UNDERSTANDING CO-TEACHING RELATIONSHIPS

by

JENNIE WADSWORTH VIRGIN

(Under the Direction of SALLY J. ZEPEDA)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. In particular, this study sought to learn the perspectives and patterns within the co-teaching experience. A qualitative approach was used to collect and analyze data from six teachers, in three co-teaching teams, through interviews and observations. Participants were interviewed independently and later with their co-teaching partner, and each co-teaching team was observed twice: once during a co-planning session and again during a co-taught lesson. All collected data were analyzed using the constant comparison approach, with reflective practices throughout the study in the form of a researcher's log in which descriptive data were recorded.

The findings were revealed through analysis of each co-teaching team as an individual case study, as well as a cross-case analysis. Each individual case study uncovered a number of themes relating to each co-teaching team's relationship. Among these findings were particulars about the way teachers planned together, the evidence of student-centered classrooms, and the power of long-term co-teaching relationships. It was through the cross-case analysis that three overall patterns of co-teaching at the selected site came forward. First, each co-teacher described

one “pinnacle” co-teaching partner that made for a highly memorable experience and became the metric to which all other co-teaching relationships were compared. Second, experiencing a negative co-teaching experience had a significantly damaging impact on the teachers involved. And finally, the reality of balancing the power and responsibilities between co-teachers at the selected site was specific to each individual partnership and looked different from other partnerships and what the research advocated.

INDEX WORDS: Co-Teaching, Inclusion, Collaboration, Shared planning time, Special education, English as a second language

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my Nana, Ellen Mapp Rue. In the month after your death, I enrolled in this doctoral program and met the man who is now my husband. Your influence clearly continues to be as significant as ever! Thank you for supporting me through my educational journey. Your love was felt throughout. I wish you were here to be impressed with me, as I know you would have been. I love you, and I miss you.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Co-teaching, defined here as two teachers planning and carrying out instruction in a collaborative way, is an interesting dynamic being used in American schools to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse group of students. The co-teaching teams referred to in this study included general education teachers and the special education or English as a second language teachers working with them to plan and carry out instruction.

Schools implement co-teaching models for a variety of reasons and with a range of results. Through co-teaching, the student-teacher ratio can be reduced (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010), students with exceptionalities can learn from their peers (Little, 2005), teachers can enhance learning by sharing their specific expertise (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000), and the stigma attached to teaching students in a specialized and separate setting can be reduced (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989). Many experts believe that in this era of high-stakes testing and standardized-based reforms, the benefits that co-teaching can offer should not be ignored (Friend et al., 2010; Little, 2005; Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010; Sims, 2008). Little (2005) explained, "With educational reform sweeping across the nation, many educators, myself included, feel that all of these forms of collaborative teaching may be key to resolving many of our nation's educational dilemmas" (p. 84). To ensure this resolution, the relationships between teachers engaged in co-teaching should be understood as these teachers share the workday, classroom space, and instructional duties. These extended interactions can be rewarding, challenging, or a combination of both.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of teachers who co-teach. The relationship and interactions between co-teachers who share classroom space and the children that occupy this space are worthy of study.

Within this chapter, the statement of the problem and the background of this study are explored, including the history of special education and English as a second language programs related to co-teaching. The purpose of the study is then presented. Next, the research questions, conceptual framework, and overview of the methods that will be used in the study are provided, along with the significance of the study, assumptions, definition of terms, and limitations. Finally, the organization of the dissertation is offered.

Statement of the Problem

In this interpretive case study, the researcher sought to learn about co-teaching relationships, in particular, the experience of teachers engaged in co-teaching in a large, suburban elementary school in the southeastern United States. Data were gathered by conducting individual and paired interviews, as well as observing the planning and co-taught lessons of six teachers engaged in co-teaching. These pairs included a general education teacher and the special education or English as a second language teacher who co-taught with them.

This study is significant because co-teaching is a method that is increasingly being used to meet the needs of students in American schools today. Friend et al. (2010) pointed out, "Co-teaching seems to be a vehicle through which legislative expectations can be met while students with disabilities at the same time can receive the specially designed instruction and other supports to which they are entitled" (p. 10). There is a correlation between an increase in co-teaching practices and the current standards-based movement in American education. The requirement and expectation for all students to have equal access to a curriculum with enhanced

rigor has become an incentive for co-teaching to occur (Friend et al., 2010; Little, 2005; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). The relevance of co-teaching is not only found in a special education setting; schools are also meeting the needs of students who speak English as a second language by co-teaching as well (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Carless & Walker, 2006; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007).

Research has documented various positive student results from co-teaching, including an increased interest in class (Gerber & Popp, 1999), better attendance records (Friend et al., 2010), higher self-perception (Pickard, 2010) and improved student grades (Jang, 2006; Friend et al., 2010). Teachers have also reported strong results for their own professional growth from co-teaching (Carless & Walker, 2006; Game & Metcalfe, 2009; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; Scheeler, Congdon, & Stansbery, 2010). Each of these factors contributes to the importance of understanding the relationships between teachers working in co-teaching teams.

Numerous studies have pointed out lists of factors that should be in place to take full advantage of the co-taught classroom. Among these are shared planning time (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003), honoring teacher voice in putting together teams (Craft, Kraig, & du Plessis, 1998; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008), professional development about co-teaching (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia, Switzer, & Brundrett, 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007), and simple compatibility (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). However, there are few studies that directly correlate co-teaching to improved performance on standardized tests (Friend et al., 2010).

This particular study allowed the researcher to examine the relationship between co-teachers in the context of their elementary school through interviews and observations. With an intention of gathering data from a wide range of participants who have differing levels of experience and work with different grade levels, the results offer a clearer view of the co-teaching perspectives and patterns at the selected site.

Background of the Study

Co-teaching as a pedagogical practice in schools can be traced to the increased understanding of students with special needs, and more recently, students who speak English as a second language. Before the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was passed in 1975, there was a general belief that students with disabilities could not be taught (Richardson & Parker, 1993). A decade later in 1986, the Department of Education passed the "Regular Education Initiative" that pushed school systems to begin forming partnerships between special and regular education programs and personnel (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989). While the practice was referred to at that time as "mainstreaming," the legislation saw that students with special needs were taught in classrooms alongside general education students. To meet their unique academic needs, a special education expert was included in the classroom along with the general education teacher to help the student. While the first steps of mainstreaming might have looked very differently than many co-teaching scenarios today, the potential for student achievement and teacher collaboration was recognized (Friend et al., 2010).

Legislation regarding the rights of students who speak a language other than English have changed the course of second language teaching and learning, and co-teaching has increased as a result (Carless & Walker, 2006; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008). On the heels of the Civil Rights movement, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) was passed in 1968 and stated that it is

permissible to use education funds to buy special materials and train teachers to help students who have limited English, but contained no requirement to teach them. Next, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) was passed in 1974 and prohibited states from discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin. The EEOA also required schools to eliminate language barriers for second language learners so they could fully participate in the school experience (Garcia, 2009). At that time, the widespread belief was that blended or bilingual instruction was best for students, a concept that has now moved out of many schools to be replaced by English-only immersion. This shift occurred mainly because of the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 (Garcia, 2009).

While the delivery of instruction by two teachers has been cited as beneficial to students and teachers (Friend et al., 2010, Gerber & Popp, 1999; Jang, 2006; Pickard, 2010; Scheeler et al., 2010), the prospect of bringing two teachers together to plan and carry out instruction certainly has its difficulties. Be it issues of control (Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007), differing communication styles (Conderman, Johnston-Rodriguez & Hartman, 2009), or different levels of content knowledge (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005; York-Barr et al., 2007), teachers put in the same room together and labeled "co-teachers" will not always reap the same positive results as others. At times, the best intentions of schools and systems by adding the practice of co-teaching are not fulfilled because of interpersonal issues between the teachers.

Much of the research and popular literature about co-teaching have yielded a list of factors that should be in place to encourage strong co-teaching relationships. For example, having a shared planning time is mentioned as vital to the success of co-teaching (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003).

However, when a school is juggling multiple schedules, student needs, and overworked teachers, a shared planning time cannot always be a reality. Also cited as important was allowing teachers to voice their opinions about the teacher they share a classroom with (Craft et al., 1998; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). And, like shared planning time, many of the daily realities of schools can get in the way of that desire. Looking across the studies about co-teaching, there is no clear magic bullet that makes or breaks a co-teaching team. As dynamic as any individual teacher can be, a pair of teachers can be just as complex and dynamic as they co-teach.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine qualitatively the experiences of teachers working in a co-teaching setting. The dynamic between co-teachers is unlike any that exists in the school building, and this relationship should be examined and understood. Using an interpretive framework, the research questions sought understanding of this dynamic between two teachers in which "[u]ltimately, both teachers must be responsible for student learning" (Nichols et al., 2010, p. 649). Through the use of semi-structured interviews and observation, insight to the perspectives and patterns within co-teaching teams was revealed.

This study is significant because it brings the focus specifically to the co-teachers, their relationships, and the perspectives and patterns within these partnerships. Focusing solely on student learning and thereby ignoring the adult interactions makes co-teaching relationships difficult (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sims, 2008). On the other hand, professional development can put teachers on the same page when combining their efforts (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007). Also, when given time to plan and to collaborate, studies have found that co-teachers report more positive results

(Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003).

General school climate also impacts co-teaching relationships. In a study examining co-teaching practices in both the U.S. and Australia, researchers found, "teachers attributed the success or failure of co-teaching to a school-wide commitment to inclusion and the extent of administrative and collegial support they received" (Rice & Zigmond, 2000, p. 192). Furthermore, having a voice in the selection of their co-teacher enhanced the experience for members. Teachers have a strong need to be heard, and matching up co-teachers is a particular time when teachers want their opinions honored (Craft et al., 1998; Nichols et al., 2010). Each of these factors contributes to the purpose of this study, which was to understand the perspectives and patterns of co-teachers at the selected site.

Research Questions

Because co-teaching is a practice that is increasingly used in schools today, a focus on building constructive relationships between teachers can prove beneficial to the schools using these partnerships. Fortifying the relationships between co-teachers, or at the very least offering the teachers tools to aid them in enacting their roles, could strongly impact the effects on students.

The researcher pondered a number of questions that in many ways helped to frame the present study. Here are a few of the overall questions that led the researcher on a clearer path in this study. Given teaching teams that are together for a long amount of time, at what stage can co-teachers be most effective? Are co-teachers able to put aside personal and professional differences to take full advantage of learning opportunities for students? Likewise, does their co-teaching relationship affect a teacher's impact on students? How can co-teaching bring out the

positive characteristics of each teacher? What is necessary for co-teaching relationships to be deemed "successful"? These questions are among many that come forward when considering co-teaching relationships.

The primary research questions that were examined in this study included:

1. What are the perspectives of general education teachers and special education or English as a second language (ELL) teachers regarding their pedagogical experience of co-teaching?
2. What are the patterns within the co-teaching team experience?

The research questions were answered using an interpretive inquiry approach through semi-structured interviewing and observations. Reflective practices were present throughout the study, in the form of fieldnotes and a researcher's log. The constant comparison method was used for analysis of the data, with an eye out for the themes uncovered in the review of the literature regarding in-school relationships, as presented in Chapter Two.

Conceptual Framework

This interpretive case study examining the experiences of co-teachers working together was approached with qualitative methodology, and more specifically through an interpretive lens. The assumptions within the interpretive frame indicate that each interaction is unique, worthy of study, and can construct within it a new perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Diaz, 2009). In this case, the relationships and dynamics found within a co-teaching team are vital to understand due to the increased use of co-teaching as a pedagogical practice. Particularly because of the research questions being asked, seeking data in a qualitative manner was most appropriate: "[q]ualitative research is great for addressing 'how' questions – rather than 'how many'; for understanding the world from the perspective of those studied (i.e.,

informants); and for examining and articulating processes" (Pratt, 2009, p. 856). Understanding the world from the perspective of co-teachers offered vital information to extend understandings of co-teaching and the variability of relationships between co-teachers.

The case study method was also particularly suitable for the research questions being asked because of the holistic understanding of co-teaching that was being sought (Diaz, 2009). More specifically, interpretive case study asks readers to create their own understandings from the presented data. Stake (2010) explained:

> [C]ase study researchers provide extended descriptions, a body of relatively incontestable data, a patterned account of durable and clear meanings…The researcher acts as an agent of the reader, supporting alternative interpretations by offering data in detail – data that contradict as well as data which support the researcher's conclusions. (p. 37)

The interaction between researcher, participant, and reader takes on a particularly interesting importance in interpretive case study. Furthermore, the accuracy of data, interpretation, and analysis are vital to build the confidence of the reader. The researcher therefore strived to establish "a confidence in the accuracy of observations and trustworthiness of interpretations" (Stake, 1994, p. 37). Uncovering the experiences of co-teachers working together was best carried out through an interpretive case study approach.

Overview of the Methods

Data collection began with a first round of one-on-one interviews with each of the six participants to learn about the roles and relationships in the selected co-teaching teams. Data analysis occurred at the same time as data collection; the researcher did an initial analysis of each transcribed interview and set of fieldnotes to adjust the interview guide as appropriate for the interview that followed. After the initial interview phase, the researcher observed each co-

teaching teams' planning sessions to learn additional information regarding experiences that may not have come forward in the interviews, while continuing to analyze collected observation data. Following the observation held during a planning session, the researcher observed a lesson co-taught by the teachers. A round of follow-up interviews followed, this time with both co-teachers together, to learn more about aspects of the co-teaching partnerships that came up in the first two phases of data collection and to get closer to answering the research questions. A researcher's log was present throughout the study for initial analysis and continuous reflection.

The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data collected. This method was particularly appropriate for the kind of data that was collected, and offered the researcher a way of "going back to data and forward into analysis" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 23). By coding and comparing the coded data to other data sets and to itself, the researcher developed a well-analyzed and data-rich presentation of the perspectives of teachers involved in co-teaching and the patterns of co-teaching at the selected site. When the researcher had analyzed all data using relevant theories and research questions, a complete interpretation of the data was written. This interpretation was shared with participants to do member checking. Once their response data had been collected, the researcher analyzed those additional data, and revised interpretations accordingly.

Significance of the Study

This interpretive case study, with the purpose of understanding the co-teaching relationship, is unlike the large number of studies about co-teaching that exist elsewhere. In conducting a review of the literature about co-teaching relationships, it became clear that these relationships are dynamic, can be positive or negative, and furthermore can greatly impact the day-to-day work of teachers as well as the achievement of students. While many studies state the

benefits of a co-taught classroom (Al-Saaideh, 2011; Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Carless & Walker, 2006), others examine the difficulty teachers have when working together in the same classroom (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Mastropieri et al., 2005), and others claim co-teaching is simply an artificial solution to larger problems in education (Armstrong, Armstrong, & Spandagou, 2009; Hulgin & Drake, 2009; Nichols et al., 2010). The researcher found few studies to date, however, which qualitatively examined the experiences of co-teachers in both a special education and English as a second language (ESL) context in an elementary school using an interpretive case study format. Furthermore, using the self-created observation protocols, the researcher was able to gain insight to the co-planning and co-teaching practices within the studied teams.

Pickard's 2010 case study in North Carolina, for example, can be contrasted to the study presented here in several ways. A primary difference is that the school system studied used a very formulaic, step-by-step method of introducing co-teaching within the school district, called the Welsh Inclusion Model (Pickard, 2010). This is in contrast to Westview Elementary School, the selected site, in that this particular school came into using a co-teaching model over many years of trial and error combined with a relatively slow, multi-year implementation. Now in its sixth year of inclusion, the selected site is at a particularly interesting stage for study. All of the six participants have been working in co-teaching teams for many years, although none have been co-teaching with their studied partner for more than one year.

In addition to the novelty of this study, co-teaching as a pedagogical practice is on the rise due to the current high-stakes nature of schools. This climate particularly targets students with disabilities and those who speak English as a second language, and a model that meets the legislative requirements and academic needs of students is vital for schools to adopt (Garcia,

2009; Karvonen, Wakeman, Browder, Rogers, & Flowers, 2011; Simon & Black, 2011). Lingo, Barton-Arwood, and Jolivette (2011) wrote, "[w]ith this focus on academic outcomes and access to the general curriculum, there is increased pressure for accountability in the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms" (p. 6). With two teachers responsible for planning, implementing, and carrying out instruction for these particular sub-groups of students, districts are hoping that their student needs are being met and that results will indicate the same.

Furthermore, the fiscal advantages of co-teaching have contributed to its increased use in public schools. Instead of paying for additional space and teachers, co-teaching allows schools to spread their resources a bit more (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999). Particularly in the developing world, Armstrong et al. (2009) noted, "inclusive education may in practice be a useful policy option that is less resource intensive than other approaches to the provision of services for children" (p. 32). It is the intent of this study to shed light on the co-teaching practices at the selected site. Considering an increase in the use of co-teaching nationwide, the patterns and perspectives presented here may offer implications to other school sites.

Assumptions

In this research study, it was assumed that teachers have adequate training and experience in their particular field to carry out the roles and responsibilities associated with their job title. It was also assumed that administrators arranged the co-teaching partnerships with a goal of increasing student achievement. Furthermore, it was assumed that teachers involved in this case study determined their method of co-teaching and norms for their relationship based on their own experiences. Because of this, one can also assume that the members understood what co-teaching

was within their own context and for their particular relationship, despite the variety of definitions and expectations that exist within this particular pedagogical practice.

Definition of Terms

There were several terms used throughout the dissertation that were important to understand. These included:

1. administrator – assistant principals or principals in the school building
2. co-teacher – a teacher who collaborates with, plans with, and teaches with another certified teacher; often this pairing is made up of a general education teacher and a teacher who has a specialized degree in special education or English as a second language (ESL), particularly at the selected site; there may be varying degrees of responsibilities according to the co-teaching partnership formed
3. co-teaching – the pedagogical practice of planning instruction and teaching together, models may vary
4. collaboration – two or more teachers working together to plan and implement instruction
5. CRCT – Criterion-Referenced Competency Test; the standardized test students in grades 3, 4, and 5, take each Spring at the selected site; it tests all the core subject areas such as Reading, English/Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies and determines promotion to the next grade level in some critical subject areas
6. EIP – Educational Instruction Program; an educational program implemented to help students who have earned a failing score on one or more parts of the Criterion-

Referenced Competency Test; students are given extra support in their academic areas of need

7. ESL – English as a Second Language instructional program, meets the needs of students who are learning English; is also called ESOL (English to speakers of other languages) and ELL (English language learners)
8. general education teacher – a teacher with certification to teach all subject areas in an elementary school, including reading, English/Language Arts, mathematics, science and social studies; this teacher spends the day with the same group of students and is mostly responsible for their academic performance
9. Special Education – an instructional program for students who have special academic needs; students who qualify for this program have been tested and determined to have a specific learning disability, other health impairment, or a behavioral disorder; there are other Special Education diagnoses as well, but students with those diagnoses are not found at the studied site
10. team teaching – according to Friend et al., (2010), team teaching was the original name of the practice that evolved to be co-teaching with some slight changes:

> [T]eam teaching generally included the delivery of a core lesson by a teacher deemed to be most expert among all available teachers on the identified topic…[t]his conceptualization of team teaching provided a model that called for educators to work together closely and divide teaching responsibility, even if not typically engaged in the simultaneous delivery of instruction. (p. 13)

Limitations of the Study

This study has geographic limitations, in that it focused on the work of co-teachers at a particular school in a particular county in the Southeastern United States. This study was also limited in the time span it covers. It is not a longitudinal study by nature, as the interview and observation period fell within a six-month time period.

Another limitation in this study is related to reflective practice. Because the researcher has a great interest in this topic of study for her own professional development, it cannot be denied that her opinions and experiences could emerge in the data collected and the analysis. Measures were taken to minimize the impact and included keeping a researcher's log and fieldnotes, as well as paying close attention to standards of reflective practice. In qualitative analysis, the researcher is not believed to be able to remove him or her self altogether from the data, but in fact pay attention to the connection and reflect on it. The researcher was continually aware of this closeness to the data and employed appropriate techniques throughout the research process.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation was organized in a traditional format. Chapter One was the introduction of the study wherein the researcher made a case for this research to take place, framed the study within the time period, and presented an overview for the study. Chapter Two reviewed the literature surrounding co-teaching relationships, including studies about different in-school relationships to broaden the information base. The review of the literature was organized with thematic analysis, wherein several themes that came forward through studies of in-school relationships were revealed. Chapter Three outlined the methods that were used in this research study. Chapter Four presented the data collected and analyzed using constant comparison

methods. Finally, Chapter Five offered the conclusions, implications, next steps, and recommendations arising from the study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Schools and school systems have relationships at their heart. Without the human interactions that make up the school day, schools would not exist. Be it student-to-teacher, teacher-to-parent, administrator-to-teacher, or teacher-to-teacher, schools run on the power of relationships. Comer (1995) said, “No significant learning can occur without a significant relationship” (Education Service Center). While this statement was referring to the relationship between teacher and student, the meaning can certainly be generalized to other in-school relationships. In examining the literature regarding co-teaching relationships, then a wider variety of relationships in schools, many themes emerged. Some of these themes can be found across scholastic relationships no matter the interaction. In fact, researchers investigating co-teaching teams, student teachers and their supervising teachers, and teachers that were peer coaches to one another expressed many of the same needs and concerns (Conderman et al., 2009; Msila, 2009; Murphy, Beggs, Carlisle, & Greenwood, 2004; Pickard, 2010).

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. These relationships are unique, as sharing the work day, physical space, and instructional planning with another teacher can add an extra layer to the duties and responsibilities of a teacher.

The primary research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What are the perspectives of general education teachers and special education or English as a second language (ESL) teachers regarding their pedagogical experience of co-teaching?
2. What are the patterns within the co-teaching team experience?

Examining the co-teaching experience with a focus on the perspectives and patterns found within these relationships was pursued through a qualitative, interpretive approach.

A definition of co-teaching as well as the variety of models used within co-teaching will be presented. Next, the legal history of the practice of co-teaching will be examined. Following this base of information, the relevant themes that came forward while analyzing the literature will be explained, such as the importance of effective professional development, issues of inequality, the necessity of common planning time, and compatibility. A strong research basis for each theme will be presented, exemplary cases will be examined, and cases that offer wisdom because of their failings will also be documented.

Co-Teaching Definition and Models

Co-teaching, for the sake of this dissertation, is defined as two teachers planning, carrying out, and reflecting on instruction with the intention to benefit the students in their classroom, most often those with special education or English as a second language (ESL) needs.

A number of experts have identified the most common models for deploying two teachers in the same classroom (Friend et al., 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sims, 2008). The common co-teaching models include: one teach, one assist; station teaching; parallel teaching; team teaching; and alternative models of co-teaching. The “one teach, one assist” model most often involves the general education teacher leading the lesson with the co-teacher

assisting. Scruggs et al. (2007), in a comprehensive look at studies regarding co-teaching norms and practices, found that this model was most often being used. The "station teaching" model involves students rotating through small learning groups, or centers, which are led simultaneously by the general education teacher and the co-teacher.

"Parallel teaching" occurs when the general education teacher and co-teacher are teaching the same content at the same time, often with the co-teacher in a small group and the general education teacher leading the larger class. The model of "team teaching" involves both teachers leading a whole class lesson together, exchanging ideas in front of students or taking turns delivering content. "Alternative models" of co-teaching would be any combination of the above models or another way of using two certified teachers in the classroom.

The History of Co-Teaching as a Response to Legislation

The relationships that exist within co-teaching teams can be multifaceted. They can greatly enhance or hinder a teacher's school year and can improve or confront a teacher's professional knowledge base. The use of co-teaching to meet the diverse needs of students is a growing trend in education, particularly in a time of high stakes for struggling students (Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). With this in mind, it is vital that the relationships between co-teachers are understood, and the possibilities for enhancing these partnerships are well documented. Looking into the histories of teaching students in Special Education and English as a Second Language programs gives insight to the history of the pedagogical practice of co-teaching, as outlined in Table 1.1. Additionally, examining the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 enriches the information base about co-teaching, as it encouraged more schools to use co-teaching to meet legislative requirements (Simon & Black, 2011).

Table 1.1

Significant Legislation Impacting Co-Teaching Practices

case or legislation name	**year**	**summary**	**impact on co-teaching**
Education for All Handicapped Children Act	1975	The statute required all schools to identify and provide special education services to all children with educational, developmental, emotional, and/or physical disabilities. It will later evolve to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which calls for students to be served in the least restrictive environment possible.	With a newfound understanding that students with disabilities can actually learn, the focus in the coming years will be how best to teach them.
Regular Education Initiative	1986	This legislation moved school systems away from having a dual system, one for special education students and one for general education students.	When the concept of "mainstreaming" came into schools, it was a natural step to employ two adults in the classroom to see that needs were being met. While this model may have looked quite different from the co-teaching models today, they were the beginning of the modern day partnerships.
Mendez v. Westminster	1946	In California, social equality became mandatory for students, regardless of lineage. This case focused particularly on Mexican-American students.	Recognizing that language minority students have a right to education will pave the way for decisions about how to best teach them.
Bilingual Education Act (Title VII)	1968	This act recognized that second language learners had unique needs and began suggesting how schools may teach these students.	Questions of whether to use native language in the instruction of bilingual students will continue to be a debate for years to come. Co-teaching most often currently uses English-only immersion.

Table 1.1 (continued)

Significant Legislation Impacting Co-Teaching Practices

case or legislation name	year	summary	impact on co-teaching
Lau v. Nichols Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA) – passed as a result of this case	1974	This court case shifted the focus from Mexican American students to other language minority groups and the resultant act classified language rights as vital to a just educational experience, so that students had no barriers to education due to language differences.	The English as a second language (ESL) programs in schools today were put in place after this Act, in a variety of ways. Today, one may find co-teaching as one of the models carried out in an ESL program.
Guadalupe Organization, Inc. v. Tempe Elementary School District No. 3	1978	A court in Arizona set the stage to allow individual states to decide the best model of education for their language minority students, with a nod to bilingual education.	States now decide how to teach their language minority students, with funding formulas and federal mandates in mind. Mostly because of these factors, the current climate has moved from a blended language approach to English-only, and often using a co-teaching model.
Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization (No Child Left Behind Act)	2001	This act impacted both special education and English as a second language instruction by increasing the spotlight on minority groups, insisting on equal access to grade level curriculum, and increasing the amount of standardized testing for all students.	Co-teaching has evolved in schools in recent years as a way to satisfy many of the legislative demands put forward by this act. For example, ensuring students with special needs equal access to the curriculum is a natural match to inclusionary, co-teaching practice.

Co-Teaching and Special Education

The history of co-teaching can be traced through special education legislation. Early in the United States educational history, students with special needs were either refused service because of their handicap or ignored in a classroom setting. There was a general belief that students with disabilities simply could not learn (Richardson & Parker, 1993). Later, vocational education was introduced as a way to educate some students with special needs, although still separating them from regular education students (Richardson & Parker, 1993). As attention began shifting to equality with the Civil Rights Act, the 1970s brought some focus to recognizing the right to a free and public education for all children, including those with disabilities. Stainback, Stainback, and Bunch (1989) asserted that this movement was the natural sequel to *Brown v. Board of Education* of 1954. While the Civil Rights movement was calling for schools to "desegregate," the movement for students with disabilities later took on the vocabulary of "integration," notable because of the similarity in terminology, but with differing and slightly evolved connotations (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989).

Education for All Handicapped Children Act.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) was implemented, asserting that students with disabilities should be taught in the least restrictive environment possible. This act paved the way for inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education classroom, a practice that led to co-teaching. As with any widespread change in legislation, it would take time for states to begin supplementing schools for programs to accommodate children with special needs (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989). The law required all schools to identify and to provide special education services to any child with educational, developmental, emotional, and/or physical disabilities. Referred to as the "Bill of

Rights" for children with handicaps, the EHA standardized special education practices throughout the nation and significantly changed the landscape of special education in American schools.

Regular Education Initiative.

In 1986, the Department of Education began a Regular Education Initiative (REI), intended for "encouraging special education and other special programs to form a partnership with regular education" (Stainback, Stainback & Bunch, 1989, p. 11). At the time this undertaking was known as "mainstreaming," and would change the way teachers and the general public viewed the abilities of students with special needs. The authors Stainback, Stainback, and Bunch (1989) point out three main reasons for "mainstreaming" that were used as arguments at the time. First, there was simply no need for a dual system: "*All* children have unique needs that must be met" (Flynn & Kowalczyk-McPhee, 1989, p. 30, emphasis in the original). Secondly, a dual system is inefficient and unrealistic. A young adult with special needs explained, "I graduated…completely unprepared for the real world…Believe me, a segregated environment just will not do as preparation for an integrated life" (Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1987, p. 4). Lastly, a dual system caused inappropriate attitudes in which children with special needs are viewed as charity (Stainback, Stainback, & Bunch, 1989).

The goal of the legislation and shift in service model is best expressed by Forest (1985) who optimistically reported, "Hopefully, by the year 2000, there will be no more special education but only an educational system that serves all children" (p. 40). For this goal to be attained, schools had to work out a system to give all students the individualized support they needed to succeed. The move to mainstreaming, therefore, marked the beginning of a system that

could support and encourage co-teaching. Little (2005) points out what she sees as benefits of the co-teaching model:

> Children with special needs glean useful information from interactions with 'regular education' students, and by being placed in heterogeneous learning communities, children of all levels can improve academically. They typically achieve more in co-taught classrooms than in stereotypical self-contained special education classrooms. (p. 91)

As the view of students with special needs evolved, the services that were offered to them also changed.

Co-teaching allows for collaboration between teachers, a support system for students, and the more specialized attention that all students need. As pointed out by Friend et al. (2010), "these classroom partnerships illustrate the potential and complexity of collaboration as contemporary special education evolves to more deliberately and effectively integrate with general education" (p. 11). The move from the widespread ignoring of students with special needs and denying them an education to offering vocational education and apprenticeships (Richardson & Parker, 1993) to finally recognizing that all students need and deserve individualized support, this nation has come a long way in helping students of all types. Co-teaching is one model that schools are using to manage this shift in expectations and services.

Co-teaching and English As a Second Language

Students who speak English as a second language are another group whose history is important when considering the progression of co-teaching in the United States, as this demographic is increasingly being taught through co-teaching. From the 2002-2003 school year to the 2007–2008 school year, the number of second language learners went up from 3.6 million to 4.3 million (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2012). Ideas and

issues surrounding how best to meet the academic needs of second language learners have been discussed in the United States since the 1940s. While the country has made progress in such aspects as integrating schools with students who have diverse language needs, practices such as bilingual instruction have become less prevalent, despite the near-universal nature of it in the 1970s (Bredas & Hahn, 2005; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Co-teaching has instead been increasingly put in place in recent years to help second language learners.

Mendez v. Westminster.

The quest for equal rights for students who speak English as a second language can be traced back to 1946, when a class-action lawsuit representing over 5,000 Mexican American students was filed in Orange County, California. The case *Mendez v. Westminster* pre-dated the *Brown v. Board* 1954 decision by eight years, and many scholars believe it paved the way for the overturning of *Plessy v. Turner* of 1896 (Bredas & Hahn, 2005; Valencia, 2005). At the time in California, students of Mexican descent were sent to their own schools apart from their American and English-speaking peers. When a Mexican immigrant father in California attempted to enroll his children in the local school, his request was denied and the court proceedings began (Valencia, 2005). The notion that separating students by race or linguistic abilities is unjust was first questioned in this trial, the first of many debating similar issues.

Examination of the case indicated that the struggles of Mexican Americans have a long history:

> The segregation of Mexican American students in the Southwest continued to increase into the 1890s and spilled over to the 20th century. By the beginning of the 1930s, the educational template for Mexican American students—one of forced, widespread segregation, and inferior schooling—was formed. (Valencia, 2005, p. 395)

Judge McCormick in the *Mendez* ruling declared that, "A paramount requisite in the American system of public education is social equality. It must be open to all children by unified school association regardless of lineage" (*Mendez v. Westminster*, 1946). With this ruling and a beginning focus on minority rights, changes would soon follow in the way minority-language students were educated.

Bilingual Education Act.

In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act (Title VII) was passed in the wake of the Civil Rights Movement. The act stated that it was permissible to use education funds to buy special materials for students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and to specially train teachers for their unique language needs, but contained no *requirement* to teach LEP students. Mostly regarded as a symbolic legislative act because it did not mandate instruction for second language learners, Title VII, an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA), brought the spotlight to Limited English Proficient (LEP) students and recognized that their difficulties in schools are unique (Bredas & Hahn, 2005).

It was not until several years later that the specific instructional needs of second language learners were considered by the federal government. While a mandate for providing students with both primary and secondary language instruction was not included in the bill, the concept of bilingual education was adopted by many states and systems as a result: "While the role of native language instruction was not specifically addressed until the 1974 reauthorization … all of the programs funded under the BEA in its early years featured native language instruction" (Garcia, 2009, p. 90). The trend of native language or bilingual instruction would change drastically over the next 40 years to a time when most second language instruction is currently English-only immersion with the support of a specialized teacher, at times, using a co-teaching model.

Lau v. Nichols.

In 1974, the United States was reminded that second language instruction was not an issue pertaining only to Latino students, with the Supreme Court case *Lau v. Nichols*. Chinese parents in San Francisco filed a class-action lawsuit because some students in the district were receiving additional English language classes, while others were not. The parents felt this was in violation of their Fourteenth Amendment rights, and the Supreme Court decided "the district must take affirmative steps to rectify the language deficiency in order to open its instructional program to these students" (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). By classifying language rights as vital to a just educational experience, this decision began the federal government's role in regulating limited English proficient (LEP) and bilingual education programs (Garcia, 2009; Nelson, 2007). This case indicated yet another shift in thinking by the American public about language's tie to identity. The *Lau v. Nichols* ruling denoted that language was so connected to identity that denying someone adequate linguistic instruction was as discriminatory as making decisions based on race.

The Equal Educational Opportunities Act (EEOA), passed in 1974 as a result of the *Lau* decision, expanded inequity issues faced in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by prohibiting states from discriminating against students on the basis of race, color, sex, or national origin. The EEOA required schools to eliminate language barriers for students with limited English so they could fully participate in the school experience (Garcia, 2009). In addition to passing this act, Congress amended the Bilingual Education Act, or Title VII, to state explicitly the components of a bilingual education program, allotted federal funding for its maintenance, and made it a requirement for schools to provide a program for its Limited English Proficient (LEP) students (Bredas & Hahn, 2005). The Bilingual Education Act indicated that blended

language instruction, or instruction that uses the native language of a student, is the most appropriate and should be used when possible.

