigated collaborative experiences of teacher candidates enrolled in teacher preparation programs (Moses, 2009; Parks, 2009). Moses (2009) found that candidates had mixed perspectives about the benefits of collaborative practices. In her study, the teacher candidates used collaborative practices with other educators as a way to understand curriculum goals and increase access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (Moses, 2009). Parks' study (2009) found that teacher candidates' experiences focused on collaborative groups discussing instructional plans during university course work. However, Parks' study found that the expectation of using collaborative groups to generate strategies to meet the needs of all learners as well as increase their knowledge when they entered K-12 classrooms. However, when candidates became special education teachers, they reported their time was typically spent in the role of expert consultant to general education teachers or paraprofessional in the classroom (Moses, 2009).

Teacher Preparation Programs

The literature reports that teachers often felt unprepared as they entered the profession (Conderman & Rodriguez, 2009; Magiera, et al., 2006). Hanline (2010) studied the coursework

and field placements in a teacher preparation program. She found that teacher candidate's preparation should emphasize the importance of and exercises in writing reflections. She believed that reflections influenced teacher's effectiveness within the classroom and sense of confidence when working with all learners. Hanline (2010) also required student teacher participants in her study to document relationships and their concerns with their assigned mentor teachers. Student teachers were noted to be more effective and focused when they wrote about themselves, their students, mentor teachers, concerns, instructional planning, differentiated instruction, and inclusive settings. She also emphasized the importance of exposure to inclusive settings. Hanline (2010) reported a sense of confidence of student teachers with their instructional practices and commitment to complete their student teaching assignment.

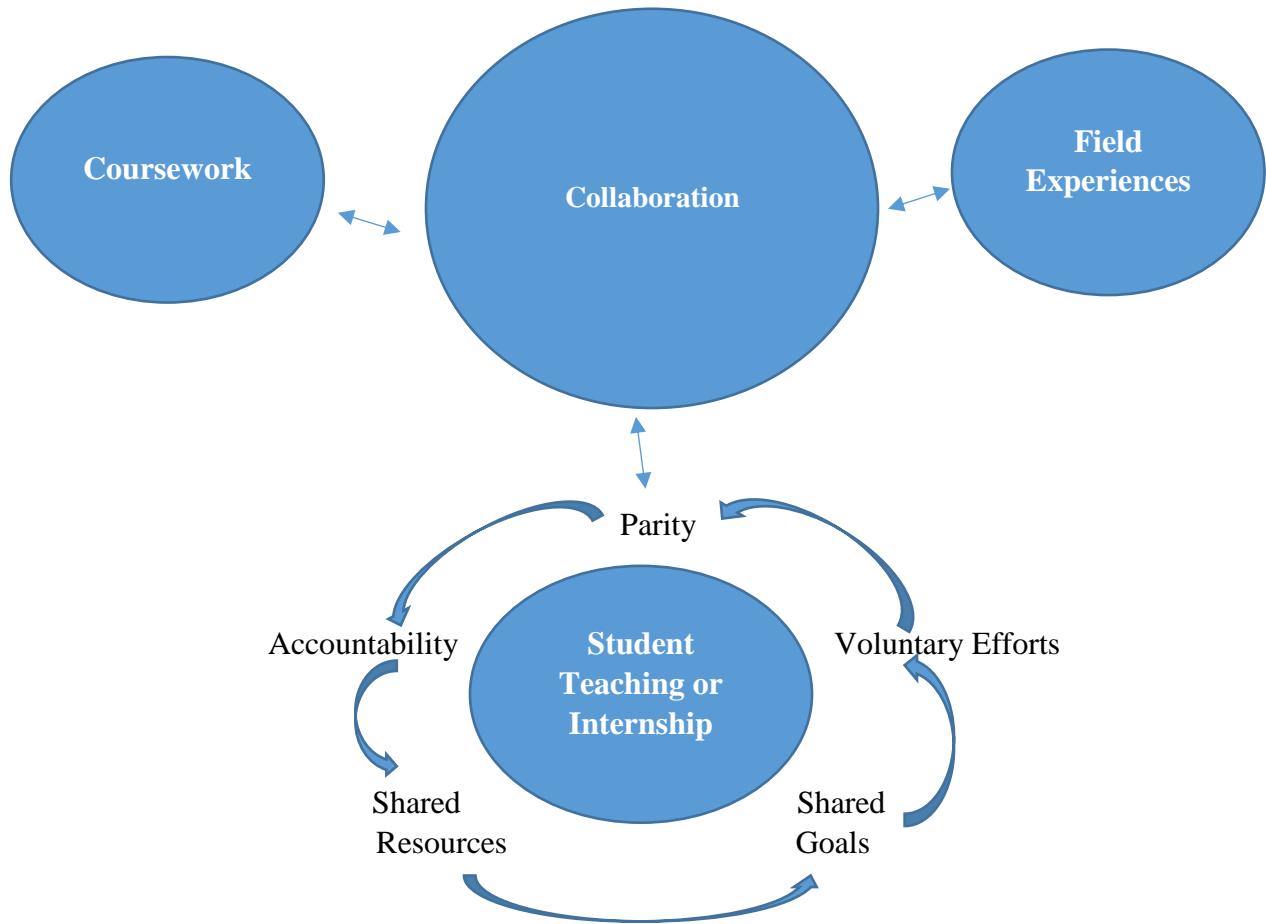
Conceptual Framework

Collaboration among educators has become critical since P.L. 94-142, the reauthorizations of IDEA (1990, 1991, 1997) through IDEIA (2004) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. These mandates obligated educators to collaborate about instructional practices and goals for student with disabilities.

The major elements of collaboration included parity, shared goals, voluntary efforts, shared resources, and accountability (Friend & Cook, 2000). This study investigated the university course work, field experiences, and student teaching/internships of teacher candidates.

Figure 1.

Factors and Teacher Preparation Components among Teacher Candidates



Summary

In the past, the task of special education teachers was to prepare students who had social and academic needs within self-contained or resource room settings. The movement from segregation to inclusion for students with disabilities has led to a complex change in U.S. classrooms. The federal benchmark of P.L. 94-142 surfaced to address the lack of education for students with disabilities. Later, an emphasis was placed on the inclusiveness of the educational experience, specifically the movement was prompted by the LRE clause of IDEA that suggested students with disabilities receive their education in public schools with their same-aged, non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible. However, the LRE clause had numerous interpretations. Then, with the reauthorization of IDEIA (2004), further clarity of inclusion practices in K-12 U.S. schools was provided.

Another current issue that affects the delivery of special education services is an increase in the number of students identified as needing these services by 42% since 2004. So not only is there a requirement for inclusion in general education classrooms, but there now more students who need to be included. Consequently, collaboration among special and general education teachers is more important than ever. Thus, we now see a plethora of collaboration models provided to teachers to join efforts to implement instruction. Researchers have identified collaborative practices as one way to improve continued communication, shared responsibility, accountability, and increased student achievement. The relationships between special and general education teachers has become the foundation to building collaborative practices.

Nevertheless, general and special education teachers, and administrators have faced a variety of challenges. Some general education teachers preferred to collaborate with special education teachers to increase student achievement, but there are also others who prefer to

collaborate just with other general education teachers in their content area. The literature indicates that special education teachers may have understood the importance of collaboration, but they are often unsure of the implementation process, or are challenged by their numerous responsibilities.

Teacher candidates, like general and special education teachers, have faced challenges when achieving their goals of meeting the needs of all learners. During teacher preparation, candidates identified their feelings of unpreparedness, overestimation of time they thought they would spend with general education teachers, and underestimation of time they would spend with administrators and parents. Research also identified collaboration as influential in adjusting curriculum. However, teacher candidates appeared to lack familiarity with the skills needed for this process.

CHAPTER III

Introduction

Collaborative practices assisted both special and general education teachers when they planned and implemented effective practices that enhanced student achievement (Anrig, 2015; Goddard et al., 2015; Hallam et al., 2015; Jones & Vail, 2014; Tzivinikou, 2015). My research began with a pilot study that explored teacher candidates' experiences with collaboration and later developed into a phenomenological study that involved one-on-one interviews.

Pilot Study

During the spring of 2016, I conducted a pilot study with 12 participants. Participants were from a dual mild/moderate, general education teacher preparation program and near the completion of their coursework and student teaching/internship. Three focus group sessions were conducted. The first focus group consisted of 12 participants; the second consisted of 12; the third consisted of 11. Different questions were asked in each of the three groups. An Olympus recorder and an iPhone were the recording devices used.

In the first focus group session, teacher candidates were asked to describe times when collaboration went well and other times when it did not go well. Candidates gave the following examples of times when collaboration went well: 1) when they conferenced with their co-teacher regarding materials used, 2) when they discussed instructional strategies to use with students who had disabilities, 3) when the cooperating teacher and the student teacher team-taught a lesson, and 4) when they met with teachers at grade level meetings. When asked for examples of when collaboration did not go as well, four out of the six student teachers voiced the following: 1) when administrators led a collaborative group, 2) when there was collaborative disconnect

between general education teachers, and 3) when there was lack of communication with special education teachers and special education academic interventionists.

