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Running Head: MIDDLE SCHOOL COLLABORATION

The Effectiveness of General and Special Education Collaboration in Middle Schools

A Dissertation Presented

By

Kerri Olore

Submitted to the Graduate School of Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2017

Ph.D. Educational Studies

Educational Leadership Specialization

The Effectiveness of General and Special Education
Collaboration in Middle Schools

Kerri Olore

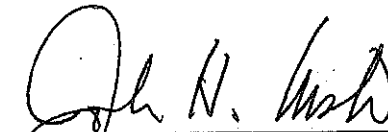
Graduate School of Education
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Ph.D. Educational Studies
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Approvals

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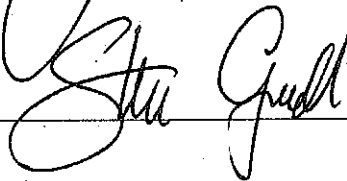
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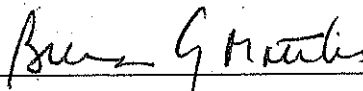
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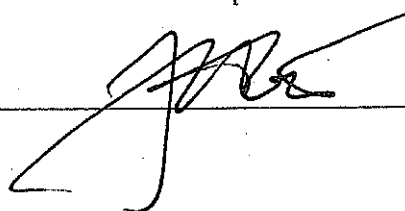
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Abstract

With the recent mandates involving students with disabilities, there has been ongoing debate regarding the effectiveness of inclusive programs in today's public schools. Recent research has demonstrated that teacher collaboration is an essential component to the success of inclusive education programs (Hernandez, 2013). There is an abundance of research done on the topic of teacher collaboration, but little has examined the effectiveness of general and special education teachers working together. The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to examine the degree to which general and special educators value collaboration with one another, the ways in which they collaborate, and the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration in the classroom. Data were gathered from 90 Massachusetts public school teachers through online surveys and interviews. Data analysis generated seven key findings. Findings #1 showed that general and special education teachers value different types and degrees of collaboration with one another. Findings #2 discovered that the degree to which teachers value collaboration does not always correlate to the amount of time they spend collaborating. Findings #3 revealed that general and special education teachers do not have a clear definition of the term collaboration, and therefore struggle to collaborate effectively with their colleagues. Findings #4 and #5 delineated that general and special educators spend the majority of their collaboration time discussing student concerns and making instructional modifications, while they spend the least amount of their collaborative time together developing lesson plans and sharing resources. Findings #6 showed that both general and special education teachers recognize there are significant benefits to collaboration. Finally, Findings #7 identified that the majority of teachers are struggling to overcome the barriers of collaboration. Overall, these findings recognize that collaboration between general and special education is essential; yet,

teachers are in need of more support to begin collaborating more effectively. Specific recommendations are delineated for teachers, school administrators, and higher education institutions. Future research recommendations suggest further study on teacher understanding of collaboration, training on how to collaborate with colleagues, and differences in collaboration across elementary and secondary school cultures.

Keywords: general education, special education, inclusive education, collaboration, collaborative culture.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to students with disabilities who deserve the opportunity to be “included” in all school environments. I continue to be inspired by your joy of learning, your will to succeed, and your unwavering perseverance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a debt of gratitude to a collective group of people who have assisted me on this journey of study and research. First and foremost I would like to thank my husband, Paul. If it had not been for your love, support, and constant encouragement I never would have embarked on such a journey. Thank you for putting up with my crazy, and reminding me how strong I really am. I love you more than words can express.

To my daughter, Brooke, thank you for providing me with study breaks full of laughter and snuggles. Watching you learn and grow everyday has reminded me how important my work truly is. You have taught me far more than all the books in the library!

I would also like to acknowledge the members of my dissertation committee, a very special group of people who have provided support and guidance throughout this process and helped me to believe this goal was achievable. Heartfelt thanks go to John Ciesluk, my advisor, for believing in me and most importantly understanding the passion I have for my job and the importance of this work. Your support throughout this process gave me the courage to continue on when the road was tough. To Stephen Gould, the ninja, thank you for sharing your expertise and guiding me through this complex process. Lastly, a special thank you to Robert MacMillan. Though you may not have realized it at the time, you inspired me as an undergraduate student to become the very best advocate for students with disabilities that I could be. Your encouragement and guidance led me to continue my journey as a scholar, and for that I am eternally grateful. I would also like to thank my parents, Don and Ginny. Your unwavering support over the past 30 years provided me with amazing opportunities. You always pushed me to do better work, to reach higher goals, and to never settle for less than what I was capable of. Finally, thank you to