Schools in the United States today most often teach second language learners through English immersion because the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 completely eliminated any mandate for bilingual education. Instead, it focused only on "attaining English proficiency" (Garcia, 2009, p. 91). While co-teaching was a step toward a more individualized version of the English-only immersion model, it was quite a step away from the bilingual classroom of the 1970s. This shift has its fair share of critics who value primary language instruction and the development of both native and secondary languages simultaneously (Bredas & Hahn, 2005; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia, 2009). The 2001 reauthorization of the ESEA changed many aspects of education, and these changes continued to shape the way language minority students were taught.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) significantly changed education in the United States, and the programs for students with special needs and those who speak two languages proved to be no exception. With an increased focus on subgroup achievement, the legislation brought the spotlight onto these two groups in particular, and the results have changed instructional models, expectations, and assessment practices, but it is still unclear whether it has had a positive impact on student achievement (Garcia, 2009; Karvonen et al., 2011; Simon & Black, 2011).

A challenge in particular for special education programs was the mandate by the NCLB legislation to create and use alternative assessments for students with special needs to assess their learning of the grade level curriculum (Karvonen et al., 2011). Creating and using alternative

assessments have been challenging for many special education teachers, as well as learning how to "provide meaningful academic instruction for students with significant cognitive disabilities" (Karvonen et al., 2011, p. 4). The requirement for equal access to curriculum and contexts for students with special needs was a novel idea at the time, and states were given authority to manage that change in their own ways (Simon & Black, 2011). This "shift in traditional ideology and practices related to students with disabilities" lent itself to inclusionary and co-teaching practices in many states (Simon & Black, 2011, p. 162).

To make this shift to higher stakes and higher expectations, many schools adopted co-teaching. Alongside this adoption was a necessity for professional development addressing both co-teaching practices as well as how to offer students access to the general education curriculum (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sims, 2008). Differentiation strategies were also increasingly put into place, so that students with a variety of academic needs could be taught appropriately (Simon & Black, 2011). While many cite the benefits of focusing on a subgroup that was once wholly ignored, there were also questions of realistic expectations.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) had different effects on students who speak English as a second language. With its movement away from bilingual education, push for acquiring English as quickly as possible, change in funding formulas for ELL programs, and rigorous standardized testing, the Act worked to overturn much of the progress made by legislation regarding second language learners since the *Mendez* case of 1946. It can be conceded that the NCLB Act brought accountability to the forefront of instruction of all students, including those of a language minority. Gándara and Contreras (2009) reported, "No longer could schools bury the inequalities in student outcomes within test score averages" (p. 48). However, there is the idea that despite all the changes, not much has actually evolved in the academic lives of

second language learners. Garcia (2009) aptly shared, "For students in non-English-speaking families…educational 'reform'…particularly since the NCLB legislation, has had almost no impact; 6 years into the NCLB reforms, wide achievement gaps persist between these students and their English-only peers" (p. 83). Despite all the changes, the academic impact appeared to be minimal.

Additionally, the instructional decisions made for second language learners also saw a drastic change. Garcia (2009) wrote of the programs adopted since the advent of No Child Left Behind and offered, "They are subtractive in nature, ignoring the linguistic resources that bilingual students bring to the classroom, and disregard responsive attributes of programs that work well for these students" (p. 94). While co-teaching is a research-based pedagogical choice for students who speak two languages, there are many critics who believe the altogether abandoning of bilingual programs was a mistake (Bredas & Hahn, 2005; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Garcia, 2009).

Another high impact result of NCLB for both subgroups was the increase in standardized testing for all students, including those with a language minority status and with special needs. With greater accountability for all subgroups came this increased responsibility for assessing student growth—even at times to the detriment of student learning:

> The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has even fostered the idea that by testing these students repeatedly and holding their schools accountable for those test scores, schools can rise to the challenge and do a better job – as though students were failing simply because no one had pointed it out. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 6)

While raising the bar and expectations for all students cannot be denied as important to progress academically, the level of expectation can at times be seen as extreme. The long and shifting

history of both the special education and English as a second language legislation in the United States has led our country to supporting students by increasingly using the method of co-teaching. While the results of co-teaching have been varied and school systems have looked to improve the process, the practice seems for many systems to be one of the best options for supporting students in high-stakes environments.

Professional Development

A theme that came forward in the literature examining in-school relationships, particularly those between co-teachers, was the benefit and necessity of effective professional development for teachers. In fact, effective professional development is cited as the key piece to enhance all aspects of the scholastic relationship, in particular for building common goals and intentions (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007). Professional development in its many forms, be it a more traditional format, job-embedded (Pickard, 2010), or through peer coaching and evaluation, (Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005) enhances the relationships within a school more than any other endeavor, and is a necessary step in any move toward change. The following section takes a close look at the role professional development plays in a co-teaching relationship.

Job-Embedded Professional Development

Professional development, or the learning that takes place by teachers while working in the field, can take a variety of forms. Perhaps the most commonly occurring within co-teaching teams is labeled "job-embedded," in that it occurs throughout the workday. Zepeda (2008) wrote about the environment needed for effective job-embedded learning when she emphasized, "Job-embedded learning can be achieved more readily if learning opportunities are efficient, relevant, and yield mastery of skills and increases in knowledge that can be applied immediately to the

work of teaching" (Zepeda, 2008, p. 142). An example of this job-embedded learning specific to co-teaching was found in a case study from a school in North Carolina moving to a co-teaching model for its special education students (Pickard, 2010).

The professional development plan used in the Pickard (2010) study was a multiphase process by which teachers learned to teach in an inclusion model while considering individual student needs and using the strengths of both teachers effectively. Through a series of phases, teachers were gradually released into their own inclusion teams, wherein they would continue to grow as collaborative teachers (Pickard, 2010). Pickard (2010) wrote about the observations carried out after the professional learning experiences and explained, "the researcher observed strong elements of collaboration whereby both teachers were directly involved in the teaching process…it was difficult for the observer to determine who the special education teacher was from the regular classroom teacher" (p. 268). This equal sharing of responsibility and role is a goal for many co-teaching programs, and one that proves difficult to attain in reality. At times and perhaps more often, teams are battling inequality throughout the workday (Al-Saaideh, 2011; Antia, 1999; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sims, 2008; Rice & Zigmond, 2000).

The results of this study in North Carolina further indicate that both teachers and students benefit from planned, meaningful job-embedded professional development, including unique evidence of the effective nature of inclusion on test scores. Pickard (2010) reported, "data…are revealing that when inclusionary practices are incorporated into the regular classroom, special needs students are showing both academic improvement as well as improvement on state-wide tests*"* (p. 270). The Pickard study was one of very few that found a positive correlation between co-teaching and standardized test scores, whereas more studies pointed to social and academic benefits not measured in a standardized way (Friend et al., 2010). Furthermore, there was an

increase in the positive attitudes of regular education students about their special education peers (Pickard, 2010).

In a study by Wischnowski, Salmon, and Eaton (2004), researchers focused on the implementation of a co-teaching model in a rural school district and the assessment of that model. In this case, professional development took on a few forms, such as observing other schools using the model and participating in traditional in-service training. Each form worked to develop common purpose and uniform implementation across the school (Wischnowski et al., 2004). This high level of professional development resulted in multiple positive outcomes, including student achievement growth, decreased behavioral concerns, students' feelings of acceptance by peers, and overall parent satisfaction (Wischnowski et al., 2004). Professional development enhances the relationship between co-teachers by building common intentions and it can be argued that it offered results that could not be achieved otherwise.

Peer Coaching

As another practice-changing endeavor, engaging in peer coaching can enhance the work of teachers while connecting them to the larger structure that is vital to keep a teacher's craft current. South African researcher Msila (2009) undertook a study in which he examined the impact that peer coaching can have on the classroom and the relationships within a school. In this previously low-achieving school, incorporating peer coaching was first marked by forming new teacher relationships, a highly beneficial undertaking. Msila (2009) reported, "Forming teams in schools is one of the best ways that would ensure breaking teacher isolation and indifference which are the two culprits against teacher change and advancement" (p. 556). This change to a peer evaluation model at the studied site was far from painless. Rather, like many

changes in schools that alter the relationship structure, it was met with resistance and at times anger.

Despite the initial growing pains, peer coaching proved to create powerful and practice-changing relationships within the school. Based on the idea that "[w]ithout professional collaboration, teachers will hardly get the necessary zeal and motivation," these collaborative teams met regularly to discuss what was observed, formed solutions to specific problems, and connected with one another in a way that was not done before (Msila, 2009, p. 549). The forming of strong relationships in the work setting actually makes the school a better place for all involved, a powerful concept best stated by Msila's (2009) summary: "When teachers fail to find working relationships, they cannot achieve successful schools" (p. 549). This concept of feeling linked to the larger structure can be seen when teachers have access to meaningful relationships at school. This, in conjunction with a move from isolation, proved in Msila's (2009) study to change teachers' practice and, therefore, to change school climate.

Furthermore, the relationships formed went a long way to clarify a revised common goal for the school. The research was based on the assumption that many of the involved teachers needed to "move from being teachers to be learners," a novel goal for the school at the time (Msila, 2009, p. 543). The peer evaluations carried out initially revealed a lack of consistency among and between teachers in teaching styles, philosophies, and even in their interpretation of school-wide initiatives (Msila, 2009). Over time, however, the implementation of peer observations positively affected the teachers' common attitudes toward learning and evaluation, the norms in classrooms, and shifted the general school culture by introducing a more collaborative form of leadership.

In another study focused on peer coaching, Little (2005) found that when organized appropriately in schools, the opportunity to learn from peer teachers can have great impact. As a nonthreatening form of professional development, peer coaching allows teachers to learn something new in an impactful way. Little (2005, p. 87) asserted, "Peer coaching… provides educators the opportunity to access a natural support system at their school." In her article, Little (2005) proposed a reciprocal peer-coaching model that included a pre-conference, observation, then a post-observation conference to increase the comfort level and knowledge base of teachers. This cycle is particularly powerful when we consider that "most teachers reported a greater likelihood of trying new practice after collaborating with a colleague" (Kohler, Crilley, Shearer, & Good, 1997, p. 241). This mutual benefit can be a powerful factor in the lives of teachers facing change.

Using peer coaching as a catalyst for change allows schools to streamline common goals with the benefit of the mutual satisfaction that comes from learning from and with a colleague. Msila (2009) wrote, "effective managers of change share not only resources but their experience as well. Peer evaluation is one of the most critical aspects of effective change management in schools" (p. 545). Again, the nonthreatening atmosphere offered by a trusted colleague helps teachers realize that the greatest resources for professional development are sometimes teaching in the same room.

Collaborating with a colleague, no matter the relationship, is an endeavor that can have a great impact on the teacher's work and the school environment as a whole. Through collaboration, clarity can be achieved, problems can get solved, and, perhaps most importantly, teachers can feel supported. As Hildenbrand (2009) pointed out, "Research has recognized that collaboration is a skill that enhances the expertise of all teachers—in fact, it is identified as one

of the most important competencies for both teachers and administrators" (p. 11). Co-teachers can provide professional support for one another. Magiera and Zigmond (2005) wrote, "Ideally, co-teachers collaborate in all facets of the educational process" (p. 79). In a model co-teaching relationship, the collaborative support can be seen in a classroom on a regular basis. Strong relationships in schools can provide members with support that enhances practice through collaboration, as well as connections for teachers to the larger community that is available at schools but at times overlooked (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999). Effective professional development programs are a vital link to building strong, mutually beneficial relationships.

Inequality

There are certainly two sides to every story, and co-teaching can be an incredibly trying experience for many teachers if both parties are not in agreement about the many aspects of education that come up in a typical co-teaching relationship. Despite the benefits suggested by sharing the classroom with another teacher, simple compatibility and mutual respect play a large role in the level of success each co-teaching team will experience.

In addition to the control issues and differing levels of content knowledge, inequality in a co-teaching relationship can manifest itself in difficulties with communication. Conderman et al. (2009) identified not understanding a co-teacher's communication style to be a paralyzing factor in a relationship. They wrote, "Understanding and respecting each other's preferred mode and method of communication fosters mutual respect, reduces the likelihood of being misunderstood, and maximizes collaboration" (Conderman et al., 2009, p. 5). Communication differences and mismatched communication styles can be critical factors when relationships are seen as unequal.

Issues of Control

Differences of intentions, levels of control, and degrees of investment were blamed for a failed co-teaching relationship portrayed in a 2010 study carried by researchers Gürgür and Uzuner. In the studied school, the general and special education co-teachers began the endeavor with differing levels of understanding about co-teaching, its various models, and how it was to be carried out in their classrooms. The school year began on a negative note when the special education teacher gave his general education co-teacher a booklet to read about co-teaching. When the co-teacher chose not to read the literature, both were frustrated by the other's assumptions and expectations (Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010). When teachers do not have the same intentions as their co-teaching partners, it is difficult to foresee a successful working relationship. Gürgür and Uzuner (2010) reported, "there is an inconsistency between the intention of the teacher and her effort to obtain the necessary knowledge to achieve her intention" (p. 317). In this particular co-teaching relationship, it was difficult to bridge the gap between two teachers with highly differing intentions yet who were expected to work together.

The inequities that came forward in Gürgür and Uzuner's (2010) analysis indicate just one example of how frustrating and unconstructive co-teaching experiences can be. In this study, the general education teacher played the role as leader, while the special education teacher as visitor, instead of being equals (Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010). The researchers reflected on this point: "First, the teacher did not want to relinquish control of the class. Powerful individuals in the culture of fear are not open to innovation and thus create barriers against the development because they fear they will lose their power" (Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010, p. 320). This interaction is not uncommon and is often cited as an issue that comes in the way of successful co-teaching experiences. The authors Scruggs et al. (2007) conducted a meta-synthesis of qualitative research

about co-teaching and found that, across multiple studies, special education teachers were often used as helpers in the classroom, playing a less dominant role than the classroom teacher.

In a study by Antia (1999), a special education teacher at a school for the deaf described her role in the inclusive classroom, "I'm an aide sometimes, I'm an interpreter sometimes, and sometimes I'm a teacher" (p. 211). Because most of the co-taught classes observed and studied used whole-group instruction most of the time, the various models of co-teaching were not used and the "one teach-one assist" model tended to dominate (Scruggs et al., 2007). In fact, Rice and Zigmond (2000) found each of the 17 co-teaching teams they studied to be under-using the possibilities that co-teaching can offer. They explained their findings:

> In all of our interviews and classroom observations we did not find a model of co-teaching that fully met the criteria we set: a shared teaching space with a diverse student group, shared responsibility for planning and for instruction, and substantive teaching by both co-teaching partners. (Rice & Zigmond, 2000, p. 196)

A high degree of collaboration and compatibility is needed to make strong co-teaching teams, and it seems some partnerships are too overwhelmed or blocked by other factors to strive for that level.

In some cases, the co-teaching experience was so negative and control-driven, things escalated quickly. Gürgür and Uzuner (2010) reported, "A person who has the authority performs his/her work by disregarding the other person who feels inferior, where the former shows no respect to the latter and ignores his/her contribution" (p. 321). These issues of control can be difficult to overcome and have been cited to work against positive in-school relationships. While many interactions within schools have the intention of "building a strong and parity-based

relationship," it is no secret that this is not always the case (Friend et al., 2010, p.11). Negative and unproductive relationships can significantly tarnish a teacher's professional life.

Content Knowledge

However surprising as it might be, having an adequate amount of content knowledge is often not a requirement to be placed in a co-teaching partnership (Al-Saaideh, 2011; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Mastropieri et al., 2005; York-Barr et al., 2007). According to the research, frustrations can occur when one teacher has more knowledge than the other. In the case study by Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008), it was found that when co-teaching teams were incompatible, it was in a number of areas including "ability in specific academic content areas" (p. 125). In this study, an algebra teacher frustratingly tells about a special education co-teacher who has such little content knowledge that he feels it necessary to give her lessons and assign her homework as though she were an extra student. Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) summarized, "successful co-teaching relationships are based on mutual respect and effective communication on the part of both professionals…these two professionals appear to have different perspectives regarding roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching relationship" (p. 125). This difference in perspective and knowledge base works against success in co-teaching relationships.

In a study in Jordan about exploring the possibilities for team teaching in vocational education, Al-Saaideh (2011) found that a major roadblock to initiating a team teaching model was differing levels of content knowledge. The model examined in the study was multi-disciplinary, and required teachers to effectively teach a wide range of subjects. The participants voiced their opinions that this task could not be expected of everyone. Furthermore, they feared the consequences of team teaching in a situation where the other teacher had less knowledge than

they did. Not trusting a co-worker to have the same level of expertise about a given topic can be an obstruction to forming the partnership needed for effective co-teaching (Al-Saaideh, 2011).

Shared Planning Time

Another concern reported in the research examining in-school relationships was the importance of having time for teachers to communicate, plan, and reflect on their work together, such as during a shared planning time (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003). Quite simply, time set aside for communication between teachers enhances the relationship of teams (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). A case study by Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) followed a school that was moving into a co-teaching model for its students with special needs. An issue that came up in these newly formed co-teaching partnerships was regarding how and when co-teachers took on which roles and responsibilities, as well as deciding on task management between the two teachers. In many cases, neither the classroom teacher nor the special education teacher felt comfortable delegating responsibilities to the other, and the results were frustrating on both ends.

Isherwood and Barger-Anderson (2008) listed "essential components within a co-teaching relationship. They included: (a) interpersonal communication, (b) physical arrangement, (c) familiarity with curriculum, (d) curriculum goals and modifications, (e) instructional planning, (f) instructional presentation, (f) classroom management, and (g) assessment" (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008, p. 124). Productive time spent planning together would contribute to most of these components, such as interpersonal communication, physical arrangement, instructional planning, presentation, classroom management, and assessment. Valuing this time together as job-embedded professional development would further augment the experiences of both teachers and students. Pickard (2010), a researcher who observed strong co-

teaching teams, wrote, “The sharing of lesson plans, as well as the facilities and resources, laid the foundation for a successful inclusionary team and student success” (Pickard , 2010, p. 270). For communication between members of a scholastic team to be enhanced, teachers need time together to work through differences, understand one another, in addition to planning and reflecting on instruction.

Communication

Communication matters—and matters significantly—in relationships. When considering professional relationships, there is much to be said for the power of communication to enhance and improve the work experience. In a study of co-teaching in a second-language learning context, the teachers noted the power of this dynamic:

> A Grade 1 teacher stated, ‘Nothing we are going to say is as important as the conversations we are having.’…it reflects and honors the localized, ground-level learning processes required to advance practice in particularly complex social organizations…[T]he most substantial ingredient for success lies within the intellectually and interpersonally adaptive interactions – the learning conversations – among team members themselves. (York-Barr et al., 2007, p. 326)

Without time reserved for teachers to communicate, the potential benefits of strong in-school relationships are diminished.

Communication enhances relationships, and understanding and respecting the communication style of a partner teacher or team member can enhance compatibility in the relationship. When reviewing the literature about best practices for co-teaching, Conderman et al. (2009) recognized the importance of honoring another person’s communication style. They advocated and supported the idea that “the challenge is to communicate not in your preferred

manner, but in the manner preferred by your co-teacher" (Conderman et al., 2009, p. 5). When teacher styles, perspectives, and beliefs vary most significantly, the co-teaching relationship often does not prosper (Conderman et al., 2009). Showing commitment to the cause of collaboration, however, benefits the team greatly because "Understanding and respecting each other's preferred mode and method of communication fosters mutual respect, reduces the likelihood of being misunderstood, and maximizes collaboration" (Conderman et al., 2009, p. 5). Not only does this compromise benefit the team, but it can also aid in professional growth. While this concept of considering a partner's communication style may seem a natural compromise for a marriage, it may not be as easy to pursue in a professional setting where the level of investment is likely less significant.

Game and Metcalfe's (2009) study of team teaching in the college setting affirmed that open-minded communication helps educators grow. They reported, "The meeting of what is common and what is different is … interest, inspiration, engagement, wonder, fascination, curiosity and relevance. Through meeting the differences of others, we meet the differences in ourselves" (Game & Metcalfe, 2009, p. 47). Similarly, Carless and Walker (2006), in studying the collaborative pairings of local teachers with native English speakers in bilingual education programs around the world, found that the most successful relationships exhibited "sufficient sensitivities, both cultural and interpersonal, and each party is able to show some respect and actual accommodation for the views and actions of their counterparts" (Carless & Walker, 2006, p. 473). Communication increases open-mindedness and, once the communication patterns are honed, the benefits to a team can be dramatic. Without time for these understanding to be built, however, the possibilities are decidedly limited.

Learning novel ideas from other teachers results in changed practice because "Often, the exchange of ideas between teachers allows for more risk taking and the use of innovative strategies on the part of each teacher to benefit all students in the classroom" (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008, p. 10). The benefit of having another teacher in the classroom can offer a different perspective from what one can imagine when working alone. Game and Metcalfe, in a 2009 study of team teaching at the university level, noted:

> [t]he presence of other teachers as witnesses allows the teacher to get out of themself [sic] and see the world through the eyes of others. Team teaching that is dialogic is based on an open flow of feedback that encourages teachers to be aware of how they are responding to the class. Teachers teach each other. (p. 49)

Strong communication between team members can certainly prove a lofty goal when perspectives are so varied. However difficult to attain, sustained communication is near impossible without the precious commodity of time. Schools without shared planning time for members of a team simply cannot expect the same level of communication as schools that see it as a priority.

Reflection

An advantage of being in a co-teaching partnership is the increased possibility for reflection and self-evaluation because of the fact that another teacher is directly and regularly connected to daily work. Effective co-teaching teams have good relationships, strong communication skills, and are highly reflective (Game & Metcalfe, 2009; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Positive relationships go deeper than simply getting along in a classroom. Strong results come from planning together and then jointly reflecting on powerful lessons that meet the needs of students (Mastropieri et al., 2005). As pointed out by Airisian and Gulickson (2006) about in-

school relationships in general, all "teachers must reflect on their practice to understand, critique, and modify it; reflection is a central aspect of the process of constructing knowledge and developing professionally" (Airisian & Gulickson, 2006, p. 190). Reflection increases the quality of a teacher's craft, increases compatibility, and therefore has the potential to enhance relationships in a school setting. It is not enough to simply commit to reflective practices. Having time set aside for this endeavor makes it far more likely to occur.

Game and Metcalfe (2009) researched co-teaching in the college setting and pinpointed reflective dialogue as most impactful on the success of this model. They even asserted that co-teaching without dialogue is ineffective and wasteful (Game & Metcalfe, 2009). The authors explained the power of dialogue this way: "the pedagogic potential of team teaching only becomes apparent when its dialogic possibilities are recognized" (Game & Metcalfe, 2009, p. 46). This dialogue makes co-teachers feel whole and effective, and more connected to their practice. Whether it is in debriefing a lesson taught, planning for one coming up, or analyzing student work, co-teachers may out of necessity reflect or self-evaluate on an even more consistent basis than general education teachers working in isolation. However, in a difficult co-teaching relationship, frustration can quickly overshadow any reflective intentions (Sims, 2008).

Compatibility, as discussed further below, goes beyond simply getting along in a meeting or in the classroom. The successful teaching experiences Mastropieri et al. (2005) referenced "had a hands-on, activity-based approach to instruction that made the content more concrete for students and lessened the language and literacy demands of tasks" (p. 263). To plan this type of instruction, co-teachers and any teachers working together as a team dedicated time on a regular basis for planning and reflecting on instruction together. In general, teachers with compatible team members are more productive and content (Cave & Wilkinson, 1997). When engaged in a

mutually beneficial relationship with plenty of opportunities for communication and reflection, co-teachers tend to gain from the knowledge base that their teaching partner can offer, and there is no shortage of research supporting this idea (Friend, 2010; Little, 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). On the other side of the story regarding the benefits of shared planning, time is at the top of the long list of frustrations when teachers are not given enough time to work together.

Honoring Teacher Voice

Multiple decisions are made within school buildings every day, and often have to be made based on scheduling, financial, or legal concerns. All teachers appreciate feeling valued, and when decisions are made that affect their everyday work, honoring teacher voice is vital to the success of partnerships. Nichols et al. (2010) reported:

> Teachers generally reported a more positive working arrangement if they chose their co-teaching partner. This also included better communication, which in turn led to an enhanced relationship. Teachers who had no choice in selecting their partners, in general, had more negative views of co-teaching. (p. 648).

Teachers also feel the need for validation while embarking on a new endeavor such as co-teaching that requires forging ahead with new teaching relationships. In the first year, the teachers in Isherwood and Barger-Anderson's (2008) case study following a school moving to an inclusion model, complained that their voices were not being heard and wanted to know if the co-teaching teams would be maintained the following year. These teachers reported not being let into the conversations or even granted time for having conversations, and this greatly impacted the teachers' overall attitudes and outlooks.

Honoring teacher voice does more than simply keep the peace in the school building. In a study about teacher preparation programs around the world, the researchers Craft et al. (1998)

found that teachers' involvement in decision-making, plus an ability to change their own circumstances, makes them highly motivated and can even have positive effects on student achievement. While it is unrealistic perhaps to go to teachers for each and every decision, it certainly has been shown that consulting teachers and assuring them that they have some voice in the decisions that greatly affect their daily work make for stronger relationships and better schools (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sims, 2008).

Compatibility

The concept of compatibility has been heavily referenced in the literature. Compatibility is a vital theme to discuss when examining in-school relationships, as it is a thread that runs through all discussions about this topic. Like romantic relationships, professional relationships are at their most beneficial when composed of compatible members. While this is not a novel concept, simple compatibility is often overlooked in schools because of scheduling and administrative decisions. For co-teaching teams in particular, research indicates that most often, co-teaching teams are formed out of "an arranged partnership the school administrator (principal) established based on logistics (school schedule) and available resources (personnel)" (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008, p. 125). Unfortunately, teacher choice is often not a factor when co-teaching teams are established. It is clear from the research that compatibility greatly enhances relationships as "teachers spoke of the importance of personal and professional compatibility for the success of a co-teaching partnership" (Rice & Zigmond, 2000, p. 192). Just like any relationship, compatibility in scholastic relationships is not automatic but can grow over time. In fact, planning and reflecting on instruction aids in this growth.

In a study focusing on co-teaching relationships, Mastropieri et al (2005) synthesized the work of multiple co-teaching teams. Both successes in co-teaching and areas for continued growth were reported. Some of the characteristics of compatibility were described:

> …when both teams of teachers conversed, they frequently joked together, appeared genuinely at ease, and seemed to enjoy each other's company. Their personalities appeared to be upbeat, and they seemed to have respect for one another's positions and opinions. For example, during class observations, it was common to see either co-teacher presenting to the class as a whole while the other co-teacher would interject with elaborations or comments. This type of interaction between co-teachers was completed with ease and in a nonthreatening manner, which truly augmented class presentations. When asked about their working relationships, both teams indicated a genuine trust and respect for their partners, and this appeared to facilitate their working relationships. (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 263)

The teachers described are clearly compatible and are gaining much from their membership in the co-teaching team. However, when compatibility is not apparent, professional relationships become difficult to maintain, as in this very different relationship described here show the deleterious effects of incompatibility between co-teachers:

> [N]oticeable tension began to emerge between co-teachers as the year progressed…one of the teachers consistently spoke independently to researchers to discuss troubling aspects of getting along with his co-teaching partner…This teacher expressed feeling frustrated and trapped in an undesirable co-teaching situation. He expressed concerns of not having control of the class or curriculum, which augmented his feelings of helplessness in the situation. (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 264)

Simply put, compatibility matters when seeking out or finding oneself in a professional relationship. While compatibility might seem to come naturally in some partnerships, there are times when it is simply not a possibility. While the benefits of compatibility are great, co-teachers who are in unfavorable positions can find the lack of compatibility to be paralyzing.

Mutual Fulfillment

Of course, no one is wholly invested in a relationship, particularly not a professional one, without the possibility that they have something to gain from membership. Rice and Zigmond (2000) wrote, "The teachers reported that their experiences of co-teaching were professionally satisfying in terms of student learning, their own professional growth, and the support each received from co-teaching partners" (p. 190). The mutually fulfilling co-teaching partnerships described included members who recognized each other's strengths. Learning from peer teachers gives ample reason to stay in and thrive within scholastic relationships. This idea of getting something from the partnership is particularly significant when thinking about the learning possibilities present in a co-teaching arrangement (George & Davis-Wiley, 2000). In fact, Sims (2008) points out the simple idea that, "there is nothing a lone educator can do that partnered educators cannot amplify" (p. 61). By contrast, there are also unfulfilling co-teacher partnerships that also warrant examination.

Hildenbrand (2009) discussed pre-service teachers' relationships with their supervising teachers and the amount of mutual learning that can take place within that space. She indicated that these relationships "allow the members to co-construct knowledge and negotiate the roles of membership in the community" (Hildenbrand, 2009, p. 13). She contended that powerful learning took place during this time not only because of the work pre-service and veteran teachers do, but also because of the dialogue between and among other pre-service teachers as

well as with their supervising teachers. And because "learning is an integral and inseparable aspect of social practice," it is a natural fit that these relationships have the potential to make the most of learning opportunities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 31).

The study by Murphy et al. (2004) examining student teachers in primary school science also indicated the power of learning within the pre-service teacher and supervising teacher relationship. The mutual nature of this type of learning, in conjunction with the confidence building cited, indicated the power of being "equal partners in the classroom" (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 1033). It is within this type of learning, in fact, where members of a relationship make the switch from colleagues to collaborators. Hildenbrand (2009) describes this switch like this, "a community of learners working through a central experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse more readily experiences transformation as a group" (p. 23) When teachers are open to learning from each another, it is possible to cement the relationship and transform it into what is desired: practice-altering, mutually beneficial partnerships. On the other side of this possibility, however, is the reality of stunted progress when relationships are less than ideal.

Lessening the Burden

Teaching is an altogether overwhelming task. Juggling all the requirements and expectations can seem at times too much to bear. Some at-school relationships work to satisfy both parties by quite simply lowering the burden that doing a task alone can cause. In an article about the Response to Intervention (RTI) methods for identifying students with learning disabilities, Murawski and Hughes (2009) made a strong case for partnerships among co-teachers and general education teachers to lessen the burden. They provide extensive evidence that co-teaching can "make RTI more efficient, effective, and realistic" (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 267). From organizing materials for learning experiences, writing lesson plans, and sharing

resources, to assessing students and being a member of a group can be instrumental in lessening the burden that a teacher faces alone.

The Response to Intervention framework assumes that the student is falling behind because of the nature of instruction that he or she is receiving, and that, barring a learning disability, changing this will result in increased student achievement. Having two teachers in a classroom can aid in implementing a significant change as called for by the RTI process. Teachers can move "from a reactive approach to a proactive approach" when supported by another teacher (Murawsi & Hughes, 2009, p. 268). Furthermore, "[t]eachers are able to engage in a more active instruction, learn different strategies from one another, and are more easily able to differentiate in the classroom," all of which are helpful when determining the best individualized plan to aid a student in need, as the RTI process expects (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 270). The authors stated how unrealistic the expectation is that general education teachers can undergo this task alone:

> If a primary goal of RTI is to address the needs of all learners in the general education classroom by using research-based best practices in a proactive approach, it would be folly to imagine that individual teachers can accomplish this alone. (Murawski & Hughes, 2009, p. 270)

Planning, gathering resources for, carrying out, and assessing dynamic learning experiences for a diverse group of students with a wide range of needs while also meeting school and state requirements is at times a task that is just too cumbersome to be accomplished alone.

Building Confidence

Because of the large burden carried by teachers as mentioned above, the need to build up a certain level of confidence is a requirement for leading a productive working life. There is a

good deal of mutual satisfaction that comes from a positive, confidence-building relationship. Evidence of this comes forward when a relationship is balanced, as in some relationships between student teachers and supervising teachers (Murphy et al., 2004), as well as in some co-teaching relationships (Al-Saaideh, 2011; Game & Metcalfe, 2009; Rice & Zigmond, 2000).

In a study by Murphy et al. (2004) investigating the impact of student teachers and supervising teachers' relationships on children's enjoyment of science, the building of confidence for teachers and students was an additional outcome. The high level of confidence was attributed to a focus on strong science teaching practices and an alternative teaching format. Because "many teachers have difficulty with the teaching of investigative science," approaching the task in this alternative way reduced pre-service teacher anxiety while it also built classroom teacher confidence in new teaching methods (Murphy et al., 2004, p. 1033). Game and Metcalfe (2009) also pointed out the confidence-building possibilities and wrote, "An attuned teaching team can readily and fluently carry within its relation the various responsibilities of the teacher. The dialogue between teachers allows them to think together and think differently at the same time" (p. 50). Having the benefit of another teacher in the classroom can make a teacher self-conscious at first, because of the foreign concept of "cooking in someone else's kitchen" (Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, & Reeves, 1999, p. 187). Over time, however, a level of confidence can build, if for no other reason than the power of two heads being better than one (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Sims, 2008).

On the contrary, there are certainly times when the relationship is not mutually beneficial:

> When asked about the qualities needed in co-teaching partners, participants emphasized mutual respect, tolerance, and a capacity to persevere in overcoming difficulties. Co-

> teaching had no attraction if, as one teacher said, '…one person acts like a prima donna or if one or other of us were to regard ourselves as either better or worse than the other.' (Rice & Zigmond, 2000, p. 194)

It cannot be denied that there are a number of studies that portray difficult working relationships and the negative effect they can have on a teacher's professional life (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Sims, 2008). As beneficial as the positive relationships are, the negative ones can be just as detrimental.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. The research questions that examined these perspectives and patterns were guides during the data collection and analysis phases of this study. The history of co-teaching legislation and the themes that came forward in the analysis of the relevant literature were used to examine the data collected through interviews and observations. In Chapter Three, the research and analysis process are presented as well as the rationale for the choice of data collection, analysis, and design.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Building from the well-established base found in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, this chapter presents the methodology for this interpretive case study about co-teaching relationships. The research purpose and questions are offered. Then, the theoretical framework is presented along with the research design and rationale. Next, the data sources are explained, including the sampling process and the methods of data collection, both interviews and observations. Following this, the data analysis process is explained. Finally, trustworthiness is considered, including concerns of ethics, risks, benefits, and limitations.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. In this interpretive case study, the researcher interviewed and observed three pairs of teachers engaged in co-teaching, who worked in a large suburban elementary school in a southeastern state to learn about their experiences.