In the second focus group, participants were asked questions related to who teacher candidates turned to during their student teaching/internship semester and what those collaborative experiences looked like. Participants referred to: 1) special or general education teachers who were located close to their classroom 2) administrators 3) academic interventionists and (4) family members who shared their knowledge about their child.

I attempted to conduct a third focus group at a restaurant and soon realized that the setting was not conducive to gathering information. Candidates' voices were muddled due to the background noises. I could not hear responses from either the Olympus recorder or iPhone.

The first two focus groups were conducted in a quiet office environment which was more conducive to data collection and the third focus group was eliminated. Findings from the two focus groups appeared to confirm the literature I had explored; teacher candidates experienced a variety of accomplishments and challenges. However, I realized from the experience, using focus groups was not the most effective way to collect my data because of the following concerns: 1) focus groups did not provide a level of comfort for participants to share their experiences and 2) the amount of time needed to establish rapport prior to the focus group. However, from the focus groups, I gained information about the type of questions to ask and strategies to use to gather more in-depth responses.

Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study. The methodology was typically used when a natural phenomenon was to be studied (Creswell, 2013). As explained by Merriam (2009), qualitative methodology allows the researcher to be placed at the center of discovery

through inquiry, while revealing meaning. Qualitative methodology also provided the opportunity for deeper insight into participants' experiences.

There were several qualitative designs used to understand experiences, but after consideration, a phenomenological method was chosen for this study. A phenomenological method places emphasis on personal perspective and interpretation. Phenomenological studies are efficient for understanding individual experiences and providing information about motivations and actions. The implementation of this method provided an opportunity to explore the mental and emotional perceptions regarding experiences of participants. (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Merriam, 2009).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe the phenomena of teacher candidates' experiences regarding collaboration. The goal was attainable through the analysis of the responses from candidates within a university teacher preparation program after their completion of student teaching/internship placements.

Research Questions

It was not known how teacher candidates perceived their collaborative roles and responsibilities. This study investigated how participants perceived collaborative practices with special and general education mentors to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Furthermore, by acquiring this information, this study potentially could assist the teacher preparation program and school districts with providing environments to promote collaborative partnerships. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent were teacher candidates confident in their collaborative efforts?

2. To what extent did university coursework promote collaborative experiences between special and general education mentor teachers?
3. What collaborative factors influenced teacher candidates' knowledge and skills during their student teaching/internships?

Participants

The population for this phenomenological study were dual mild/moderate general education teacher candidates in a university teacher preparation program. The criteria for participation was: 1). undergraduate students who were currently enrolled in student teaching in a dual mild/moderate general education program. 2). graduate students who were enrolled as student teachers/interns in a dual mild/moderate, general education program. Out of a pool of 14 candidates who qualified for this study, 9 students volunteered. The methodology used was one-on-one interviews.

Recruitment. Before participants were contacted, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was requested and approved by the university. The study description, data collection, age range of participants, recruitment procedure, project start and end dates, and risk to participants were provided for project review.

Once IRB approval was received, participants were contacted through email with an invitation to participate in the study (see Appendix A). My contact information was provided to participants who required further clarification about the study. However, I recognized that not all participants would respond to the initial email invitation. So after one week, I sent a second email invitation to potential participants as a reminder to consider participation in this study.

Participants who volunteered were then telephoned to set up an appointment. On the day of the interview a letter of consent was provided to the participant for their signature (see Appendix B).

Researcher's Educational History and Perspective

I have remained focused on the improvement of collaborative practices among teachers before they transition into K-12 classrooms as a bonafide, qualified teacher. This commitment was a result of 13 years of teaching within K-12 schools and 2 years as a research director. I have experienced the accomplishments and frustrations of collaborative practices or lack thereof during my periods of employment.

For the first three years of my experiences, I was employed as a paraprofessional for students with disabilities in the northeast. During my time as a paraprofessional, I began a Masters of Arts in teaching for certification in general education, grades K-6. Upon the completion of my student teaching and subsequent licensure, a paraprofessional position became available within the school where I completed my student teaching. After a year in this position, Hurricane Katrina occurred, which prompted me to travel to New Orleans to volunteer as a co-teacher in a third-grade class. When this year-long placement expired, I returned to the classroom in the northeast as a middle school special education teacher in a private school for students with disabilities. At this time, I began a Master of Science in special education, grades K-12. Upon the completion of that degree three years later, I returned to New Orleans to join the charter school movement as a special education teacher in some of the city's economically disadvantaged schools.

During my 13 years of experience in education, I was introduced to educators with both positive and negative attitudes toward collaborative practices. Within those years, I experienced

challenges in K-12 schools such as lack of resources and diminished commitment of educators to implement collaborative practices among professionals for students with disabilities. In addition, I experienced administrative resistance and parental frustrations regarding students' access to the general education curriculum and failure to meet expected academic progress.

I also participated in data-driven collaborative decision-making via Response to Intervention (RTI) in both the northeast and southern schools. The involvement of the special and general education teachers, administrators, other service providers, and parents were at times required and expected.

During my employment in higher education, I had an opportunity to work side-by-side with faculty members as a Research Director under a federal special education grant. My tasks consisted of budget management, observations of practicum and student teachers, identification of field experience sites, and research.

My background experience may have created potential bias; however, my bias was managed by continuous reflection on the influence of my biases as recommended by Merriam (2009) and Huberman and Miles (1994). I specifically used a reflective journal to add a trail of my thoughts, which was central to the rigor of this study. I acknowledged my experiences, viewpoints, and assumptions about collaborative experiences during data collection and presentation of findings through journaling. This process was also used as a point where I or other readers could understand my logic and further determine the reliability of this study's findings.

Data Collection

The data collection stages involved numerous phases of interviews, memoing and reflection, instrumentation, triangulation, and ethical considerations.

The Interview Process. It was essential to establish rapport at the beginning of the interview process. Thus, I used my initial phone contact with participants to initiate a level of comfort and support. I introduced myself and spoke of my time at the university and then explained that each interview would last between 45-60 minutes and would take place at a mutually agreed-upon location (office or home). I also explained how each interview would be audio recorded and would not begin until the participant informed me that she was ready to start the interview.

To assure confidentiality for participants, I outlined the purpose of the study, my contact information, and indicated any potential risks to participants once they arrived for their interview. I offered each participant a bottle of water and allowed them to choose their seat of choice. I began interviews once participants completed the informed consent form.

Audio Recordings. Audio recordings allowed me time to pay attention to the participants during the interview process, rather than documenting throughout the interview. My full attention was provided to each interviewee. I nodded, made eye contact, and asked for clarification periodically. Recorded interviews then provided me time for continuous review of each participants' words (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

I recognized that audio recordings could be problematic. There may be difficulties with recording devices and essentially loss of data. One of the technological devices used for each interview was an Olympus Digital Voice Recorder. The recorder was reliable and had been used previously with other interview projects. However, to decrease the problem of technological errors, an additional recorder of an iPhone Voice Memo application was used. Interviews were stored immediately on my locked home computer and labeled with a number, date, time, and location for reference.

Memoing and reflective journaling. Miles and Huberman (1994) identified memoing as an important tool to be used once transcriptions were completed. Brief notations were added to my transcriptions to document reflective practices. A journal was also used during this process. After each interview and throughout this study, continuous reflection took place to address each stage of the proposal stages, defense of the proposal, IRB submission and approval, initial contact with participants, interview environments, interviewee behaviors, audio recordings, transcriptions verbatim, analysis stages, and results.

Instrumentation

Creswell (2014), Miles and Huberman, (1994) and Merriam (2009) acknowledged that researchers were the primary instrument through the data analysis process. The researcher is, in fact, the one responsible for reflecting upon the completion of each interview and inviting participants to member check their transcriptions. Miles and Huberman (1994) identified the components of this process in three stages referred to “flows of activity” (p.10) that included data reduction, data display, and conclusive drawing and verification. However, due to reliability concerns, inter-coder reliability was also initiated with another researcher to provide consistent estimates of my identified codes.

Data Reduction

Data reduction was the first “flow” of this process. It focused on the selection, simplification, and transformation of the data set. I addressed these areas of focus by reviewing field notes and interview transcriptions. This process was continuous and occurred throughout data collection and the analysis process. Other data reduction procedures consisted of the creation of summaries, coding, theme identification, and memos. Essentially, data reduction provided focus for the organization, sorting, and extraction of the data.

Inter-Coder Reliability

Locating themes in qualitative research is susceptible to human error (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman (1994) specifically acknowledged inter-coder reliability agreement as the stability and reliability required to analyze qualitative data with multiple coders.

The process unfolded with one other researcher. Each researcher reviewed the first transcription, identified codes and text segments. Once the initial review of a transcription was completed, a meeting was held to discuss identified codes and text segments, while the implementation of the inter-coder formula was applied. A score of 80% or better confirmed a code. Each researcher then continued to analyze transcriptions one at a time, with meetings to discuss, and apply the inter-coder formula if there were any newly identified codes. This process took place until all transcriptions were reviewed, coded and discussed. Upon completion of this process, the other researcher determined she would not be available for data display. See Figure 2.

Figure 2.