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| Abstract..... | iii |
| DEDICATION | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | vi |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | viii |
| TABLES AND FIGURES..... | x |
| CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| Personal Interest Statement | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem | 1 |
| Purpose of the Study..... | 5 |
| Definition of Terms | 7 |
| Significance | 7 |
| Rationale..... | 9 |
| Participants | 9 |
| Site Description | 10 |
| Instrumentation..... | 10 |
| Confidentiality | 11 |
| Data Collection..... | 12 |
| Data Analysis..... | 13 |
| Delimitations of the Study..... | 14 |
| Chapter Outline | 15 |
| Chapter One..... | 15 |
| Chapter Two | 16 |
| Chapter Three | 16 |
| Chapter Four | 16 |
| Chapter Five | 16 |
| Introduction | 17 |
| History of Special Education in the United States | 21 |
| General and Special Education As Separate Systems | 25 |
| The Shift Towards Inclusive Education | 28 |
| Defining Inclusion..... | 29 |
| A Collaborative Approach..... | 32 |
| Models of Collaboration Between General and Special Educators..... | 35 |
| Attitudes Towards Inclusion..... | 43 |
| Educator Perceptions About Inclusion | 43 |
| Factors Hindering Collaboration | 48 |
| Role of the Principal in Creating a Collaborative Culture | 53 |
| Importance of a Collaborative Culture | 53 |
| Middle School Collaborative Culture..... | 56 |
| Role of the Principal | 57 |
| Summary..... | 59 |
| CHAPTER THREE: METHOD..... | 62 |
| Introduction | 62 |
| Philosophical Worldview and Influence of Social Cultural Perspective..... | 62 |
| Overview of Research Design..... | 64 |
| Rational for Qualitative Phenomenological Approach..... | 64 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Role of the Researcher..... | 68 |
| Research Questions | 69 |
| Selection of Participants | 71 |
| Development of Instruments | 72 |
| Data Collection | 74 |
| Data Analysis..... | 75 |
| Reliability and Validity | 77 |
| Delimitations | 79 |
| Limitations..... | 79 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 80 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS..... | 82 |
| Introduction | 82 |
| Demographic Information | 84 |
| Research Question One: To What Degree Do General and Special Education Teachers Report They Value Collaboration With One Another?..... | 87 |
| Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question One | 106 |
| Research Question Two: What Are Various Ways General and Special Educators Report They Collaborate With One Another? | 110 |
| Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question Two..... | 119 |
| Research Question Three: What Factors and Conditions Do General and Special Education Teachers Consider to Promote and Hinder Collaboration? | 122 |
| Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question Three..... | 149 |
| Chapter Summary..... | 152 |
| CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH & FINAL REFLECTIONS | 157 |
| Introduction | 157 |
| Summary of the Study | 160 |
| Discussion..... | 163 |
| Future Research | 175 |
| Final Reflections..... | 177 |
| Appendix A | 190 |
| Invitation to Participate | 190 |
| Appendix B..... | 191 |
| Participant Survey | 191 |
| Appendix C..... | 203 |
| Interview Informed Letter of Consent..... | 203 |
| Appendix D | 205 |
| Draft Interview Protocol..... | 205 |
| Appendix E..... | 207 |
| Permission For Bracketing Conceptual Framework..... | 207 |

TABLES AND FIGURES

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 1 - Massachusetts Teacher Licensure of Participants..... | 85 |
| Table 2 - Number of Years Participants Served as Public School Teachers..... | 85 |
| Table 3 - Amount of Time Educators Spent Per Week Collaborating | 94 |
| Table 4 - Amount of Time Per Week Educators Wish to Spend Collaborating..... | 95 |
| Table 5 - Frequency of Collaborative Behaviors | 115 |
| Table 6 - Degree to which educators find obstacles to be a problem in their setting..... | 130 |
| Table 7 - Amount of Professional Development Taken By Educators | 143 |
| | |
| Figure 1. Grade Levels Taught by Participants | 86 |
| Figure 2. Are Educators happy with the amount of time they spend collaborating? | 96 |
| Figure 3. The Degree to Which Benefit Outweigh Obstacles of Collaboration..... | 99 |
| Figure 4. Willingness to Adjust Teaching Strategies | 103 |
| Figure 5. Participants' Definition of Collaboration | 112 |
| Figure 6. Ways General and Special Educators Collaborate..... | 114 |

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Personal Interest Statement

My eleven years of experience as a special education teacher in the public school system have provided me with the foundation for my core belief that every child should be valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences as their peers. These days you would be hard-pressed find an educator who would disagree with that statement, but the truth is not everyone is excited about bringing students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom setting. The historical view of general and special education as parallel systems has impacted schools' ability to effectively implement inclusive education.

As someone who is deeply invested in the success of children with disabilities, I believe it is the shared responsibility of the general and special education teachers to collaboratively build a safe and nurturing learning environment for students with disabilities. It is only when educators begin working together to share ideas and expertise that we will truly see the potential of these students in succeeding in the general curriculum.

This study sought to identify the degree to which middle school general and special educators value collaboration with one another. Furthermore, it sought to identify how middle school general and special equators collaborate and what factors and conditions promote and hinder collaboration with one another.