The primary research questions that were examined in this study were:

1. What are the perspectives of general education teachers and special education or English as a second language (ELL) teachers regarding their pedagogical experience of co-teaching?
2. What are the patterns within the co-teaching team experience?

The researcher answered the research questions using an interpretive approach to qualitative inquiry, through semi-structured interviews and observations. Constant comparative analysis methods were used to uncover themes from the collected data, and continual reflective practices were present to stay close to the data and generate a final product that can inform other researchers, as well as teachers and administrators in the field who are interested in the co-teaching approach.

Theoretical Framework

A researcher's theoretical framework is continually at play during a research journey such as this one. Building on the work of qualitative researchers, and in particular those using an interpretive lens, this case study uncovered the perspectives and patterns within co-teaching relationships. While the researcher kept the interpretive framework present in the analysis, there was also the constant balance of allowing the data to speak for itself. As Glesne (2006) writes, "[t]ypically, qualitative research is not explicitly driven by theory, but it is situated within theoretical perspectives" (p. 29). In other words, it was a goal of the researcher that the data was allowed to flourish within a backdrop of interpretive theory. Because interpretive theory expects meaning to be constructed within each and every interaction, the balance of theory and data was an intentional one as the data collected from the co-teaching teams were analyzed.

Qualitative Research Design

Research that looks to uncover understandings about the social world is well suited for qualitative methods. This particular case study sought to understand the relationships between co-teachers, and asked co-teachers to share their beliefs about pedagogical practices. Qualitative research is a match for this type of inquiry, wherein the focus is on humans' perceptions, and their beliefs are held up as important pieces of data. Fetterman (1988) summarized, "what

people believe to be true is more important than any objective reality; people act on what they believe" (p. 18). Unlike more positivist work, qualitative research values the power of individuals and their ideas. Guba and Lincoln (1982) explained, "naturalistic approaches take full advantage of the not inconsiderable power of the human-as-instrument" (p. 235). Quite simply, there is power in the human experience—and co-teaching is certainly a powerful human experience that can be learned about through this form of inquiry.

As for the final product coming from a qualitative study, it appears quite differently from one with a more positivist framework: "qualitative researchers are more likely to employ more descriptive techniques" (Fetterman, 1988, p. 18). Qualitative research is well suited for any research journey that seeks to understand the human experience, and results are presented with a thorough portrayal of that experience. Because of these characteristics, this case study looking to understand the co-teaching experience was a clear match for this type of research methodology. The researcher has worked to craft a thorough portrayal of the co-teaching experience at Westview Elementary School.

Interpretive theory.

Interpretive theory dictates that within each and every interaction among humans, there are levels of understandings as yet undiscovered that "stem from the subjectivity of human consciousness" (Crotty, 1998, p. 94). Furthermore, within these interactions there is the possibility of constructing a before unknown reality. Diaz (2009) explained, "[i]nterpretive research assumes that reality is socially constructed and the researcher becomes the vehicle by which this reality is revealed" (p. 43). It is in fact the interaction between researcher and participant that constructs the social world being studied. Interpretive researchers seek to understand this continually constructed social world. Within this ever-changing reality,

interpretive theorists seek understanding. In this case, understanding the perspectives and patterns of co-teachers was the goal.

Symbolic interactionism, which can be connected to the roots of interpretive theory, also indicates that meaning is not something that exists on its own, as compared to the positivist theorists of the past. In fact, "objects, people, situations, and events do not possess their own meaning: rather, meaning is conferred on them" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 36). Of course, complete understanding of the constructed meaning is an elusive goal. Crotty (1998) explained, "human understanding can never exhaust the real and that in the real there will always remain something unknowable and ineffable" (p. 93). However intangible, understanding remains the goal for the interpretive researcher and matches the purpose of this particular study to understand the co-teaching experience, including the perspectives and patterns found within these unique partnerships.

Research Design and Rationale

In this case study, the goal was to identify and interpret the nature of and perceptions within co-teaching teams to understand the relationships between teachers engaged in co-teaching. This type of research lends itself to qualitative methods, and more specifically, viewing and analyzing these interactions through an interpretive lens. Case study methodology was also used and is appropriate because of the holistic nature of the study presented (Diaz, 2009; Laws & McLeod, 2004).

Case Study Design

Interpretive case study in particular seeks understanding by focusing in on specific human interactions surrounding an identifiable topic or phenomena, such as co-teaching. This understanding came from, in this case, interviews, observations, fieldnotes, and researcher's

memos. In contrast to positivist experiments, Laws and McLeod (2004) highlight the advantages that interpretive case study offers:

> Case studies…attempted to get as close to the subject of interest as possible, partly by means of direct observation in natural settings, and partly by their access to subjective factors (thoughts, feelings, desires), whereas experiments often used convenient derivative data such as test results. (pp. 5-6)

Case study design is aimed for examining the nature of a previously unstudied or understudied phenomenon to reach a holistic understanding (Diaz, 2009). In interpretive research, the researcher becomes a "passionate participant" whose investment in the case study is great (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 115).

The construction of meaning in this case study became mutually beneficial: both researcher and participant built understandings as the study progressed (Diaz, 2009). Throughout this study, participants indicated that talking about their work was a refreshing experience and not one that they were able to engage in very often during the hectic workday.

Using the case study approach in particular was a suitable choice to answer the research questions. As Prior (2003) indicated, "[C]ase studies by their very nature cannot be representative. However, they can be indispensable for developing theoretical insight, and for examining the fine detail of social life" (p. 153). In this inquiry into the socially constructed partnership that is co-teaching, this fine detail held key pieces that uncovered the nature of the co-teaching teams studied. While there is controversy surrounding a researcher's ability to generalize based on case study data (Flyvberg, 2006), it certainly can be said that the findings revealed from this study focusing on co-teaching relationships painted a picture of the co-teaching experience at the selected site.

Justification of the Methods

The researcher was looking to identify and to interpret the perspectives and patterns within co-teaching teams to understand the relationship between teachers engaged in co-teaching. The first step in any journey is to understand, and this interpretive case study looked directly to understand the particular human interaction known as co-teaching.

Qualitative data are directly oriented toward utilitarian needs; practices within schools are far more influenced by experience than by quantitative data (Guba & Lincoln, 1982) and the practice of co-teaching is no different. Teachers make decisions about their daily work based on their own experience, and qualitative research values experiential learning (Stake, 2010). Furthermore, an in-school study such as this one brings with it the uncontrollable factors that occur in a school building. As Guba and Lincoln (1982) pointed out, "[f]inding a paradigm that can tolerate real world conditions surely makes more sense than manipulating those conditions to meet the arbitrary design requirements of a paradigm" (p. 234). The experiential, genuine, and realistic nature of qualitative research made it an appropriate fit for this case study.

Furthermore, Stake (2010) identified a number of characteristics of qualitative data that were in line with the goals of this particular research study. Namely, qualitative data "strives to be naturalistic, to neither intervene nor arrange in order to get data" (Stake, 2010, p. 15). Using semi-structured interviews with co-teachers about their in-school relationships can be described as just that. Each interview and observation was held at the school building, with no special arrangements made. To that end, the data gathered were authentically collected and qualified as "naturalistic" (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

Using an interpretive lens in particular to view and analyze these co-teaching relationships increased the understanding of co-teaching at the selected site. This seeking of

meaning was approached through interview and observation with the six purposefully selected participants who had varied perspectives and experiences. During the sample selection phase, only teachers who had a depth of experience with co-teaching were considered, as experience was an important selection criterion. Selecting these six particular participants, therefore, revealed a more complete picture of co-teaching. A case study such as this one "keys on the meaning of human affairs as seen from different views," and this has enriched the resultant data (Stake, 2010, p. 15).

Of course, one cannot expect to come away from a study such as this one with complete understanding. This research journey at times stimulated more questions than answers. Prior (2003) wrote, "[M]eaning and interpretation are undertaken by human actors and attempting to access subjective intentions and meanings of actors is a difficult (some might say impossible) task" (p. 24). As with any research journey, the quest for understanding is certain to continue.

Data Sources

In the following section, details about the sampling process are presented. Next, the research site and the participants are detailed. The methods for collecting data are included as well as details about the interview and observation processes.

Sampling

The participants in this case study included six teachers from a total of 87 teachers working as general education, English as a second language (ESL), or special education teachers at the research site. The researcher used purposeful sampling to arrive at the choice of these six participants. Purposeful sampling can strengthen a qualitative study and ensure stronger results (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The sample selection criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Participants were employed in a single system (Brockman County Public Schools) in the elementary school selected for this research study (Westview Elementary School).
2. Participants were teachers currently working in co-teaching teams.
3. Participants were teachers who had some previous experience with the co-teaching model.

Because co-teaching is a pedagogical practice that can take time to get accustomed to (Pickard, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007), it was important to the researcher that the participants were not learning about it for the first time while the study was taking place. With a longer view of co-teaching, teachers with previous years of experience were able to offer authentic and rich descriptions of co-teaching relationships, past and present.

The groundwork for this study began long ago, as the researcher talked about the benefits of this study to many teachers and administrators at Westview Elementary School. Many reported an interest in participating and engaged in informal conversation about the topic of co-teaching relationships. To select teachers to interview, each co-teaching team member at Westview Elementary School, a total of 59 teachers comprising 47 co-teaching teams, was sent an explanation of the research study by email asking for participants. When responses were collected, the researcher followed up with one-on-one conversations to clarify intentions and to make final decisions about which participants were included in the final case study.

While qualitative research is not always intended for generalizations (Stake, 2010), it was important to the researcher that the results of this study represented the wide range of experiences at the selected research site. With this in mind, the researcher selected co-teaching teams to study that represented the general population at the school and at many schools. By selecting teachers from a variety of grade levels with a variety of ages and experiences, the

resultant data was more likely benefit the school and the general research base. Two of the three selected co-teaching teams worked with special education students, and one worked with students learning English as a second language (ESOL). The general classroom teachers selected worked with third, fourth, and fifth grades. Their special education and ESOL co-teachers worked with multiple grade levels across the school site.

Research Site

Westview Elementary School is located in the Brockman County Public Schools system, a large school system. The county was located in the suburbs of a metropolitan area of a Southeastern city. During the 2012-2013 school year, the county served more than 165,000 students in its 132 elementary, middle and high schools. The county was divided into 19 geographic areas referred to as clusters, each named for the high school within the region. Each cluster had one high school serving grades ninth through twelfth, one or two middle schools serving grades sixth through eighth, and from three to six elementary schools serving grades kindergarten through fifth. The county also included 11 alternative format schools.

Brockman County Public School district is a large and diverse district. The district was awarded a prestigious national education award in 2010. The county was selected because it was a large urban district that demonstrated strong student achievement and improvements in narrowing the achievement gaps between income and ethnic groups. The county spent about $7,391 per student in expenditures. Countywide, White students made up 33% of the student body, African American students made up 28%, and Hispanic students made up 25%. These demographics were compared to Westview Elementary School's demographics in Figure 3.1.

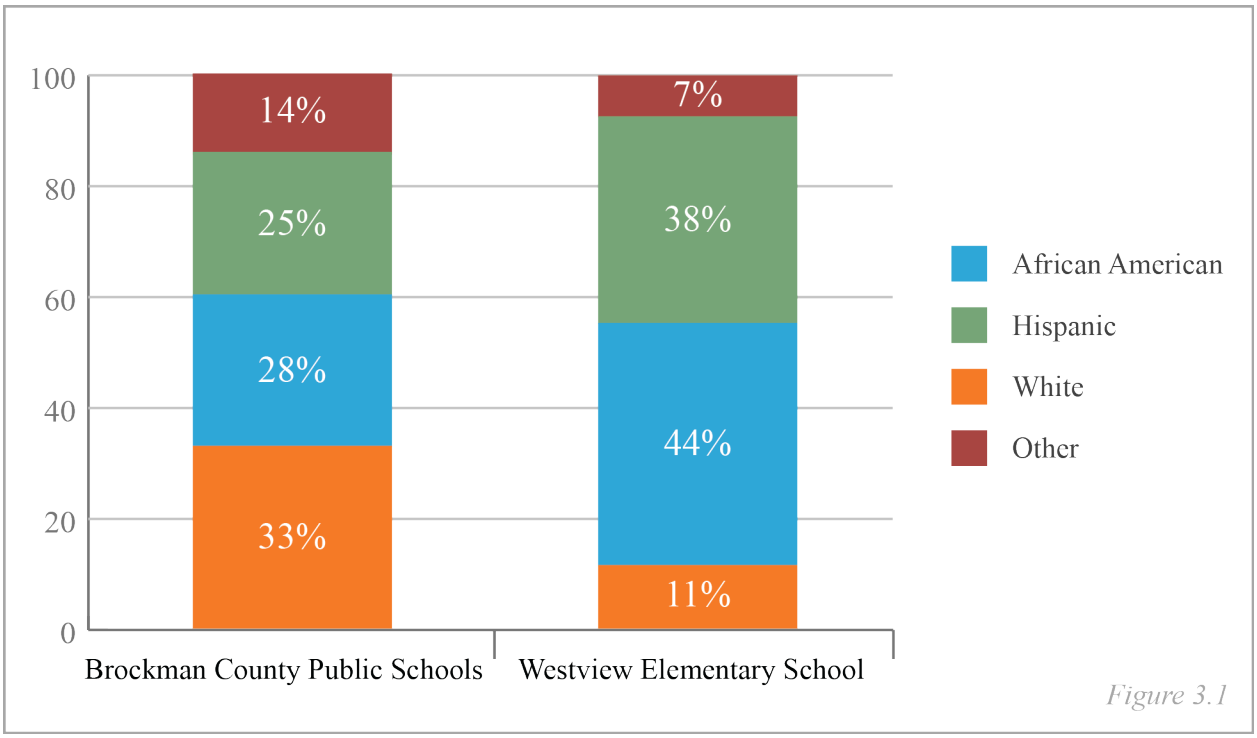

Figure 3.1: Demographic Information of Brockman County Public Schools and Westview Elementary School.

Across all Brockman County Public Schools, 50% of students qualify for free or reduced-price school lunch. This is a much smaller percentage than the 82% of students at Westview Elementary School that qualify for free or reduced-price lunches. Countywide, 16% of students were designated as English language learners. At Westview Elementary School, 35% of students were receiving specialized instruction in English as a second language (ESL). About 11% of students countywide received special education services, which is comparable to the 9% at Westview Elementary School. These comparisons of students served in the English as a second language and special education programs in the county and at Westview Elementary School are visually displayed in Figure 3.2. These subgroups were the main recipients of the co-teaching model at the selected site and, presumably, across the county.

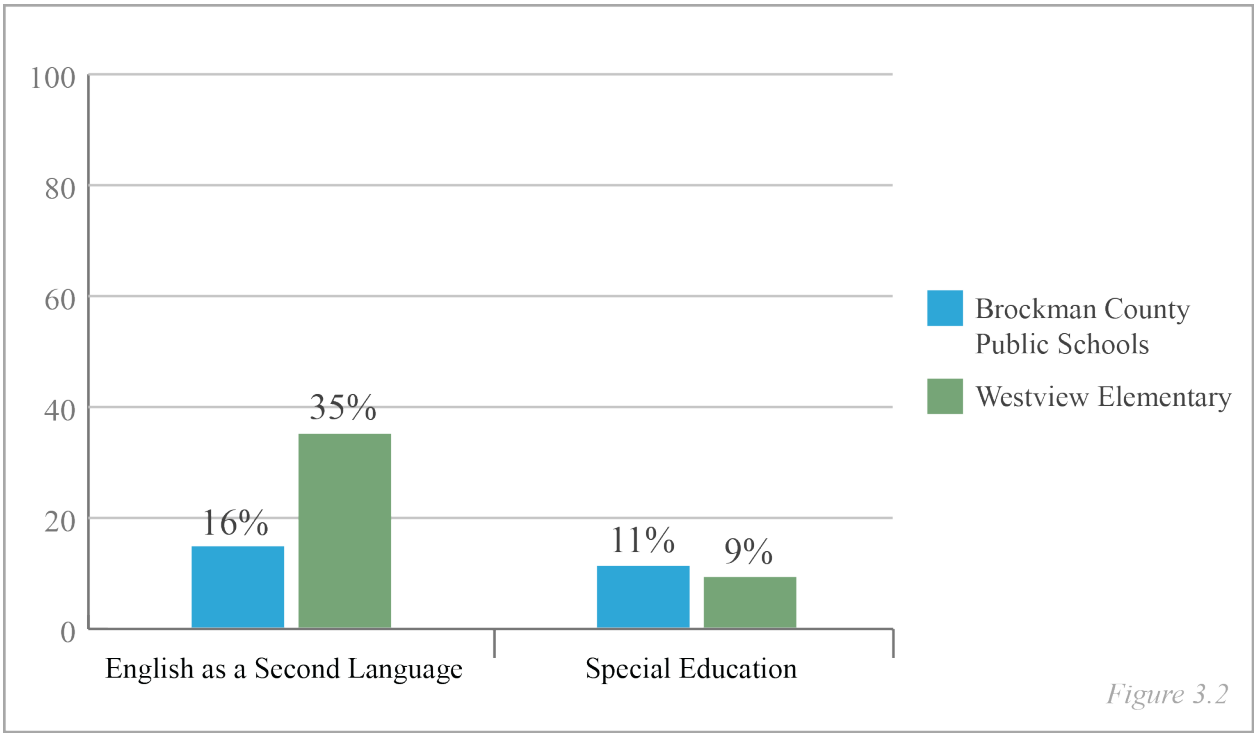

Figure 3.2: Students Receiving Special Programs, Brockman County Public Schools and Westview Elementary School.

Westview Elementary School was a purposeful and highly appropriate site for this research study. At the time of the study, the co-teaching model had been in place for the English as a second language (ESL) program for about nine years, and for the Special Education program and Early Intervention Program (EIP) for about eight years. Classroom teachers in grades kindergarten through fifth grade worked with ESL, special education, or EIP teachers to meet the diverse needs of students in their classes.

It was the goal of the administrators that every classroom in the school was co-taught, and for several years this occurred. As budgets tightened within the school system, however, this goal became more difficult to reach. While Westview Elementary School has seen many positive student results from co-teaching, there were instances where the human relationship between

teachers was difficult. This study helped to bring understanding to the nature of these partnerships, which have become an integral part of the school community.

Westview Elementary School was a large school compared to other elementary schools in the county, and the demographic makeup of the school is indicated in Figure 3.3. During the 2012-2013 school year, African American students made up 44% of the 1,649 students enrolled. Hispanic students comprised 38% of the school population, and White students made up 11%. Also in the 2012-2013 school year, 82% of students qualified for the free or reduced lunch program and therefore the school met the criteria of a Title One school. The school has been qualified as a Title One school for 12 years.

The students who qualified for special programs, such as English as s second language, ESL, (35% of students at Westview Elementary School) or special education (9% of students), were the primary focus of co-teaching efforts, although the administrators believed it was in every students' best interest to be taught by two teachers, an idea supported by research (Gerber & Popp, 1999; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). For this reason, most classrooms in grades one through five had at least one co-teacher present at some point during the school day.

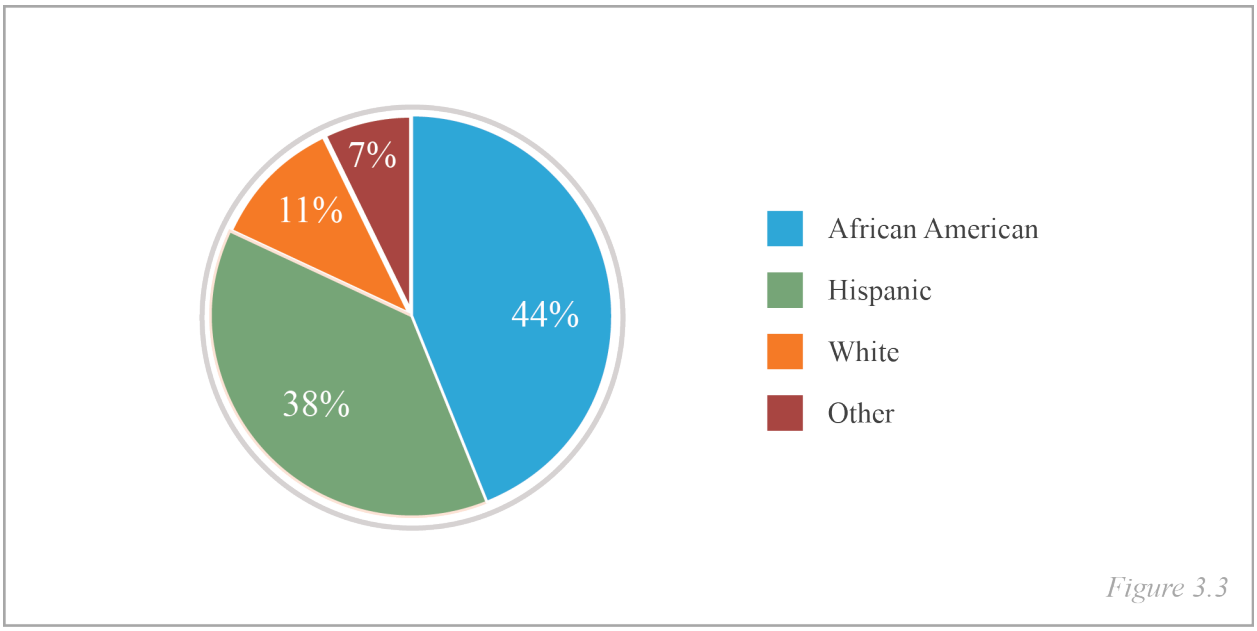

Figure 3.3: Demographic Information, Westview Elementary School.

The research site was selected as a highly appropriate choice because of the co-teaching model and the large number of possible participants; the school had 71 general education teachers and 16 support (ESL or Special Education) teachers during the year of the study. These 16 support teachers co-taught 47 classes during the 2012-2013 school year, offering the researcher a large number of possible participants. The number of co-teaching partners at Westview Elementary had in fact declined as compared to previous years, when in 2011-2012 there were 59 co-taught classes and in 2010-2011, there were 63 classes that used some model of co-teaching.

At Westview Elementary School, as shown in Figure 3.4, about 40% of all teachers have either an English as a second language (ESL) or special education certification. More specifically, of the 87 teachers employed during the school year of this study, 28 teachers had ESL certification and 9 teachers had special education certification.

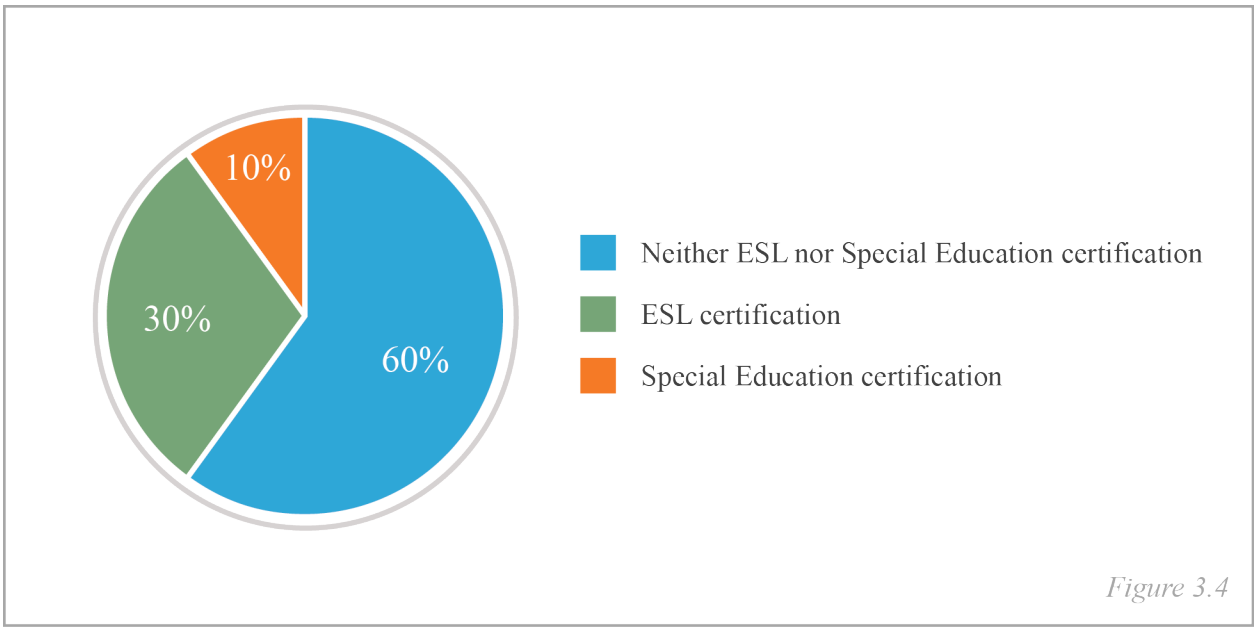

Figure 3.4: Westview Elementary School Teacher Certifications.

In addition to the school population and the many co-teaching partnerships, Westview Elementary School was also a suitable site because the school had undergone a multi-year, gradual phasing in of co-teaching. This progress was well supported by professional development and teacher leadership, both factors that are advocated by the research. Professional development provided for teachers while transitioning into co-teaching is vital for success (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007). Also, when teachers rather than administrators lead the way into a new pedagogical practice, this can have powerful implications for success at a school (Jang, 2006).

Participant Profile

The six participants, who made up three co-teaching partnerships, were selected from the pool of 59 possible participants from 47 co-teaching teams, of which 39 responded as interested in participating. Of the 39, some teams were excluded from being possible participants because they had never before worked in a co-teaching team or were new to Westview Elementary

School. The participants selected met the following criteria, in addition to the sample selection criteria presented above:

1. Participants had experience working in co-teaching partnerships. Altogether, the participants had 45 co-teaching relationships, past and present, to reflect on.
2. Participants were working with a wide range of grade levels. To be more specific, the three general education teachers worked with third, fourth, and fifth grades and the support teachers (ESL and special education teachers) worked with kindergarten, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades during the year of the study.
3. Participants were working in Westview Elementary School and had worked there for multiple years, from 4 to 16 years.

The six participating teachers brought to the study unique experiences with the pedagogical practice of co-teaching. Because of this background, they were each able to offer particularly rich descriptions of the perspectives and patterns within the co-teaching team experience. Table 3.1 offers an overview profile of the participants.

Table 3.1

Profile of Participants

	Isabella Harris	**Louise Somers**	**Cassandra O'Neal**	**Coal McVey**	**Maya Cosby**	**Eleanor Smith**
Grade Level(s)	3rd	3rd, 4th special education	4th	4th, 5th ESL and literacy coaching	5th	K, 2nd, 5th special education
Years of Teaching Experience	7 years	9 years	20 years	25 years	23 years	13 years

Table 3.1 (continued)

Profile of Participants

	Isabella Harris	**Louise Somers**	**Cassandra O'Neal**	**Coal McVey**	**Maya Cosby**	**Eleanor Smith**
Years of Co-Teaching Experience	5 years	9 years	8 years	10 years	9 years	8 years
Number of Co-Teaching Experiences	5 different partners	13 different partners	5 different partners	12 different partners	5 different partners	5 different partners
Years at Westview Elementary School	7 years	4 years	9 years	12 years	16 years	13 years

Isabella Harris

Isabella was teaching third grade at Westview Elementary School during this study. Of her seven years at the school, she has taught third grade for six years, having spent her first year teaching fifth grade students. Just after graduating from an undergraduate program in another state, Isabella moved to the area around Westview Elementary School and was hired by a former principal. After spending one year teaching fifth grade students, Isabella asked for a move to a younger grade and was moved to third, where she has been in the years since. Isabella has spent five of her years teaching at Westview Elementary School with a co-teaching partner, and has had five partners. During the research process, Isabella mentioned several times that she hoped to "keep Louise" so as not to have to switch partners again.

Louise Somers

Louise was teaching third and fourth grade special education students during the year of this research study. Louise spoke from a unique position about the co-teaching experience because she has worked on both sides of the relationship. Of the nine years she has spent teaching, she served as a special education co-teacher for seven years and as a fourth grade general education teacher for the other two years. In both positions and every year of her teaching career, Louise was in co-teaching partnerships. With a grand total of having 13 different partners, Louise has had more experience co-teaching than the other participants. Louise feels that her role as a co-teacher is to support the teachers she is working with. Louise said, "This support role, it means support the teacher, doesn't it? It doesn't just mean support the kids!" This is a sentiment from Louise that came across in all areas of the study.

Cassandra O'Neal

Cassandra has 20 years of teaching experience, in addition to 6 years she worked as a substitute teacher. Her experiences were widespread. Cassandra has taught grades three through six, and served as a substitute teacher in all grades from kindergarten to eighth grade. She has been at Westview Elementary School for nine years, and has taught fourth grade every year. Cassandra has also been a part of some "excellent co-teaching teams," with five different partners over an eight-year period. She reflected that she was "very lucky to have such good co-teachers" with strong instructional skills and extensive content knowledge. Her co-teacher at the time of the study, Coal, described her as "such a hard worker."

Coal McVey

Coal had been in the education field for 25 years, mainly teaching upper elementary grades. She had been teaching at Westview Elementary School for 12 years, and has had 12

different co-teaching partners since the model was introduced to the school. Like Louise, Coal has had more experience with co-teaching partners than the other participants. With a background in both Literacy coaching and English as a second language (ESL), Coal has spent the last 10 years working as either, or at times both, a literacy coach and an ESL teacher. At Westview Elementary School over the last few years, the length of time co-teachers spend inside the classrooms they support has been shortened. Coal feels strongly that when she "used to be in a teacher's classroom for half the day, every day," the co-teaching models were more successful and the relationships were stronger.

Maya Cosby

Maya has been teaching for 23 years, with 16 of those years spent at Westview Elementary School. During the time of this study, she was teaching fifth grade, where she had been for 16 years. Before teaching fifth grade, Maya taught first grade for seven years. As a fifth grade teacher, Maya has been co-teaching for eight years, with five different co-teaching partners. Maya was teaching at Westview Elementary School when co-teaching was first introduced, and claimed to be involved in the adoption and gradual phase-in of the program. Since that time, Maya has come to understand that the co-teaching experience depends greatly on the partner teacher someone is assigned to work with. She has had very trying co-teaching relationships, and spoke about them openly during the course of this study.

Eleanor Smith

Eleanor was co-teaching special education students in kindergarten, second, and fifth grades when she participated in this research study. Eleanor has been at Westview Elementary School for 13 years, first as a kindergarten paraprofessional for 5 years, then as a special education teacher for 8 years. She had a brief job at an educational non-profit organization, but

decided quickly that she preferred working at a school. When she contacted Westview Elementary School with a desire to return, Eleanor said the principal "made a position for her," and Eleanor has never left again. Eleanor has been co-teaching for eight years, and has worked with five different co-teachers. She said the secret to successful co-teaching was her ability to be "very flexible."

Methods of Data Collection

As a way of gaining rich descriptive data to use in analysis, a researcher must view the case study participants and the practice of co-teaching from a variety of perspectives. Therefore, to gather rich descriptive data, there were four phases of data collection in this research journey. They were:

1. A round of individual interviews with each of the six participants
2. A round of observations of co-planning sessions with each of the three co-teaching teams
3. A round of observations of co-taught lessons with each of the three co-teaching teams
4. A final round of paired interviews with both co-teaching partners together

The purpose of this study was to learn about the co-teaching experience for members of co-teaching teams, and more specifically, to learn about the perspectives and patterns that occur when co-teaching is used as a pedagogical practice. Out of the 59 possible participants in the selected site, six teachers comprising three co-teaching teams were selected as ideal participants. To gather the appropriate data to answer the research questions and come closer to a complete understanding of the co-teaching experience, both interviews and observations were used to collect data.

Interviewing.

Interviewing is a vital method of qualitative research. While it is a given that we learn by seeing, it is in discussion that this learning is deepened. Glesne (2006) shared, "Observation puts you on the trail of understanding that you infer from what you see, but you cannot, except through interviewing, get the actor's explanations" (p. 80). Per agreement by the participants, each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed as quickly as possible. The transcriptions served as the physical rendering of the data, which was then used for analysis. The recordings were destroyed and pseudonyms were used to protect the privacy of participants. Additionally, fieldnotes about the interview experience and the researcher's own log were also used as data sources.

Roulston (2010), among others, advocates that a researcher craft the interview guide with his or her theoretical outlook in mind. Namely, with interpretive theory, interviews are believed to co-construct data, wherein both researcher and participant make sense of the research topic: "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). The belief that there is value in each conversation makes interviewing a vital practice in qualitative and interpretive work. This particular study hoped to "understand how participants make sense of topics" (Roulston, 2010, p. 89), specifically those related to the experience of co-teaching. Before and during the interview process, as well as throughout the analysis phases, the researcher considered the goals and purpose of the study, as well as the theoretical outlook of interpretive theory.

Listening, and listening closely, to the participants during the interview process was a vital practice to ensuring rich data would come forward. Researchers have great concern for the words of their participants:

> At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants is a complex and sensitive task. (Seidman, 2006, p. 9)

Qualitative interviewing is built on this deep interest, and listening closely allowed the researcher to respond to nuances in the interview that would impact the data. The researcher's log became a place for post-interview reflection and consideration of what was learned during the interview that could inform the next step in the research process and analysis. A strong interest in the participants' perspectives came across in the interview guide. Glesne (2006) recommended that interviewers use phrases such as, "Now I want to 'hear about' instead of 'talk about' " (p. 87). Considering small conversational touches such as these made a difference in the ability of the participants to pass along important data.