Inter-Coder Reliability Formula

$$\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of agreements} + \text{disagreements}}$$

Data Display

Data display was the second “flow” of the process. Data was considered displayed when the researcher completed the organization of data and developed conclusions. The most common data display consisted of visual representations of information, rather than numerous pages of field notes. Field notes became a challenge for me as I am not accustomed to processing large amounts of information. Therefore, helpful data displays used were charts, graphs, and matrices. Data was organized visually, which allowed me to observe the data unfold. With continuous review of data displays, I continued to make sense of the data, and was able to draw justifiable conclusions.

Data Conclusion Drawing and Verification

Conclusion drawing and verification were the third “flow” of activity. From the first and second stages of analysis, I noted patterns and regularities from the data set. The initial conclusions were considered vague during the other phases, and surfaced as explicit during this stage. This process led to verification. Verification prompted me to revisit field notes briefly and thoroughly and to develop with certainty, the clarification of themes. Data were then considered confirmed and valid through third and final stages.

Achievement of these processes occurred with the creation of a matrix on my home office wipe off board. Initially post it notes were placed on the board, but graphs and matrices were created with a computer, which ensured the data stayed in place. Table 2 is an example of how

themes were arranged horizontally and participants assigned numbers vertically. Participants who identified with a theme received a check placed in the appropriate box, and transcription page numbers were noted to locate the theme at a faster rate.

Table 2.

Matrix of Study Themes and Participants

Participants	Theme 1 Relationships	Theme 2 Skills	Theme 3 How to Work with Others	Theme 4 Challenges to Working with Other School Staff
Participant 1	√	√	√	√
Participant 2	√	√	√	√
Participant 3	√	√	√	√
Participant 4	√	√	√	
Participant 5	√	√	√	
Participant 6	√	√	√	√
Participant 7	√	√	√	√
Participant 8	√	√	√	√
Participant 9	√	√	√	√

Member Checks

Transcriptions initially began after the completed interview, and a great amount of time was devoted to their accuracy. The first few participants transcriptions were completed in two to three days, but the remaining four took between two to three weeks for completion. Interview transcripts were provided to participants via email. A time frame of one week was given for

review and return. If an interviewee didn't initiate contact within a week, they were called and asked if they had questions or needed further clarification to complete the process.

The process of member checks, according to Creswell (2014), Merriam (2009), and Miles and Huberman (1994) involved the researcher and each interviewee. Once I received a completed transcription I reviewed for its accuracy, corrections, and/or further clarification. This process allowed for strength to be added to the accuracy of each interview. Of the nine participants studied, seven out of nine completed the member check.

Triangulation

The diversity of such triangulation tools for this study consisted of teacher candidates' one-on-one interviews, assignments, and reflections focused on collaboration from various courses and student teaching/internships. Specifically, the approach of triangulation for this data allowed me to cross reference one-on-one interviews with the students' reflections on collaboration during sophomore/junior year and collaboration journals completed during student teaching or internship. Both sources were then analyzed and used for verification purposes of this study. Therefore, one-on-one interviews were matched with the written reflections of teacher candidates at 2 points in their teacher preparation program.

Ethical Considerations

The efforts used to decrease potential harm to participants in this study were taken seriously. Audio recordings started only when participants determined they were ready to begin the interview. Also, participants were reminded of their right to stop and/or discontinue the interview at any time without penalty. After interviews were completed, confidentiality was maintained with the use of a number in place of participants' names. Data collected was stored

and secured on a password protected computer. All paper documents were secured in a locked safe.

Summary

Through the exploration of five qualitative designs, phenomenology was chosen for this study's methodology. This study sought to understand the phenomena of dual mild/moderate general education teacher candidates' experiences through one-on-one interviews. A total of 9 participants were included in this study. Seven out of nine were student teachers and two were interns. Once the study was approved by my committee and the university IRB staff, initial contact with participants consisted of an email invitation to the study, with one-on-one interviews scheduled via telephone. Data was gathered via voice recorders and then analyzed through the development of themes. Inter-coder reliability was implemented to create the initial identification of codes with another researcher. Themes were identified by myself at first, and then with my committee co-chairs to operationalize the identified agreed-upon themes. Triangulation was used to cross-reference results and analysis. All information continues to remain confidential.

CHAPTER IV

Results

With the collection of one-on-one interviews, the experiences of nine teacher candidates who graduated from a university dual mild/moderate, general education teacher preparation program were explored. Student teachers were university undergraduate and graduate students who completed their final capstone experience under the supervision of a certified mentor teacher in that teacher's classroom. Interns were university graduate students who were the "teacher of record" in their classrooms.

Demographic data was collected and revealed a diverse pool of participants for this study. First, the pool included participants from various ethnic groups: Hispanic, Caucasian, African American, and Native American (see Table 3). The ages of participants also diverse: Four participants were between the ages of 24-27, two were between 18-23 years of age, one participant was between 28-35 years of age, one was between 36-45 years, and one was over the age of 45. The years of university enrollment reported by participants spanned a timeframe of 2-5 years in the teacher preparation program. Four participants reported three years, two noted four years, two stated two years, and one reported five years.

Table 3.
Demographic Data

Participants	Ethnicity	Age	Years in dual mild/moderate program
#1 Student Teacher	Hispanic	18-23 yrs. old	4 yrs.
#2 Student Teacher	Native Am.	36-45 yrs. old	3 yrs.
#3 Student Teacher	Hispanic	28-35 yrs. old	3 yrs.
#4 Student Teacher	Caucasian	24-27 yrs. old	2 yrs.
#5 Student Teacher	African Am.	24-27 yrs. old	5 yrs.
#6 Student Teacher	Caucasian	18-23 yrs. old	3 yrs.
#7 Student Teacher	Caucasian	24-27 yrs. old	2 yrs.
#8 Intern	Caucasian	45+	3 yrs.
#9 Intern	Caucasian	23-27 yrs. old	4 yrs.

Mentor Relationships

One of the first themes identified by nine out of nine (100%) participants was relationships with their assigned special and general education mentor teachers, as well as university faculty mentors. Participants described these relationships as beneficial to their development as a teacher and valued the time spent in one-on-one conversations with K-12 teachers and faculty mentors. They also pointed out challenges in the areas focused on the differences in opinions as well as lack of communication with special and general education teachers and university faculty members (see Table 4).

Table 4.

Mentor Relationships

Participants	Positive Special Education Mentor Relationships	Challenging Special Education Mentor Relationships	Positive General Education Mentor Relationships	Challenging General Education Mentor Relationships	Positive University Faculty Mentor Relationships	Challenging University Faculty Mentor Relationships
#1 Student Teacher	√		√		√	√
#2 Student Teacher	√			√	√	
#3 Student Teacher	√		√		√	
#4 Student Teacher	√		√	√	√	
#5 Student Teacher		√	√	√	√	√
#6 Student Teacher	√		√		√	
#7 Student Teacher	√		√		√	
#8 Intern	√		√	√	√	
#9 Intern	√		√	√	√	

Positive special education mentor relationships. Eight out of nine participants (89%) noted that communication with their special education mentors was positive. Positive communication was explained as continuous verbal encouragement and input. Participants’

relationships were described with various examples of communication such as: feedback during lesson planning, guidance during or after lessons were implemented, instructional support, and classroom management practices. For some, these opportunities contributed to the development of their self-confidence. For example, Participant 3 emphasized that her mentor “took the time to sit and provide feedback” and those discussions helped her “understand students’ needs better”. Another example provided by Participant 8 was when she explained that her mentor said, “all students didn’t learn the same” which Participant 8 appreciated as it helped her focus more on lesson planning to facilitate her ability to reach all students.

Challenging special education mentor relationships. One (Participant 5) of nine participants had a challenging relationship with her special education mentor. For example, she expressed difficulties communicating with her special education mentor because the mentor frequently responded with “you’ll do better next time” and didn’t offer any suggestions on how this could be done. She felt that this lowered her confidence in her ability to teach. Additionally, Participant 5 explained that her mentor did not have access to the state’s special education data base, Special Education Reporting System (SER), because she was newly hired. So, she had to work with another special education teacher to access the paperwork for students with disabilities. Thus, one out of nine (11%) participants felt dissatisfied with her special education mentor teacher.

Positive general education mentor relationships. Six out of nine (67%) participants described positive relationships with their general education mentors. Overall, relationships were described as occurring daily, of a supportive nature, and/or involved instructional discussions. For example, Participant 7, stated that she was close with her mentor and they were “working on ways to improve lessons and activities” during and after the school day. Participant 6 discussed

her relationship with her general education mentor as a person who “would never knock me down”. She felt comfortable to initiate a conversation, discuss her ideas about current instructional practices, and share ideas for future lesson plans.

In addition, Participant 1 described her relationship with her mentor as one that was acquired during her coursework, field experiences, and practicum. Then this same teacher became her mentor during student teaching. This established rapport, a level of confidence and comfort before student teaching. For example, Participant 1 was assigned to observe a general education teacher as part of her a field experience assignment during her university coursework and then was placed with the same teacher for student teaching. She had a positive experience with her student teaching mentor and described the time as “well spent”, “comfortable”, and “helpful” because they knew each other. She explained that asking questions was usually difficult for her, but because she already knew her mentor, she felt relieved and reassured.