Following the introduction, Chapter One explains the nature of the study in the following manner: (a) statement of the problem, (b) statement of the purpose, (c) research questions, (d) key definitions, (e) significance of the study, (f) delimitations and possible biases, and (g) chapter outline.

Statement of the Problem

Students with physical and mental disabilities have been the target of discrimination across cultures (Martin, Martin, & Terman, 1996). For most of our nation's history, schools were allowed to exclude certain children, especially those that required special services (Sacks, 2001). Traditionally separate cultures have existed between general and special education (Robinson & Buly, 2007). Since the passing of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), significant progress has been made in the provision of equal access to free and public education for all students, but barriers continues to block the full promise of the law; the continuing segregation of many students in disjointed programs (Wang, 1986). The two fields have viewed the world of education from different theoretical perspectives, which appears to have drawn a line between "us" and "them" when discussing the topic of inclusive education (Kavale & Forness, 2000). Furthermore, licensing requirements continue to draw the line between these two systems as teachers are not required to be highly qualified in the area of special education and content area, but rather one or the other (Wang, 1992).

Within the last several decades, however, the public school system has undergone dramatic changes. Nationally, inclusive schooling has been elevated to a dominant education discourse (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Adherence to federal mandates such as IDEA and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have resulted in the development of educational programs designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

IDEA mandates that children with special needs be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to support their education. It requires schools to consider modifications in the general education classroom prior to moving them to a more restrictive setting (Sacks, 2001; Sharpe & Hawes, 2003). In addition to IDEA, the recently passed Elementary and Secondary

Education Act legislation known as NCLB was established to ensure that all schools would be held accountable to close the academic achievement gap among students, including those with disabilities (Bush & Department of Education, 2001; Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006).

NCLB, established in 2001, focused on raising the achievement in mathematics and literacy by forcing states to establish academic standards as well as a state testing system (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003). The law emphasized the need for heightened performance among historically low achieving subgroups such as children with disabilities (Handler, 2006).

This legislation has emphasized the increased need for collaborative teaching initiatives among general education and special education educators (Handler, 2006). Nonetheless, general and special education continue to function as parallel systems in many schools, districts, states, and nationally. Unfortunately, these dual systems often establish artificial barriers among educators that promote competition and alienation (Robinson & Buly, 2007).

The global movement towards inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has intensified focus on skills teachers need to meet the unique demands of this challenging equal educational opportunity (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Although collaboration has been included in many mission statements, and educators are expected to collaborate with one another, with administrators, and with parents, the word is often used generically, implying that collaboration happens when individuals are working together (Cook & Friend, 1993; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Knackendoffel, 2007; Robinson & Buly, 2007). For the purpose of this study, collaboration is defined as general and special education teachers sharing knowledge and expertise to accomplish a shared goal. Collaboration is the binding of different thoughts and ideas to form new understanding. Robinson and Buly (2007) delineate that collaboration is an “interactive process that enables people with diverse expertise to generate

creative solutions to mutually defined problems” and it requires “effort, diligence, and training” (Robinson & Buly, 2007, p. 84). The success of inclusive efforts is largely dependent upon the teachers’ ability and willingness to make appropriate modifications to accommodate individual differences (Miller & Savage, 1995).

Research has shown that attitudes of teachers towards inclusion differ at the elementary and secondary school settings. Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop, and Villa (1997) pointed out that differences in organizational and academic structure between elementary and secondary schools make it difficult to develop inclusive programs at the secondary level. A critical issue that impacts secondary teachers’ ability to address the needs of students with disabilities is the content-driven academic nature of secondary education. In the following passage, they explicate the purpose of collaboration:

The middle school culture leads itself to a paradigm that includes teachers working alone in their content areas; a lockstep, grade-by-grade curriculum; an emphasis on individualistic and competitive student out-put and grading; classes scheduled in 50-minute time blocks; students tracked by academic ability; learning occurring only within classroom walls for most students or in vocationally oriented sites for other students; and separation of special education students and their teachers in their own tracks or classes. (p.271)

Cole and McLeskey (Shippen et al., 2011) also have called attention to the differences between elementary and secondary classrooms in the structure of the classrooms. They state that elementary classrooms tend to be more student-centered, while secondary classrooms tend to be more teacher-centered. For this reason, it is believed that teachers may need a better understanding of how best to serve all students including students with disabilities.

A major assumption made about educators is that the ability to collaborate is instilled within and does not require explicit instruction on how to do so (Coben, Thomas, Sattler, & Morsink, 1997). Hernandez (2013) has advocated teaching educators how to effectively collaborate is the first step to increasing teacher efficacy ratings. In looking at the complex relationships that need to develop for effective collaboration, it is essential for educators to be fully supported in their learning through a variety of professional development opportunities (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron, & Vanhover, 2006). It is crucial for educators to feel supported by their administration as well throughout this learning process (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998).