The first round of interviews, held on a one-on-one basis, served the purpose of learning about the roles and relationships in the three selected co-teaching teams. After the study's steps and goals were explained to each participant and consent was granted, the first round of interviews were scheduled. The consent form, signed by each participant, is found in Appendix A. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants because the researcher understood what a precious commodity time can be in a school setting. The researcher arranged the interviews according to the scheduling preference of each individual participant. Each of the participants chose a time before or after the school day to be interviewed, and all of the interviews took place in a quiet classroom selected by the participants. After each interview was completed, the researcher took extensive notes in a researcher's log to reflect on the experience, noted any initial understandings, and further shaped the next interview guide by reviewing what

the participants said and seeing if other interview questions should be added, deleted, or modified.

Each interview probe was intended to develop an initial rapport or level of trust with the participants to begin answering one of the two research questions. These probes and their purposes are outlined in Table 3.2, and each question was asked with the intention of gathering rich descriptions of the co-teaching experience from the participants to use for analysis. Additionally when crafting the interview guide, the researcher heeded the advice of experts about factors that make a qualitative interview likely to result in rich data to use for analysis (Baker & Johnson, 1998; Glesne, 2006; Warren, 2001). In addition to these probes, there were a number of clarifying questions and comments that came up during the initial interview that were not always reflected in the interview guide presented in Appendix C. Most often, these additional follow-up questions included questions such as, "Tell me more about…" or "You mentioned…Can I hear a little more about that?"

Table 3.2

Initial Interview Guide Probes Aligned to Purpose

Developing Rapport and Trust with Participant	**Answering Research Question #1: What are the perspectives of teachers in a co-teaching team?**	**Answering Research Question #2: What are the patterns found within co-teaching partnerships?**
Casual conversation while explaining the study and the goals	Tell me about a time when you felt you and your co-teacher had a really positive teaching experience. Probe for: -Feelings about the situation -Does this happen often? We all have disappointing or frustrating lessons. Tell me about a time when you felt your co-teaching experience could have been better. Probe for: -Feelings about the situation -Does this happen often?	Tell me about your work as a (general education teacher/support teacher) in your co-teaching team. Probe for: -When and what subjects are co-taught -Organization of the day -Who teaches what (roles of each – self and other) -Which models of co-teaching are being used -Communication between teachers -Lesson planning details -Relationship building details -Relationship maintenance details
As you may know, I have worked as both a support teacher in ESOL and a classroom teacher. I am really interested in the human relationships that form in a co-teaching setting, and the successes and frustrations of that partnership. I have some interview questions here that I will refer to, but I mainly want you to tell me about your work in a co-teaching team.	I would like you to think about your assistant principal and how she supports you – specifically as a member of a co-teaching team. Can you think of anything specific to that role that she does that is beneficial? Probe for: - feelings about the situation - suggestions for what would be helpful	

Each interview was transcribed within one week of when the interview occurred, and the researcher engaged in multiple readings of the transcribed data immediately after receipt. Additional notes and reflections were made in the researcher's log while reading the transcribed data as a step in initial data analysis. Questions to include in the second round of interviews as well as confirmation or disagreement with the literature about co-teaching were both included in the researcher's log and in memos within the data. In this way, data analysis occurred at the same time as data collection. The researcher also adjusted the interview guide as appropriate for the interview that would follow. All of these individual interviews were completed in September and October of 2012.

Between the two rounds of interviews with participants were two observation sessions, held in November and December (2012). Additionally, some participants casually mentioned to the researcher aspects of the co-teaching experience that were not discussed in the first round of interviews. This indicated that some reflection was taking place about the topic of co-teaching relationships throughout the study, not only when the participants were actively participating. One participant sent an email to the researcher adding to the data collected during an interview.

A round of follow-up paired interviews was conducted with both teachers in January and February of 2013. The same process was used for scheduling this round of interviews as with the first round, and the teachers' schedules and preferences were honored. The goal of this second and final round of interviews was multi-purpose: (a) to share with participants their transcripts from the first interview for review, (b) to share initial analysis findings as a member-check and to engage in more discussion about those topics, (c) to get closer to answering the research questions and learn more about aspects of the co-teaching relationship, and (d) to observe the co-

teachers interact with one another in an interview format. The purpose of each interview probe is displayed in Table 3.3 and the complete interview guide is in Appendix C.

Table 3.3

Second (Paired) Interview Guide Probes Aligned to Purpose

Deeper Discussion of Themes Revealed in Interview and Observation	**Answering Research Question #1: What are the perspectives of teachers in a co-teaching team?**	**Answering Research Question #2: What are the patterns found within co-teaching partnerships?**
When I observed your planning session, I noticed… Can I hear a little more about that? Would you say this is typical of your practice?	There are a few things that are initially coming across from your co-teaching team from our interviews and/or observations. One of them is…(*explain theme from initial analysis*). Can I hear a little more about that?	There are a few things that are initially coming across from all three co-teaching teams in our interviews and/or observations. One of them is … (*explain theme from initial analysis*). Can I hear a little more about that from your perspectives as co-teachers on the same team?
When I observed your co-taught lesson, I noticed… Can I hear a little more about that? Would you say this is typical of your practice?	There are a few things that are initially coming across from your co-teaching team from our interviews and/or observations. One of them is…(*explain theme from initial analysis*). What do you think about that initial analysis?	
One of the things I noticed when I was looking at the interviews and observations I did with both of you was… (*explain theme from initial analysis*). Can I hear a little bit more about this?	Do you have anything to add that did not come out in our first interview together?	

Member checking was an important step in attending to the validity and reliability of a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1994). Through this final round of interviews, the researcher gathered additional information from the participants, and was able to get closer to answering the research questions. Additionally, the purpose of taking fieldnotes about the participants' interactions during the interview shed even more light on their particular relationship and in some ways, served the purpose of yet another observation.

When the researcher analyzed all data using relevant theories and research questions, a complete interpretation of the data was written and offered to the participants as another layer of member checking. The participants were also given copies of the transcripts from the second round of interviews. Once the final response data had been collected, the researcher analyzed those additional data and revised interpretations accordingly.

Baker and Johnson (1998) wrote about interviewing not only as a way to build knowledge, but also as a step toward action. For the teachers who participated in this study, the interview process acted as a type of professional development: "the post-lesson conversations…were another form of practicing their respective professional knowledge" (Baker & Johnson, 1998, p. 233). Listening was an important way to connect with the participants, and the research process brought light to the perspectives they held. After each interview was complete, several participants commented on the power of talking about their own work with someone in a setting such as the one provided by the participation in this research study. Participants appreciated the opportunity to talk about co-teaching and their work within a co-teaching team, as the opportunities for doing so are typically limited by time and other job-related stresses.

Because the interview guides were crafted to consider the goals of the study, the participants, and the overall theoretical outlook of the study, their intentions were to yield data-rich information. The researcher further increased the richness of the collected data by listening closely to the participants' responses and taking full advantage of the possibilities of mutual benefit for the participants and the researcher.

Observation.

Between the two interview phases, the researcher did two rounds of observations. First was an observation of each co-teaching team's planning session. Next, a co-taught lesson from each team was observed. The purposes of the observations were to learn additional information regarding the co-teaching experience, the perspectives, and the patterns that did not come forward in the interviews, while continuing to analyze collected data.

Observing a planning meeting between co-teachers gave insight to their working relationship and offered more data to contribute to the analysis. The researcher looked for patterns, similarities, and differences between and among co-teaching teams through observing their meetings, all of which were informed by the research process as well as the literature base surrounding co-teaching. The method of constant comparative analysis played a role in all aspects of the research process, including the observation phase. Special attention was paid to ensure that the researcher entered the observation setting without assumptions, trying to "make the familiar strange," a continual goal in any research endeavor (Glesne, 2006, p. 55).

Observation has been used in previous studies regarding co-teaching, often with a focus on observing the co-taught classroom during instructional time, particularly concentrating on equity of power and workload between co-teachers (Hang & Rabren, 2009; Murawski & Lochner, 2010) or on student engagement during co-taught classes (Magiera & Zigmonde,

2005). This case study, however, looked to examine the experiences within a co-teaching relationship, so the observation focus was slightly different. Co-planning is a vital aspect of the success of co-teachers' work together. Murawski and Lochner (2010) explained:

> The purpose of co-planning is for the special educator to have proactive input into the instruction. By using his or her expertise in differentiation, accommodations, positive behavior support, and pedagogy, a lesson can be created that will enable more of the students to access and learn the curriculum the first time it is presented. (p. 175)

It was during these interactions that much about the co-teachers' relationship came forward.

The observation protocols, as presented in Appendices D and E, were each developed based on behaviors indicated in the research to be significant in the analysis of co-teaching partnerships. For the observation of the co-planning session, the researcher selected 10 behaviors to take note of during the observations. These behaviors are supported by research about co-teaching teams, and laid out in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Behaviors Included in Observation Protocol #1 Connected to Research Base

Behavior to be Observed	**Research Base for its Inclusion**
Balance of Power/ Unequal Power Distribution	Murawski, 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2008
Communicating Needs	Conderman et al., 2009; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010
References to Professional Development	Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007
Discussion of Student Needs	Pickard, 2010; Ploessl et al., 2010; Hawbaker, Balong, Buckwalter, & Runyon, 2001

Table 3.4 (continued)

Behaviors Included in Observation Protocol #1 Connected to Research Base

Behavior to be Observed	**Research Base for its Inclusion**
Indication of Compatibility/ Incompatible Indications	Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000
Additional Behaviors Noted During Observation Period	
Body Language	
Verbal Interactions	
Power Dynamics	

For example, the researcher included balance of power and unequal power distribution as behaviors to observe during this first observation session (Murawski, 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2008). Strong communication between co-teachers has been proven as necessary by a number of researchers, so communicating needs was a noted behavior to observe during the planning sessions (Conderman et al., 2009; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008). A preponderance of evidence from reviewing the literature also indicated that professional development is necessary for developing strong co-teaching teams (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007). Because of this finding, the observation protocol included a section to note any reference to professional development during the planning session.

Furthermore, the researcher included any discussion of student needs as another behavior to make notes about (Hawbaker et al., 2001; Pickard, 2010; Ploessl et al., 2010). Because researchers have indicated the importance of co-teachers being compatible (Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000), the observation protocol included indications

of compatibility and incompatibility. The observation protocol also included sections to take notes regarding body language, verbal interactions, and power dynamics, as these are important to record based on research about co-teaching teams (Beninghof, 2003; Friend & Cook, 2013; Kohler-Evans, 2006).

Some of the body language that was noted in particular during the observation period was described in the researcher's log after a co-planning observation with Cassandra and Coal:

> Both teachers were standing throughout the planning session, with their arms crossed in front of their chests off and on and a desk between them. They looked at different resources together such as books selected for reading groups, Coal's planning binder, and Indian corn and squash. The standing I believe can be explained because neither one expected the meeting to last very long, because originally it was only about the schedule change. When Cassandra was talking about the students acting "like marshmallows," she poked Coal several times in the shoulder to indicate what she meant by that choice of words. Coal later pointed this out to me as a bit uncomfortable, although they laughed about it at the time.

Observing the body language of the co-teachers offered further insight to their relationship, as did the other behaviors included in the observation protocol.

Following the observation of a planning session, the researcher observed a co-taught lesson while continuing to collect and analyze data. For this observation, it was important to record any departure from the way the participants described their co-teaching practice and what was actually happening in their classrooms. A Collaborative Teaching Observation Protocol (Stetson and Associates, Inc., 2008) was referenced to create the final protocol that was used, found in Appendix E. First, the researcher observed the type of groupings used by the co-

teachers, namely whole group, small group, or individual instruction. Also noted were the co-teaching models of choice and how long during the session each model was used. Because experts have identified the five main co-teaching models of one teach-one observe, one teach-one assist, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching, it was important to recognize any patterns regarding which models were being used the most often or not at all (Friend et al., 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sims, 2008).

Next, the researcher noted significant behaviors observed with further fieldnotes written about each observed or non-observed behavior. These behaviors were included with an aim at learning the perspectives and patterns to be found within the co-teaching arrangements at the selected site. Informed by research as shown in Table 3.5, these behaviors comprise a quasi-best practices list of co-teaching expectations. A noticeable trend found by seminal researchers of co-teaching indicated that sharing duties and responsibilities equally between teachers is vital to success, so that became a focus of the observation protocol (Conderman et al., 2009; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2005). Furthermore, the researcher was looking for indications of the benefits to teachers and students found through co-teaching. The overall goal of the co-teaching experience is that students and teachers benefit from the partnership, and it was therefore included in the observation protocol.

Table 3.5

Behaviors Included in Observation Protocol #2 Connected to Research Base

Behavior to be Observed	**Research Base for its Inclusion**
Both teachers participate in the presentation of the lesson.	Conderman et al., 2009; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2005
Students interact with both teachers.	Friend, 2008; Murawski & Dieker, 2008; Murawski & Lochner, 2010

Table 3.5 (continued)

Behaviors Included in Observation Protocol #2 Connected to Research Base

Behavior to be Observed	Research Base for its Inclusion
Both teachers are engaged in classroom management.	Conderman et al., 2009; Friend, 2008; Murawski, 2005; Murawski & Lochner, 2010
Instructional resources are shared between teachers.	Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Pickard, 2010
Teachers communicate with one another – verbally? With body language?	Conderman et al., 2009; Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008
Teachers share "power" in the classroom.	Murawski, 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2008
Students benefit from having two teachers in the classroom.	Little, 2005; Pickard, 2010; Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989
Teachers benefit from sharing the classroom with another teacher.	Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000

As the researcher used the observation protocol to glean information from watching both the co-planning and co-taught lesson, extensive fieldnotes were also taken. It was within the detail of the fieldnotes that rich data was also extracted. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) wrote, "[t]he successful outcome of a participant observation study in particular, but other forms of qualitative research as well, relies on detailed, accurate, and extensive fieldnotes" (p. 111). By focusing during observations on the data coming forward regarding the experiences of a co-teaching relationship, the observations proved highly beneficial to this research study.

Data Analysis

This case study was analyzed with the goals of qualitative research and interpretive theory in mind. Moreover, the constant comparison method was used for analysis. Also informing the analysis was the relevant research base about co-teaching relationships.

Qualitative and Interpretive Analysis

As qualitative research and interpretive theory in particular look to build understanding of the humanistic elements in our world, the analysis of collected data in this study was focused on the same goal. As Stake (2010) explained qualitative study, this particular case study was "well triangulated, with key evidence, assertions, and interpretations redundant" (p. 15). Additionally, the goal of this analysis was in line with that of qualitative analysis in general, primarily, "aiming at knowledge production or toward assisting practice" (Stake, 2010, p. 15). The analysis of the data collected during this case study gave a sense of the co-teaching practices at Westview Elementary School. If the information can prove helpful to others looking to know more about co-teaching, that could be an added benefit of this study and these data collection and analysis procedures.

Data analysis was described as "moving from organization to meaning" with a careful eye on valid interpretation based on the data collected and backed up by the underlying theories of the research study (Glesne, 2006, p. 164). Because qualitative research is guided by theoretical perspectives but not artificially formed to fit into theoretical frames, the interview guide, observation protocols, and analysis were all informed by interpretive theory (Roulston, 2010).

Successful researchers are analytic, and view analyzing as "a continuing process that should begin just as soon as…research begins" (Glesne, 2006, p. 94). To that end, the researcher analyzed each interview immediately after it occurred, and considered altering the next interview

guide as a result of analysis. Writing fieldnotes and keeping a researcher's log also proved a necessary aspect of the analysis as well, for it is through writing that we gain understanding. As Richardson (2000) explained, "Writing as a method of inquiry, then, provides a research practice through which we can investigate how we construct the world, ourselves, and others, and how standard objectifying practices of social science unnecessarily limit us and social science" (p. 924). Fieldnotes were therefore also analyzed directly after interviews and observations to reflect on new learning and to consider the focus before the next interview. After all, research interests shifted and took shape throughout the analysis process.

Constant Comparison Method

With an interest in expanding the field of qualitative inquiry while pushing to increase its reputation as a valid form of science in a world mostly focused on quantitative data, Glaser and Strauss (1967) introduced the method of constant comparison analysis "to generate more theory systematically" (p. 102). Grounded theory and constant comparison analysis go hand in hand, working to keep the researcher close to the data, so a theory can be produced that is consistent and practical (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). While this particular case study did not use a grounded theory framework, the constant comparison analysis was a vital process within the data analysis.

Like all research methods, the constant comparison analysis method concerns itself with validity by using a thorough analysis of interview questions and responses, established data collection procedures, an awareness of the researcher's bias, and a concern for the comprehensive nature of the study (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002). Constant comparison analysis has in many ways achieved the goal set for the field of qualitative research by Glaser and Strauss (1967) several decades ago, as its reputation in the research community has been strengthened.

Coding and analyzing data on an ongoing and fluid basis is at the heart of the constant comparison analysis method. Charmaz (2005) described it as "going back to data and forward into analysis" (p. 23). As codes were assigned to pieces of collected data, the researcher looked for "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based…data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). It was through coding and comparing what has been coded to other data sets, to itself, and to the literature, that patterns emerged and conclusions were drawn. Coding as an act brings clarity to the collected data. As Charmaz (2005) shared, "Through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means" (p. 46). This systematic and conscientious method of analysis yielded well-documented processes and conclusive results.

Analyzing the Data

After each interview was transcribed, the researcher read the transcripts several times for complete understanding and to internalize what was said. This proved helpful during the constant comparison method, in that comparing one interview to another takes knowing the data, inside and out, to find points of agreement or disconnect. Key comments were highlighted, and memos were made within the interview transcription. From these highlights, initial codes were developed that attempted to categorize the significant comments. As an example of this process, Table 3.6 shows highlighted text from interviews with memos and initial codes.

Table 3.6

Sample of Transcription Analysis, Interview #1

Participant Interview	Highlighted Text	Researcher Memos	Initial Codes
Louise Somers	"No matter what anybody says, you're not equal in that room to the teacher. You're just not. It's supposed to be 50-50. You are supposed to do the most amount of work but because you get to leave, you cannot hold the same value in that room as teachers."	in line with other comments Louise has made classroom teacher has more ownership of the class and more responsibility	balance of power (BOC) administrative support (AS)
Maya Crosby	"This year's a good year. We're working together very well. It's just a natural synergy. It really is. And I've been co-teaching in special ed inclusion for eight years."	the attempt to describe what makes it "work" continues to be elusive to participants	what makes it work (WMW)
	"And I think that that's the hardest thing about being a co-teacher is that you'll really have to set aside a lot of your professional beliefs and get in there and find some common ground and that's obviously not so easy all the time."	elusive description of success Maya has had some really tough co-teaching situations and has reflected on them	what makes it challenging (WMC) what makes it work (WMW)
Coal McVey	"But again, she might have that background in writing, but I don't know it because I haven't spent that much time with her. We don't have that professional relationship yet – because I've heard all about her divorce but I haven't heard about her Writer's Workshop."	building relationships is a vital first step the difference between personal and professional relationships	building relationships (BR) balance of power (BOP)

From this initial analysis within the interview transcripts, one master table was created to organize the salient data from all interviews. By this stage, through the constant comparison process, some initial codes were collapsed into another code or a new, more accurate code was created. For example, the code "RTI process" (RTI), that referred to the Response to Intervention process for struggling students, was collapsed into the code "Professional Development" (PD). Streamlining the codes made the data more digestible and the analysis more accurate. Using the cross-reference function in Microsoft Word, the researcher was able to use the table for toggling between codes and memos and the exact words of the participants connected to that code. This increased the ease of looking across codes, memos, and the participants' own words to continue the analysis. A very abbreviated example of this master table is shown in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7

Abbreviated Example of Master Table, Transcription Analysis

	planning/reflecting together (PRT)	**what makes it work (WMW)**	**what makes it challenging (WMC)**	**co-teaching models (CTM)**
Isabella Harris	difficult to find time, but necessary describes ideal planning situation	we think the same feels easy feeling confidence in the co-teacher	co-teacher unaware of the other teacher's frustrations with her totally different wavelengths	parallel teaching (using homogeneous small groups) trying one teach-one assist model with poor co-teacher

Table 3.7 (continued)

Abbreviated Example of Master Table, Transcription Analysis

Direct Quotes From Interview (Isabella Harris)
planning/reflecting together: "I like to plan regularly. It's hard to find time especially because last year and this year, I haven't had common planning with either of my co-teachers, and that really hurt us last year. Louise and I try to meet and plan as often as we can. I think it's important because you can't really build effective lessons without doing that. Sometimes it doesn't have to be hours worth of planning. Sometimes it can just be getting together for 5 minutes to touch base on something or it could be an hour of really planning things out."
what makes it work: "It's fabulous. I love it because we think the same. I told Nina Marzipone the other day, she was my EIP support teacher my 2nd year of teaching and it was fabulous because our brains just think the same and I know that's hard to pair...but it just works because we just think the same way in the way we act and talk to the kids. Our focus and motivation is really similar because last year did not go so well at all…It's almost like we're talking and we're talking fast in the conversation and they're not exactly saying everything clearly, I get it. I still can follow them and know what they're talking about because I think they're both very organized and so I can relate to that. "

As the second round of interviews was completed and the data analyzed, the master chart was added to and amended and the analysis process of coding, collapsing codes, and building categories from codes continued.

Observations were also used to gather key information regarding the perspectives and patterns within the co-teaching experience at Westview Elementary School. In this case study, there were two rounds of observations, the first of a co-planning session and the second of a co-taught lesson. The observation protocols, fieldnotes, and researcher's log memos were the

physical rendering of the data from these interactions. The researcher collected this data gathered from each round of observation into a chart as a way to look across observations to confirm similarity or see points of departure. Again using constant comparison, trends started to emerge through analysis. A sample from the table used for analysis of Maya and Eleanor's co-planning session is found in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8

Sample Analysis, Co-Planning Session, Maya and Eleanor

Behavior from Observation Protocol	**Fieldnotes Taken During Observation**	**Researcher's Log Memos**
Balance of Power	schedule change discussed	-Eleanor brought up the topic of adding reading groups to the plans for the next nine weeks and Maya agreed to it. -Maya suggested a time period in the schedule when it might work and Eleanor responded that that sounded "perfect"
Unequal Power Distribution	none noted	
Communicating Needs	Eleanor requested they do more small group reading groups Eleanor requested they do more formal planning	-Eleanor indicated she had a strong need to pull reading groups because of what she has noticed about the students. -Also discussed was how Eleanor has to encourage Maya to do more formal planning. The assumption is, then, that Maya's nature is not to do this formally.
Professional Development References	none noted	

Table 3.8 (continued)

Sample Analysis, Co-Planning Session, Maya and Eleanor

Behavior from Observation Protocol	**Fieldnotes Taken During Observation**	**Researcher's Log Memos**
Discussion of Student Needs	planning done based on individual student needs	-Several student names were brought up when discussing next steps - what needed to be taught next and how -Maya commented that much of their planning is done based on discussing individual student needs -They were reflecting about a test they had given, gone over with student, then allowed students to take a retest. They were disappointed with the results and referring to this test when discussing next steps.

After each observation, the researcher spent time reflecting in the researcher's log, noting anything significant that was observed or any preliminary analysis. A researcher's log is a tool that can be used to ensure reliability. Watt (2007) looked at her own reflection journal from a pilot study to understand the role of reflexivity. She wrote, "Reflective writing allowed me to meaningfully construct my own sense of what it means to become a qualitative researcher" (Watt, 2007, p. 83). A sample of the observation protocol created during Isabella and Louise's planning session including notes about power dynamics and body language, as well as a sample from the researcher's log written immediately after this observation are included in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9

Sample Research Measures, Co-Planning Session, Isabella and Louise

observation protocol sample– planning session with Isabella and Louise	**What power dynamics were noted during the observation period?** Isabella seems to hold more "power" in this particular interaction because of many reasons. For one thing, she had already made her individual plans before this session and was sharing them with Louise. Louise is doing a lot of question asking and Isabella is really taking notes and following Isabella's lead. One reason for this is that Isabella is more familiar with the third grade curriculum, abilities, and expectations than Louise is, so in that way takes the lead. This is in line with the expectations Louise laid out during our first interview together – she made it very clear that classroom teachers should have more control and more power. **What body language was noted during the observation period?** Both teachers were sitting at a kidney table, with their planning books open between them. Louise was taking notes, changing her lesson plans, and looking up resources as they talked. Isabella, by contrast, glanced at her own plans as they talked but made no changes and included no notes. This seems to corroborate my thinking about Isabella being more in charge of plans and decisions, and Louise acting as support.
researcher's log sample – after observing planning session with Isabella and Louise	11/2/12 - *There are a number of indications pointing to the idea that Isabella and Louise have an interesting balance of power dynamic that is a little different from what I read in the research, which often insists on even sharing of power. Louise spoke about this in our interview, indicating that the classroom teacher has so much more work to do than the special education co-teacher. She was more vocal about this idea than anyone else, as she has just worked as a 4th grade classroom teacher. I am beginning to think that, while the research says it needs to be evenly shared, actually it is more important and practical for the power balance to work out for the team itself. Louise and Isabella are both really pleased with the way this partnership is going, so isn't that enough to call it successful?*

A similar process was undertaken for the second observation, this time while observing a co-taught lesson. Using an observation protocol, the researcher noted significant behaviors and wrote extensive fieldnotes during the observation period. After the observation, the researcher's log was used again as a vital physical rendering of the data. An example of fieldnotes taken during the co-taught lesson observation with Coal and Cassandra follows. These notes refer to the behavior on the protocol, "Students Interact with Both Teachers," a behavior mostly not observed:

- Only the students in Coal's reading group mostly interacted with Mrs. McVey (Coal).
- Most students interacted more with Ms. O'Neal (Cassandra), the general education teacher, and would throughout the day because they spend more time with her. After her reading group finished, one student came over to Mrs. McVey to share a personal story as the others were lining up for recess.

Observing the co-taught lesson was important to further analysis and also to see the models of co-teaching used by the three teams at Westview Elementary School.

There are five main co-teaching models identified by the research: one teach-one observe, one teach-one assist, parallel teaching, station teaching, alternative teaching, and team teaching (Friend et al., 2010; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007; Sims, 2008). Noticing trends about which models were being used brought light to the patterns of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School, and therefore addressed one of the research questions of this study. Of the 120 minutes spent observing co-taught lessons, the parallel teaching model was used for 70 minutes, an alternative model (in this case, two small guided reading groups) was used for 40 minutes, the one teach-one assist model was used for 5 minutes, and the one teach-

one observe model was used for another 5 minutes. A few extra minutes were spent one-on-one with a child in one of the classrooms as well. These co-teaching models are presented in Figure 3.5.

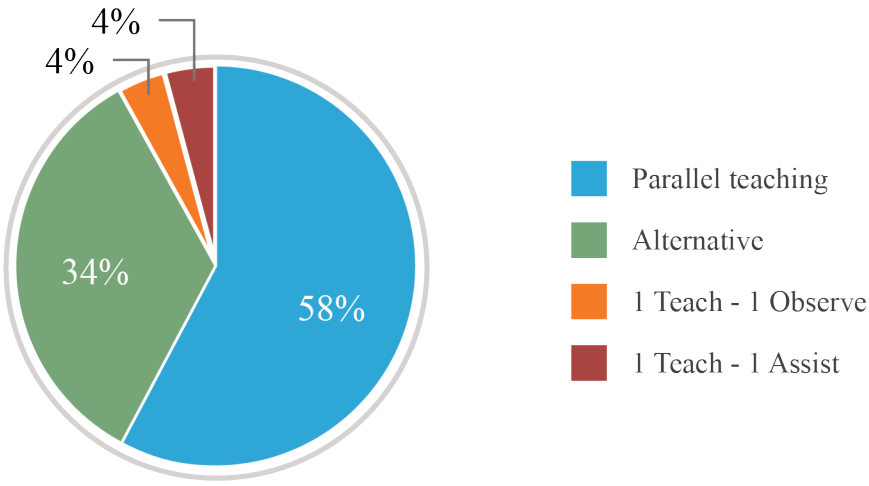

Figure 3.5: Co-Teaching Models Observed.

There was a clear preference to the parallel teaching model of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School during the observation periods.

Through the process of constant comparative analysis, each piece of data collected was compared to itself and to other pieces of data. The resultant trends revealed much about the co-teaching experience, namely the perspectives and patterns that existed in co-teaching. The perspectives of co-teachers at Westview Elementary School were revealed through separate case studies of each co-teaching team. The co-teaching patterns were revealed through a cross-case analysis, looking at the data revealed from all six co-teachers studied. Findings from both types of analysis are reported in chapter four.

Trustworthiness

Researchers continually aim to build validity and reliability with their participants during the data collection phase, then with the public that will read their finished work and trust in the findings. As a researcher working from an interpretive frame, this can prove problematic at times. Schwandt (2007) explained: "Among the most knotty problems faced by investigators committed to interpretive practices in disciplines and fields such as…educational research…are deciding whether an interpretation is credible and truthful and whether one interpretation is better than another" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 11). There were a variety of measures the researcher put into place to increase trustworthiness. Among them were:

1. triangulation of data: interviews, observations, fieldnotes, researcher's log
2. participant validation through member checking
3. extracting rich, descriptive data
4. reflective practices, namely through writing about what was observed and uncovering possible meanings in the researcher's log

Lincoln and Guba (1986) established several techniques that increase trustworthiness, including triangulation, member checks, and thick descriptive data, each of which were used by the researcher. Being a reflective researcher also increases validity. Stake (1994) wrote, "[g]ood researchers deliberately challenge their own emergent findings, pursuing rival explanations supported by data and strengthening conclusions about what is learned" (p. 37). Deeply understanding emerging data, the relevant literature and theories about co-teaching, and continually questioning these understandings strengthens the validity of findings and interpretations.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a continual goal of the qualitative researcher and one that increases the trustworthiness of a study. Roulston (2010) explained, "The task of considering the self in qualitative inquiry is a continuously evolving and ongoing task, and will never be completed" (p. 127). Qualitative researchers, unlike those with a more positivist stance, never wish to remove themselves completely from the research; it is in fact believed by many to be impossible to do (Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Roulston, 2010; Stake, 2010). However, reflexivity goes beyond self-analysis as a researcher, beyond recognizing one's own subjectivities and connections to the data.

True reflexivity is an ongoing exercise in the process of a research study. It asks the researcher to examine every part of the study, from the topic selection to the writing process, with a reflective eye. Reflexivity can offer much to a research study in that it ensures validity by crafting thoughtful researchers (Bott, 2010; Dowling, 2008), and allows deeper understandings to be built through writing reflectively (Watt, 2007).

In an interpretive case study, reflexivity is seen as an interaction. Not only does the researcher have to consider what biases are being brought to the research study, but also why each and every decision has been made along the way. Bott (2010) wrote, "Central to maintaining reflexivity is the need for researchers to constantly locate and relocate themselves within their work, and to remain in dialogue with research practice, participants, and methodology" (p. 160). In this case study, continual reflection took the form of a researcher's log, fieldnotes, and research memos.

Reflective practice in this case study was fleshed out through the written word. Writing in itself offered major benefits to the researcher throughout the research process and became an

integral part of this case study. Through writing, the researcher came to understand the data, the emerging analysis, and the final product. The method of constant comparison was augmented and aided through writing. Richardson (2000) explained the power of writing as discovery when she wrote, "I write because I want to find something out. I write in order to learn something that I did not know before I wrote it" (p. 924). Finding out the perspectives and patterns of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School was made possible through writing about the data and the experience of collecting, and then analyzing the data.

Subjectivity Statement.

This research topic was closely tied to the researcher's own professional learning. Interpretive theory, in itself, asks researchers to look again at the seemingly familiar: "Understanding turns out to be a development of what is already understood, with the more developed understanding returning to illuminate and enlarge one's starting point" (Crotty, 1998, p. 92). While looking more deeply at the pedagogical practice of co-teaching, this research study had profound implications for the researcher's own professional growth.

Many researchers have found the schoolhouse to be an incredibly rich venue for the observation of human relationships; great pleasure can come from pondering the human relationships that are found up and down the halls. As a teacher of English as a second language (ESL) accustomed to working with students alone in her own classroom, the researcher's taste for learning from and about people was indulged when the administrators adopted a co-teaching model several years ago. From that time until recently, the researcher planned with, learned from, taught with, and got to know several dynamic classroom teachers in a co-teaching team. Since then, with an interest to see both sides of the relationship, she has worked as a 4th grade

classroom teacher welcoming English as a second language (ESL) co-teachers into her classroom, learning, planning, and teaching together.

While no researcher is completely disconnected from his or her research study, the professional and personal interest of the researcher surrounding this topic is great. The researcher is an elementary school teacher, as were the teachers included in this case study. At the time of writing, she is currently and has been in the past involved in numerous co-teaching partnerships, on both the side of the English as a second language (ESL) teacher as well as the general education teacher. Also, because of the statistical makeup of the staff at the selected site, they also shared her gender (female), race (white), and presumably her socioeconomic status. With this in mind, these similarities have no doubt colored the analysis of the data collected. Conversely, qualitative researchers never wish to remove themselves completely from the research, as they understand the impossibility of that task and the benefits at times offered by their subjectivities (Roulston, 2010; Stake, 2010; Jootun et al., 2009). Being aware of these truths in similarities and reflecting on them throughout the research process ensured the desired trustworthiness.

Ethics.

There were no significant ethical or political problems in doing this study. It cannot be denied that teachers take their craft to heart, and in discussing these relationships there was a constant possibility that negative information would come up about former or current co-teachers. Keeping this in mind, the researcher assured participants of the confidentiality agreement before interviewing and observing, and gave member check interviews to reassure participants of the importance of confidentiality.

Furthermore, pseudonyms were assigned while writing up the data and used at all times during the study, further reassuring participants that their own and others' identities would remain confidential. Once the transcriptions were completed, the researcher destroyed the original recordings so there would be no trace of the interview except the transcribed data with pseudonyms in place. Copies of all transcripts were also shared with each participant. Particularly in cases that revealed a negative relationship between teachers, adequate use of pseudonyms and stripping the data of identifying features was especially important to ensure anonymity.

Risks and Benefits.

There were no major risks to the participants in this study. As for benefits, talking about the dynamics of being in a co-teaching team allowed time for the participating teachers to reflect on this aspect of their professional life. Teachers set aside so little time to contemplate the teaching craft and their daily work; it was the researcher's hope that the interviews provided time for this. Baker and Johnson (1998) view the qualitative interview as a forum for teachers to build knowledge and to take a step towards action.