Challenging general education mentor relationships. Five out of nine (56%) participants described relationships with their general education mentors as difficult. Participants described their mentors as too busy with classroom preparations to spend time with them. The relationships were described as ineffective and that they did not build self-confidence. Moreover, participants stated they felt unprepared to teach independently and they questioned their instructional practices. So, the majority of participants were not confident in their abilities to teach. For example, Participant 4 described her mentor teacher as a person she “shouldn’t bother” and she would just have to figure it out on her own or ask other staff members. Furthermore, Participant 2 described her relationship with her mentor as overwhelming. She was discouraged throughout her experiences when explained that she “just wasn’t able to teach”

because her mentor frequently interrupted her lessons with suggestions. As a result, she was unable to focus on teaching the students when her mentor interrupted her.

Positive university faculty mentor relationships. Nine out of nine (100%) participants reported their experiences with faculty as positive. Several participants explained how faculty assigned groups of students to work together during their coursework and field experiences. These participants described this group work as a way to discuss their ideas. For example, Participant 2 explained how her group work in the university classroom consisted of one person who took the lead in distributing roles and responsibilities, while other group members simply worked on completing the assigned task. Participant 3 explained how she worked with her classmates to create a lesson plan during one of her group work assignments. She described her experience as “I’m in charge of this and you’re in charge of this...and everybody took their part, got it done, and put it together”. So, a leader was necessary when group members had an assigned task to complete.

In addition, another Participant (6) described a classroom assignment where she worked with group members and learned to value the perspectives of others:

“That unit project was a big collaborative experience...in every class there would be at least one point where we would have to get together with other people and share ideas...I learned how to deal with different points of view”.

Challenging university faculty relationships. As stated above, all of the participants wanted more time with university faculty members even though they all described positive relationships. All participants explained the insufficiency in the number of observations from faculty during their student teaching or internship, but when they occurred, the observations consisted of valuable one-on-one feedback and constructive considerations for their instructional

practices. Participant 6 noted that her assigned faculty member dedicated a short period of time to observe her teach. However, this same faculty member on occasion took time for joint planning sessions. During those times, they reviewed instructional plans together, and Participant 6 had the opportunity to ask for clarification when she misunderstood the content to be taught.

Moreover, two interns provided descriptions of their faculty members and time spent where they reviewed teaching techniques. For example, Participant 8 and 9 described how they sought advice from their faculty members during their office hours. Participant 9 explained that when she visited campus she was able to ask for concrete resources such as books and manipulatives, which provided her with the additional support she needed to develop her lesson plans. Participant 8 described how her faculty member provided support, but only through “a few” observations. However, when she attended a university course required during internship, she described the time as useful when she created lesson plans and the challenges she had with backwards design (a teaching technique) were overcome. One night her faculty member reviewed the process of backwards design again and Participant 8 explained how the “lightbulb lit up”. She couldn’t thank her instructor enough for her time and continuous review she received regarding backwards design.

Another participant (5) expressed that her relationships with faculty were a challenge because they were graded by her. For example, Participant 5 described how she completed assignments in one of her previous courses and felt she was “judged harshly”, when she received a letter grade B. However, she admitted that she chose not to follow directions from her faculty mentor. She described how she earned an A on most of her assignments in the course, but when she wrote an IEP with assistance from an unassigned special education teacher, her faculty mentor explained that the directions for the assignment indicated it was to be completed with the

assigned special education teacher. Another example of a challenge with a faculty member focused on the school assignments for field work. Participant 1 described how she was placed in some schools that were not culturally diverse. She expected to be placed in settings with diverse student populations when she was assigned field work and was disappointed when this did not occur.

Skills needed to become an Effective Teacher

The second theme that surfaced among participants' interview data was the development of skills they believed were required to be effective teachers. The participants described their role as a classroom teacher, the creation and implementation of accommodations and IEPs, classroom management strategies, and reflective practices (see Table 5).

Table 5.

Skills Learned to be an Effective Teacher

Participants	Student teacher/intern teaching schedules	Create and Implement Accommodations	Develop IEP Process	Develop Classroom Management	Reflection
#1 Student Teacher	√	√	√	√	
#2 Student Teacher	√	√	√		
#3 Student Teacher	√	√	√		√
#4 Student Teacher	√	√			√
#5 Student Teacher	√	√	√	√	√
#6 Student Teacher	√	√			
#7 Student Teacher	√	√	√		√
#8 Intern	√			√	√
#9 Intern	√	√	√	√	√

Student teaching/internship teaching schedules. All seven of the student teachers stated that they initially observed in the classrooms. They observed between two to five days until they began direct instruction in one or two content areas. Some indicated their classroom instruction time was guided by the university calendar, which specified the time to be spent taking over direct instruction in content areas, and when they should take full time responsibility

of the class. For example, Participant 1 described her experience as “observation for the first week”, instructor of two content areas the second week, and the addition of other content areas with each passing week until she was the instructor of all content areas by the end of the semester. Participant 5 and 7 described a similar experience with gradually taking over the responsibilities of full-time instructor for the entire day.

On the other hand, two interns described their experiences as the primary teacher. Participant 9 described how she talked to other colleagues who were easily accessible in the school when she had questions. Additionally, she explained how she was appreciative of everything they had offered and that she learned a lot. Participant 8 said that one of her helpful colleagues was “right next door” and she was able to ask questions, but knew she was the “teacher of record” for the class and was “on her own” to provide instruction to her students.

Create and implement accommodations. The literature indicated that teachers are more willing to collaborate if they have confidence in their ability to teach. The participants provided insight about their level of confidence in the following areas: accommodations, IEPs, classroom management and reflection. Eight out of nine (89%) participants described the documentation and implementation of accommodations for students with disabilities. The descriptions used by participants when they provided accommodations were the implementation of modified work, one-on-one or small group instruction, use of calculators, or extended time for students. Modified work was explained as a reduced amount of work from the expected curriculum. One-on-one and small group instruction were described as two ways to provide students with disabilities direct contact with the teacher to better understand the curriculum. The use of calculators and extended time were described as additional strategies for students with disabilities when they completed their classroom assignments. For example, Participant 2

described the accommodations she provided to students with disabilities as “really important” to incorporate into her lesson plans before they were implemented. She described herself as being comfortable when she completed the identification of accommodations. She also identified the preparation she received during practicum as the most significant to her understanding of accommodations. Participant 5 described implementing accommodations as one of her responsibilities as a teacher and talked about the provision of a calculator to assist a student with mathematics. She also described the importance of how she monitored student understanding, and identified additional strategies when the student continued to struggle.

Develop IEP process. Six out of nine (67%) participants described the creation and implementation of IEPs as another acquired skill during their teacher preparation, especially during student teaching/internship. Participants learned the importance of early IEP documentation in the state’s database, wrote goals and objectives with their special education mentors, and continued to monitor student progress throughout the school year. For example, Participant 7 described that her special education mentor provided “step by step directions” designed to guide the candidate when she would be a special education teacher and have to write them on her own. Another participant responded similarly when she explained that “she taught me the process every step of the way”. In other words, the mentor teacher collaborated with the candidate to develop the IEPs.

However, at the conclusion of participants’ student teaching/internship, three stated that they still did not feel prepared to develop IEPs and the statewide benchmark paperwork required throughout the school year. Candidates expressed feelings of being “overwhelmed and stressed” when they thought about the responsibilities of the paperwork. For example, Participant 3 stated “I didn’t think I would be able to complete the paperwork on my own”. Participant 2 also

identified being “stressed out” when she mentioned IEP paperwork. Clearly, concerns about the creation of IEPs existed. So, more time needed to be dedicated to the IEP process.

Develop classroom management. Another skill identified by participants was classroom management. Five out of nine participants (56%) described organization of the classroom as one way to increase their effective instructional practices and outcomes for all students. For example, Participant 8 explained that student learning increased when she “didn’t clump” students in a whole class lesson, but assigned small groups according to student’s needs. Participant 3 noted similar sentiments when she described her student groups as “meticulously planned”, and when she asked for advice from her mentor before she finalized her groups. She explained that if her students felt comfortable in her classroom, they would be more likely to take risks and increase their achievement levels.

Reflection. Six of the nine participants (67%) spoke of self-reflection skills that they acquired. Reflections were described as a process of writing down thoughts about their experiences related to teaching, lesson planning, relationships, and challenges/solutions throughout their coursework, field experiences, practicum assignment, and student teaching/internship. Initially, the teacher preparation coursework at the university prompted participants to complete reflections regarding teaching practices. Some students began to recognize the value of reflection as they progressed through the program. For example, Participant 5 explained how she used reflection to understand a student when he faced a difficult situation at home with the following sentiment “reflection really does help when you’re trying to reach a student”. Regarding this troubled student, she recorded how he behaved, what he said, and strategies she used for him to attempt to complete his work. She then reviewed her notations and considered her next steps. Also, Participant 8 described writing reflections during her

coursework, but specifically when she completed her assigned field experiences. She visited a summer school program, and described in her reflection how the teacher “opened her eyes” to the variety of instructional practices and activities she could provide her own students. She was particularly impressed by the fact that the teacher was of a different racial background than her students, and the teacher was able to relate to and facilitate student learning.