Much research has been conducted regarding inclusion, with an abundance of information regarding current models of inclusive practice and its benefits. The problem this study has addressed is that not all general and special education teachers collaborate to the degree necessary to support student learning at the middle school level.

Purpose of the Study

Collaboration is a word that has many meanings and is often “subsumed in the rhetoric of educational improvement” (Hernandez, 2013, p. 482). Many administrators would argue that teachers learning to work together to achieve common goals are an essential element of school reform (Anderson & et al., 1994; Weiss, Pellegrino, Regan, & Mann, 2015). Brownell (2006) states that “professional collaboration is an important medium for teacher learning, but researchers need to understand in better depth what individual teachers bring to the process and how those individual qualities assist them in applying what they have learned to practice.

As a result of my own personal experiences teaching at the middle school level and the research supporting the importance of collaboration between educators in the success of students

with disabilities, I want to learn to what degree middle school general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another. In doing so, I also hoped to learn in what ways the middle school general and special education teacher collaborate with one another. The pedagogical practices and beliefs of middle school teachers who work with students with disabilities were examined to gain understandings about the collaborative needs of the general and special education teacher.

Teaching has long been portrayed as an isolated profession, but the inclusion of students with disabilities has resulted in collaboration being regarded as best practice and necessary for student success (Hernandez, 2013; Kavale & Forness, 2000). I want to learn what factors and conditions impede and foster successful collaboration between middle school general and special education teachers. More specifically, this study explores the type of supports middle school teachers feel are essential for collaboration and obstacles teachers face when working in collaborative relationships.

My interest in this topic was driven by my wish to support both middle school general and special education teachers in their efforts to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms. As a result of this research, I hoped to gain the knowledge necessary to make positive changes in the ways both general and special education teachers view collaboration and inclusive education. As a middle school special education teacher, I believe this knowledge is crucial to my ability to support my colleagues and most importantly promote a successful school climate.

In order to achieve these goals the study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what degree do middle school general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?

2. What are various ways middle school general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?
3. What factors and conditions do middle school general and special education teachers consider to promote and hinder collaboration?

Definition of Terms

Document(ing): To create a record of (something) through writing (Merriam-Webster, 2015)

Collaboration: General education teacher and special education teacher interacting and sharing diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems when working with students with special needs.

General Education Teachers: An educator who instructs within the program of education that typically developing children should receive, based on state standards and evaluated by the annual state educational standards test (DOE, 2006).

Middle School: In this document middle school refers to grades 5-8 in the public school setting. These grades are contained within a single building.

Special Education Teacher: An Educator who works within a program that gives specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of the eligible student or related services necessary to access the general curriculum and shall include the programs and services set forth in state and federal special education law (DOE, 2006).

Significance

The pairing of a special education teacher and a content area teacher has the potential to provide solid academic instruction to all students in the classroom. How these professionals work to meet the needs of each individual child is of utmost importance in educating students with disabilities. It has long been recognized (Cochran, 1998; Gokdere, 2012; Knackendoffel,

2007) that a major factor in the success or failure of inclusive education are the attitudes of the teachers involved. These attitudes with regard to the integration of students with disabilities have historically been “multidimensional and reflect a variety of underlying factors” (Kavale & Forness, 2000, p. 284).

This study has the potential to build a constructive dialogue between middle school general and special education teachers. The results of this study will provide inclusion teachers and educational leaders with information that will enable them to re-examine their behaviors and attitudes that underpin the formulation of instructional practices. Better inclusion practices lead to more effective instruction, which in the end has the potential to benefit all students in the inclusion classroom. Furthermore, research suggests that collaboration among educators has the potential to impact school climate (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009; Drago-Severson, 2012) and developing and maintaining a positive school climate is an essential ingredient to raising academic achievement (Bryk, 2010).

Student needs are seldom met when teachers do not collaborate (Gokdere, 2012; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Knackendoffel, 2007). Many teachers, however, teach students with disabilities in inclusion classes, but they have limited supports in place to ensure the effectiveness of their instructional practices. This problem can be addressed by exploring what supports are currently in place and what factors and conditions have the potential to enhance their ability to teach within the inclusive classroom. The needs of the teachers, however, must be known before appropriate supports can be put into place. The significance of this study is to identify those perceived needs by determining the current practices and attitudes of the general and special education teachers toward inclusive education.

As Drago-Severson (2012) has delineated, educational leaders nationwide are searching

for ways to grow schools as learning centers that can nurture and sustain the development of adults and children. The implications discovered as a result of this study can be significant for building principals, district administrators, as well as policymakers, as they work to promote a more collaborative climate among their staff. Furthermore, schools of education that are currently working to train new educators can benefit from the findings within this study.

Rationale

The general research focus of this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). Examining the literature on qualitative research, Creswell (2013) has classified five major traditions of inquiry: biography, phenomenological study, grounded theory study, ethnography, and case study.