There was no doubt that the conversations about co-teaching enhanced relationships and strengthened teaching experiences, as many of the participants made casual comments about the value they placed on the time spent in interview and observation during the research phase. Baker and Johnson (1998) explained, "Talk is situated action; and professional talk is situated professional action: pedagogic practice" (p. 241). Offering this sort of professional development to teachers was a before-unexpected advantage of participation in most instances. Particularly for the participants who had negative co-teaching partnerships, this study gave them a confidential format for voicing those concerns.

Limitations

This study was limited by scope and by geographic and temporal factors. The study focused on three co-teaching teams in one specific elementary school in one specific district in one specific state. Because co-teaching can look very differently across schools and systems, the findings represented cannot be generalized to other systems or schools. Included in the review of the literature, however, were studies that depicted co-teaching in a wide variety of settings. As this information was used to strengthen analysis, this limitation was minimized.

This study took place over a six-month period, from August 2012 to January 2013, so the results are also limited by time. While the time frame was limited, many of the conversations in the interviews were relating to past co-teaching experiences, so in some ways the time period was not exclusive. Much of the final analysis came from data related to these past interactions, so their inclusion was significant. Also, several studies in the literature review were longitudinal in nature and offered a perspective that aided in analysis.

Despite these limitations, all research adds to the research base, expands the thinking about a topic, and can inform future practice. Because of these truths, and despite the limitations, the researcher felt confident that this study told the story of co-teaching in one place, and those results are in line with the intentions at the outset of the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. In particular, this study sought to learn the perspectives and patterns within the co-teaching experience. A qualitative approach was used to collect and to analyze data from six teachers, in three co-teaching teams, through interviews and observations.

This study was significant because of the trend toward co-teaching and inclusion during the current climate of standards-based reform in American schools (Friend et al., 2010; Little, 2005; Nichols et al., 2010; Sims, 2008). To hold all students accountable for mastery of each subject area, schools began looking for alternative methods of teaching students. Co-teaching is one of these methods, and many believe the benefits to children are significant (Friend et al., 2010; Nichols et al., 2010). While no studies have yet identified an increase in standardized test results due to co-teaching, schools began using the pedagogical practice for its other offerings, such as increased interest and participation in class (Gerber & Popp, 1999), increased student attendance (Friend et al., 2010), improved self-perception (Pickard, 2010), and improved student grades (Friend et al., 2010; Jang, 2006).

Teachers have also reported strong results for their own professional growth from positive co-teaching experiences (Carless & Walker, 2006; Game & Metcalfe, 2009; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008; Scheeler et al., 2010). Of course, there have been also been a significant number

of studies that point out less than ideal co-teaching situations, the difficulties experienced by teachers and students in these negative partnerships, and the damaging effects they can have (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Sims, 2008).

This study examined the adult relationships that form within the co-teaching arrangement, as sharing the workday and classroom can significantly impact the lives of teachers. The research questions pursued in this study were:

1. What are the perspectives of general education teachers and special education or English as a second language (ESL) teachers regarding their pedagogical experience of co-teaching?
2. What are the patterns within the co-teaching team experience?

The research questions were answered using an interpretive inquiry approach through semi-structured interviewing and observations. The researcher interviewed each of the six teachers individually and in pairs, and observed a planning session and a co-taught lesson. Reflective practices were present throughout the study, in the form of fieldnotes and a researcher's log. The constant comparative method was used for analysis of the data. The data are presented in this chapter, first by offering an analysis of each individual co-teaching team and then as a cross-case analysis. The perspectives of co-teachers were understood more thoroughly through the case study of each co-teaching team, and the patterns were presented through the cross-case analysis.

Overview of the Study

The study was launched in August 2012, when the researcher sent an email to possible participants asking for their interest in participating in the study, as seen in Appendix A. Multiple follow-up conversations took place before a group of six participants, in three co-teaching teams,

were selected. Participants in this study were selected based on a number of requirements. The sample selection criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Participants were employed at Westview Elementary School, the school selected for this research study.
2. Participants were teachers currently working in co-teaching teams.
3. Participants were teachers who had some previous experience with the co-teaching model.

The participants in the study included three general education teachers (Isabella, Cassandra, and Maya), two special education teachers (Louise and Eleanor), and one English as a second language teacher (Coal). The researcher wanted the resultant study to be indicative of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School; and therefore, selected co-teachers from both the special education and English as a second language (ESL) departments, as all are used in co-teaching teams at the selected site. The six participants are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Participant Profile

Participant Name	Years in Education	Years at WES	Highest Degree Earned	Grade Taught	Certification Area(s)	Number of Years Co-Teaching
Cassandra O'Neal	20 years	9 years	Educational Specialist, Instruction	4th, general education	Pre K – 8	8 years
Coal McVey	25 years	12 years	Masters, School Counseling	4th/5th, ESL and literacy support	Pre K- 8, ESL, Reading	12 years

Table 4.1 (continued)

Participant Profile

Participant Name	Years in Education	Years at WES	Highest Degree Earned	Grade Taught	Certification Area(s)	Number of Years Co-Teaching
Isabella Harris	7 years	7 years	Masters, Elementary Math and Reading	3rd, general education	Pre K - 5	5 years
Louise Somers	9 years	4 years	Masters, Special Education	3rd/4th, Special Education	Pre K – 5, Special Education (PreK-12)	9 years
Maya Crosby	23 years	16 years	Masters, Educational Technology	5th, general education	K-6	8 years
Eleanor Smith	13 years	13 years	Masters, Social Work	K/2nd / 5th, Special Education	Special Education, School Social Work	8 years

The round of individual interviews were held in September and early October 2012. The interviews were held at a time and place convenient to the participants, and every attempt was made so that it was a comfortable experience for each participant. The researcher took extensive notes in a researcher's log after completing each interview, so that no significant remembrances would be lost, and so the researcher's log could be used as another source for data analysis. The researcher also transcribed and analyzed the interviews as soon as possible to adjust the interview questions and to process content. After each interview, a significant amount of

reflection took place to prepare for the subsequent interview, with the hope of continually improving the process of gathering data for this study.

In late October and throughout November 2012, the researcher observed a co-planning session with each co-teaching teams using an Observation Protocol, as presented in Appendix D. As the participants planned together, the researcher sat in on the session and took extensive fieldnotes. Special care was taken to ensure the planning sessions were held in an authentic manner indicative of how the team would typically meet. After each observed session, the researcher reflected and took notes in the researcher's log to continue the process of analysis, noting any significance across or within co-teaching teams that addressed the research questions.

Following soon after the planning session observation was the observation of a co-taught lesson wherein the researcher was able to see the actual co-teaching practices of the participants. A second Observation Protocol was used to guide this observation and is displayed in Appendix E. The researcher assured the participants that the observation should take place at a time when typical practice was being displayed, so that more authentic data were collected. The participants offered several time options for being observed, and the researcher chose between those times and gave advanced notice of the observation. The researcher's log was again used to record significant remembrances and to begin the initial analysis of what was observed.

The final stage of data collection took place in January 2013 in the form of a paired interview with each co-teaching team. By this stage, the researcher had done a thorough analysis of all data collected up to that point and was therefore able to construct an interview quite specific to the data that had been revealed and any gaps that needed to be addressed. The interview guide is presented in Appendix F. This final phase of data collection was coupled with member checking, wherein the researcher briefed the co-teaching teams about what the data

analysis had revealed thus far, and made changes and additions as needed based on the feedback of the participants. Finally, the transcripts of the initial round of interviews were shared with the participants. They were asked to read them over and make comments as necessary.

The process of data analysis using the constant comparison methods was ongoing through the data collection phases. As soon as interviews were completed, the data were transcribed and read over several times to ensure a more complete comprehension, as the data set included nine interviews and six observations. Next, the researcher highlighted particularly salient points, trends noted across interviews and observations, and anything surprising or out of the ordinary. The researcher continued to return to the researcher's log to record new thinking during this process, as well as to read over notes taken during the interviews and observations to augment analysis.

As initial codes were assigned, the researcher organized the emerging data on a master table, including original quotations from the participants that expanded on the ideas simplified by memos and codes. The cross-reference function in Microsoft Word allowed the researcher to toggle between codes and research memos and the exact words of the participants, a feature that allowed for streamlined and more precise constant comparison. As the analysis continued, some codes were collapsed to be included into more appropriate codes or categories. Other codes were eliminated altogether for their irrelevance and others still were changed to more accurately reflect their meaning.

A second and third matrix were made using the data from both rounds of observations, with interactions and behaviors noted in an organized way, also useful for the constant comparison method of data analysis. Throughout the data collection process, the researcher's log became a vital tool for ensuring reflective practices, for moving deeper into analysis, and to

come to understand the analysis process. Using the constant comparison method of analysis with the interviews, observations, notes from the researcher's log, fieldnotes, and research memos, a complete interpretation of the perspectives and patterns of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School was written. The perspectives of co-teachers at the site were revealed through the individual case study of each co-teaching team, and the patterns came forward in the cross-case analysis of all six co-teachers that participated in the study.

Context of Brockman County Public Schools

Brockman County Public Schools is a large school system in the southern state where it is located. During the 2012-2013 school year, the county served more than 165,000 students in its elementary, middle, and high schools. The county is divided into 19 regions referred to as clusters, each named for the high school within the region. Each cluster had one high school, one or two middle schools, and from three to six elementary schools. There were a total of 132 schools in the county system, including 11 schools of alternative format that are not classified within the cluster system.

Brockman County Public Schools have received recognition across the country for strong academic achievement, notably because of the system's large size and ability to make headway in closing the achievement gap for various income and minority ethnic groups. A motto of "A System of World-Class Schools" became the foundation in all countywide initiatives and was included in all system-wide publications. The system was awarded a prestigious national award for educational excellence in 2010, the largest education award in the country. Co-teaching and other alternative teaching models are used to reach students with disabilities and students whose first language is not English. Some of the strategic goals of the school system speak directly to the idea that all students should succeed:

Strategic Goal 1: Brockman County Public Schools will ensure a world-class education for all children by focusing on teaching and learning the curriculum.

Strategic Goal 3: Brockman County Public Schools will optimize student achievement through responsible stewardship of its financial resources and the proactive pursuit of all resources necessary to meet current and future demands.

Brockman County Public Schools, therefore, support schools like Westview Elementary School where co-teaching is the norm for helping all students to be successful.

The county had a relatively even demographic distribution, with roughly the same percentages of White, Hispanic, and African-American students. More specifically, 33% of Brockman County Public School's students were white, 28% were African American, and 25% were Hispanic. The county spent about $7,391 per student in expenditures, a figure that was roughly equivalent to the amount per pupil spent in the other surrounding school systems.

As for students receiving special programs, Westview Elementary School was relatively representative of Brockman County Public Schools for the percentage of students in special education, but not for the English as a second language program. More specifically, Brockman County Public Schools served about 11% of students in special education services, and Westview Elementary School served about 9%. Countywide, 16% of students were learning English as a second language (ESL) while at the selected site, 35% of students were receiving ESL services. This difference was likely due to the wider scope of students from grades kindergarten through twelfth-grade for the county, while the school was only including students from kindergarten through fifth grade. It can be assumed that fewer students qualify for ESL services as they get older and acquire more English.

Context of Westview Elementary School

Westview Elementary School was a public K-5 elementary school in Brockman County Public Schools, a large school system in the southeastern United States. In the 2012-2013 school year, there were 1,649 students enrolled at Westview Elementary School. As for racial background, 44% of students were African American, 38% were Hispanic/Latino, and 11% of students were White. Students in the Special Education program made up 9% of the school's population in that calendar year, and 35% were in the ESL (English as a second language) program. The special education and ESL student populations at Westview Elementary School have historically been the main recipients of co-teaching efforts. However, a benefit cited by experts about co-teaching is that all students in the classroom can benefit from having a second teacher in the classroom (Al-Saaideh, 2011; Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Carless & Walker, 2006).

Westview Elementary School was a school with students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Many of Westview Elementary School's students came from families with low socio-economic status. More specifically, 82% of the school's students were in the free or reduced price lunch program in the 2012-2013 school year. This level has remained relatively stagnant for the last few years, as in the 2011-2012 school year there were 79% of students in the free or reduced price lunch program and in 2010-2011, 81% were enrolled. The high poverty classification qualified Westview Elementary School to be a Title One School, a classification the school had held since 1991.

As for teachers at Westview Elementary School, there were 116 teachers employed during the 2012-2013 school year. Of these, 64 teachers had earned a Master's Degree, 19 teachers had a Specialist in Education Degree, and 5 held Doctoral Degrees. At the time of the

study, most teachers at Westview Elementary School had between six and ten years of experience in education, while a large number also had between 11 and 15 years of experience. The teachers selected as participants in this study were representative of all teachers at Westview Elementary School.

Specific to co-teaching at the selected site, during the year of the study, there were 47 co-teaching teams at Westview Elementary School, made up of 71 general education teachers and 16 support (special education or English as a second language) teachers. The number of co-taught classes and the amount of time co-teachers have spent in classrooms had declined over the last few years before the study, due to budget and personnel concerns. This information is displayed on Figure 4.1. In the 2011-2012 school year, there were 59 co-taught classes and in 2010-2011, there were 63 co-taught classes.

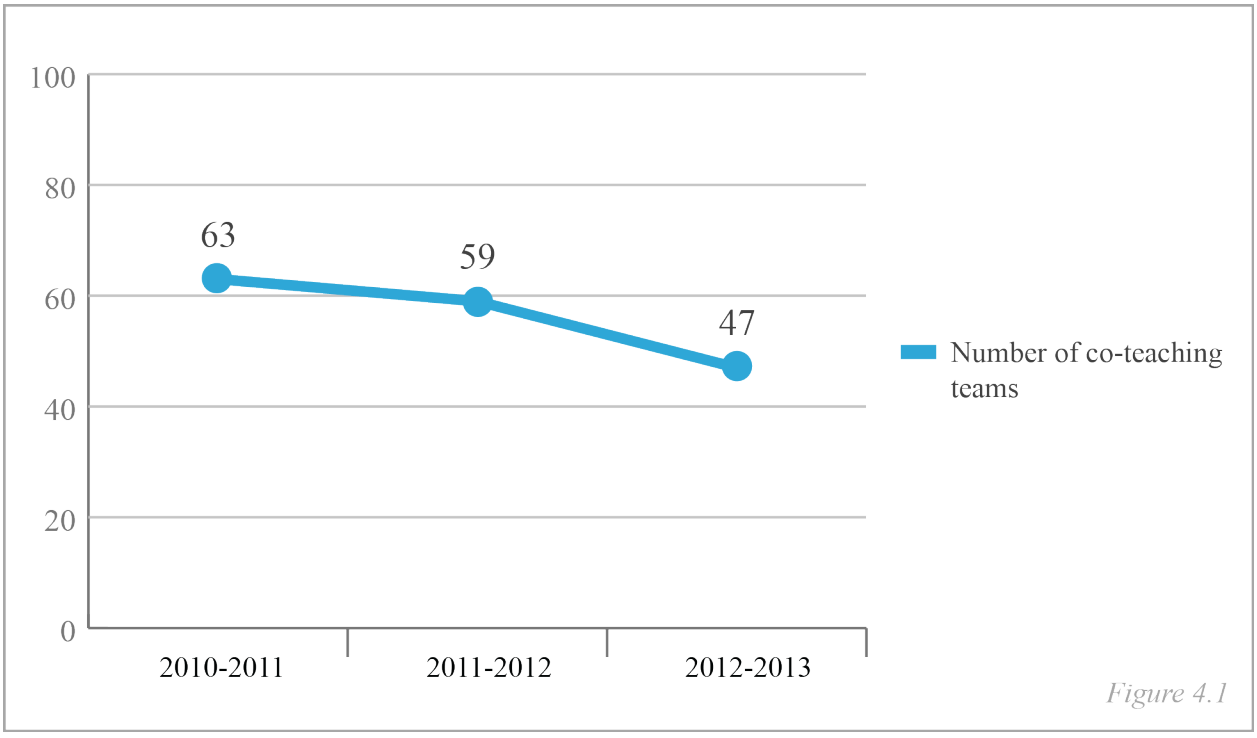

Figure 4.1: Number of Co-Teaching Teams, Westview Elementary School.

Furthermore, about 30% of all teachers at Westview Elementary School held an English as a second language (ESL) certificate and about 10% of teachers have their special education certificate.

Co-Teaching Teams: The Perspectives of Co-Teachers at Westview Elementary School

By looking at each individual co-teaching team and the data collected through interviews and observations with each team, the perspectives of co-teachers at the selected site were uncovered. The research questions regarding the perspectives of teachers in a co-teaching relationship were examined by focusing in on trends that were noted through the constant comparison analysis. Each individual team, Isabella and Louise, Cassandra and Coal, and Maya and Eleanor, offered a different set of perspectives on the practice of co-teaching. Because of the variety of perspectives that came up during the analysis, a true picture of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School can be revealed.

Isabella and Louise

Isabella and Louise were co-teaching in Isabella's third grade class at Westview Elementary School when this study was conducted. Louise was a special education teacher and was co-teaching with Isabella for three segments spread throughout the day, teaching the subject areas of Math, Reading, and Language Arts. In interviews and observations, the teachers described having a very positive relationship, discussed issues in a very low-conflict way, and spoke highly of one another. During the final paired interview, the two teachers interacted in a sociable and friendly way, making jokes and laughing with one another. Their students responded very well to both teachers, and in general, their classroom was a place where teaching and learning was evident, and students felt appreciated.

Isabella has been teaching third grade for six years and has been at Westview Elementary School for seven, coming straight from college to teach there. She has had many co-teaching experiences over the years with many different co-teachers. Louise has been teaching for nine years and at Westview Elementary School for four years. The year of the study was Louise's first year back to teaching special education inclusion because for two years prior to that she was a 4th grade general education teacher. Isabella has, therefore, experienced co-teaching from both sides of the relationship, and she was able to offer her unique perspective on the matter because of this experience.

When observed co-teaching a lesson, this pair used the co-teaching model of parallel teaching. Parallel teaching is defined as two teachers working with small groups at the same time delivering the same content. It was evident from the interviews that this was their preferred model, and the one they used most often. Both teachers brought small groups of students to their reading tables to deliver the same lesson or concept simultaneously. The teachers spoke in the final interview about the benefit of overhearing their co-teacher explain a concept to students, then "re-using" the same ideas or methods with their own group, an advantage to sharing a classroom with another teacher.

During the classroom observation, both teachers used geoboards and math journals to teach about the area of rectangles. Each teacher called two separate groups to their tables for the same lesson during the 40 -minute time block. Students appeared engaged and excited to be in a small group. When Isabella and Louise called their second math group over, the kids went quickly to their tables, seemingly excited to have their turn. Students who were not working with a teacher at any given time were doing independent work related to the math topic of area as

well. This parallel teaching model appeared to suit the needs of both teachers and students, as it offered small group and individualized instruction to students.

Among the trends that showed up as important within Isabella and Louise's co-teaching relationship were the difficulties of planning together and the balance of power, the positive and negatives of co-teaching, the influence that administrators have on their co-teaching roles, and standardized testing as it relates to co-teaching.

Planning together: a three-act play with one director.

Isabella and Louise both felt that planning together and being well prepared for class was essential to "building effective lessons" (Isabella). Despite this, time restraints broke up their planning process into three separate sessions. These teachers did not have common planning time built into their school day, so finding time to meet was a challenge. Each teacher began the process by planning separately, based on the 3rd grade curriculum calendars and teaching resources. In particular, Isabella preferred doing initial planning alone, and cited Louise's first year co-teaching the third grade level as one of the reasons. She said, "especially this year with Louise, she's never taught third grade before, so she doesn't know the curriculum well which is fine." Because of this, Isabella preferred getting her "thoughts together" before discussing the upcoming week with Louise.

After that, if time allowed, the two teachers came together and confirmed their plans. Because they did not have a common planning period, this usually happened during lunch on Fridays when students were invited back to Isabella's classroom as a reward. As Isabella said, "It's hard to find time especially because last year and this year, I haven't had common planning with either of my co-teachers, and that really hurt us last year." The teachers planned with *The Magic School Bus* or another video playing in the background. This was by no means ideal, but it

was their reality. Isabella acted as the leader of this joint meeting, as she spent much of the time updating Louise on what the students were expected to know and how she has found it best to teach them. Both teachers changed or updated their plans as needed. A theme that ran throughout the data collected from Isabella and Louise is that Louise saw Isabella as the lead teacher who held more power, and Louise felt this was a perfectly fine arrangement.

Because Louise has been on both sides of the co-teaching relationship, she understood the role and stresses that are felt by a classroom teacher such as Isabella. Louise explained the difference in stress and work level between a classroom teacher and a special education teacher. Louise stated quite bluntly that classroom teachers have more work by saying:

> In terms of the prep and the amount of space that's in my brain now that wasn't there when I was a classroom teacher, it's a lot less stressful for me [as a special education teacher]. Because there are so many things to keep track of [as a classroom teacher].

This realization combined with her first year co-teaching in third grade made Louise feel okay about relinquishing control to Isabella. This norm of control was also evident in the observations conducted. During both the co-taught lesson and the planning session, Louise deferred to Isabella for decision-making. For example, when planning together, Louise asked Isabella to clarify the curriculum standards that needed to be covered in the coming week and about the pacing of a book they planned to read aloud in small groups. Also, when teaching together, Louise asked Isabella if they planned to work with two small groups or just one during the math period.

Isabella also alluded to the fact that her load is a bit heavier than most general education teachers. She was discussing the number of teachers she has worked with in years past, either coming into her room or taking students out for special services. Isabella was the only special education inclusion teacher in third grade, so the busy nature of her classroom was unique. On

any given day, Isabella has had in her room a special education co-teacher like Louise, a speech teacher, an occupational therapist, and had students leaving to go to their special education classes in another part of the building with yet another teacher. She explained:

> So I think sometimes…I think it's more [work] if you're [teaching] Special Education [inclusion.] I don't think people realize how many adults I'm dealing with because somebody really recently said to me, "What's wrong with Special Ed?" Because I don't complain hardly ever about it… I just looked at her and I thought, 'I'm going to walk away now!'

Isabella certainly had a busy classroom, and Louise was quite aware of this and willing to do what it took to help Isabella be successful. Allowing Isabella to have more control seemed to work for their partnership, and they both recognized why.

The final phase in the planning sessions for these teachers, especially Louise, was keeping an emergency backup "stash" of materials. Because Louise traveled to her inclusion classrooms with a cart, she kept extra materials just in case plans changed, and she had to pull something out at the last minute. She said in an individual interview:

> I've kind of learned… I don't want to be caught. I don't ever want to say, "You didn't tell me what to do!" I don't ever want that…I just like to have a couple of extra things in case she says, "Do you want to pull this group to the back?" I don't want to ask her, "What [am] I supposed to do with them?"…Because I'm a teacher, like she is. I'm not a parapro [paraprofessional]—contrary to what the kids think, or an assistant, or anything like that...I should be responsible to know what I'm supposed to be teaching in that room.

This "be prepared" attitude that Louise held was in contrast to a negative co-teaching experience Isabella had in the past, wherein the special education co-teacher was never prepared and relied

on Isabella to tell her what to do. Isabella explained what it was like working with a difficult co-teacher by saying, "She came in and it was like I knocked on her head, 'Hello! I need your help!' It was awful because she just wasn't focused. She wasn't prepared, didn't have things organized." Perhaps this was one of the reasons for the success Isabella and Louise have found working together: Isabella felt preparation was very important, and Louise wanted to always be prepared so that she can maintain her professionalism.

Successes and failures: teaching is an "intimate experience."

Isabella and Louise have both had multiple co-teaching experiences with a wide range of results. Isabella has worked with five different co-teachers and Louise has worked with 13. Not only has Louise experienced working as the special education support teacher, she has also seen the other side of the relationship. Before returning to the special education department, Louise was a general education fourth grade teacher and had two special education co-teachers in her classroom. Isabella, as a classroom teacher for seven years, has taught with five co-teachers, from the special education, English as a second language (ESL), and Early Intervention Program (EIP) departments. Because of these experiences, both teachers were able to reflect on the positives and negatives that co-teaching can bring.

As for the current co-teaching assignment, both teachers spoke very positively about their experiences, an opinion that was supported by their interactions. Isabella described a constructive co-teaching experience as one in which the teachers "think the same," where the partnership felt "easy." Isabella was in general a strong advocate for co-teaching, saying, "When she [Louise] comes in, I want it to be fun because it's fun to have another adult in the room." Isabella spoke of several positive experiences, and connected the positive interactions to her students' perceptions. In Isabella's eyes, having a positive co-teaching relationship also impacted the students. Isabella

explained, “It’s just so nice when there’s another adult in the room. You can do funny things and it gets the kids’ attention…because the kids love seeing their teachers have a good relationship.” Louise also enjoyed co-teaching with Isabella, and credited the success to a classroom and teacher who have established “a flow” and their abilities to read one another’s “nonverbal cues.”

Much of the conversation in the interviews was about co-teaching experiences of the past, and these teachers both had a wealth of information to reflect on. Louise had a particularly poignant, multi-year co-teaching relationship at a former school several years ago with a teacher named Cindy. Louise shared:

> We’re really good friends still. Teaching is a very intimate experience. It’s not like if you’re a data entry person or something and you sit next to somebody and that’s how you work together. It’s very human. It’s intimate - a word I can only think of that accurately describes teaching with teacher-student relationships and teacher-teacher relationships.

A thread that ran through the conversations and observations with both Isabella and Louise was this idea that teaching is unlike many other professions, and that because of this, relationships in the school building have particular impact.

In the final interview, both teachers expanded on the idea that “teaching is an intimate experience,” and how co-teaching can enhance this intimacy. Louise explained, “I think it takes on a mom-dad situation, where it feels very familial. Just the fact that there are two people in there, sets it up as more like a family.” Isabella agreed that when co-teachers are connected, the students appreciate this closeness. Isabella clarified, “That’s important to me—building relationships with the kids. I think it helps them academically, and having someone that you get along with so well, I think it helps bring the kids where you want them sooner.” This positive,

intimate, and relationship-building kind of co-teaching arrangement is what both teachers hope for each year and with each new co-teaching partner.

When the pair was discussing a fellow teacher's difficulties with angry or demanding parents, Louise returned to defining teaching as different from other professional endeavors because of the intimacy involved. Louise said:

> That's also a part of why it's intimate. It's because people get mad at you. That doesn't really happen at corporate, business-type jobs. It's unprofessional to be mad at somebody, but parents don't have that requirement and they don't even feel that kind of obligation to be civil sometimes or to be polite. And you have to deal with crap like that all the time. That's intimate. Anger is intimate—somebody being mad at you is intimate.

Sharing the burden with another teacher, be it an angry parent or whatever else can come up in a busy school day, is a cited benefit of co-teaching (Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Both Isabella and Louise also spoke with clarity about relationships in their past that were less than ideal. In particular, Isabella worked with a special education teacher the previous year that "just didn't interact with the kids. Hardly at all." Despite numerous attempts to talk over the matter with administrators and to try different approaches to help Mrs. Rocker, Isabella felt it was never a successful relationship. And the impact was significant. Isabella described her frustrations:

> I would rather have a more difficult class student-wise than have a difficult co-teacher because I can work with the kids and try and figure out different things and strategies to help their behavior, get them the learning support that they need if they're low [academically], but as far as somebody who I can't communicate with, that was really hard.

Whatever the reason for its difficulty, the relationship between Isabella and Mrs. Rocker was an example of what a burden co-teaching can be when the teachers are not compatible.

Louise, while reflecting on co-teaching relationships that were less than ideal, referred back to the "teaching is an intimate experience" idea. Because of the closeness required of teachers sharing the workday, when things do not work out, it can be "very sticky and weird." Louise spoke of taking preventative steps to avoid this situation, such as getting to know her co-teachers in advance and spending significant time observing their classroom norms to fit into the expectations set. She hypothesized, "What would you do if it didn't work, and you're in there for the whole year? The kids would pick up on that. It would be so terrible."

Because of these feelings about an unsuccessful relationship, Louise preferred to approach new co-teaching situations "like a marriage or like a best friendship," again referencing the intimacy involved in teaching. Furthermore, Louise stated, "as good as [co-teaching] is, it's just as bad when it doesn't work out." This is a fact confirmed time and again by the participants in this study and in prior research (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Sims, 2008)

Administrative support: faking it and feeling it.

When asked about how administrators have helped Isabella and Louise in their roles as co-teachers, the two had very different responses. Louise's impression of administrative aid was a more hands-off, checking-in response whereas Isabella retold countless interactions with a particular administrator that were absolutely priceless in her work as a co-teacher.

Louise felt there was a small amount of "faking it for the administrator's sake" in terms of what they perceived was happening within co-teaching partnerships and what was happening in actuality. She explained:

> When you talk about co-teaching, with administrators…[you say] "Yes, it's great. This is what we both planned together. We do this…." You do those things that make it look like 50-50, [but] it still isn't…They're kind of in on it too, but there is this idea that it should be 50-50 and what I'm saying is that it isn't.

Louise was coming from the point-of-view that a classroom teacher, such as Isabella, had more stress and a larger workload than the special education co-teacher. Therefore, when she talked about this impression that co-teachers share the workload evenly, she assumed the administrators know the same, but are holding a false expectation that work is shared more equitably.

Another viewpoint that Louise held about administrator support was that administrators prefer teachers to solve their interpersonal issues on their own and not ask for help. Louise shared, "The more I can just not…need the help of an administrator, people are supportive here. The more I cannot need that help is better for me." This topic came up when discussing negative co-teaching relationships and what a teacher can do if he or she is feeling frustrated by an at-work relationship. Louise continued, "I kind of get the impression they just kind of want it to work out." In contrast to this opinion is Isabella's, who credits an assistant principal with helping her through her challenging year with Mrs. Rocker. Isabella explained:

> Basically, it's the fact that I can go to [my assistant principal] and pretty much tell her exactly how I'm feeling is really helpful, and she doesn't give me some kind of answer where it makes me frustrated. She's just really open to how she can help improve it…Anytime I would go to her with a problem, she was always very supportive on how she can help me to fix it and thinking about different things she could do.

Perhaps it is a difference in leadership styles that gives these two teachers at the same school such differing opinions about administrative support.

Isabella not only found the support from an assistant principal to be necessary, but she also agreed to co-teach the special education inclusion group of students again with the caveat that she would not be assigned to the same co-teacher. When Isabella was told that Louise would be teaching with her, she agreed immediately. Isabella pointed out how extraordinary this situation with her administrator is, and said; "I'm lucky because I talk to my [assistant] principal really openly which is not always typical because I've had [assistant] principals that I don't feel comfortable doing that with." Clearly, this trust in her assistant principal and the idea that her voice was being heard was one way Isabella felt support as part of a co-teaching team. Honoring teachers' voices within a co-teaching relationship is one way administrators are able to show their support (Nichols et al., 2010). Based on the differing opinions of Isabella and Louise, it was unclear whether this is a universally practiced norm at Westview Elementary School.

Standardized testing: not all pressure is created equally.

Isabella and Louise have taught in the upper elementary grades throughout their time at Westview Elementary School. In Brockman County, these grade levels are particularly impacted by standardized testing because their results are factored into the school and county "report cards." Because of this, neither teacher was unfamiliar with the pressure for students to perform strongly on the CRCT. When examining this pressure and the dynamics of co-teaching, both Isabella and Louise indicated that the general education teacher feels this pressure more acutely than the support teacher.

Isabella, during her co-teaching time with Mrs. Rocker, tried to impress on her the level of pressure she was feeling just before the CRCT. These feelings were not reciprocated. Isabella reported saying to Mrs. Rocker, "I am completely stressing. I'm worried. I feel like the kids aren't where they should be. We've been working so hard, but we both need to give more effort."

To avoid putting the blame entirely on her co-teacher, Isabella always tried to phrase her criticism or suggestions in the plural sense: "I always try to not just say, 'YOU' because I didn't want to be mean." Mrs. Rocker's response was frustrating to Isabella and indicated that their levels of pressure about the testing would never be the same. Isabella said, "She was just like 'I feel fine. I'm not stressed.'" One of the factors contributing to successful co-teaching relationships, according to the research, is the ability to share the burden with a colleague (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). When the co-teacher does not accept the burden being shared, frustrations can result.

Louise agreed that the general education teacher has more stress and pressure surrounding standardized tests such as the CRCT. Remembering when she was a 4th grade classroom teacher with a special education co-teacher, Louise said:

> We would both do math and we would both do reading groups, but it's still on me. It was still my class. My name is still on the CRCT scores. No one's ever going to look back at that three years from now and remember that Madeleine was my co-teacher…They're just not going to remember that. I remember that. When you look back in the data, [other] people aren't going to.

When presented in this way, Louise's perspective that general education teachers have more pressure and stress on them than the support co-teachers seems true. Perhaps the concept that co-teaching is helpful because of the sharing of burdens it offers to teachers as presented in the research of Murawski and Hughes (2009) is simply not as significant during the standardized testing time of the school year.

Cassandra and Coal

Cassandra and Coal were co-teaching a 4th grade class when this study was carried out. Cassandra, a 4th grade teacher, had been teaching for twenty years and had been at Westview Elementary School for nine years, all the while working with 4th grade students. Coal came into Cassandra's room each day for 45 minutes to support her English as a second language (ESL) students. This partnership was unique from the others in several ways. First, Coal and Cassandra spent the least amount of time together compared to the other groups—45 minutes instead of almost three hours. Secondly, this partnership was the only one in this analysis with an English as a second language (ESL) teacher and a general education teacher. The other co-teaching groups were pairings with special education teachers. Lastly, Coal had a dual role at Westview Elementary School of also serving as a literacy coach part time, assisting teachers in fourth and fifth grades with their literacy instruction. At times, this led to a bit of role confusion for Coal.

Through conversation and observation, it became clear to the researcher that this was a partnership made up of two veteran teachers, and that both Cassandra and Coal held assumptions about their partnership because of this veteran status. For example, when asked about planning together, this team indicated the least need for extended time spent planning together. Cassandra said she would like "at least 15 minutes a week" or perhaps more, but would not want to be "*required* to do much more." Cassandra was emphatic in her perspectives about planning time when she asked, "But if it's working, why set the timer, and say, 'Okay, we have to meet every Wednesday, at planning time, for 25 minutes?'"