How to Work with Others

The subsequent and third theme identified by all nine participants (100%) involved how to work with others (see Table 6). A combination of three subthemes then surfaced which were compromise, listening, and asking for help. Generally, compromise was described as a group of two or more individuals who shared their ideas and came to an agreement about instructional practices. Participants explained the benefits of asking for help throughout their coursework, field experiences, and then as a student teacher or intern. In addition, participants identified the value of listening to others when they set aside their own thoughts while others talked. The overall process of how to work with others was explained by participants as reliant upon effective communication.

Table 6.

How to Work with Others

Participants	Compromise	Listening	Asking for Help
#1 Student Teacher	√	√	
#2 Student Teacher	√	√	√
#3 Student Teacher			√
#4 Student Teacher	√	√	√
#5 Student Teacher		√	
#6 Student Teacher			√
#7 Student Teacher	√	√	√
#8 Intern	√	√	√
#9 Intern	√	√	√

Compromise. One way participants mentioned how they worked with others was through compromise during their coursework and field experiences. Six out of nine participants (67%) identified that conversations with their peers involved all team members sharing their thoughts and recognizing that part of the process of compromise involved some agreement or disagreement before task responsibilities were to be determined. For example, Participants 2 and 4 described how each team member shared their ideas before the “delegation” of tasks were determined among team members. It was important to acknowledge each team members strengths so they could be successful. In addition, Participant 4 emphasized her ability to disagree with other team members when she provided her thoughts before a final decision was made in her student group. However, Participant 7 stated that she would listen to her team members’ ideas, implement their agreed upon plans, reflect, and then provide her ideas for future

plans. So, compromise to her meant allowing other seasoned teachers to share their ideas, thinking about their conversations and sharing her thoughts at another team meeting. This process was also emphasized by Participant 8 when she described the importance of learning from one another and making joint decisions. She indicated without this process that she would be at a definite disadvantage.

Listening. Seven out of nine (78%) participants felt the ability to listen provided them the ability to grow as a teacher. The ability to listen allowed the candidates to learn ways students with disabilities could better access the general education curriculum. Generally, the term listen was explained by participants as a time to hear and be aware of others' thoughts or suggestions. For example, Participant 1 stated that she learned to "listen when a faculty member provided feedback" about her coursework assignments. Faculty members were described as "good at questioning" lesson plans. So, the participant had to be focused on listening to those suggestions. Another participant explained that her mentor suggested that during the first week of observation she pay attention to students and paraprofessional needs, as well as instructional approaches of teachers. She described those directions from her mentor as pivotal to how she began to understand student behaviors and the role of a paraprofessional. Likewise, Participant 7 described her willingness to grow and learn by listening to faculty members and K-12 teachers, as well as to the experiences and suggestions of her peers. She explained how her peers had students with a variety of abilities and sharing strategies was helpful.

Asking for help. Seven out of nine (78%) participants mentioned that they asked for help from faculty members, K-12 teachers during field experiences, and/or their special and general education classroom mentors. Some participants explained the initial discomfort they felt about asking questions of others, but noted their courage to ask questions was developed over time.

University coursework laid the foundation for students to ask questions. For some, field experiences and practica continued the development of student's ability to ask questions. However, there were some participants who indicated their discomfort even up to the time of student teaching/internship. For example, Participant 5 described how she didn't ask questions to her mentor without first starting a casual conversation, in order to decide whether or not she would ask her questions. Similarly, Participant 2 explained that she was hesitant to ask questions, but she was better able to when she considered faculty and her school mentors as the "experts". She didn't have all of the answers and knew that these relationships were established for her to benefit to become an effective teacher.

The Benefits and Challenges of Relationships with Other School Members

Benefits and Challenges of relationships with other school members was another theme identified in this study (see Table 7). The term "other school members" was described as special and general education teachers (but not assigned mentors), a librarian, English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher, a substitute teacher, and a social worker.

Table 7.

The Benefits and Challenges of Communication with Other School Members

Participants	Benefits of Communication with Special and General Education Teachers	Challenges of Communication with Other General and Special Education Teachers	Benefits of Communication with Other Staff	Challenges of Communication with Other Staff	Benefits of Communication with Principals	Challenges of Communication with Principals
#1 Student Teacher	√				√	
#2 Student Teacher	√	√	√	√		
#3 Student Teacher	√	√				
#4 Student Teacher	√					
#5 Student Teacher	√					
#6 Student Teacher	√				√	
#7 Student Teacher	√	√			√	
#8 Intern	√	√			√	√
#9 Intern	√		√		√	

Benefits of communication with other special and general education teachers. All participants (9/9) explained that they had short or casual conversations with other school members in other places, along with their assigned classrooms. For example, a few participants described communicating in the hallway. Participants stood in their hallways outside of their classrooms, watched their student's transition to another classroom, and discussed how a lesson went. Those hallway conversations were described as small increments of time because participants had to stay on the school schedule. For example, Participant 8 valued her hallway conversations as an opportunity for "feedback" and "next steps" for lesson plans. So, the location of participant's classrooms made a difference in the amount of communication that occurred. Participants described their relationships as positive, and it was clear that support was valued. Participant 1 explained other places (her assigned classroom) where she connected with other special and general education teachers because they would "check in" on her throughout her student teaching and definitely when she had a university faculty observation. She learned to depend on follow-up conversations with other special and general education teachers.

Another place where participants connected were in classrooms other than their own. Participants 8 and 9 felt like they could go to any classroom in their school and ask for assistance. Another participant mentioned her nonverbal interactions with other general education teachers as welcoming and supportive when she explained her school's "note system". The "note system" was a school wide activity where teachers and staff anonymously left messages of support for one another.

Challenges of communication with other special and general education teachers. In addition to hallway conversations four out of nine (45%) of participants described the challenges of conversations with other school members. Participant 3 described how she felt like she was at

a disadvantage when her mentor teacher was absent and a substitute was assigned to her classroom. The substitute used a different classroom management approach, students were not following directions, and the student teacher felt overwhelmed because she couldn't "keep up" with the pace of the substitute. The substitute was described as a person who rushed to keep students occupied and the student teacher's interaction with her was limited. The substitute was also described as a person who struggled to manage the classroom when students were not following rules already established. Another participant explained her intentions to talk with other teachers, but she felt "talked down to". So, she mainly focused on her relationships with her assigned mentors. Likewise, Participant 2 described how she put forth the effort to meet other school staff members in the teachers' lounge by being "assertive, yet humble". However, most teachers sat with the same people each day and didn't invite others to sit with them. She felt like there were cliques among the teachers.

Benefits of other staff. One participant 2 described a relationship with a social worker and another described a relationship with an office person. Participant 2 described how she was provided with an opportunity to understand a social workers' roles and responsibilities in a school setting through conversations with the social worker. In addition to a school's social worker, Participant 9 explained how her school's office staff members provided general information about the school (e.g., office and school procedures).

Challenges of other staff. One out of nine (11%) of participants stated they had other relationships with staff that were difficult. The same participant (#2) who described positive communication with a social worker also reported complications when she worked with the same social worker. Her mentor and the social worker "did not get along" and she felt like she was in the middle of the disagreements. She mentioned wanting to keep the peace and that she took on

the role of a mediator when her mentor and the social worker argued about special education paperwork deadlines.

Benefits of principals. Five out of nine (56%) of participants spoke about positive interactions with their schools' principals. Some described situations where the principal took them on school tours and introduced them to other special and general education teachers and staff. For example, Participant 9 described how her principal was "helpful" when she was introduced at the beginning of the school year to the other teachers and staff. The principal had a positive attitude and focused on "a great community of teachers, of learners, and workers". Participant 6 described her principal as "helpful" when she provided a simulated job interview toward the end of the student teaching period. Participant 8 explained that she "could go to any of them to have a discussion about instruction or students' needs", and she included the principal in this group. Similarly, Participant 2 described her principal as mostly busy during the school day, but there were times when she was able to have a one-on-one conversation about becoming a teacher. Furthermore, another participant described positive experiences with her principal when the principal walked into her classroom unannounced and watched her teach. She enjoyed the time they would spend after her lesson discussing how it went and what strategies she could use for future lesson plans.

Challenges of principals. One out of nine (11%) participants expressed challenges with her principal. Participant 8 (who was an intern) described her principal as difficult and avoided conversations with her because she felt like they didn't agree on instructional practices for students with disabilities. The Participant described how students with disabilities required a variety of strategies to access general education curriculum, "and that took time". She was

focused on the pace that matched her students' needs, while the principal focused on the pace of the school's curriculum map. Thus, agreement was not always present.

Interns versus student teachers differences. Each table in this study has been reviewed to identify, if any, differences between interns versus student teachers. Table 2, mentor relationships, displayed sporadic data from student teachers. However, two interns matched four out of six categories. There were no clear patterns between student teachers or interns in Table 3, skills learned to be an effective teacher. The vast majority of student teachers and interns gained the skills of creating and implementing teaching schedules and accommodations. When comparing how student teachers and interns worked with others, student teachers' data was inconsistent, yet 100% of interns used the skills of compromise, listening, and asking for help.