The purpose of this study was to understand the inclusion phenomenon from the perspective of general and special education teachers. Given the research questions, this study was qualitative and phenomenological. A phenomenological study centers on a concept or phenomenon and seeks to “describe the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences”(p.76). This study can help researchers gain understanding through in-depth interviews of participants. These interviews provide valuable insights into how general and special educators view their own experiences with inclusive education.

Participants

Collaboration is defined, for the purposes of this study, as a general education teacher and special education teacher interacting and sharing diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems when working with students with special needs. The population of

this study consisted of current middle school teachers of grades 5-8 in Massachusetts.

A purposeful sampling technique was employed to find participants. Specifically, a criterion sampling strategy was used. This strategy had been chosen because it is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). This study included 56 participating general education teachers as well as 34 participating special education teachers. Participants held an active teaching license in Massachusetts and work with students with disabilities in grades 5-8. Additionally, participants had at least one full year of teaching experience.

Site Description

I contacted local public school districts in Massachusetts to identify potential participants. A convince sampling method was used to select districts that participated in the study. This study will not include any participants who have previous relationships with me. Interviews took place at local coffee shops and libraries.

Instrumentation

Multiple sources of data were used to collect information during the course of this qualitative study. The forms of data included surveys and interviews. Prior to beginning this research project, a pilot study was conducted. Conducting a pilot survey and interview allowed me to improve upon the research design prior to the full-scale study. The purpose of the pilot was to develop and test the initial survey to determine whether it gathers adequate data on potential participants. In addition, this pilot served the purpose of refining interview questions to ensure they are yielding the type of information needed. Convenience sampling was used to determine participants for the pilot study.

A survey was developed using Qualtrics and sent out to potential participants to collect

background data to determine whether they fit the criteria for this study. Data collected included, job title, area of licensure, current grade(s) taught, years of teaching experience, years of teaching students with disabilities, current caseload, and amount of professional development in the area of collaboration. Participants who fit the above criteria were then be asked questions that focused primarily on collaborative behavior to identify the various ways in which general and special educators collaborate with one another. At the end of the survey, participants had the option to leave their contact information to take part in a follow up interview. Eligible participants were contacted for a follow up interview.

Finally, in order to fully understand the lived experience of the participants, in depth interviews with participants took place. Interviews are actively constructed conversations through which narrative data are produced (Silverman, 2016). It is a method in which enables rich and detailed information about how individuals experience, understand, and explain events. Twenty-three participants took part in a one-on-one interview to discuss his or her experiences with inclusive education. Interviews were semi-structured in design allowing for more in-depth discussion with participants when needed. The questions were open-ended and focused on the stated guiding questions. I designed a research protocol (Creswell, 2013) to assist in guiding the interview process. Furthermore, all interviews were recorded with consent of the participant and transcribed into a word document. Interviews were held at local coffee shops or libraries. Interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Confidentiality

The research community has long recognized the importance of respecting the rights of research participants (Corti, Day, & Backhouse, 2000). Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were of the utmost importance. All participants were given a letter of informed

consent detailing the purpose of the research, procedures, potential risks and benefits, procedures for ensuring confidentiality, data storage, withdrawal information, and the contact information of the researcher for further questions. To ensure that the anonymity of the participants was protected all names were omitted. School names and districts were also omitted to ensure confidentiality. All identifying information was stored electronically and required a password to access. All documents and audio recordings were destroyed upon the completion of the study.

In addition, participants were informed of my position as a special education teacher at the middle school level. I explained the intent of the study was to better understand the factors and conditions necessary for collaboration and ensured participants that my current position had no impact on the objectivity of the results.

Data Collection

Given my experience as a special education teacher it is essential for the validity of the study that bracketing occur. Bracketing is a method commonly used in phenomenological studies that requires the researcher “to set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective towards the phenomenon under examination” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Schmitt delineates that setting aside prejudgments, biases, and preconceptions about the phenomenon being studied, the researcher is then able to invalidate, inhibit, and disqualify all commitments with reference to previous knowledge and experience (as cited in Creswell, 2013). Through the fundamental methodology of bracketing the researcher’s own experiences, the researcher does not influence the participant’s understanding of the phenomenon (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013).

Throughout the study data was collected in a variety of ways. All data was stored on a locked laptop and backed up in a secure Dropbox file. Data was also stored on a flash drive, which remained in a lock box. Paper documents remained in a lock box throughout the duration

of the study. As previously mentioned, all documents were deleted and shredded upon the completion of this study.

In order to identify participants that fit the criteria for the study the researcher contacted local public school districts to obtain permission to email school employees. Upon approval, a participant letter (see Appendix A) and a survey (see Appendix B) was sent out to middle school teachers. Data from the survey was collected using Qualtrics. Data was transferred to an Excel spreadsheet to identify and organize background information and collaborative behaviors. Participants interested in taking part in a follow up interview were contacted.