Coal expressed her perspective that their planning situation was not ideal, but they were able to "make it work." She said, "I'm certainly not up here as much as I should be, but if she sends me [an email saying], 'I'm working on this, can you come up [to] talk…?', I'll do that

because…she's asking for help." Unlike the other teaching teams included in this study who spent more time teaching together each day, this team of veteran teachers did not seem to value planning together as much as the other participants in this study.

Cassandra and Coal's planning observations for the purposes of this study were split across two separate abbreviated sessions, a true picture of how they actually planned together. Both sessions were held with the two teachers standing, perhaps indicating the short amount of time they intended to stay together. While materials were referenced such as books anticipated for use during reading groups and student writing pieces, there were no formal planning materials, such as a plan book, lessons, or units present. The pace of the conversation was rapid, as both of these teachers were quick talkers with ideas presented in a rapid manner. The first session started as a discussion of an upcoming schedule change, then altered course and became a conversation about the Colonial America unit and student behavior. The second session started as a discussion of the upcoming unit and then focused on examining student work.

When they were observed co-teaching, Cassandra and Coal were using the method of parallel teaching, where each had a reading group of six students that they were working with. A third group was seated at their desks doing independent reading and another group left the classroom to go to their gifted education class. It appeared that the group working with Coal was made up of students in the English as a second language program (ESL), so the observer assumed the reading groups were organized by ability, an idea confirmed in the final interview.

Students did not interact with both teachers, only the teacher leading his or her reading group. During the observation period, the teachers also did not interact. Coal came in and immediately gathered her reading group at her table and Cassandra did the same with her small group. Coal then left while the students were lining up for recess, and never spoke to Cassandra.

When this observation was discussed in the final interview, the teachers explained what a precious commodity time was for them. Therefore, they felt no need to spend time talking to one another when there were students that needed to be taught. At first, Cassandra was sensitive that the observation was a criticism by the researcher. When that worry was laid to rest, she explained that having Coal in her room for only 45 minutes meant that every single second was important and needed to be spent with students. Cassandra's unrelenting work ethic came up throughout the research process as the motivation for many of her actions.

Among the trends that came out while examining the interviews and observations with Cassandra and Coal were the difference in viewpoints between classroom teachers and support teachers, how best to build relationships, and the benefit of sharing the load between co-teachers.

Positive and negative experiences: a walk in the park vs. walking on hot coals.

It was in conversations with Cassandra and Coal that the researcher recognized that many of the support (special education or ESL) co-teachers involved in this study have thought about, reflected on, and analyzed the ins and outs of the dynamic of co-teaching far more than their general education partners have. Mainly connected to the idea that co-teaching offers teachers an opportunity to share their burden (Murawski & Hughes, 2009), the researcher found that classroom teachers tended to welcome the offer of a co-teacher without too much hesitation, persevere through even sticky co-teaching situations, and simply carry on with their work. Special education or English as a second language (ESL) co-teachers, by contrast, whose day is made up of co-teaching in various classrooms, tended to give more thought to the dynamics present. An appropriate analogy would be cooking in someone else's kitchen, a far more memorable experience for the visiting cook than for the owner of the kitchen.

As for Cassandra and Coal, Coal has spent far more time reflecting on the ins and outs of co-teaching than Cassandra. Coal has had twelve different co-teaching partners and spent time reflecting on and comparing each of them. Cassandra also has co-taught for many years, but with only five different teachers. Cassandra's perspective was best stated in her own words: "Every teacher I worked with, we like what we do, and we know it's a great opportunity with two people in there to make a bigger difference." Cassandra felt that two is better than one, and wished for more time with Coal, as Cassandra was accustomed to having a support teacher to co-teach math in addition to reading. Cassandra's perspective was unique: she did not necessarily desire spending more time planning with a co-teacher, but clearly wanted a co-teacher for more time spent teaching.

For Cassandra, it was an easy choice: two teachers are better than one, any co-teaching support is preferable to none at all, and the more the better. She said, "I just feel that I'm a better teacher when there's another partner in there." Her reasons for this were quite simple: "Every single [co-teacher] is coming in for a good reason - to help the kids. And if you're on the same page there, everything else is kind of easy." When observing this pair plan together, however brief, Cassandra's excitement about her work was at times tangible and her work ethic substantial. She clearly enjoyed teaching, was consumed by her job, and strived continually to push her students to make progress.

It can be assumed that this eagerness and drive was what makes Cassandra discount extended co-planning time, as she wanted to get straight to the work of teaching. So passionate was her desire for student success that she would not honor any barriers that may stand in the way. Because of this, it was easy to get the impression that Cassandra would gladly accept any help given to her, as another way to work toward the high expectations she held for herself and

for her students. With no negative co-teaching experiences to speak of, she saw co-teaching as one of the most successful methods for this support.

When asked about administrative support, Cassandra maintained the same position: that any time spent away from teaching students was time wasted. Often at Westview Elementary School, as explained by Cassandra, co-teachers such as Coal were pulled out of the classroom to help with managerial tasks such as testing or registration of students. Cassandra indicated her frustration when a co-teacher was used in a capacity in a way other than in her classroom, taking her away from co-teaching duties. Coal was even more likely to be out of the classroom because of her dual role as literacy coach. Cassandra explained her position:

> I would say the number one thing is that they [administrators] pull them for stuff…I didn't see her for three weeks. She was helping deliver kids, help register kids, instead of getting in the classroom. Another thing is, they get pulled out, "Oh, we've got to proctor this test or this test," so now it's already been CO-GAT, and it's going to be the ITBS, and then in January or February it's going to be what? Three weeks doing the ACCESS testing. So then those kids, that group, is without their main Reading teacher. It's four to five weeks there during the year then for sure…So that is the main thing. I don't think that the principal sees it as how much they're actually putting a roadblock up or messing with the classroom.

Cassandra came to the study from the viewpoint of many general education teachers, holding to the concept supported by research, that co-teaching is a way to share the burden (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Working as a general education teacher is such a challenging task, especially when it is done with the same boundless enthusiasm as Cassandra does it. Any help, therefore, was appreciated and welcomed.

Coal spoke about co-teaching with a different perspective, and with so many years of experience co-teaching with 12 different teachers, this difference was to be expected. While her overall perception was that "no matter the adult relationship, the practice of co-teaching is a benefit to students," she has faced difficult interactions with general education teachers. In her individual interview, Coal said, "When it works well, it really works well. But even when it's not the ideal situation or the ideal relationship, I think it's still beneficial for the kids. I think you can rise above it whatever your differences are." As for differences, Coal had a long history of co-teaching with colleagues quite different than herself.

One experience that Coal spoke about was co-teaching with a third grade teacher during a school year when the rest of her time was spent in fourth and fifth grade classrooms. Not knowing as much about the third grade curriculum, Coal looked forward to meeting regularly with this teacher for planning to ensure the likelihood of co-teaching more effectively. When trying to set a meeting up at the beginning of the year, Coal found that her co-teacher's preferred schedule was to arrive early in the morning and to leave early in the afternoon, while Coal's was just the opposite. After one conversation covering these basics, the classroom teacher said, "Okay. Then I guess we can't meet." Coal found the results of the interaction to be clear: "And so, it just set the tone for the rest of the year, which was not good."

Coal explained a trend that continued in this particular relationship was the teacher's tendency to stop what he was teaching each time she entered the room to ask for affirmation of what he was doing. Perhaps this was done because of her role as a literacy coach, but she felt it was highly inappropriate, and moreover, gave the students the wrong impression of what she was there to do. Coal had thought a lot about this interaction and all of her co-teaching relationships, wondering quite a bit what she could have done differently to change the course of relationships.

Another difficult relationship was one in which the general education teacher assumed Coal would do more work than he would do. This norm evolved into a resentful relationship, and made day-to-day work very difficult. Because of Coal's strong literacy background and many years of experience, this particular teacher, new to the classroom teacher job, assumed she would do more work than she was willing to do. While co-teaching may occasionally offer teachers the opportunity to give away some of their workload, it is certainly not intended to be unbalanced.

Coal's experiences with co-teaching have been very different than Cassandra's. As a support teacher, Coal has taken on a more reflective role than many of the general education teachers she has been paired up with. For her, co-teaching relationships have ranged from the incredibly uncomfortable to the highly effective. From one interaction to the next, Coal has analyzed what was happening to make the current reality and what she could do differently in the next partnership.

Cassandra, in contrast, so singularly focused on student success, seemingly would take any help she could get and be pleased with it, as long as that co-teacher had the same expectations as she. So far, Cassandra has been lucky enough to have that. In fact, during the final paired interview, Cassandra was very surprised by some of Coal's previous experiences while co-teaching. She acted as though it had never occurred to Cassandra that the co-teaching experience could be less than ideal. Cassandra said, "I can't imagine having a co-teacher that's just going to come in and be lazy." To which Coal replied, "You can't imagine that, but I see that!" These two teachers came to their co-teaching partnership from two very different perspectives because of their past experiences. Regardless of this, what they had together seemed to be working quite well, as evidenced through the interviews and the observations.

Building relationships: professional, not personal.

Both Cassandra and Coal viewed the building of relationships within co-teaching teams as important, and this idea was supported by the research (Friend et al., 2010). Both Cassandra and Coal made a clear differentiation between personal and professional relationships and what was necessary for co-teaching to be successful.

Cassandra, for example, did not place a large amount of importance specifically on building relationships; she would rather just get to the work of co-teaching. In an interview, Cassandra shared, "It's not like we're getting married or anything; [do] you need to go through a honeymoon phase or anything?…Let's go to work. She's driven, and I'm driven." Slightly contradictory of this attitude that relationship building is unnecessary, Cassandra also indicated that there was always a strong relationship with her co-teachers, that they have been part of the "family" of her classroom. Parallel to her negative feelings about being required to plan with her co-teacher for extensive amounts of time, Cassandra may think that building a personal relationship would take time and energy away from instruction. Despite this, Cassandra recalled how closely connected to her class Bethany, a former co-teacher, was. She explained in the final interview, "When it was her birthday, they wrote birthday cards and Christmas notes and stuff because I want it to be family-like. And our kids need that." It was an interesting inconsistency that Cassandra made—her hesitation to spend much time on anything at all that was not directly impacting student success, but then an expectation to have a familial relationship with her co-teacher.

Building relationships was often on Coal's mind when reflecting on her own co-teaching experiences. When referring to an ineffective co-teacher who seemed unaware of her shortcomings, Coal realized she should have done more to help her. She said, "It wasn't that they

were bad teachers or that I was a bad teacher or whatever, it's like they'll tell you in every book—it's with children also, you have to build those relationships." Coal felt that a strong professional relationship was vital to a resilient co-teaching partnership.

Coal discussed that her ideal co-teaching situation, with a fifth grade teacher named Sandy Heathrow, was not necessarily the closest personal relationship she has ever had at school. Coal further explained:

> We didn't really have a real personal relationship. We didn't go out to dinner or anything. We had a more of a professional relationship, which kind of leads to a personal relationship. But I've had a surface personal relationship with people, but we didn't have that professional relationship, and I don't think you can really work with someone and really talk about learning until you have a professional relationship.

These thoughts echo those of Cassandra, when she indicated the unnecessary "honeymoon period." This co-teaching pair made the demarcation between professional and personal relationships more clearly than the other co-teaching teams included in the study.

During this study, Coal worked as both a co-teacher and a literacy coach, and at times, these roles spilled one into the next. This variability in her day and working with a large number of teachers while fulfilling two different roles caused Coal to spend quite a bit of time in reflection. One of the things that kept coming up in the interviews was her concern with her own language use and the way she was perceived by her co-teachers. She referred to herself as a "Cranky Yankee" who needed to say things "in a more gentle way, more like a Southerner might." Coal gave an example of a time she was called in to cover another teacher's class while she was in an emergency parent meeting. This teacher had never been a co-teacher of Coal's, so she did not know the ins and outs of her classroom the way she might with a co-teacher. After

working with her students for quite a while, Coal made a suggestion to the general education teacher about how to organize the students' writing. Again reflecting on her own use of language, she said:

> But we probably weren't there yet for me to make comments about her writing workshop when I don't really know what she knows about writing workshop, and I just kind of was making a suggestion that was taken the wrong way…We don't have that professional relationship yet – because I've heard all about her divorce, but I haven't heard about her Writer's Workshop.

This idea of building relationships is strongly correlated to co-teaching. Whether the relationships formed were considered professional or personal, both recognized that having a relationship was necessary when working in such close proximity to another teacher.

Sharing the load: that annoying kid!

A theme that came up with both Cassandra and Coal in both interviews was the idea that co-teachers can be helpful because of their ability to help a student that the other teacher may be frustrated with or, quite frankly, tired of. This very honest analysis of a co-teacher's experience was not mentioned by any of the other teams as a benefit of co-teaching, although one can imagine it could be universal, and it is indirectly reflected in the literature.

While Murawski and Hughes (2009) wrote specifically about the Response to Intervention (RTI) process of increased individualized instruction and assessment and how it is virtually impossible without the help of another teacher, they also wrote about the advantage of sharing the workday's burdens with another. Lortie (1975) and Msila (2009) wrote about what a historically isolating profession teaching has been. Perhaps co-teaching is a trend that can work against this norm, and the handing off of a student at times certainly speaks to the advantage of

that. Walther-Thomas (1997) wrote about co-teaching's offer of "increased professional satisfaction, opportunities for professional growth, personal support, and increased opportunities for collaboration" (p. 401). This "personal support," in strong co-teaching partnerships, included sharing the load with another teacher.

Cassandra reflected on the advantage of having a former co-teacher, Bethany, to help teach students she needed a break from and vice versa. She said:

> It was helpful to me, with Bethany sometimes, where I [could say], "Bethany, I just can't have this child in my group today." And then she would say the same thing. She says, "Please, just take this one, because that kid is driving me crazy in small group." And so it helps the teachers have a little escape clause that day. And it gives you a little flexibility.

In addition to the advantage these "escape clauses" can offer teachers, there was also an equal advantage to students. Cassandra went on to point out the reality that at times, teachers need a break from students, but the opposite is also true. She said, "Yeah, the kid has a little power too; not [choosing a favorite teacher], but, 'I like the way Ms. Morris taught this lesson.'" The "escape clause" Cassandra mentioned was a very realistic advantage to co-teaching that not all teams might admit.

Coal spoke of the same benefit in her individual interview, which indicated that these teachers had a similar perspective, and might have been part of the reason their co-teaching experience was positive. Coal said about the students that were regularly in her reading group, "One of the kids is capable, but kind of drives her [Cassandra] nuts. Not that he doesn't need help, but I think it's nice for her just to have a break. I get that, I totally get that." This similarity in topic between Cassandra and Coal is interesting, and in the researcher's eyes this is a reality

that many co-teaching teams appreciate, but may not admit. Students and teachers are both human, and like any human interaction, both have an ability to "drive the other crazy."

Maya and Eleanor

During the time of this study, Maya and Eleanor were co-teaching Maya's fifth grade class at Westview Elementary School. Eleanor was a certified special education teacher and had been teaching special education for eight years. Before that, Eleanor was a paraprofessional at Westview Elementary School for five years, working in a kindergarten class. When Eleanor spoke about co-teaching, she referenced her time in kindergarten as well as the last few years of co-teaching special education classes. Therefore, she had a rich and varied co-teaching history to speak about. Maya had been teaching for 23 years, at Westview Elementary School for sixteen years, with seven years in first grade then nine in fifth. Maya has also had a variety of co-teaching experiences, with a wide variety of results, for the past eight years.

When this pair was observed co-teaching, Eleanor and Maya used the parallel teaching model in which both teachers delivered the same content to small groups. During the observation session, the students were in small groups working on different readers' theater productions, practicing lines, and preparing to perform them for the class in the following days. Both teachers walked around and helped each group with their work. Fluency appeared to be the teaching objective of the lesson, with added benefits that these plays were centered on fifth grade content such as the story of Harriet Tubman and scientific destructive forces. The teachers both helped all students, and the energy level in the classroom was high. The students seemed excited about what they were doing, and Maya and Eleanor seemed pleased with their student's progress.

Maya and Eleanor preferred the researcher to observe a post-teaching reflection session as opposed to a formal planning session because this was more indicative of what they did as a team. Both admitted that formal planning was not a norm of their partnership. Maya said in an individual interview:

> We do have time together, but a lot of the time that we spend together is just decompressing. [Eleanor] knows what to do, which is the same curriculum guide as I do and then I'll say, "Here's what we're doing," and then she'll bring in her piece and I'll bring in my piece, but the planning where we sit down in front of planning books? No, no, it's not really that.

The reflecting session that was observed was just after the reader's theatre lesson, and the teachers discussed individual student needs and their next steps. There was a brief discussion about the upcoming nine week semester, and how they planned to change their schedule a bit to incorporate reading groups and more individualized instruction. The interaction between Maya and Eleanor was comfortable, and power appeared to be shared equitably, although because Maya is the classroom teacher and with the students all day, she had the final say about schedule changes. The session observed shed light on the idea that the teachers much preferred reflecting to planning, and both in a very casual, conversational style.

Longevity: is this just a rebound thing?

Both Maya and Eleanor have been involved in very long-term co-teaching relationships, and this was in particular contrast to the relationships described by the other members of co-teaching teams included in this study, whose relationships have mostly lasted one, at times two, years. Maya co-taught with Erin for four years, in one of the first co-teaching teams at Westview Elementary School. Maya remembered offering the idea as a suggestion to the principal at the

time. She said, “Actually—if memory serves me correct—Erin and I went to Bridgett and said that this is what we wanted to do. Of course, Erin had the research, and I had the passion...” It was through their lead, Maya claimed, that co-teaching evolved as it did at this site. It was easy to see that Maya took pride in the trail blazing she and Erin undertook, as well as the results. Maya explained the first few years:

> It wasn’t a model in terms of what you would think people would be looking at and learning from. It was just, “Are we going to move towards this? Is this going to be successful? Is it not?” And it was, it was successful and when I say success I mean student achievement. That’s basically that’s my idea of success and it was very, very, very successful.

The successes Maya and Erin experienced together seemed to be the continual goal Maya was striving for in her co-teaching partnership with Eleanor. Maya has also wanted to be in a co-teaching relationship that was as positive as the one she had with Erin for several years. It seemed that Eleanor might just have fit the bill, as Maya spoke very positively about their relationship and their rapport was equally as positive in the paired interview and observations.

In the years since the partnership with Erin, Maya struggled with two other co-teachers that were, in her eyes, “less than ideal.” And in fact, when Maya voiced her frustrations to the administrative team, their perceptions about the time she had spent with Erin were revealed. She reflected:

> Anytime I would even allude to Erin, anytime that I would allude to an issue it was more like, “You’ll be okay. It’ll be fine. You’ve done it before. You know you can do it on your own.” Just basically, “Suck it up and do it.” When people say that enough times that’s what you do, you suck it up and you do it. That’s basically what happened.

In her eyes, the administrators felt that Maya's time spent with Erin was unbalanced and that Maya was the one that made the team and students successful. She explained, "But what they didn't see was …what Erin [had] taught me…that I could do it by myself…which actually turned out to be true years later." In hindsight, according to Maya, the work she and Erin did together over a three-year period was preparing her for the difficult co-teaching experiences that were to come.

Maya's first experience post-Erin was with a young man she referred to as having "deep psychological issues," whose time at Westview Elementary School was terminated mid-year. Leaving the co-teaching team with Erin was difficult, after three years working toward the common goal of student success and getting to know each other professionally. Despite this change, Maya was initially very excited to take on a new co-teacher. When she was assigned to work with DeAndre, she looked forward to the opportunity. He was coming from an undergraduate program, and Maya assumed "that was good…and I like that because together we can create an environment." But things changed quickly, and this relationship went much further into the personal, negative realm than others in this study.

Maya's second negative experience after Erin lasted for two years and was with Julianne, a teacher she felt was ineffective with students and passive aggressive toward her. When asked how she dealt with this particular relationship, Maya admitted to carrying on as though Julianne was not even a factor. She said, "I held my tongue a lot…. I stopped complaining, and I just took the reins, and it was successful. The kids were successful and that's our goal…I was as fake as she was and it worked." In essence, it appeared that Maya used the skills taught to her during the two-year positive relationship with Erin to carry her through the negative ones.

Such is the power of long-term, positive co-teaching relationships. Eleanor also experienced this potential through her work as a paraprofessional and then a special education co-teacher with the same kindergarten teacher. Eleanor worked with Beverly for six years as a paraprofessional, then four more years as a special education co-teacher. Eleanor described this long-term relationship as ideal, and she explained what made the relationship work so well, "With Beverly, the second year, we just didn't really have to discuss too much. We knew what we were going to do." Feeling like two teachers have routines, procedures, and norms with one another goes a long way in making co-teaching partnerships positive and effective.

For Eleanor, this multi-year relationship was comforting and difficult to leave. She said in an interview without much explanation but clearly strong feelings, "They broke a lot of us up." Eleanor has reflected quite a bit on the difference between new and established relationships. She described, "In the beginning, it is like you're going into someone's home as a visitor and you have to feel your way around and see what is acceptable and what is not." This was in contrast to a multi-year relationship, like the one Eleanor had with Beverly. Eleanor explained, "Working with the teacher for so many years, you form a relationship where you almost know what each other is thinking. You are not afraid to bring things up." This idea of knowing what the other is thinking has emerged numerous times by several participants when describing positive co-teaching relationships. For Eleanor and Beverly, much like Maya and Erin, this symbiotic thinking came from extended time spent together.

Student-centered work: It's all about the kids.

A noted trend across interviews and observations with Maya and Eleanor was the recurring evidence that the main focus of their work was on students and student achievement. During the individual interview, Eleanor described in detail each student who was receiving

special education services in Maya's classroom, their disabilities, and specific information about their families and particular situations. Eleanor actually had the opportunity to follow several of her students from grade level to grade level, starting with kindergarten. As a co-teacher, she saw this as a great benefit in terms of "knowing, and knowing deeply," her students. Eleanor said:

> Well, I know the kids very well in the school setting and so I hadn't had to start from the very beginning. We already have the relationship. We already have the relationship with the parents. It happened on purpose, kindergarten to first, but then second-grade they moved me up just for Bobby because he has a very difficult time forming relationships.

While knowing students and having a strong relationship with them is a goal of any educator, it came out particularly clearly with this co-teaching team.

Maya and Eleanor admitted to having a hard time getting together to write formal lesson plans. They were in constant contact, and communicated all the time in person, via email and text message, but did not often sit down with plan books and have a formal planning session. More often, Eleanor would bring up a particular student and tell Maya what she had noticed about the student: his strengths, what he was struggling with, and so on. From that conversation came a discussion about other students in the class that might be struggling with similar concerns. From there, the teachers decided what they needed to teach next, and plans were made in an informal, student-centered way.

When observing in Maya and Eleanor's classroom, it was easy to see that this was a very student-centered place. The noise level was high, and student desks and all other surfaces were overflowing with books, binders, and school supplies. The messy factor could certainly be compared to a fifth grader's bedroom. During the observation period spent by the researcher, the students were working in small groups on a readers' theatre play, practicing lines, and making

plans for the performance to be held the following day in front of the class. As students worked together, the co-teachers moved from group to group, helping and guiding as needed. Again, the student-centered nature of this pair came out.

Unlike other parallel teaching models of co-teaching, where both teachers are teaching the same content at the same time in small groups, in this one, the teachers moved instead of the students. The three small groups were spread around the room, sitting on desks, on the floor, and at a cluster of chairs in the back of the room, and Maya and Eleanor moved between them with ease. The level of chaos to the outside observer seemed high, but there was no doubt the students were engaged in the lesson.

As a special education co-teacher, Eleanor had students assigned to her caseload who were in Maya's class. These students were the reason she was co-teaching in Maya's class, in fact. Despite this, during the observation session it was unclear which students had special needs and were assigned to work with Eleanor. A benefit credited to co-teaching is its ability to reduce the stigma attached to a special education label (Stainback, Stainback, & Forest, 1989). Maya appreciated that Eleanor worked with all of her students and the inclusive nature it offered to her class. Maya said, "It's like the kids don't know who she's there for." When Maya thought back to the relationships she had with DeAndre and Julianne, Eleanor's willingness to work with all of the students was remarkable. Maya explained, "She'll help anyone who needs it and that's what I like." Maya and Eleanor's co-teaching model choice varied from day-to-day and lesson-to-lesson, but the model was often whole group centered. From what Maya explained about her past co-teachers, the one teach-one assist model, where one teacher takes the lead in teaching the lesson while the other assists students in understanding it, was not as effective with some of Maya's past co-teachers as it is with Eleanor and Maya.

While neither teacher can pinpoint exactly what makes their relationship so effective, it is easy to assume that this student-centered thinking must have something to do with it. Maya said, "it's not very pleasant to be in a room in that close environment with someone that doesn't share the same values." Putting students first is most certainly a value that comes out loudly and clearly when talking to either Maya or Eleanor. Maya, during the paired interview, while reflecting on what made her relationships with DeAndre and Julianne so difficult, said:

> You're in there and … to get your kids where they have to be … you have to set up relationships with the children and in order to set up relationships with the children, you have to be vulnerable. You have to show some sort of vulnerability along with the delicate balance of strength. Doing that with kids comes naturally to me. Doing that with adults, doesn't.

Maya admits that the trying relationships in the past were not one-sided. In fact, she was quite reflective about what went wrong and what was different about her arrangement with Eleanor.

Maya's reasons for continuing in co-teaching partnerships, despite the negative interactions, were mainly because of the special education population and her own pride. She explained that she did not want to give up the challenge of teaching students with special needs just because of the difficulties associated with her former co-teacher. She said,

> There are a lot of issues with Special Ed and a lot of the times in my perception through the years, they get the short end of the stick. People don't have high enough expectations. People don't push them hard enough. I wasn't going to let that happen either. And so [Julianne] wanting to be an inclusion teacher and me saying, "So do I," that's why we had to work together again.

This child-first attitude was similar to Eleanor's attitude, again perhaps explaining the bond between Maya and Eleanor.

What makes it work: the yin and the yang.

Maya and Eleanor made a lot of reference in interviews to how different the two were and the benefits that these differences were able to offer, and these traits were further supported by observations. Maya said during their planning session that Eleanor kept her "on track," as opposed to Maya who admitted to being "all over the place." While the team did not tend to do formal planning sessions together, it seemed that might have been more indicative of Maya's nature than Eleanor's. Eleanor had a more organized manner about her work than Maya. This organization was later seen in Maya's classroom by way of the sentence strip reminders Eleanor put up around the room. Maya explained:

> [Eleanor] knows that these children need a lot of reminders … and so I would leave and Eleanor works late and I come in the next morning and everything we taught, there were sentence strips all of over my room [like] a little elf put up.

The visual reminders were much appreciated by Maya and used by her students, and would not be up if Maya were teaching alone. In an ideal co-teaching situation, the teachers involved are able to balance one another out, like Maya and Eleanor did.

Another way Maya and Eleanor balanced one another out was that Eleanor tended to be more of a "rule follower" than Maya, but each understood the other. Maya said:

> She's like a rule follower and stays definitely in the lines…I have the big picture. I know where we have to go and I'm not worried that the piece of paper says [a unit] has to end today. She understands and accepts that I'm not teaching to paper and … I'm not going to move on just because a piece of paper says I'm going to have to.

This understanding came from the flexibility Eleanor had as a character trait helpful to make co-teaching work. It also spoke to the idea that perhaps Maya, as a disorganized teacher, needed someone that could help her stay more structured.

Despite the differences, or perhaps because of them, this teaching pair got along quite well. Maya equated this to a number of things: "First of all, I think it's the trust and then secondly, I think it's the professional respect that we have for one another." Because she was a little shell shocked from the previous co-teaching relationships, Maya was not too sure when she was told she would have a new co-teacher. She said, "I have to say that when I found out we were working together, I was petrified." But it did not take long until she realized the partnership was going to work. Maya explained, "[Eleanor] has this underestimated and underdog kind of thing that I really like." Eleanor also felt that their relationship was positive, and equated it to both teachers being New Yorkers and pet lovers. Whatever the case may have been, both teachers were pleased to be working with one another and hoped this could become another long-term relationship like they both had in the past.

Cross-Case Analysis

The purpose of this study was to understand the perspectives and patterns of teachers working in a co-teaching scenario. The perspectives reported in the data of the six teachers who were engaged with one another in co-teaching pairs of two were further analyzed by using the constant comparison method of analysis. Certain common themes emerged across the pairs of co-teachers, and these trends spoke to the general perspectives of teachers in co-teaching relationships at Westview Elementary School. The researcher also looked across the cases to identify themes and trends that appeared across the co-teachers that participated in the study. These themes and trends were considered the patterns of co-teaching at the selected site.

The Patterns of Co-Teaching at Westview Elementary School

By analyzing the data collected through interview and observations from all three co-teaching teams, the patterns of the co-teaching experience began to emerge. Through cross-case analysis and the constant comparison method, a picture of the patterns became evident. These patterns were (a) the pinnacle co-teaching relationship, (b) the significant impact negative co-teaching relationships can have, and (c) the complicated balancing of power that tends to occur in co-teaching teams.

The Pinnacle Co-Teaching Relationship

A trend that was revealed often in the interviews of the three co-teaching teams was the idea of what actually made co-teaching teams successful. And, conversely, there was much discussion about what kept co-teaching teams from thriving. While all of the six teachers spoke with satisfaction about their current co-teaching situation, each had a past relationship that was referred to in a particularly revelatory manner. These were the relationships that stood out as examples for all of that teacher's partnerships to follow. They were referred to most often, and in some cases, seemed to be the reason the participating teachers were advocates for co-teaching.

There was no clear-cut list of particular factors that made the relationships extraordinary, and in most cases, the participants found it difficult to even explain what it was that made the experiences stand out. More importantly, these ideal relationships were rare. Participants each only described one partnership from all of their multiple experiences that could be categorized as pinnacle. These relationships are summarized in Table 4.2, and then explored more in depth.

Table 4.2

Pinnacle Co-Teaching Experiences

participant	"pinnacle" co-teacher	time spent together	longest co-teaching partnership?	descriptors used
Isabella Harris	Nina Marzipone	1 year	no	"we think the same" "we have the same thoughts about different strategies to use" "She's my favorite person to plan with because she likes to do it that way, too." would co-teach differently now, would love to try again
Louise Somers	Cindy Brown (at a former school)	3 years	yes	"like a marriage or a best friendship" "you can read their nonverbal cues easily" "you can tell by a look when it's time to step in" spent a lot of time grading and planning together – after school, on Saturdays
Cassandra O'Neal	Bethany Morris	3 years	yes	"I just think the best comes out" "we'd get a lot more done" "make that person a real part of the team too" "it's more fun to have a friend"

Table 4.2 (continued)

Pinnacle Co-Teaching Experiences

participant	"pinnacle" co-teacher	time spent together	longest co-teaching partnership?	descriptors used
Coal McVey	Sandy Heathrow	4 years	yes	both teachers cried when Coal was taken out of her room "it was all in the best interest of the children" "you respect their judgment" "we knew a lot of the same things and we believed in a lot of the same things"
Maya Crosby	Erin Richardson	4 years	yes	"dynamic duo" "it was very, very, very successful" "my time with Erin was great" "absolutely wonderful"
Eleanor Smith	Beverly Handel	4 years co-teaching, 5 years as a paraprofessional	yes	"didn't really have to discuss too much" "you almost know what the other is thinking" "you are not afraid to bring things up"

For Isabella Harris, an experience with Nina Marzipone, a math coach at Westview Elementary School, was particularly powerful. While they only co-taught for one year, they continued to plan math lessons together and spoke with enthusiasm about how differently they would approach co-teaching if they were once again paired together. Isabella said:

> And we both say, "If we could do it again now, it would be so different." Because that year, all the EIP kids went to her table and I talked in front. She [only] helped them, and it was more like that. But now that I've gotten more knowledge about [co-teaching] and more experience, obviously that's not the best way to do it.

This interaction was one of many that were difficult to pinpoint exactly what made the relationship work. Isabella tried to describe it by saying, "It was fabulous because our brains just think the same and I know that's hard to pair." Isabella tried to be more specific, saying "we have the same thoughts about different strategies to use." This difficulty to identify just what it was that made it work is something that can be seen in many of the ideal co-teaching partnerships.

The co-teaching partnership between Isabella and Nina only lasted for one year, but the amount of time they spent together was lengthy. Isabella explained, "With Nina…she was in my room a lot. She was in my room for almost three hours a day…She was in there a long time." Extended time spent together can be a factor in successful co-teaching relationships, as this was seen in the other pinnacle relationships. Conversely, it was also clear from the findings that spending extended time together was not enough to ensure success, as the ideal relationships had a wide range of time spent together as did the most negative experiences.

Louise spoke with a similar level of respect about her ideal second-grade co-teaching partner from a former school, Cindy Brown. This relationship lasted for three years, and the two teachers were still in touch regularly even though Louise lived in another city. Louise described this partnership as "like a marriage or a best friendship." In a similar way that others have described a positive pairing, Louise said that in a successful relationship, "you can read their nonverbal cues easily." She said it is difficult in a new co-teaching arrangement to know when to

speak up and when to assist; subtlety was difficult to navigate at first. But, with a partner such as Cindy, Louise said, "you can tell by a look when it's time to step in." This reference to feelings of comfort or being at ease with one another were noted a few times during the research process when the participants were discussing their ideal relationships.

Louise and Cindy planned together frequently, with perhaps more regularity than any of the other teams discussed. Frequent planning was an expectation of their school at the time. Louise painted the picture of their process:

> When I first started at [that] school…people stayed after school a lot. People were there at 4:30 or 5:00, or [Cindy] didn't have a problem meeting on Saturday afternoon at Starbucks or something and planning two weeks, which was great. It was perfect. We would grade together in the afternoons and with math, we would make these spreadsheets with the problems and [based on that, we would] make our groups for the following week…Looking back, it was a lot of work but also looking back, thinking of bringing that to either one of my teachers [at Westview] would be like, "Hey! How do you feel about five or six [o'clock]?" That wouldn't just happen. That's not even a consideration for me to do that. Although it worked great and you learn a lot about the kids that way.