Verification Process

With the identification of demographic information and the four themes, initial conclusions were made. Verification procedures allowed for the time to be taken for a more thorough review of data to develop with certainty, the clarification of themes. In this study one-on-one interviews were cross-referenced with researcher memos that focused on each participant's body language, tone, and demeanor. Participants' collaboration reflections during sophomore and junior years and collaboration journals completed during their senior year were then analyzed and also used for the verification process of this study. With this multi-step process, data was confirmed and deemed valid because it supported participant's responses.

Summary

In this study, one-on-one interviews were collected from nine teacher candidates who graduated from a university dual mild/moderate degree program. The majority of participants were Caucasian, between the ages of 24-27, and completed the teacher preparation program an

average of two years. Four themes were then identified from participants data as mentor relationships, skills learned to be an effective teacher, how to work with others, and advantages and disadvantages of communication with other school members.

The first theme, mentor relationships, were described by participants as positive and challenging with special and general education mentor teachers, and university faculty mentors. The second theme, skills learned to be an effective teacher were explained as creating and implementing accommodations and IEP paperwork for students with disabilities, the development of classroom management skills, and reflections. One hundred percent of participants identified the importance of teaching schedules, 89% identified the importance of creating and implementing accommodations, and the remaining data was sporadic. For the third theme, how to work with others, participants explained the lessons they learned about compromise, listening, and how to ask questions when they worked with others. The fourth theme, the benefits and challenges of communication with other school members, special and general education teachers were noted by 100% of participants as a benefit of their teacher preparation. In addition to the identification of themes, the differences between interns versus student teachers was also explored.

One-on-one interviews were cross-referenced with researcher memos of body language, tone, and demeanor. Initial conclusions were vague. Therefore, verification was achieved with the use of participants' demographic information and the four themes, coursework reflections, and student teaching and internship collaborative journals.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to add to the existing literature on the experiences of candidates enrolled in a teacher preparation program for dual certification in general and mild/moderate (mi/mod) disabilities. Research questions addressed included: how teacher candidates were confident in their collaborative efforts, the extent to which their coursework promoted collaboration, and what, if any, collaborative factors influenced candidates' knowledge and skills during their student teaching or internships. A total of nine undergraduate and graduate candidates participated in this study. Seven (1 graduate and 6 undergraduate) were student teachers and two were graduate student interns. Interviews were conducted, data were analyzed, and a discussion of the results is presented.

Research Question 1: The Extent to which University Coursework Promoted Collaboration

Research question one focused on the extent to which university coursework promoted collaboration. Results focused on the relationships between teacher candidates and special and general education teachers. Teacher candidates had a transformative experience as a result of the ample preparation they received during their program of study (e.g. class assignments, field experiences, practicum, and student teaching/internships). Candidates reported that an introduction to the foundation of collaboration (i.e., individuals coming together for the purpose of completing a task) was presented by faculty and acknowledged by teacher candidates as an important component in their preparation. Friend (2010) defines collaboration as voluntary interaction between two or more educators who made decisions as they worked towards a common goal. Evidence of this resonated throughout the data from both undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates.

Class assignments. Student teachers and interns described three principles of collaboration (i.e., parity, voluntary, shared resources) when they created lesson plans, developed presentations, or worked on the projects with other group members. Groups were made up of 2-4 people. Faculty were instrumental in guiding teacher candidates in how to work as a group in order to complete their assignments.

Group work. Five student teachers and two interns stated that during their coursework when they were assigned group work, they were anxious about their roles or what their responsibilities might be. In addition, when their instructors talked about dividing into groups, teacher candidates described how they really would rather work alone. But when working independently was not an option, these candidates became aware of the benefits of collaborating as a group. One teacher candidate described how she worked with 2-4 people in a group, benefited from different perspectives of group members, and learned to appreciate the value of collaboration. Another teacher candidate described group work as helpful, but she felt as though she took on more of the responsibilities in her groups. Candidates seemed to need and want very clear and specific directions from faculty about group projects. When roles and responsibilities were established, their level of anxiety was reduced. When individual groups working together were observed by faculty, students were reminded to “share” the responsibilities of the assignment.

Teacher candidates did not specifically state the terms used by Friend (2010) who described the components of collaboration: (parity, voluntary efforts, shared goals, shared responsibility and decision-making, shared resources, and accountability) when they were interviewed. But, they did convey the ideas. They described the sharing of different roles when completing a group project (parity). They volunteered for different roles (voluntary), and shared

resources (knowledge and skills). Perhaps the literature about these specific components of collaboration needed to be identified, emphasized, and later revisited during coursework and field experiences.

Additional group work with different groups. Candidates' discussed how roles and responsibilities related to collaboration became more established in the advanced courses in the mild/moderate program. Faculty expected candidates to exercise their collaboration skills when working in groups. Team members were expected to share their lesson plans and receive feedback. Teacher candidates found this task positive and useful to improving their lesson plans. They were able to hear their peers' perspectives about their lesson plans and consider adjustments. This highlights the importance of faculty creating teams with different memberships and providing the opportunity for candidates to learn from one another.

Whole class presentations. Another assignment was the requirement of each team to present their lesson plans in an open forum. Teacher candidates described this time as an opportunity where teams were asked questions by their peers and faculty, shared their ideas, and considered other suggestions. Since the role of teachers is to instruct, guide, and encourage student to learn, the opportunity to present a brief lesson allowed candidates to practice in this role. Some candidates were more comfortable than others when presenting to a group, thus, future teachers need this practice while in a supportive environment. Also, opportunities to have the content of their presentation evaluated further advanced their abilities as a teacher. The teacher candidates recognized this form of collaboration as beneficial to their effective instructional practices.

Practica. All teacher candidates in the undergraduate (UG) program were required to complete a practicum prior to student teaching over the course of a semester. Graduate students

were not. Teacher candidates spent one day a week in an assigned K -12 school. Faculty organized the candidates' time to be spent equally between both special and general education mentor teachers. A practicum provided teacher candidates opportunities to implement practices they had learned in their coursework. They interacted with their mentors and learned about basic teaching techniques through observation and practice.

However, true collaboration did not occur during their practica. Rather, teacher candidates reported being treated like a paraprofessional and not an equal partner in the classroom. The practicum teacher was the expert. Candidates explained that collaboration rarely occurred, and if it did, they worked only with their practica teachers on IEP paperwork compliance and classroom management styles. Teacher candidates described this moment as a time to mimic or model the same practices as their mentor teachers. The focus of teacher preparation was now in the authentic K-12 classroom and not the university classroom.

Student teachers. Specific collaborative instances with their mentors were described as conversations that took place when lunch, planning times, or informal hallway conversations occurred during student teaching. Some data even revealed how student teachers stayed after regular school hours to have one-on-one discussions with their mentors. One participant described the value of communicating with their mentors using written notes and establishment of gestures in order to avoid disrupting classroom instruction. Student teachers also recognized the advantage of the same teacher for both the practicum and student teaching. These established relationships contributed to their success in learning to become an effective teacher. Participants expressed how an established relationship added to their level of comfort because they were able to ask questions when they misunderstood or had concerns. This highlights the value of time spent together to build trust and establish a relationship with a mentor teacher.

Furthermore, the description of substitute teachers in the classroom (two mentor teachers were absent for a day or two) caused a change in the roles of the student teachers. The student teachers worked in one of two ways: (1) they either worked together to ensure that students received the required content or (2) they were treated like a paraprofessional to help students who challenged the substitutes authority. According to one participant, a substitute teacher asked about the students' schedules, rules, and how to teach in content areas as she wanted to ensure that the classroom day went smoothly. This substitute valued the student teacher's opinion. When student teachers are part of the decision-making process and contribute to classroom information, they feel more empowered and confident. This was not the experience of another student teacher who described how the substitute did not want her involved and said, "I can handle it". Perhaps it would be helpful for the student teacher to reflect on how she could build a collaborative relationship with those who seem resistant.

Research Question 2: Confidence in Collaborative Efforts

Research question two focused on the extent to which both undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates were confident in their collaborative efforts. Data revealed how the relationships among their special and general education teacher mentors, university faculty, college coordinators, other special and general education teachers, and principals were both a detriment and a benefit in regard to collaboration. Specifically, researchers (Jones et al., 2013; Crater et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2008) indicated that collaboration between special and general education teachers is necessary for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities. These relationships also often contribute to the factors which influence teachers' knowledge, ability to communicate and problem solve in and outside the classroom.

Special and general education mentor relationships. The data revealed that the majority of subjects, six student teachers and two interns (89%), expressed how relationships with their special education mentors were positive. Teacher candidates described how they received feedback during daily lesson planning and guidance during or after the implementation of lessons. Instructional feedback was helpful as was input into the management of students' behaviors. This seems logical because a major focus of the teacher preparation program was to ensure that teacher candidates could plan lessons, be open to feedback through observations, and learn to manage a classroom.