All data collected aligned to the three guiding research questions. In order to collect data on the phenomenon being studied, interviews were conducted with willing participants. A research question protocol was developed prior to interviews and all questions focused around the guiding research questions. Each interview was recorded with participant permission using an Apple Voice Memo application. In addition, participant interviews were transcribed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Recordings and transcriptions were stored on locked laptop and backed up using Dropbox and a secure flash drive.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an essential element to qualitative research. Survey results and interview notes were organized and coded for further analysis. Creswell (2013) describes the process of data analysis as he states,

Interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data. It is a process that begins with the development of the codes, the formation of themes from the codes, and then the organization of themes into larger units of abstraction to make sense of the data. (p187)

Using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, the process of coding included aggregating the text or visual data into small categories, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in the study, and assigning it a label or code (Creswell, 2013). A color-coding system was employed to aid in this process. Information gathered from the previously stated sources of data was used to develop themes that were later used to assist in the interpretation of the findings.

In order to display and develop the results of a categorizing analysis, data matrices and hierarchical tree diagrams (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013) were created using the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This included a list of significant statements about how individuals are experiencing the phenomenon. These statements were grouped into themes including textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2013). The data presented were displayed according to the 3 Questions that guide the study.

Delimitations of the Study

There are several delimitations within the scope of the study. Participants chosen for the study needed to be employed as a middle school educator in grades five through eight. Furthermore, educators needed to work with, and have at least one year of experience working with students with disabilities. The study only focused on middle school personnel due to the fact that the literature (Cochran, 1998; Gokdere, 2012; Knackendoffel, 2007; Royster, Reglin, & Losike-Sedimo, 2014) suggested middle school teacher's attitudes towards inclusion are less favorable than those at other grade levels and the middle school culture often leads itself to teacher isolation. Due to the nature of evolving federal mandates, it was important to focus on educators who were currently working with students with special needs as these mandates can impact the factors and conditions that lead to collaboration.

The definition of middle school has been limited to grades 5-8 within a single self-

contained building. For the purpose of this study, buildings that also house elementary or high school grades were excluded. I have excluded these schools because research (Shippen et al., 2011; Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop, & Villa, 1997) suggested that the middle school culture impacts educator perceptions towards inclusive education.

The definition of general education teachers was limited to core content curriculum teachers and did not include allied arts teachers. The study was delimited due to the fact that the researcher has expertise and training in special education services for core academic classes. Furthermore, the body of literature available (Cook & Friend, 1991a; Donegan, Ostrosky, & Fowler, 2000; Friend & Cook, 1992; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Sharpe & Hawes, 2003) related to collaboration between general and special education teachers rarely included the perspective of the allied arts teachers.

Finally, this study sought the perspective from the middle school teachers who work with students with special needs and did not seek the perspective of administrators. Although it is intended that the administration may use the data to promote a collaborative climate, the study sought to identify the supports needed from the perspective of those individuals working directly with students with special needs.

Chapter Outline

The dissertation consisted of five chapters, which were organized in the following manner:

Chapter One

A personal interest statement introduced the dissertation, which connected inclusive education issues in the context of teachers' collaborative efforts with one another. After the introduction, the chapter delineated the problem that provided a rationale for the purpose of the

study. The study design was described, and the research questions explained in the context of the process of data collection and analysis. Delimitations, potential bias, and significance of the study followed.

Chapter Two

The dissertation required a literature review that contributed to the conceptual framework that guided the study. The literature review examined four areas of relevant literature: (a) history of special education in the United States, (b) inclusive education, (c) collaborative school cultures, and (d) impact of the administration on building collaborative cultures.

Chapter Three

A personal philosophical worldview and social cultural perspective were articulated, followed by an overview of the research design. The overview included rationale, an explanation of the participant selection process, and a description of the mixed methods approach. The research questions precluded explanations of the data collection and data analysis procedures. Limitations, delimitations and the trustworthiness of the study concluded the chapter.

Chapter Four

This chapter includes the research sub questions and data analysis of each of these sub questions. Also included are the emergent themes and the resultant findings for each sub question. A chapter summary concludes this chapter.

Chapter Five

The chapter began with an introduction that restated the context for the study, followed by a summary of the study, and a discussion of conclusions stemming from data related to key findings. Recommendations for principals, superintendents, teachers and institutions of higher education followed. Future research about this topic and final reflections concluded the chapter.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Few issues in education generate more discussion, confusion, or angst than the topic of including students with disabilities into the general education setting. It is an issue that has advocates on all sides, whether persistently for, against, or somewhere in between (Thompkins & Deloney, 1995). A generation ago, few classrooms in the United States included children with disabilities. In fact, in 1970, more than 1.75 million students with disabilities were excluded from public schools (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

The evolution of special education in the United States has been one of alternating periods of progression and optimism and regress and pessimism (Sacks, 2001). In the early 20th century, the enactment of compulsory attendance laws in the United States began to change the educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s proved to be a pivotal time in the nation's history in shedding light on the continued exclusion of students with disabilities (LaNear & Frattura, 2007). In response to the deplorable conditions that children with special needs had to endure in school, as well as the increasing exclusion from school, an influx of parent advocacy groups began to emerge, which gained the attention of the federal court system (Yell et al., 1998). By the 1970s, the federal courts made it clear that public schools owed students equal protection of the law without discrimination on the basis of disability (Martin et al., 1996).