This planning stood out as unique, and perhaps could be credited with the successes described by Louise in the co-teaching team with Cindy. As with the descriptions by Isabella and the other participants, this relationship was spoken about in a way that clearly stood apart from the other partnerships. Planning together and having set-aside common planning time is a well-cited necessity for co-teaching teams to be successful (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003). It is through strong communication that teachers are able to build a relationship, and planning together is an ideal time for this to

happen. Louise and Cindy saw the power in planning together and the strong bond it can create in co-teachers.

Cassandra had a co-teacher, Bethany, for three years, who came into her classroom to co-teach both reading and math, something Cassandra would have loved to have during the year of this study when she co-taught with Coal for just 45 minutes of reading instruction. When Cassandra spoke about Bethany, there was a good-old-days nostalgia noted. Cassandra described an example of the time spent together with Bethany:

> Sometimes, Bethany and I would almost do tag team. We might be teaching a new lesson in math, and she would start with it, and then we both kind of walk around to help kids on their white boards. And then for the next [math] problem, I go up there, and put the next problem on [the board]. And then we're walking around, and the next time, maybe she'll do one or two. And we tag team, but we're both with the whole group.

Cassandra explained that lessons like this one were the most successful, wherein both she and Bethany were able to help students in a dynamic and interactive way.

Furthermore, Cassandra pointed out that co-teaching was more fun than teaching alone, that "it's just a happier time for everybody. It's sort of like more like a family." Cassandra also made additional references about balancing one another out, an advantage to co-teaching with someone a teacher is comfortable with and understands, like she and Bethany. Cassandra explained, "Well, I'm usually the silly one, so we balanced each other out." It is only in a situation of understanding one another that teachers can have a relationship like the one described by Cassandra and the other participants.

Coal's description of her ideal co-teaching partnership brought tears to her eyes. Sandy and Coal were together in Sandy's fifth grade classroom for four years, and a strong bond was established. Coal referred to Sandy as "wonder teacher" and undoubtedly compared all co-teaching interactions to theirs. One of the credits Coal gave to the success she found with Sandy was that they had similar training. Both teachers had received specialized literacy training from the same university, and so their academic mindsets were similar. Coal explained: "And she came to teaching late in life, so she was older. She had the wisdom, but she had that new knowledge that was similar to what I had at the local state university." Speaking the same language certainly contributes to compatibility, and going through the same academic training added a bond in Coal and Sandy's case.

When Coal spoke about her co-teaching relationship with Sandy, she also mentioned Sandy's willingness to plan with Coal and Sandy's flexibility. Coal said, "You have to have someone who is willing to plan with you." Many of the factors mentioned by Coal about this particular relationship could be considered as universally understood best teaching practices. This brought up a number of questions and speculations for the researcher, such as: Do strong teachers make up strong co-teaching teams? Are troubled or difficult relationships caused by weak professional practice? On further consideration of the data collected and the extensive research base, that assumption cannot be made outright. For the particular co-teaching team of Sandy and Coal, there were a number of reasons that come together to make the relationship ideal, and best teaching practices happen to be some of them. For other teams, success is defined in a different, and at times, unclear, ways.

Maya's pinnacle co-teaching experience was with a special education veteran teacher named Erin. Maya described the two co-teachers as the "dynamic duo" and did not try to hide the

fact that all other co-teaching relationships since that one were held up in comparison. As the first co-teaching team at Westview Elementary School, they proposed the idea to the principal at the time as a way to help students in the special education program succeed. Maya reported that the attempt was "very, very, very successful" in terms of student academic growth. The respect that Maya held for Erin was evident in her descriptions of the way they taught together and, moreover, the results they were able to achieve.

When the relationship between Maya and Erin came to an end because of Erin's retirement, Maya described this time as one might describe a romantic break-up. Maya said, "I'm leaving someone right before that. I was leaving Erin. I'm leaving someone that I absolutely worked well with and he [the subsequent co-teacher] is coming in new…" Change is difficult, and transitioning away from a multi-year, positive co-teaching experience can be particularly challenging. One also has to wonder if teachers who have experienced these pinnacle partnerships are more critical of those that follow after them.

Eleanor's exemplary co-teaching partnership was with Beverly, a kindergarten teacher. The pair worked together as a paraprofessional and classroom teacher team for five years, then as co-teachers for three more. If any partnership indicates that spending multiple years together increases the strength of a relationship, this one does. Eleanor spoke about how the partnership evolved:

> It was great. She was very, very organized and very, very set in her ways. At first, it was really hard. She said, "I do things this way" and I asked, "Well, can we try it this way?" It was really, really very hard, but she ended up being fantastic and still is. She's very flexible and loves the kids. She does a great job.

When in a new partnership, as evidenced by many of the co-teaching teams examined in this study, it takes time to adjust to one another's norms and routines. Eleanor's mention of Beverly being "very, very set in her ways" was no exception to this trend.

By the second year together, Eleanor's description of their relationship was changed. She described, "With Beverly, the second year, we just didn't really have to discuss too much. We knew what we were going to do." Growing comfortable with one another was a tendency that was indicated in many of the long-term co-teaching partnerships examined in this study, and was seen by Eleanor as a strong advantage. The mutual growth experienced by Eleanor and Beverly was one of the many indications of their compatibility and again supported the idea that perhaps extensive time spent together may be one of the factors correlated with successful co-teaching relationships.

The pinnacle experiences described by each of the participants were important to examine. They stood out as quite unique, in that between all the participants there have been 45 co-teaching partnerships and only six truly stand up to the standard that the participants and researcher labeled as exemplary. For some teams, such as Louise, Coal, and Eleanor, this consummate partnership may be credited to extended time together. For others, elusive ideas such as being "on the same page," thinking the same way, or the ability to read one another's nonverbal cues makes for this pinnacle interaction, as was the case for Isabella, Cassandra, and Maya. Whatever the reasons may be, based on the results of this analysis, it can be assumed that partnerships that meet the exemplary status as viewed by the participants stand out from the rest, and are more rare than ordinary.

Negative Co-Teaching Experiences Can Ruin a School Year

Contrary to the examples provided by participants as exemplary, when co-teaching relationships were unsuccessful, the level of frustration came through quite clearly and very specific reasons were often cited. Feeling resentful, questioning another teacher's work ethic or competency, giving up on any possibilities for success early on, and vastly different communication styles were among the factors mentioned when teachers explained the devastating effects of a negative co-teaching pairing.

These exceptionally awful interactions were described in depth, and it was evident the toll they took on the teachers and the impact they had on an entire school year. Particularly negative experiences were described by Isabella, Coal, and Maya and are also examined in literature about co-teaching (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Sims, 2008). The experiences of the participants are summarized in Table 4.3 and then explored in more detail.

Table 4.3

Negative Co-Teaching Experiences

Participant	Time Spent Together	Descriptors Used
Isabella Harris	1 year (Alexandra)	"The thing is she doesn't even know we don't get along. That's how hard it was." "She came in and I was like a knock on her head. 'Hello! I need your help.' It was awful 'cause she just wasn't focused. She wasn't prepared, didn't have things organized." "And she just didn't interact with the kids. Hardly at all. When she would be out for some reason, once they were used to her being there, they would never ask me where she was."

Table 4.3 (continued)

Negative Co-Teaching Experiences

Participant	Time Spent Together	Descriptors Used
Coal McVey	2 years (Sam)	"I resented [it] cause I felt like I was doing all the work"
	2 years (Brandy)	"[If] you've got a great marriage, you don't need to go to marriage counseling, but when things aren't working out…"
Maya Crosby	less than 1 year, ~5 months (DeAndre)	"I mean he went as far to go on Facebook and call me a fat ass…Called me the devil and the other things."
		"The weird thing about him was he felt that he was in competition with me the whole entire time. When you walk into that classroom as co-teachers, there is no competition. We all have our strengths and weaknesses and even regardless of us all sharing our strengths and weakness, it's not personal."
	2 years (Julianne)	"There were a lot of things that she said to a lot of people about me and who wants to walk into a room and be vulnerable because that's what you have to do?"
		"To be quite candid, by the second year it was like if you need something and I'm busy, you can let her and if she's willing to help you and not just sit there and mark papers or do IEPs or whatever you are doing sitting at my back table instead of teaching, then you can go to her."
		"passive aggressive"

These partnerships are examples of relationships that were never nurtured or even built, for a variety of reasons. For some teams, pedagogical differences were so vast that no common ground was found, thereby blocking a relationship from building. For others, the participant did not have a positive view of their partner teacher's work ethic and without this respect, it was difficult to nurture a partnership. Others have blamed communication concerns or simple

resentment as the reason for the demise of the co-teaching team. Building a relationship with the person teaching next to you is a vital step toward strong co-teaching experiences (Friend et al., 2010). As these negative relationships were examined in this cross-case analysis, more patterns about co-teaching emerged.

Isabella's negative co-teaching experience was with a special education co-teacher who was seemingly unaware of Isabella's frustrations. Isabella said, "The thing is she doesn't even know we don't get along. That's how hard it was." Isabella felt that Alexandra was a less than competent teacher, and these feelings initiated the downward spiral described by Isabella. The relationship was so frustrating to Isabella, in fact, that she offered her assistant principal an ultimatum about getting out of it at year's end or not teaching students with special needs again the following year. She explained:

> So when I talked to [my assistant principal], I said, "I'm thinking about next year, and I will only [co-teach the special education cluster] if I have a different co-teacher and if I have a say in who it is." I felt maybe I was pushing it a little bit. I didn't want to be disrespectful or anything like that because I really appreciate her, but I was so fed up…and she said, "How about Louise?" and I said, "Done. Fine."

Honoring a teacher's voice has proven vital to successful in-school relationships. Nichols et al. (2010) wrote about the difference it makes to allow teachers to have a say in selecting their co-teaching partnerships. The researchers found that co-teachers who were given a choice had a much more positive view of co-teaching than those who were forced into a pairing (Nichols et al., 2010). Because Westview Elementary School has so many co-teaching teams (about 55 each year), it might be a challenge to allow all teachers to select their partner teachers, but respecting

a teacher's request to end a partnership after a frustrating school year is a reasonable measure for administrators to take to honor a teacher's opinion and give weight to their concerns.

Isabella took pride in connecting with her students on a deep level, to have a class that could be considered as close as a family. One of her concerns, therefore, was Alexandra's lack of connecting with the students. Isabella said, "And she just didn't interact with the kids. Hardly at all. When she would be out for some reason, once they were used to her being there, they would never ask me where she was." Alexandra's lack of personal relationships with their shared students was unacceptable to Isabella, who prided herself on the relationships she built with students. Isabella explained her preference to have a difficult student rather than a difficult co-teacher, because "somebody who I can't communicate with well, that was really hard." Unfortunately, as indicated by many of the participants in this study, negative co-teaching partnerships can impact an entire school year.

Coal's frustrations with co-teachers were also significant. Two particular interactions came up as exceptionally difficult for her. Coal explained her perspective regarding the negative interactions. She said:

> Well, the negative experiences, I think it was just the nature of the beast – it wasn't that they were bad teachers [or] that I was a bad teacher, it's [what] they tell you in every book – with children also, you have to build those relationships.

Building relationships is a necessity for positive co-teaching experiences (Friend et al., 2010), and most of these negative interactions mentioned by participants lacked strong relationships for a variety of reasons.

One co-teaching relationship that proved exceptionally difficult for Coal was with a fifth grade teacher, Sam, and lasted for two years. Coal's desk was inside Sam's classroom; and

therefore, the two teachers were with one another frequently throughout the day, a bit different than some of the other teams studied. Coal's frustrations with Sam were mostly about his work ethic and the barriers this put up to building a strong relationship. Coal explained how she felt:

> He'd be at his computer and he'd say, "Oh, you go ahead and do whatever you want. Just send it to me and whatever you want to do is fine." And that turned ugly because – well, it never did turn ugly, but I resented it. Because of course I felt like I was doing all the work and you know that doesn't last long because I'm not going to do someone else's work while you sit at your computer and email your wife. I was really resentful.

In the case of Coal and Sam, this unequal sharing of the workload and imbalance brought on resentment and kept a relationship from developing, much like in Isabella's negative experiences with Alexandra.

A second frustrating experience for Coal was with another fifth grade teacher, Brandy, whose professional style and instructional decisions were very different from Coal's, and therefore made it difficult for Coal to proceed with the relationship in a positive way. In Coal's eyes, some of the things that Brandy was doing were "detrimental to children," and she could not stand for it. Coal shared an example:

> When you don't have the reading background and you're screaming at a kid to "sound out a word" and tears are rolling down that child's face…SOUND IT OUT! SOUND IT OUT! And you know they can't sound it out, they speak another language…

Eventually, this particular partnership was forced to seek help from an administrator. Coal explained, "We had a 'Come to Jesus' meeting … and it was really ugly, and it was really awful but on the other hand, it kind of had to be done." The relationship between Coal and Brandy continued to struggle, and Coal's wishes to be placed in a different classroom the following year

were granted. When professional viewpoints were so far removed from one another, it seemed impossible to piece together a successful co-teaching experience.

Maya had two partnerships that were significantly challenging, wherein relationships were not formed and resentment developed. The first, with DeAndre, may have been more credited to psychological difficulties than anything else as his position at Westview Elementary was terminated mid-year. Maya was initially very excited to take on a new co-teacher after Erin. Therefore, when she was assigned to work with DeAndre, she looked forward to the opportunity. He was coming from an undergraduate program, and Maya assumed "that was good…and I like that because together we can create an environment." But things changed quickly, and Maya noted, "the weird thing about him was he felt that he was in competition with me the whole entire time." Her assessment of this tendency indicates quite a bit about her overall teaching philosophy that could be seen across interviews and observations. Maya said:

> When you walk into that classroom as co-teachers, there is no competition. We all have our strengths and weaknesses and even regardless of us all sharing our strengths and weakness, it's not personal. And I think that's the hardest thing about being a co-teacher is that you really have to set aside a lot of your professional beliefs and get in there and find some common ground and that's obviously not so easy all the time.

This relationship went much further into the personal, negative realm than the others in this study.

When things became difficult between Maya and DeAndre, and he was taken out of her class, the personal lines were crossed in a painful way. In this case, name-calling even played a part. Maya explained, "He went as far to go on Facebook and call me a fat ass…Called me the devil and the other things." DeAndre's tendency to be in competition with Maya made it

seemingly impossible to form a relationship with him. This particular situation went beyond any others described as incompatible by the participants in this study, and comes close to the worst-case scenarios presented in the literature (Conderman et al., 2009; Gürgür & Uzuner, 2010; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005; Sims, 2008).

As a new teacher, Maya expected DeAndre to learn the curriculum before he jumped in to work with small groups of students. DeAndre felt differently about that process, and the relationship dwindled from there. Maya explained, "If you don't know curriculum, you are no help to me, and if you don't know how to speak to children or speak to adults…it's not about being friends." To have such different viewpoints from the very beginning and to get started on the wrong foot certainly gets in the way of developing the strong relationship it takes to be a resilient co-teaching team. According to Maya, that is exactly what happened.

Maya's second negative experience that lasted for two years was with Julianne, a teacher she felt was ineffective and "passive aggressive" toward her. Maya described her interactions with Julianne this way:

> [It could be described as] me teaching and someone taking up space, really…There was a lot of passive aggression, and so not that that makes me shy, but I just didn't want to make it accessible to the kids. And then several occasions after [a] spelling test, she'd be standing there grading the tests while I'm teaching, while children were struggling. It was more of an inconvenience to me than anything else.

When asked how she dealt with this particular relationship, Maya admitted to carrying on as though Julianne was not even a factor. In essence, it appears that Maya used the skills taught to her during the two-year positive relationship with Erin to carry her through the negative ones.

Maya claimed that she proceeded with her school year as though Julianne were not even a part of it, and had successes seemingly in spite of Julianne's presence in the classroom. Maya said, "I held my tongue a lot. I just stopped complaining because there's nothing to do about it." This relationship carried on for two years without ever getting resolved or being discussed at all. While this approach of ignoring the situation is not advocated in the research, it was the only solution Maya was willing to accept at the time.

When discussing this relationship with Julianne in the final interview, Maya was adamant about how difficult it was for her, that she would "cringe every time Julianne came in the door." The researcher asked Maya to expand on a comment she made in an earlier interview about Maya's goal that the children would be successful in spite of this negative relationship. Maya clarified with even more emphasis, and said, "It wasn't even *in* spite of her I'll just do it. But it was also *to* spite her" (emphasis added to convey the voice change in the interview). The strength of this statement indicates how fresh the wounds continued to be from this very negative interaction and just how impactful those feelings can be.

Each of these partnerships described by the participants took their toll on that teacher's school year. Of course, because the co-teachers outlined in this section by the participants did not actually participate in the study and were not interviewed, the views presented are one-sided. Keeping this in mind, it is possible that the sentiments expressed were biased to side with the participant's point of view. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize what paralyzing effects a poor partnership can have, and what an advantage is given to teachers who find themselves in a highly positive co-teaching match. Because, no matter how exaggerated or biased these viewpoints may be, they represent the actual perspectives of co-teachers. Right or wrong, these

teachers struggled tremendously within the teams as described in this portion of the cross-case analysis.

Discussion.

When examining the words and actions of the participants through the constant comparison method, it became clear that the language used to describe a pinnacle co-teaching relationship was far more vague than the language used to describe the negative relationships. Interestingly, it was much easier for the participants to put into words what made for unconstructive interactions than for the constructive ones. It seemed that the credit for success could not quite be pinned down, while the trying experiences were easier to explain.

Many of the participants referred to flexibility and an easy-going nature as vital for success. Eleanor, in fact, said in an interview, "I'm a pretty easy going person. I've learned to be extremely flexible. I have to be." Strong communication was also mentioned as correlated to success. Coal said, "a lot of it is just communication." Cassandra referred to communication more indirectly, saying she and a former co-teacher were "on the same wavelength." The elusive concept of success was made clear when co-teachers said things like, "We think the same" (Isabella) or "We know what the other is thinking" (Eleanor).

Presented in Table 4.4, it is clear that the non-specific nature of the language used to illustrate positive co-teaching interactions was altogether different from the precise words used to tell about negative interactions.

Table 4.4

Language Used To Describe Co-Teaching Partnerships

Pinnacle Co-Teaching Relationships: Descriptors Used	**Negative Co-Teaching Relationships: Descriptors Used**
"We think the same."	"She doesn't even know we don't get along. That's how hard it was."
"You can read their nonverbal cues easily."	"And she just didn't interact with the kids."
"It feels easy."	"It was awful because she just wasn't focused. She wasn't prepared, didn't have things organized."
"You can tell by a look when it's time to step in."	"I resented [it] cause I felt like I was doing all the work"
"I just think the best comes out."	"I mean he went as far to go on Facebook and call me a fat ass…Called me the devil and the other things."
"The lesson has a flow."	"He felt that he was in competition with me the whole time."
"It's more fun to have a friend."	"There were a lot of things that she said to a lot of people about me and who wants to walk into a room and be vulnerable because that's what you have to do?"
"We're on the same page."	"Passive aggressive"
"Synergy."	
"You respect their judgment."	
"We knew a lot of the same things and we believed in a lot of the same things."	
"Didn't really have to discuss too much."	
"You almost know what the other is thinking."	
"You are not afraid to bring things up."	

This interesting trend indicated much about what makes a co-teaching relationship positive and what may cause it to struggle.

While the co-teachers had trouble putting into words what it was that made the strong relationships so resilient, they talked around the idea, and said things like, "We were on the same

page." or "There is a synergy with us." Understanding this, several questions come up related to what can be done for future partnerships, such as: How can these feelings be taught to someone when entering a new co-teaching partnership? What is it about "thinking the same" or "being on the same wavelength" as someone that can be passed along to other teams?

Conversely, participants had no trouble putting into words what made a partnership challenging, as they were more tactile, actionable items. For example, Coal grappled with a co-teacher who expected her to do all the work. Isabella had an ongoing struggle with a teacher who did not interact with her students. These very specific explanations are much easier to identify and, in the cases detailed here, seemingly impossible to overcome.

While it may be difficult to quantify exactly what it was that made a co-teaching relationship work or not, this understanding has important implications for schools engaging in co-teaching. Namely, trusting teachers and their impressions of co-teaching partnerships can go a long way to ensuring unsuccessful teams will be discontinued and successful ones will carry on. Understanding the significant impact that a poor partnership can have on a teacher and his or her school year should be enough to trust that teachers know what it takes, despite their struggle putting it into words.

Balancing the Power in a Realistic Way

Balancing power and responsibility in a co-teaching team are necessary steps to ensuring success. Unlike much of the research published about co-teaching teams, the participants in this study tended to prefer balancing their relationship in a way they saw fit. For some, this meant a somewhat even balance of workload and responsibility, while for others their comfort level was set up differently.

When looking across the co-teaching teams, interesting patterns came forward when considering the balance of power between teachers in a co-teaching scenario. The research about co-teaching indicates concern for how power is shared between the teachers (Murphy et al., 2004). The participants in this study revealed that an ideal situation for them was when the balance of power that had been developed was comfortable for both members of the team. In contrast to this, a sort of "best practices" of co-teaching has been accumulated over the years, and one of the ideas that arose from the research is that co-teaching teams should share power equally (Murawski, 2005; Murawski & Dieker, 2008). The teams in this study have more often come to an agreement about how to best balance one another, as evidenced in both interviews and observations. At times, it took equal sharing of power, but more often power was not perfectly equally divided.

Louise was particularly vocal about her opinion on this matter. She was certain that no co-teaching arrangement can share power in an entirely 50-50 arrangement, because the general education teacher will always have more work to do and have more pressure on them. Louise has worked as both a general education teacher and a special education support teacher, so she has seen both sides of the co-teaching dynamic. From these experiences she has formed her opinions about workload differences and balancing power between co-teachers. Louise said, "They [general education teachers] are in charge of so much more in that room than I am that I err to them for whatever, discipline, the climate in the room, everything." Because of this unbalanced workload, Louise felt it was impossible to expect all responsibilities to balance out evenly between a pair of co-teachers.

Louise even referred to some denial about this balance of power by the administrative team. In her opinion, the administrators believed that co-teaching partnerships should share the

load and the power equally. Regarding the co-teacher with more of a supportive role, Louise said:

> No matter what anybody says, you're not equals in that room...You're just not. It's supposed to be 50-50. You are supposed to do the same amount of work, but because you get to leave, you cannot hold the same value in that room as [a general education] teacher. You can be equally as valuable when you're there, [but] it's not your space.

Louise's day was split between two general education teachers and their classrooms. Throughout the day, she went between the two classes to co-teach her assigned segments. This in-and-out, which Louise referred to as "drive-by teaching," made it difficult to arrange a truly even balance of power and responsibility. Despite this, she felt the need to deny this truth to the administrative team because of their belief that power should be shared equally. Louise explained:

> If you do those things that make it look like 50-50, it still isn't. I don't walk anybody to Specials, [I don't] pick anybody up from lunch. I don't have to call anybody's mom that's not on my caseload… I don't do as much…It's just not 50-50. It can't be.

To Louise, it was perfectly clear that the balance of power that may be the surface goal of co-teaching teams and advocates was not a reality.

Cassandra's perspective on balancing power and giving away control was different than Louise's, and perhaps more indicative of a general education teacher's view on the matter. Cassandra explained:

> I'll give up the whole control…Totally. And I ask advice all the time. [For example], "What am I going to do with this child? He's doing this, and this and this. Do you have any ideas?" I think if Bethany got interviewed, she'd say I shared control…and the power…shared burdens, but also shared joys.

Contrasting to what Cassandra claimed about shared power were the observable actions Cassandra and Coal demonstrated during their planning and co-teaching sessions. Because Cassandra is the students' primary teacher and with them all day, she inherently held more power than Coal, who is in the classroom for just 45 minutes per day. For example, Coal did not organize the lining up for recess when the teaching session was over and in fact only interacted with the eight students in her small group out of a class of 27 students. While Cassandra may feel like they share control and responsibilities in her classroom, the researcher did not observe it.

While these examples may not point directly to an uneven balance in the level of control each teacher holds, they can back up what Louise said about an impression that power is shared between co-teachers when it is often not in actuality. As it is in Cassandra's nature to be in charge of her own classroom and the success of her students, it may be her impression that the power is shared evenly when it may not be. But, most importantly, the balance these teachers have found is comfortable for them, as is the case with the other positive co-teaching relationships described.

Eleanor and Maya, in the final interview, offered important insight to this trend about balancing power. Eleanor claimed that the way they balance the responsibilities within their partnership is almost "intuitive." She said:

> I don't know percentage wise, but we don't do tit for tat. I grade some papers, she grades some papers. She'll do a lesson and I might think of something to go off on that lesson to do a lesson. But it's not "tit for tat," and we don't really have a structure like that. It's almost like intuitive with us.

Maya agreed and offered a discerning contrast between power sharing in a positive relationship and in one that is a struggle. She said:

> I think when the relationship is good, then the balance of power doesn't come into it. It's only when there's a struggle that you even look at power. Because both of us are there for the kids to get the job done, that's already been established. So whatever has to be done, we'll do it. With Erin, we never thought of power. When it came to DeAndre and Julianne, for sure, power was definitely in my mind - this is my room. But I never feel like that now.

All three teams, in the paired interviews, were in agreement that the way they run their classrooms was unique to their partnership. None advocated that power and responsibility could or should be divided up in a perfectly even way. Louise made an appropriate comparison, saying, "It's like a marriage - you and your husband don't split half and half what you do at home. It's just what works for those people. It's a relationship." How to balance the power and responsibilities connected to co-teaching is one of the many agreements a team must decide on to meet their unique needs.

The purpose of this study was to understand the co-teaching experience. Through analyzing the interviews and observations of three of the many co-teaching teams at Westview Elementary School, several perspectives and patterns emerged. While each co-teaching team that participated were unique and offered distinctive viewpoints, certain trends were discovered in the data through the constant comparison method. In Chapter Five, the co-teaching research base will be examined in comparison to these perspectives and patterns. Also, the implications emerging from this study will be addressed.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of co-teachers in an elementary setting, namely the general education teachers and the special education or English as second language (ESL) teachers who co-taught with them. In this interpretive case study, the researcher interviewed and observed three pairs of teachers engaged in co-teaching, who worked in a large suburban elementary school in a southeastern state, to learn about their experiences.

The primary research questions that were examined in this study were:

1. What are the perspectives of general education teachers and special education or English as a second language (ELL) teachers regarding their pedagogical experience of co-teaching?
2. What are the patterns within the co-teaching team experience?

The researcher answered the research questions using an interpretive approach to qualitative inquiry, through semi-structured interviews and observations. Constant comparative analysis methods were used to uncover themes from the data. Continual reflective practices assisted the researcher in staying close to the data and to generate a final product that revealed a more complete picture and understanding of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School.

Summary of the Study

This interpretive case study began with informal conversations with several potential participants about the researcher's aim of understanding more completely the human dynamic that exists between co-teachers. After the co-teaching partnerships were well established for the

school year and there was no chance that they would change due to student or personnel shifts, the researcher sent an explanatory email to the 59 possible participants at Westview Elementary School. To qualify as a participant, both teachers in the team had to agree to be studied, and each participant was required to have had previous experience working as a co-teacher. This particular requirement turned out to be quite vital to the study, as much of the analyzed data were drawn from participants' reflections of previous co-teaching relationships. Furthermore, by email (see Appendix A), the researcher explained the purpose of the study and provided details of the commitment needed by participants.

The researcher received positive responses from 39 of the possible participants. For a variety of reasons, this number was then narrowed down to six participants who made up three co-teaching teams. Because the researcher had a strong desire to create a study that would reflect the general populations of all teachers at Westview Elementary School, the participants selected were from a variety of grade levels in that the three support teachers worked with kindergarten, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades, and the three general education teachers were working with third, fourth, and fifth grades. The selected participants also represented both the special education and English as a second language (ESL) departments that made up most of the co-teaching teams at Westview Elementary School.

In a research setting, context is important, as the context is where the co-teachers in this study enacted co-teaching. Westview Elementary School was selected as an appropriate site for this study because of its nine-year history using co-teaching to meet the needs of students who speak English as a second language, those with special needs, and those who needed additional academic support through the Early Intervention Program (EIP). Furthermore, with 1,649 students, the school was relatively large and had about 55 co-teaching teams each year.

Co-teaching at Westview Elementary School had a history that included a process that guided the implementation of co-teaching. Co-teaching was phased in with a gradual, teacher-led approach, which was in contrast to what the prior research reported about the start-up of co-teaching. Prior research illustrated results to other schools that transitioned into the pedagogical changes associated with co-teaching quickly, completely, and at times, without much teacher support (Sims, 2008; Walther-Thomas, 1997). For these reasons, Westview Elementary School was an appropriate site for this particular case study.

Once the six participants were selected, the researcher held a round of one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each of them, the goals of which were to build rapport with the participants, to come to understand the particulars of the co-teaching partnerships, and to begin answering the research questions. The interview guide, as presented in Appendix C, was semi-structured so that, in line with any interpretive study, the participant and researcher could co-construct data in a generative way. Immediately after each interview, the researcher took notes in a researcher's log to reflect on the interview process, change the interview guide as needed, and begin the analysis process. All interviews were transcribed soon after they were held, and pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. The original recordings were destroyed as another measure of confidentiality.

To come closer to answering the research questions, two observations followed the interviews. Observation protocols were developed for each type of observation: a co-planning session and a co-taught lesson. The protocols included identified behaviors that stood out in the research of co-teaching teams, and are included in Appendices D and E. Extensive fieldnotes were taken during the observation phase, and were then expanded on after each observation, using the researcher's log to capture stray ideas, reflections, and analysis.

Next, an analysis was made of all the data collected from the interviews and observations. Multiple readings and re-readings of the interviews, the observation fieldnotes, and the researcher's log was the first step in this analysis. Following this was the assigning of codes to bits of data that were particularly salient. The researcher then recognized that across the generated codes, there were certain and unique trends within each co-teaching team. From this recognition came looking at the observation data to confirm or deny that these trends were showing up in the observations as well. This process of going back and forth between codes, trends, and both types of data is the constant comparison method of analysis (Charmaz, 2005).

Once an initial analysis was written, the researcher scheduled another round of interviews with the participants, this time as pairs. This final round of interviews served multiple purposes, namely (a) to engage participants in member checking by sharing transcripts and initial analysis findings, (b) to examine more deeply some of the trends revealed in the preliminary analysis, and (c) to observe the co-teachers' interactions one last time.

When the final interviews were transcribed and pseudonyms assigned, the researcher continued the constant comparison analysis process, continuously re-examining initial analysis and interpretations. As a final step, the researcher shared the transcripts of the paired interviews with the participants as well as findings and preliminary analysis. Participants were asked to share any concerns or questions about this final analysis as another round of member checks, and the analysis was modified as warranted.

Discussion

Many themes emerged from within the data across *each* of the three co-teaching partnerships, as well as through the cross-case analysis of *all* six co-teachers examined together. The themes uncovered in the cross-case analysis were:

1. Pinnacle examples of co-teaching relationships are rare but highly memorable.
2. Negative co-teaching relationships can ruin a school year.
3. Balancing the power in a co-teaching partnership looks differently according to the members' norms and styles.

These themes were presented as the patterns of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School. Each of these themes was analyzed with an eye on the relevant literature about co-teaching to look for agreement or disparity based on the findings of the present research.

Pinnacle Examples of Co-Teaching

The research about co-teaching has cited several factors that can lead to successful teams, such as the relationships described by the six participants as ideal. The same factors of shared planning time, compatibility, and a shared knowledge base, are laid out again and again by various researchers who study co-teaching (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Not surprisingly, the participants also mentioned these three factors when explaining their pinnacle co-teaching partnerships. Each factor is examined and connected to this case study.

Shared planning time.

Shared planning time is an important factor when examining successful co-teaching teams (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Hang & Rabren, 2009; Hwang & Vrongistions, 2003). Shared planning time was cited as the single most important factor for making co-teaching work in a survey conducted by Kohler-Evans (2006). Shared planning time was certainly helpful to Louise and Cindy and Isabella and Nina in their idyllic co-teaching partnerships, as a way to connect to one another and to plan instruction that effectively met the needs of their students.

Various researchers have a wide variety of advice about the way shared planning between co-teachers should take place. Ploessl et al., (2010) indicated that within each co-planning session between co-teachers should be a discussion of the best co-teaching model to match the intended results. For example, they write, "Use the one-teaching, one-observing model if collecting academic or behavioral student data is what matters" (Ploessl et al., 2010, p. 6). By noticeable contrast, the participating co-teaching teams in this study indicated that their selected co-teaching model most often stayed the same from day-to-day, and changed only for special lessons or when trying something new.

Hawbaker et al. (2001) even laid out a formulaic, step-by-step format to help co-teachers plan effective lessons most efficiently. This model, called BASE, focuses on the idea that "building consensus about what is most important fosters useful discussions about priorities, the goals of the class, and what students need in their futures" (Hawbaker et al., 2001, p. 24). While this model seems that it would no doubt improve the co-planning process, it appeared to be very different from and more rigid than what was observed when the co-teaching participants actually planned together. In reality, co-planning looked very different from one team to the next. For Maya and Eleanor, informally reflecting on and discussing student needs to decide on their next steps was the ideal situation. By contrast, Isabella and Louise sat with plan books open to discuss the upcoming two weeks, each noting what was decided on and what their next steps were to be. It seemed that no matter how different the planning looked, it was universally understood to be important.

Compatibility.

Simple compatibility is a quite obvious although at times overlooked factor that helps co-teaching relationships to be successful. It was clear from the teachers interviewed that their

pinnacle examples of co-teachers included teachers who were very compatible. Maya's revelatory comments about Erin indicated that their relationship went far beyond simply teaching well together; it was clear the compatibility between them ran deep. Coal's emotional goodbye with Sandy would only be described in a harmonious partnership. Compatibility was a pre-requisite for this type of comfort. While it may look different from case to case, compatibility is a necessity for successful co-teaching relationships.

In the research about co-teaching, compatibility is discussed as essential by many researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Kohler-Evans (2006) offered the simple wisdom, "have fun," to schools interested in trying co-teaching and inclusive practices (p. 262). Only in a compatible partnership can teachers appreciate this sentiment: "Here is the chance to share some of the best teaching moments with someone else, someone who understands the context and the participants" (Kohler-Evans, 2006, p. 262). For Cassandra, compatibility with Bethany was seen as balancing one another out or feeling part of the same "family." She also referenced the idea that co-teaching with her pinnacle co-teacher is "more fun than teaching alone."