However, in this study, a lack of collaboration with general education teachers had a negative impact on teacher candidates' self-confidence. A significant percentage of candidates, three student teachers and two interns (56%) voiced concern about the limited amount of time general education mentors spent with them. These teacher candidates found this situation difficult in attempting to learn new skills from their general education mentors. However, there also might have been some reluctance on the part of the general education teacher if she was unfamiliar with special education concepts/ideas or perhaps did not view teacher candidate supervision as a priority. Researchers (Caputo & Langher, 2015; Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Damore & Murray, 2009; U.S. Dept. Of Justice, 2012) reported that general education teachers believed that they were the sole provider of general education content and they preferred to work with other general education teachers. In this study, teacher candidates' sense of confidence was negatively impacted, possibly because the general education teacher did not feel approachable to them. These results could have occurred because teacher candidates might have been more reluctant to speak to their general education mentor who faced the demands related to large class

sizes and responsibilities. Also, candidates' may have felt that they should be more knowledgeable than they actually were.

Relationships with other special and general education teachers. 100% of candidates had similar experiences when other teachers (both special and general education) were in close physical proximity to the candidates. More opportunities to interact were created. For example, minutes in the hallway when they transitioned their students to other classrooms, restroom breaks, recess, or lunch provided opportunities for informal and quick conversations. Candidates benefited from these types of interactions because they were able to collect the ideas and perspectives of others. Also, they were able to problem-solve and observe experienced special and general education teachers model appropriate teacher behaviors. This finding may be indicative of how informal relationships could begin and have the potential to grow into more established and helpful interactions.

Relationships with college coordinators or mentors. 100% of teacher candidates explained how they considered collaboration with their university mentors as equally important, if not more important, than their relationships with mentors and other individuals in K-12 schools. Some relationships formed at the very beginning of the teacher candidates' program of study and continued until their graduation. College coordinators visited teacher candidates three times throughout their student teaching/internships and provided one-on-one time to discuss lesson presentations that were observed as well as management of student behaviors. Teacher candidates also met monthly on campus with their college coordinators to ensure that university and state portfolio requirements were fulfilled, to participate in discussions of their own as well as others' experiences, and to seek out advice when needed.

Student teachers. In particular, student teacher candidates described their relationships with university mentors as a mechanism to share ideas about the content and implementation of their lesson plans, or changes that could be made in the future. Candidates viewed this routine as a way to “stay focused”, but also to gain knowledge, perspectives, and expertise from their mentors. For example, one student teacher described how her lesson did not go as she planned because she ran out of time. Her university mentor suggested that it would be beneficial to set a timer, and remain attentive to it at all times. By utilizing a timer, she reduced the likelihood that she would run out of time to complete a lesson. Also noteworthy were situations described by four other student teachers when university mentors were instrumental in promoting self-reflection. Teacher candidates mentioned how their mentors emphasized the importance of writing questions that arose during the day in the candidates’ collaborative journal. Clearly, regular, ongoing contact with university mentors facilitated a fresh perspective on events occurring within the classroom.

Some student teachers expressed their disappointment regarding the number of times university mentors observed them in their school placements. In some situations, teacher candidates mentioned how they needed additional detailed directions from their mentors. Because candidates at times felt like they couldn’t rely on their “busy”, school-based mentors, they turned to their university mentors. Perhaps the teacher candidates felt insecure and, thus, looked to their “long time” relationship with faculty members who regarded them as supportive or as someone who could boost their morale. Or university mentors may have been viewed as the “gate keeper” for graduation and candidates’ might have wanted college coordinators to observe their lessons more often, be accessible to discuss concerns more extensively, and give them specifics of how to improve their grades.

Interns. Interns expressed similar concerns about their university mentors. Three observations occurred over the course of their internship and they found these classrooms visits helpful. Interns took the initiative to seek out advice from their university mentors if/when a question arose. For example, one intern described how she was challenged with a student's misbehavior and an observation visit from her university mentor was too far away to wait for advice. So, she made an appointment to meet and ask for advice. An interesting point is that this individual was older than the other intern and student teachers. Perhaps maturity and experience played a role in her decision to visit campus and not wait until the next observation to get advice. During the interview, her disposition reflected that she was a "take charge" individual. She was a problem solver. This leads one to believe that perhaps the personality traits and/or experiences of an older or more mature individual may influence their ability or interest to seek advice and work collaboratively with others.

Principals. One student teacher and two interns (33%) emphasized how acceptance by and collaboration with school staff was facilitated by the principals' introduction of the teacher candidate to other teachers, staff, and administrators. One candidate explained that these introductions were said to have occurred within the first few weeks of their arrival. In fact, one student teacher believed that her principal's introduction of her in a professional development session sent the message that she was to be welcomed and mentored by all teachers, staff, and administrators as she grew into a full-fledged teacher. Also, two interns said that they felt that their introductions by the principal ensured that they were acknowledged as equal team members of the school, but also needed to be supported. These findings could be the result of suggested policies and procedures within the university teacher preparation program. School personnel and college coordinators meet prior to the clinical experiences. These meetings are designed to build

relationships between administrators and college coordinators, secure candidates placements, and discuss state and university requirements that candidates' needed to fulfill. At their meetings, it is important to discuss ways to include teacher candidates into the school culture. When candidates feel included, they are more likely to feel confident and open to collaboration.

Research Question 3: Collaborative Factors that Influenced Teacher Candidates'

Knowledge and Skills

The third research question focused on the collaborative factors that influenced teacher candidates' knowledge and skills. Based on the themes that evolved from interviews with teacher candidates, they discussed accommodations, IEPs, and classroom management. Their experiences during their teacher preparation program of study indicated that candidates were prepared to collaborate with university and school-based staff.

Creation and implementation of accommodations. The implementation of accommodations and modifications is one of the major challenges for special and general educators. Often their personnel preparation programs do not provide sufficient information on how and when to provide accommodations. Data revealed that eight out of nine (89%) teacher candidates' experiences with accommodations for students took place during their time spent in K-12 schools. Teacher candidates described how they learned about the importance and value of accommodations/modifications from their teacher preparation program and school experiences. Teacher candidates discussed observing special education teachers working in general education classrooms, but without any input from the general education teachers. The implementation of accommodations and modifications typically took place in one-on-one or small groups in either a general education classroom or special education classroom. Teacher candidates described the importance of having special education mentors and other special education teachers in their

schools as collaborators when they needed supplemental materials or advice on adaptations when developing lesson plans. The teacher candidates may have felt more knowledgeable and skilled in this area because the university teacher preparation program required a course that included content in the provision of accommodations and/or modifications for students with disabilities to facilitate their ability to access the general education curriculum,

Develop classroom management. Teacher candidates described how they learned about, understood, and implemented classroom management procedures. Data revealed that two student teachers and two interns (44%) expressed how classroom management and student learning were connected to collaboration with their mentor teachers. Teacher candidates and mentor teachers worked together to “co-teach” in the classroom. Even though the specific terminology of co-teaching models (one teach-one observe, one teach-one drift, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching) were not utilized during the interviews, the candidates described their co-teaching experiences. Most of the participants described one teach-one observe.

Student teachers. The collaboration between teacher candidates and their mentor teachers provided mutually agreed-upon strategies to support student behaviors and thereby increase student engagement and self-regulation. Teacher candidates learned to gather knowledge about their students’ interests from their mentor teachers so that they could modify materials or deliver lessons to increase student engagement and interest. Specifically, research indicated that the development of collaborative relationships between teachers and their students leads to positive outcomes for students (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). Also, the requirement of the collaborative journal entries both independently and with their mentor teachers could have facilitated their ability to build relationships and implement recommended

practices. Discussion between candidates and mentors can help to problem solve and improve teacher responses to students' behaviors.

Interns. The two interns in this study were appeared to be prepared than student teachers to manage a classroom. They expressed confidence in their ability to teacher and manage behaviors and they were a gainfully employed teacher. In particular, one intern stated, "...if a classroom does not have organization and teachers do not provide students with positive behavioral support, teaching could be hard". Visiting other teachers' classrooms also provided another intern with the opportunity to observe the use of positive behavioral supports for students. For example, she learned how to post a daily schedule of tasks to be completed by her students. This strategy helped to keep many students on task because the classroom expectations were clear. Because interns are already working, they have experience with teaching, which then results in their willingness to seek out collaborative relationships with others. More experienced and confident teachers are more likely to collaborate with others.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. The first limitation was the small number of candidates who were interviewed. A larger number would have potentially offered additional insights.

The second limitation was the imbalance of seven student teachers and two interns. The participation of additional interns would have possibly influenced the data that was collected. Therefore, generalizing the findings from this research to other teacher preparation programs may be a challenge. With a more equal number of student teachers and interns, the findings of this study would have had greater strength because the results would have represented a balanced sample size.

The third limitation was related to the use of interviews only. Other methodologies could have been used such as a survey or focus groups. A survey would have been more anonymous. A focus group could have provided subjects a comfortable setting to discuss their experiences.

The fourth limitation in this study was the possibility that subjects knew that the interviewer was a staff member in the special education department and an academic advisor for the College of Education. They could have made the connection that the interviewer had relationships with faculty and college coordinators. It may have been problematic for them to discuss their experiences openly.

Study Implications

This study helps to fill the gap in the current research on teacher candidates who are enrolled in teacher preparation programs and specifically in dual mild/moderate, general education programs. Furthermore, it generates numerous implications for teacher preparation programs including: coursework, training for mentors, university mentors, and university faculty.