Throughout the last decade, the notion of educational opportunity for all students, including those with disabilities, has slowly become part of our national culture (Keogh, 2007). The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and then its most recent incarnation as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004, mandate that students with

disabilities receive their special education services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Hernandez, 2013).

Over the past decade there has been an increasing emphasis on providing appropriate, well-coordinated educational support for students with disabilities in the general education setting (Cochran, 1998; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2007; Miller & Savage, 1995). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (DOE, 2015), in the fall of 2012 there were over 6 million students ages 6 to 21 in the United States receiving special education services. The call for inclusive education is the outcome of a “complex set of discourses about the equality of education that is driven by changing demographics, ideologies, and perceptions of marginalized groups” (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000, p. ix).

According to the concept of inclusion, the general and special education teachers work collaboratively to deliver curriculum instruction to students with disabilities in the general education setting (Gokdere, 2012; Sacks, 2001; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Inclusion is not a federal mandate, but instead a philosophy that encompasses the concept of LRE (Sacks, 2001; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). The purpose of inclusion is not to simply replicate special education services in the general education setting, but instead finding ways to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities in ways that are natural and unobtrusive (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007). The underlying assumptions of successful inclusive programs are that all children will be included in the learning and social communities of the school, which will promote socialization, improve academic performance, and promote a collaborative culture among educators (Cochran, 1998; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Van Garderen, Stormont, & Goel, 2012).

The shift towards inclusive education has increased the need for collaboration between the multiple players in the public school system. This has created challenges for educators who

have historically worked autonomously and who may operate from very different paradigms and belief systems (Robinson & Buly, 2007). In the following passage, Robertson & Buly (2007) describe the purpose of collaboration:

Collaboration, as a successful process, takes effort, diligence, and training. It is not simply working together, liking each other, or spending time engaged in a joint activity. Instead, collaboration has been defined as an interactive process that enables people with diverse expertise to generate creative solutions to mutually defined problems. (p. 84)

Collaboration is an essential component of special education in a multicultural society (Duke, 2004). The philosophy behind inclusion address how disabled and nondisabled citizens can live together to create a socially just and democratic community (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Many forces are shaping modern special education in the United States (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). As the rights for students with disabilities continue to evolve, so will the roles, responsibilities, and demands of general and special educators.

Over the years, research has demonstrated that most students with disabilities learn more when taught the standards-based general education curriculum, rather than a separate curriculum, as long as these students receive appropriate supports and accommodations for their special needs. Legislation has encouraged this trend in recent years towards including more students with disabilities into the general education classroom. Nonetheless, special and general education remains two essentially separate systems. A variety of forces have kept them apart, from separate legal mandates and funding streams, to the historical tendency for schools to sort students by ability (Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987).

To fully understand the collaborative relationships that exist between general and special education teachers, one must look at the evolution of special education in the United States. An

extensive review of literature is presented to provide a theoretical foundation for the proposed study about special education and effective collaboration. In so doing, the following bodies of literature are discussed: (a) the history of special education, (b) general and special education as separate systems, (c) inclusive education, (d) attitudes towards inclusion, and (e) the role of the principal in creating a collaborative culture.

A brief historical look of the evolution of special education is reviewed in order to provide a clear picture of the government's impact on special education policy and instructional practices in schools. Literature examining the impact on general and special education, as separate systems, was also reviewed.

A review of literature in the area of inclusive education is explored. This body of literature is used to define inclusion as well as explore the common models used in classrooms. In addition, the debate over whether inclusive education is considered best practice is examined. This body of literature serves as the foundation for the purpose of the study.

A review of literature on collaboration is also analyzed. This review looks at the varying definitions of collaboration, the benefits of collaboration, as well as the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration among educators. Literature describing the various ways in which general and special education collaborate and the various ways educational leaders promote general and special education collaboration will also be reviewed.

Finally, literature on the role of principals in creating a culture of collaboration is examined. This review of literature serves to identify how administrators promoting conditions that foster general education and special education teachers working together, as well as eliminating inhibiting conditions. What follows is a chronology of how special education has evolved throughout history in the United States.

History of Special Education in the United States

Prior to the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) in 1975, Congress estimated that one million children were excluded from the public school system and another four million children did not receive appropriate educational services (Egnor, 1996). In examining the historical underpinnings of educational law in America, many educators look toward the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. While the Constitution itself provides support for the idea of public education in the United States, it does not stipulate a federally funded or regulated public school system; but instead, it leaves educational mandates up to the states to define and enforce (Bain, 2009).