Rice and Zigmond (2000) pointed out that compatibility is a necessity because of the extended time co-teachers spend together. They wrote, "The continuing, close cooperation that co-teaching involves was given as the reason by several respondents for identifying both professional and personal compatibility as critical" (Rice & Zigmond, 2000, p. 194). Eleanor spoke of increasing her comfort level with Beverly over time, and feeling okay speaking up about an issue and having her opinion honored after the time they spent together. Sharing important moments and spending long amounts of time together give strong reasons for arranging co-teaching partnerships between compatible members.

Mastropieri et al. (2005) summed up the concept of compatibility within co-teaching partnerships when they wrote:

> The relationship between the co-teachers is a major critical component influencing the success or failure of the inclusion of students with disabilities. When co-teachers are getting along and working well together, students with disabilities are more likely to be successful and have successful experiences in the inclusive environment. (p. 268)

The idea of getting along seems like such a simple one, but can often be missed when schools are balancing schedules, teacher certification areas, student counts, and the demands of each student's Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to arrange co-teaching partnerships. Despite these limitations, the successful partnerships at Westview Elementary School were able to thrive. Within these pinnacle co-teacher relationships, compatibility was undoubtedly necessary but also relished.

Shared knowledge base.

For participants like Isabella, Coal and Cassandra, their ideal co-teaching partnerships consisted of members who shared professional viewpoints. Each of these teachers, when discussing their exemplary co-teachers, referred to a shared understanding of student expectations, curriculum, or classroom management. Isabella explained her frustrations with a negative co-teaching experience, saying that the co-teacher would not engage in the discipline of Isabella's students, leaving that up to Isabella alone. Coal spoke about the similarity in training that she and Sandy underwent when she explained, "we knew a lot of the same things and we believed in a lot of the same things." Cassandra pondered why a "honeymoon period" existed between teachers who are both professionals and both know what and how to teach. She said,

"Let's go to work!" This concept also speaks to the idea of being "on the same page" that was alluded to by many of the participants.

While it did not appear to be at issue during this study of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School, there were arrangements spoken of in the literature wherein two teachers who have no similar training were put in a classroom to teach together. For example, in a high school, a teacher may be highly specialized in a subject area such as Physics and is asked to co-teach with a certified special education teacher who had no background in Physics. This causes its share of problems (Al-Saaideh, 2011). In a case study of co-teaching in American and Australian schools, Rice and Zigmond (2000) found several themes that attributed to the success or failure of co-teaching teams. They wrote as necessary to success, "Equivalence in knowledge and ability. Teachers expected their co-teaching partners to be at least their equals in pedagogical knowledge and instructional skill" (p. 194). In the case of Coal and Sandy, having a common pedagogical understanding and therefore expecting the same things from students proved to be a crucial aspect of their success.

There are also relationships outlined in the literature wherein teachers may start with differing content levels, but approach this lack of knowledge in a more positive, pro-active way. For example:

> At the seventh-grade level, the division between content and adaptation expert was more pronounced. In this case, the general educator appeared to have an advantage over the special educator with respect to content knowledge on the unit and assumed a lead role during the majority of instruction. However, the special educator viewed this as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. She indicated she was learning so much that she could use later in her teaching. (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 264)

Attitude and the way one approaches a new experience can go a long way in building a positive co-teaching experience for both teachers involved.

While the pinnacle co-teaching interactions can be accredited to a wide range of factors, it cannot be denied that shared planning time, compatibility, and a shared knowledge base were helpful to these co-teaching relationships. Also supported by the research, these factors help pull together successful teams. By contrast, when teachers are paired with teachers who are not compatible with them or with whom they do not build relationships, problems arise. As ideal as the positive relationships can be, the negative ones can demoralize a pair of teachers, and the impact of that can be great.

Negative Co-Teaching Experiences

While looking at what keeps co-teaching partnerships from thriving, it is tempting to simply state the opposite of the factors outlined in the research that indicate what makes co-teaching successful. However, as with all human relationships, the reasons behind success or failure are far more nuanced and subtle. Instead, the researcher sought out examples from the research that paralleled the experiences of the six participants with a goal of pointing to the factors that kept these particular partnerships from flourishing. In general, it was a lack of nurturing the relationships that kept them from growing. More specifically, resentment between co-teachers, the negative impact on students caused by contentious co-teacher interactions, and professional development's role in building co-teaching relationships were particularly parallel to the experiences described by the participants. The research base and its connection to both the pinnacle co-teaching relationships and the negative ones are displayed in Figure 5.1.

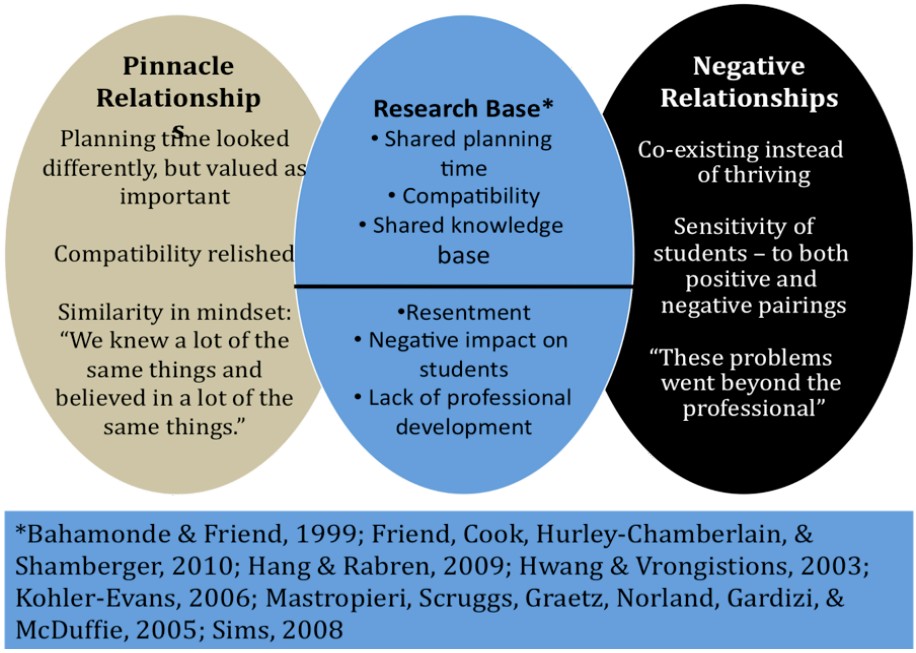

Figure 5.1: Research Base Connected to Pinnacle and Negative Relationships.

Resentment.

Coal was very outspoken about her eventual resentment for Sam, and had reflected enough on the interactions to be able to pinpoint that feeling. The resentment grew because of her negative feelings about his work ethic, and his attempt to assign her an unequal amount of work. Maya's partnership with Julianne could be attributed to resentment as well because Maya felt Julianne was not doing her part. In an explanation of a trying co-teaching relationship, Sims (2008) explained her own resentful partnership with a co-teacher who was close to retirement and paired with Sims, a novice teacher at the time. She wrote:

> On meeting me she threw her hands up in the air, declared she was "done," and sat in a student desk for the rest of the semester and gossiped about me during lunch. I did all of the planning, teaching, and grading, and my co-teacher put herself in charge of behavior management. She kept a daily list of the students who would serve lunch detention. At the end of each class, she would ceremoniously reveal the names on the list. Our class

> behaved abysmally and at the end of the term, students' state test scores were low. I had more failures from that class than from any other – and six of the seven special education students failed the course. (p. 59)

The story Sims (2008) told was just as painful to read as some of those shared by the six participants. While the intentions and goals of co-teaching can be so positive, when two teachers are placed together and a relationship is not nurtured, an opposite effect takes place.

Sims (2008) realized after the trying interaction was over that making more of an effort at building a relationship should have been a priority. Maya said the same of her relationship with Julianne, pointing out their success was "in spite of her," and later "to spite her." Coal did the same by recognizing through reflection the importance of nurturing a relationship. Sims (2008) reflected, "My co-teacher and I did not like each other, and I did not make any effort to rectify the situation. We maintained our little worlds inside the same classroom…" (p. 59). This is an exactly parallel explanation of Maya and Julianne's situation, wherein non-communication became the norm over time.

When a relationship is not nurtured, it is at times easier for co-teachers to simply co-exist, each doing their own thing and maintaining their own understanding of the relationship. When compared to what is possible, however, in co-teaching partnerships that plan dynamic instruction together in a compatible and comfortable way, it is a shame that not all can reach that level.

Negative impact on students.

When the two adults in the room are not getting along day after day, it is easy to assume that this tension can negatively impact the students as well. Certainly, two professionals can overcome interpersonal differences between adults to teach students. Coal stated her opinion about this matter in an interview by saying, "When it works well, it works really well. But even

when it's not the ideal situation or the ideal relationship, I think it's still beneficial for kids. I think you can really rise above it, whatever your differences are." While Coal felt that co-teachers with negative interactions do not impact the students, the other participants and the research stated differently (Mastropieri et al., 2005; Rice & Zigmond, 2000; Sims, 2008).

Students are sensitive to adult actions, and no matter how hard teachers try to hide the truth about their interactions, students will likely catch on to negative partnerships. Mastropieri et al. (2005) wrote, "When co-teachers experience conflict with their co-teaching relationship due to any number of issues, the inclusive experience for students with disabilities is more challenging" (p. 268). While the participants were not quick to make this point, the opposite point was made about how the students notice when co-teachers get along very well. Isabella said, "The kids love seeing their teachers have a good relationship. I think that's fun for them and it makes learning more fun…I've had kids talk about best friends and they'll [say], 'Like you and Mrs. Kurtz!'" If what Isabella said about students picking up on positive relationships has some validity, the opposite must also have some truth to it.

Maya, by her second year co-teaching with Julianne, attempted an approach she thought would minimize the negative impact on students. This attempt may be classified as a survivalist approach, and Maya seemed aware it was not the best one, but she felt it was her only choice. Maya essentially taught the students that she was the main teacher and that they could ask Julianne for help only if Maya was not available. Maya explained:

> I think the kids got the message that I was the bottom line, [whereas] the year before I worked very hard to make it that we were equal. To be quite candid, by the second year it was like, "If you need something and I'm busy, you can tell her and if she's willing to

> help you…(and not just sit there and mark papers or do IEPs or whatever [she is] doing sitting at my back table instead of teaching)…then you can go to her."

Maya, in reflecting on the year after it had passed, was able to see that perhaps this was not the best approach. Trying to turn the situation into a teachable moment may have seemed like a solution at the time, as Maya explained:

> Kids are very sensitive and [comments] that normally I would have redirected, like comments by the children [about Julianne]…Instead of going into like a seven minute monologue about how she's your teacher as well, I [would say], "How can we work through this?" Because that's a lesson too. If you don't get along with your teacher, you still have to do what they say, so we just use it as a lesson.

While it is easy to look back on her actions with judgment and interpret them, Maya was stuck in a situation she felt was unchangeable and did what she thought was right. Of course, problem-solving strategies and increased attempts at communication would have done much to amend the situation, although Maya did not seem willing to take any of those steps at the time.

Having a different amount of content knowledge can also be a paralyzing force in co-teaching partnerships. When one teacher feels he or she knows more than the other, frustrations can arise. Maya spoke about this happening in her co-teaching relationship with DeAndre, a first year special education teacher. She said, "He wanted to take the reins of pulling children [into small groups] before he knew curriculum. If you don't know curriculum, you are no help to me." Having a different amount of content knowledge is another way students are negatively impacted by co-teachers that do not have a strong relationship. Rice and Zigmond (2000) wrote about the importance that co-teachers have "shared views with regard to academic and behavioral

standards expected of students. Without agreement on acceptable standards, students became confused and frustrated" (p. 194).

Sims (2008) pointed out that students often take advantage of a weak co-teaching partnership. She wrote, "not only are students incredibly sensitive to when the adults in the room do not get along, they also know how to manipulate such situations" (Sims, 2008, p. 59). Whether or not Maya's students were manipulating the negative co-teaching relationship, it was unclear and beyond the scope of the present study. What is clear, however, is how much of an advantage teacher and students have in classrooms with teachers who are compatible and who can work well together as co-teachers.

Lack of professional development.

Most experts who write about co-teaching advocate about the importance of using professional development to increase effectiveness of co-teaching teams (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Gkolia et al., 2007; Little, 2005; Rinke & Valli, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2007). In a study by Pickard (2010), a school is outlined as it goes through its multi-year, gradual phase-in of co-teaching teams and inclusion models. Supported by professional development and the gradual release of responsibility, teachers learned how to co-teach according to specific student needs and to honor the role of a co-teacher (Pickard, 2010). This professional development endeavor was significant, and prepared the school for co-teaching like no other detailed in the literature.

When the participants in this study were asked about professional development, many claimed it had been several years since Westview Elementary School offered professional learning specific to co-teaching, although it was a push several years ago. In the first round of interviews, Coal mentioned a recent conversation she had with an assistant principal specifically about this idea. She and the assistant principal agreed it was time for another round of staff

development specific to co-teaching. The lack of this professional learning can likely be blamed for some of the negative interactions between co-teachers. Of course, there is a chance that no level of support would have changed the outcome of highly incompatible teams. For instance, Maya said of her relationships with DeAndre and Julianne, "It might be professional counseling, but not professional development in my situation." She explained her position, and clarified that "those [problems] went beyond professional." When a relationship has become so negative, it seems unlikely that professional learning would change much of anything. However, to go beyond this perspective would be purely speculative as this area goes beyond the scope of the present study.

While sitting in a traditional professional development class may be of no benefit to co-teachers struggling with a relationship, alternative methods of increasing collaborative efforts could prove advantageous. The power of collaboration is one of the most effective practice-changing endeavors (Bahamonde & Friend, 1999; Hildenbrand, 2009). A mutually beneficial relationship is a goal of co-teaching, and teachers may need some help learning how to work collaboratively. For example, Coal mentioned frustrations with Sam, who seemed to have no interest in collaboration. Hildenbrand (2009) wrote, "Collaboration…is identified as one of the most important competencies for both teachers and administrators" (p. 11). Unfortunately, according to Sims (2008), "Many preservice institutions do not adequately prepare students to become effective co-teachers" (p. 59). Noting this, perhaps a lack of strong collaboration strategies kept some co-teaching relationships from thriving, and ended up instead as quite a burden to the members.

Balancing the Power

Looking across the research about co-teaching, there is a generality that co-teachers should divide up power and responsibility evenly in a co-taught classroom (Murawski & Dieker, 2008; Murawski, 2005; Spencer, 2005). However, the participants in this study more often described a balance of power and responsibility that worked for them, and it was often not divided up in a perfectly even way. This point of departure from the research base is displayed in Figure 5.2.

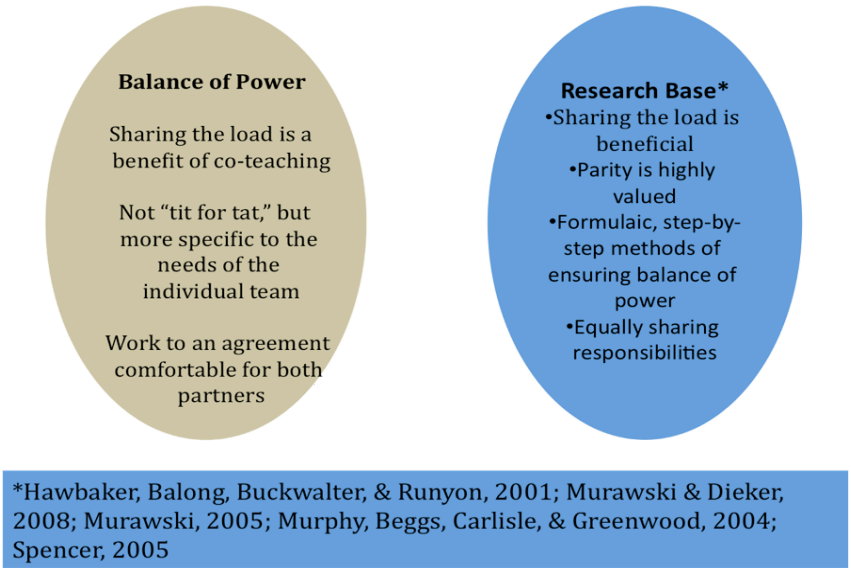

Figure 5.2: Balance of Power Findings Compared to Research Base.

As Maya and Eleanor described it, only in an unbalanced relationship would a co-teaching pair worry about "going tit for tat." Instead, making their own rules and expectations within the dynamic of co-teaching was the most beneficial scenario for these six participants.

Balancing the responsibilities of co-teaching can be a complicated matter that may appear differently from one situation to the next. Of course, the appeal of sharing the load with a co-teacher is highly appealing. Murawski and Dieker (2008) wrote:

> One of the best things about co-teaching is the opportunity to share – responsibility, accountability, workload, and fun! Letting teachers know that they will have someone else to help with planning, obtaining materials, grading, and other chores is one of the best ways to attract interest in co-teaching. (Murawski & Dieker, 2008, p. 42)

While it is likely that none of the participants in this study would disagree with this statement, their ideas about sharing would look different from room-to-room and partnership-to-partnership. For example, Louise and Isabella were both equally as accustomed to taking home some of their students' work for grading, while that was not as common an occurrence in the Coal and Cassandra partnership. Eleanor took on the role of organizing and cleaning up around Maya's classroom, where in another partnership that might appear to be going one step too far by the support teacher.

In the co-teaching partnerships included in this study, there were no obvious parity issues in interview or observation data, although when the participants described negative relationships of the past, balancing duties and responsibilities was referenced repeatedly. Parity is certainly a concern when teachers open their classrooms up to co-teaching (Spencer, 2005). It was the finding of this study, however, that parity only became a major issue when the co-teaching team was made up of incompatible members.

In any case, using a plan for co-teaching that addresses parity issues before they come up may be beneficial and could have worked to reverse the dive into negativity that some of the co-teaching partnerships experienced. Murawski and Dieker (2004) recommend that co-teachers ask themselves at all times, "Is what we are doing good for both of us?" and "Is what we are doing good for all of our students?" (p. 58). Answering positively to both of these questions would indicate a lack of parity issues, while the opposite would also be true and indicate a need to

change practice. No matter how co-teaching teams work together and divide up the many responsibilities that they face, the norms will likely evolve for them on a personalized basis.

Implications

This study and its results were not intended from the outset to offer answers to other schools engaged in co-teaching, only to paint a clear and thorough picture of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School. However, as with any piece of research, there is a possibility that an impact can be felt slightly more widely than at the selected site. Contained in this clear view of the perspectives and patterns of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School are also implications for school leaders, for practitioners, and for further research.

Implications for School Leaders

As it was made clear in this research study, administrators must honor the voice and opinions of teachers when it comes to arranging or renewing co-teaching partnerships. While it may be an unrealistic goal to allow teachers to single-handedly select their own co-teachers, it certainly should be arranged that if a co-teaching partnership were less than ideal, it would be discontinued in the following school year. Considering the finding that teachers used more precise, specific language regarding what made a co-teaching partnership fail and more vague descriptors to identify successful pairings, administrators should not expect clear explanations about why a teacher may wish to continue (or discontinue) a particular pairing. It seems that the greatest gift the administrators could have given the participants would be to continue teaching within their pinnacle co-teaching teams and to walk away from a negative fit at the end of a school year. The impact of either type of partnership is significant, and can be felt by teachers and students alike.

Also related to arranging partnerships, administrators should know and understand the teachers they work with in their schools. Co-teaching is at the root about relationships, an idea that came up again and again in this study. Understanding teachers well enough to place them in appropriate co-teaching partnerships can go a long way to ensuring success. Maya and Eleanor, in the final interview, reflected on how they were surprised to be paired together before the school year began. It was an assistant principal, Marybeth, who in fact made the arrangements. Maya explained, "It was the foresight of Marybeth in an administrative position to know that we would be a good team…[she] knew us personally as well as professionally…She did a great job of putting us together." Pairing teachers to work in one another's "kitchens" at random with no regard for personalities will likely result in more negative, year-ruining experiences than in positive ones. Thankfully for Maya and Eleanor, this was not the case. They had an administrator who knew them well enough to assign them thoughtfully into partnerships, and the positive results spoke to her professional decision making skills.

In addition to these implications for school leaders is also the idea that administrators should know how to observe a co-teaching team and how it might look differently than a one-teacher classroom observation. Namely, using an observation protocol such as the ones used in this study and presented in Appendices D and E, may allow an administrator to focus on observing aspects of the co-teaching partnership that are grounded in research. Watching a co-teaching team can be a bit like a two-ring circus, at times with much activity and various groupings of students. Without being prepared for this setting, nuances of the co-teaching plan and co-teachers' objectives could be missed.

Finally, school leaders should keep in mind the study finding that it is, in fact, not an equal balancing of power that makes for successful teams, but that individual teams should find a

balance that works for them. While research about co-teaching may hint at the idea that co-teachers should share power and responsibility in an equal manner (Murawski & Dieker, 2004), it was found in these positive co-teaching arrangements to not be the case. In fact, all of the participants in this study denied the idea that this was even possible. Trusting teachers to plan and divide up the work between them in a way that is advantageous for their particular pairing is a more realistic way to support teachers in their co-teaching endeavor.

Implications for Practitioners

There are several lessons to be learned from this study of co-teaching teams, their perspectives and patterns. Among the implications for practitioners are: recognizing the value of communication, demonstrating flexible thinking, and making the relationship work for the partnership despite expectations.

All of the participating co-teaching teams indicated the importance of strong communication and, moreover, the ability to communicate with a pinnacle co-teaching partner. Often, participants described their abilities to communicate with one another at times even non-verbally. While it may be difficult to expect to communicate with a co-teacher non-verbally, certainly being aware of communication concerns and norms could do a lot for a co-teaching partnership. Game and Metcalfe (2009) even indicated a need to match a co-teacher's communication style to ensure successful pairings. It is through communication that partners build relationships, and without a relationship, there is not much hope for building a strong co-teaching team, as evidenced in the findings of this study.

A second implication for teachers was in reference to a trend that came forward particularly in Cassandra and Coal's case study. A support teacher who is coming into a general education teacher's classroom is likely playing a more reflective, and at times sensitive, role in

the pairing. This was the case for Cassandra and Coal as well as for Isabella and Louise; the support teacher who is most often teaching in someone else's classroom is likely to be more sensitive to the dynamics of the classroom than the teacher whose classroom they are in. It is, therefore, important that both co-teachers feel comfortable and at ease, all characteristics that were mentioned when the participants detailed strong co-teaching teams. For this to be possible, the welcoming teacher should be aware of the reflective nature of the support co-teacher and act accordingly. To use an old adage, both co-teachers should be willing to walk in someone else's shoes.

Finally, a co-teaching team must realize that their norms and successes may look entirely different than what their past co-teaching partners have seen, what administrators believe should be happening, or what the research indicates as important. To be in a co-teaching partnership with a colleague can mean to make one's own rules. For co-teaching teams like Cassandra and Coal, minimal and quick planning meetings coupled with small group lessons where no adult interactions take place are the recipes for success. For Maya and Eleanor, using student-first lesson planning practices and extensive reflection makes for content teachers and successful students. And for Isabella and Louise, allowing one teacher to take the lead and the second to exemplify the "support" role is what makes co-teaching a flourishing practice.

Implications for Future Research

The observation protocols developed by the researcher and used in this study were unlike many detailed in previous studies, thereby pushing the research on co-teaching teams a bit further. Engaging in multiple observations with the use of these or similar protocols would certainly increase the research base and take this study to a different level, particularly if used over a greater period of time yielding more observations of many more co-teaching teams.

Observing the actions of co-teachers sheds great light on the practice of co-teaching, specifically when studied in the context of research-based "best practices" as highlighted in the observation protocols. In particular, a more specific look at power dynamics and body language and power dynamics may significantly add to the research base.

In much of the existing literature about co-teaching, there is a lack of research investigating co-teaching's effect on standardized test scores. In fact, researchers exploring the subject matter have uncovered that there is minimal, if any, impact on test achievement for students that are served in a co-taught setting (Friend et al., 2010). Advocates for the practice, however, indicate a number of benefits to students, and are, in fact, surprised when they find that there is no positive correlation between the practice of co-teaching and increased standardized test scores. Perhaps this is an understudied phenomenon, and more research needs to be undertaken to try and find the correlation that so many co-teaching advocates expect.

Limitations

While this study's results portray the lives of co-teachers at Westview Elementary School, in particular their perspectives and the patterns that emerged when co-teaching, it was not exhaustive or all-inclusive. Some limitations were present, including an unintentional focus on co-teaching teams working with the upper elementary grades only and selecting participants who were at the time, working within positive co-teaching pairings. Each of these limitations will be discussed and their implications for future research will be considered.

Each of the three "support" teachers (special education or English as a second language) were co-teaching with partner teachers from a wide range of grade levels, kindergarten through fifth grade, during the year of the study. Despite this, the three particular co-teaching teams selected were based in third, fourth, and fifth grades. This can be seen as a limitation, as the

nature of co-teaching partnerships in the upper elementary grades may be different from those in the primary grades. Considering this, however, the researcher worked to balance out this limitation by allowing the participants to reflect on previous co-teaching pairings in addition to their current one. Past relationships, in fact, became a vital aspect of this study and its analysis. Therefore, between the current and past co-teaching relationships discussed and analyzed, all elementary grade levels were represented in this study.

A second limitation was that all the participating co-teaching teams were in relationships they considered to be positive during the year of the study. Therefore, the conversations surrounding their current pairings were slanted to the positive. In fact, Weiss and Brigham (2000) cited several problems with co-teaching research, such as including only teachers with a positive view of co-teaching, which unintentionally was the case in this research study. However, to balance out these overly positive stories, each participant had a number of past experiences that were negative or neutral, each of which were discussed with as much weight and depth reported in the findings of this study. When a researcher asks for volunteers to participate in a study, teachers in a positive pairing are more likely to be the co-teachers volunteering. After all, any teacher who was not very pleased with his or her pairing would not be overly eager to participate, despite the large number of anonymity measures the researcher put in place. Within each of these limitations is plenty of space for further research.

Concluding Thoughts

It was the hope of the researcher that this study has painted a complete picture of co-teaching at Westview Elementary School and given a voice to the co-teachers outlined in the results of this study. While co-teaching is being used extensively to meet the needs of students across the country, the pedagogical practice can include a complicated dynamic for the adults

involved. Because of this, understanding the perspectives and patterns within these co-teaching partnerships is a necessary step in their further development as co-teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Email

Fellow Educators,

As you may know, I am currently working to earn a Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in the Educational Administration and Policy program at the University of Georgia. For my dissertation, I will be studying the relationships between co-teachers, in particular the special education teachers who work in inclusive classrooms and their classroom teacher counterparts. To carry out my study, I am asking for a few volunteer co-teaching teams who would be willing to grant me two to three 60-minute interviews, one of which will be done with both teachers at the same time. Additionally, I will be coming to observe one planning session and one co-taught lesson.

I fully understand what a precious commodity time is at our school and in our lives, so this request does not come lightly. In return for your commitment to this project, I am offering you an opportunity to discuss your craft and your life as a teacher in a way that you may not get the chance to do very often. We all know that being reflective helps us as teachers, and this is just another way to go about that reflection. If you have any questions or concerns or would like to talk to me about the project a little before committing, just let me know. I honor the work that you are doing and would like to use your expertise for my research.

Best,

Jennie Virgin

APPENDIX B

Consent Form

I, _____, agree to participate in a research study titled "UNDERSTANDING CO-TEACHING RELATIONSHIPS" conducted by Jennie Virgin from the Department of Educational Administration and Policy at the University of Georgia under the direction of Dr. Sally Zepeda, Department of Educational Administration and Policy, University of Georgia. I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. IF I DECIDE TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY, THE INFORMATION THAT CAN BE IDENTIFIED AS MINE WILL BE KEPT AS PART OF THE STUDY AND MAY CONTINUE TO BE ANALYZED, UNLESS I MAKE A WRITTEN REQUEST TO REMOVE, RETURN, OR DESTROY THE INFORMATION.

The reason for this study is to learn about co-teaching relationships, in particular the perspectives and patterns within the relationships. If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

1) Participate in two to three one-hour interviews, one of which will be conducted with both co-teachers at the same time, in which I will talk about my work as a co-teacher.
2) Allow the researcher to observe one 40-minute planning session with my co-teacher
3) Allow the researcher to observe one 40-minute co-taught lesson
4) PARTICIPATE IN "MEMBER-CHECKING" AFTER EACH INTERVIEW OR OBSERVATION, IN WHICH THE RESEARCHER WILL ASK ME TO VERIFY RELIABILITY OF COLLECTED DATA AND INTERPRETATIONS

One benefit for me is that I will be given a forum in which to be reflective and to discuss my work as a co-teacher. The researcher hopes to learn more about the co-teaching relationship that could benefit other teachers, administrators, and researchers interested in co-teaching. No risk is expected from participating in this study.

No individually-identifiable information about me, or provided by me during the research, will be shared with others UNLESS REQUIRED BY LAW. All interview data will be transcribed with the use of pseudonyms, so that the researcher is the only person who can identify the participants. IF THE RESEARCHERS USE ANY DIRECT QUOTES FROM MY INTERVIEWS IN ANY PROFESSIONAL PRESENTATIONS OR PUBLICATIONS, THE RESEARCHERS WILL REMOVE OR ALTER ANY INFORMATION THAT COULD IDENTIFY THE QUOTATION AS MINE OR BE AFFILIATED WITH MY PLACE OF WORK. The information I share DURING MY INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS will not be made available to my co-teacher or administrator. HOWEVER, AS MY INFORMATION MAY BE LINKED WITH MY CO-TEACHER'S INFORMATION IN A PUBLISHED FORMAT, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT MY CO-TEACHER MAY BE ABLE TO IDENTIFY THE INFORMATION AS MY OWN. THE RESEARCHER PLANS TO RETAIN THE PHYSICAL AUDIO RECORDINGS AND MY IDENTIFYING INFORMATION IN A SECURE WAY FOR SEVEN YEARS AFTER THE STUDY IS COMPLETE, POSSIBLY TO CARRY OUT COMPARISONS IN FOLLOW-UP RESEARCH PROJECTS.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PORTION OF THE research, now or during the course of the project. IF QUESTIONS ARISE, PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CONTACT THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR DR. SALLY ZEPEDA OR THE CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR JENNIE VIRGIN.

I understand that I am agreeing by my signature on this form to take part in this research project and understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form for my records.

Name of Researcher:___Jennie Virgin_____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Name of Participant:_____ Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide One

The following interview guide will serve as a general plan for the structure of the interviews: "As you may know, I have worked as both a support teacher in ESOL and a classroom teacher. I am really interested in the human relationships that form in a co-teaching setting, and the successes and frustrations of that partnership. Another area of interest is how administrators play a role in that relationship. I have some interview questions here that I will refer to, but I mainly want you to tell me about your work in a co-teaching team."

A. Work

Tell me about your work as a (general education teacher/support teacher) in your co-teaching team.

Probe for:

- when and what subjects are co-taught
- organization of the day
- who teaches what (roles of each – self and other)
- which models of co-teaching are being used
- communication between teachers
- lesson planning details
- relationship building details
- relationship maintenance details

B. Positives and Negatives

Tell me about a time when you felt you and your co-teacher had a really positive teaching experience.

Probe for:

- feelings about the situation
- does this happen often?

We all have disappointing or frustrating lessons. Tell me about a time when you felt your co-teaching experience could have been better.

Probe for:

- feelings about the situation
- does this happen often?

C. Administrator's Role

I would like you to think about your assistant principal and how she supports you – specifically as a member of a co-teaching team. Can you think of anything specific to that role that she does that is beneficial?

Probe for:

- feelings about the situation
- suggestions for what would be helpful

APPENDIX D

Observation Protocol One – Co-Planning Session

Participants: _____Date: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Location of observation: _____

Summary of topic of planning session observed: _____

_____

Checklist (check all that occur, note if they happen often):

behavior	notes about behavior
☐ balance of power	
☐ unequal power distribution	
☐ communicating needs	
☐ reference to professional development	
☐ discussion of student needs	
☐ indication of compatibility	
☐ incompatible indications	

What body language was noted during the observation period? _____

_____

_____

_____

What verbal interactions were noted during the observation period? _____

_____

_____

_____

What power dynamics were noted during the observation period? _____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX E

Observation Protocol Two – Co-Taught Lesson

Participants: _____Date: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

Location of observation: _____

Instructional goal of lesson observed: _____

_____

Type of grouping used	Notes about grouping choice
☐ Whole group	
☐ Small group	
☐ Individual	

Co-Teaching Model	Approximate # of minutes	Notes about choice of model
☐ 1 Teach-1 Observe		
☐ 1 Teach-1 Assist		
☐ Parallel Teaching		
☐ Station Teaching		
☐ Alternative Teaching		
☐ Team Teaching		

☐ Other: _____ _____		

	Observed	Not observed	Notes about behavior
Both teachers participate in the presentation of the lesson.			
Students interact with both teachers.			
Both teachers are engaged in classroom management.			
Instructional resources are shared between teachers.			
Teachers communicate with one another – verbally? With body language?			
Teachers share "power" in the classroom.			
Students benefit from having two teachers in the classroom.			
Teachers benefit from sharing the classroom with another teacher.			

(Stetson & Associates, Inc., 2008)

APPENDIX F

Interview Guide Two

This protocol will be further developed after analysis of the first round of interviews and observations. The researcher will determine what to discuss based on this information. It can be assumed that this second round of interviews will entail following up on items discussed and/or observed.

For example:

- How did that planning session go for you both?
- I noticed _____ during the planning session. Tell me more about that.
- I noticed _____ (one of the co-teachers) said _____ when you were planning. What did you think about that?
- I noticed _____ during the planning session. Is this typical of your work together? (ask both sides)
- I noticed _____ during the planning session. Tell me more about that. (ask both sides)
- I noticed _____ during the co-taught lesson. Is this typical of your work together? (ask both sides)
- When we last spoke, you mentioned _____. What do you think about that now after a little time to reflect?