The teacher preparation coursework provided ample opportunities for collaboration which was also embedded in field experiences, practica for student teachers, and student teaching and internships. However, candidates did not report on the specific types of models in which they were engaged. Opportunities to learn about and implement the models of one teach-one observe, one teach-one drift, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching during coursework and in the field should be included throughout their personnel preparation program. Other implications involves the lack of support by general education mentor teachers.

The teacher candidates feel supported, they will be able to contribute to the classroom as an equal team member with their mentor teachers. Therefore, university programs should

consider a formal training program for mentors who supervise interns and student teachers. Important elements in the training might include: ongoing professional development about their roles, collaboration and co-teaching, frequent meetings (formally and informally), and analysis of classroom management practices.

The study acknowledges that teacher candidates created and implemented instructional plans. However, opportunities to practice co-teaching models in the delivery of instruction should be included in field experiences, student teaching and internships. Also, university faculty in teacher preparation programs should emphasize in-depth collaborative team roles and responsibilities including: parity, voluntary efforts, shared goals, shared responsibility and decision-making, shared resources, and accountability in coursework, field experiences, and to all faculty, especially university mentors.

And finally, teachers tend to work in silos and more emphasis needs to be on collaborating to achieve a common goal. Teacher candidates need to have more opportunities to collaborate to cultivate positive relationships and facilitate positive student outcomes. Therefore, university faculty in teacher preparation programs should acknowledge the benefits of collaboration as a way to gain knowledge and experience. Both pre-service and in-service training can be conducted. Diverse teams that include special and general education teachers, administrators, parents, students, and school psychologists would enhance the importance of relationships and student outcomes.

Suggestions for Future Research

It is evident through the findings from this study that the collaborative process is complex and linked to relationships and communities of educators from both teacher preparation programs and schools. Recommendations for future studies could prove beneficial for teacher

preparation programs, K-12 schools, and instructional and behavioral outcomes for all students.

Suggestions for future research include:

Given these findings, future research should investigate collaboration in a more significant way, either through a larger study using the same research design or through the use of other methods. Future research efforts might also do well to investigate any possible connections between the demographic data of subjects and their perceptions.

Future research should consider a study of teacher candidates' experiences beyond teacher preparation. This could be done by following them into student teaching and their first year of paid, full-time teaching. Data reported on follow-up studies about graduates would uncover how their preparation programs' coursework, field experiences, and student teaching impacted their knowledge and skills as full-fledged teachers.

The collaborative practices of both teacher candidates and their mentors should be investigated. More information is needed about the perspectives of those individuals and the extent to which they agree or disagree.

In dual early childhood and elementary special education programs in some universities in the U.S., often candidates get more general education training during their student teaching than they do in special education. Mentoring and collaboration are sometimes lopsided in different types of programs. All dual mild/moderate programs would benefit from review of their teacher preparation programs' special and general education coursework and field experience requirements.

Another interesting concept is the extent to which age/level of maturity might influence the quality of collaboration. Interns in this study presented a level of maturity in comparison to student teachers when they took initiatives to seek assistance and create positive relationships

with other colleagues. A comparisons between student teachers and interns would add to the body of research. Equal and larger numbers of students would provide more significant results.

Conclusion

What is clear from this study is that, on a preparation level, teacher candidates have shown that voluntary interactions occurred between other teacher candidates, faculty, college coordinators, special and general education mentors, other special and general education teachers, and principals as they worked towards the common goal of student achievement for all learners. Collaboration was a significant component of the program of study. The specific roles of a collaborator were not strongly present (parity, voluntary efforts, shared goals, shared responsibility and decision-making, shared resources, and accountability), nor were the co-teaching models of one teach-one observe, one teach-one drift, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching. Therefore, collaboration should be prioritized to move beyond the groundwork and into the in-depth implementation phase. An emphasis on collaboration with all stakeholders could increase understanding, knowledge, and skills within teacher preparation programs and K-12 schools. Future research can provide additional data about collaboration practices in K-12 schools.

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APPENDIX A

Email Invitation

Date:

Dear [name],

My name is Mary Geiring and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Special Education at The University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements for my degree in special education and I would like to invite you to participate.

The purpose of this study is to better understand teacher candidates' teacher preparation coursework and student teaching or internship experiences. The interview will take place at a mutually agreed upon place and last between 45-60 minutes. As a token of my appreciation, you will receive a \$20.00 gift card to the Target.

Your identity and recorded interview will be kept private and confidential. Specifically, a number will replace your name to ensure confidentiality. Recordings, documents, and notes will be stored in a locked computer or safe and destroyed upon study completion. Please know my study will be of great value to teacher preparation at the university and the field of special education.

If you have any questions, please contact me at mageirin@uno.edu or (504) 428-6899.

If you would like to participate in this study, please reply to this email and state "I would like to participate".

Whether you participate or not, grades at the university will not be affected in any way.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Kindest regards,

Mary Geiring

The University of New Orleans

mageirin@uno.edu

504.428.6899

APENDIX B

Letter of Consent

Dear [name],

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professors Jan Janz and Linda Flynn-Wilson in the College of Liberal Arts, Education, and Human Development at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to describe the phenomena of teacher candidates' experiences of collaboration during teacher preparation coursework and student teaching or internship placement. I am requesting your participation, which will involve a telephone call to schedule your interview at an agreed-upon location. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, the possible benefit of your participation is to inform and improve the universities teacher preparation program, other educators, and K-12 schools. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me, Mary Geiring at (504) 428-6899.

Sincerely,

Mary Geiring

By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, please contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-3990.

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Study: _____
Date: _____
Interviewer: _____

Time of Interview: _____
Location: _____
Interviewee: _____

Study Background

“The purpose of this study is to create an understanding of special education teachers’ collaborative experiences. I will collect your experiences by audio recording. I will then transcribe our conversation and enter the data into a Microsoft Word document. Your name will turn into a number for confidentiality purposes. You will then be provided with the opportunity to review and check your interview transcripts for accuracy through an emailed Microsoft Word document. Once you have completed the review, I ask that you send the document back to me for any adjustments. I will then review your experiences and see what I notice. I will also compare your experiences with other special education teachers’.

Interview Protocol

“All answers will be kept confidential. You may ask to stop the interview at any time or choose not to answer questions”.

Pre-Interview Questions/Demographic Data

1. What is your full name?
2. How many years have you been in the dual mild/moderate degree program?
3. What age category do you fall in?
 - a. 18-23
 - b. 24-27
 - c. 28-35

- d. 36-45
 - e. 45+
4. What is your ethnicity?
- a. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - b. African American
 - c. Hispanic
 - d. White
 - e. Other
 - f. Prefer not to respond

Beginning Interview

5. Tell me briefly what was most helpful about your student teaching or internship?
- a. What did you value most?
 - b. How did it prepare you for student teaching or the intern experience?
 - c. Could you provide examples?
6. Describe the coursework, field experiences, class activities, assignments that prepared you for collaborating with others.
- a. What did you learn about collaboration?
 - b. What skills did you develop for collaboration before you went into student teaching or internship? Could you provide examples?
 - c. How did these coursework and field experiences influence your attitude about collaboration? Could you provide examples?
7. Tell me about your relationship with your general education cooperating teacher in your student teaching/ internship.

- a. Were you able to work together and, if so, in what ways?
 - b. What was easy? (Give me an example)
 - c. What was difficult? (Give me an example)
 - d. What do you think would have made the relationships better? (Give me an example)
8. Tell me about your relationship with your special education cooperating teacher in your student teaching/ internship.
- a. Were you able to work together and, if so, in what ways?
 - b. What was easy? (Give me an example)
 - c. What was difficult? (Give me an example)
 - d. What do you think would have made the relationships better? (Give me an example)
9. Tell me about your role when you went into a general education classroom?
- a. Describe the quality of the relationship?
10. Describe the relationships you have had with other individuals in the school?
- a. Describe your skills when interacting with these individuals?

Conclusion

11. Do you have anything else you'd like to add to help me understand your experience as a special educator?

APPENDIX D
Letter to Participants

Date:

Dear [name],

Thank you again for your participation in my study. I appreciate your time devoted to the interview. This experience has been quite informative and now I would like to provide you with an opportunity to review your transcripts, make corrections, and/or provide additional information.

I have attached a Microsoft Word document of your responses to the interview questions for your review. If you feel that any part of the transcript is not accurate, please comment directly on the page. Your review of transcripts will assist me with summarizing what you have shared with me.

I have valued your participation in this research study and your willingness to share your experiences. Again, thank you so very much for your time and effort that made this research study possible.

Kindest regards,

Mary Geiring

Mary Geiring
Doctoral Candidate
College of Liberal Arts, Education, and Human Development
The University of New Orleans

Vita

The author was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts. She earned a B.S. in sociology from Sacred Heart University in 2002 and M. A. in Teaching from Sacred Heart University in 2006, and an M. S. in Special Education in 2009 from the University of Southern Connecticut State University. She joined the University of New Orleans graduate program to pursue a PhD in mild/moderate special education in 2014. She was the recipient of the Marcus B. Christian, Masters Doctoral Award.