The exclusion of students with disabilities from public education dates back to the late 1800s when public concern regarding educational matters inspired the creation of the National Education Association (NEA) (Sacks, 2001). During this time, public schools began categorizing students into grade levels, and differences between students began to emerge. Students that were deemed weak in the mind and could not benefit from instruction were prohibited from public school and sent to specialized institutions (Yell et al., 1998).

The 1950s and 1960s Civil Rights Movement, which sought equality for minorities, set the groundwork for what would become a national movement towards rights for students with disabilities in schools (Martin et al., 1996; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000; Yell et al., 1998). The historical case of *Brown v. Board of Education* put an end to *separate but equal* schools (Keogh, 2007). The emphasis on the rights of a diverse population opened the door for activists who claimed that students with disabilities had the same rights as students without disabilities (Keogh, 2007; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000; Yell et al., 1998). This advocacy movement on behalf of individuals with disabilities was essential to the development of special education.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the first major federal effort to rectify the inequality of educational opportunity for economically underprivileged children (Martin et al., 1996; Sacks, 2001). While the ESEA did not provide direct grants on behalf of children with disabilities, an amendment to Title VI of ESEA enacted in 1966 did establish the Bureau for the Education of the Handicapped (BEH). The BEH would eventually become known as the National Council on Disabilities. Through this government bureau, advocates for special education students began to pursue Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with physical and mental issues that required special assistance (Martin et al., 1996). The BEH provided grants to states to initiate, expand, and improve programs for educating children with disabilities (Horne, 1991; Sacks, 2001).

In the early 1970s, following the decision in *Brown vs. The Board of Education*, parents and advocates began bringing lawsuits against their school districts for excluding and segregating children with disabilities (Horne, 1991; LaNear & Frattura, 2007; Martin et al., 1996; Sacks, 2001; Yell et al., 1998). Parents argued that, by excluding these students, schools were discriminating against the children because of their disabilities. Access to education for children with disabilities continued to gain momentum. In 1973, PL 93-113, known as the Rehabilitation Act, was signed into law. This act authorized grants to states for vocational rehabilitation services; with special emphasis on services to those with the most severe handicaps. This marked the first major legislative effort to secure an equal playing field for individuals with disabilities (Sacks, 2001; Yell et al., 1998).

In a further attempt to equal the playing field, Congress enacted an educational grant program known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975 (Martin et al., 1996; Sacks, 2001; Yell et al., 1998). This landmark law requires states to provide

students with a FAPE and provided funding to help with the excess costs offering such programs and provided a baseline for all state statutes (Martin et al., 1996). Furthermore, the enactment of the EAHCA mandates children with disabilities (1) the right to due process; (2) education in the least restrictive environment; (3) nondiscriminatory testing, evaluation, and placement procedures; and (4) individualized education plans (IEP) (Sacks, 2001).

In 1990, amendments were made to the EAHCA, renaming the act the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Martin et al., 1996). Major changes included in the IDEA were that the language of the law was adjusted to emphasize the person first, students with autism and traumatic brain injury were identified as separate and distinct class entitled to the law's benefits, and a plan for transition was required to be included on every student's IEP by age 16 (Sacks, 2001; Yell et al., 1998).

Seven years later, President Clinton signed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997, emphasizing his desire to improve the performance and educational achievement of students with disabilities in both the special and general education curriculum (Yell et al., 1998). According to Bain (2009), new provisions of IDEA included

(1) Place the emphasis on what is best educationally for children with disabilities rather than on paperwork for paperwork's sake; (2) give professionals, especially teachers, more influence and flexibility and school administrators and policymakers lower costs in the delivery of education to children with disabilities; (3) enhance the input of parents of children with disabilities in the decision making that affects their child's education; (4) make schools safer; and (5) consolidate and target discretionary programs to strengthen the capacity of Americas schools to effectively serve children, including infants and toddlers, with disabilities. (p. 50)

The new law also mandates that children with special needs be placed in the least restrictive environment (LSE) to support their education. The LRE states that students with disabilities should receive their education, to the maximum extent appropriate, with nondisabled peers (Yell et al., 1998). The IDEA requires schools to consider modifications in the general education classroom prior to moving them to a more restrictive setting (Sacks, 2001; Sharpe & Hawes, 2003). This means that state educational agencies must provide appropriate training for teachers and does not allow school districts to plead “lack of qualified staff” as justification for removing a child from the general education setting (Martin et al., 1996).

In 2001, Congress reauthorized IDEA and enacted the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). This was arguably the most significant piece of federal legislation since the Elementary and Secondary Act was originally passed in 1965 (Yell et al., 2006). NCLB was intended to improve the academic achievement across the United States by focusing on the proficiency of students in the areas of math and literacy. This law established a rigorous accountability system for states and public schools that involved rewards and sanctions based on students’ performance (Handler, 2006)

According to Handler (2006), “the complementary relationship between NCLB and IDEA in terms of the education of student with disabilities is evident in the direct references and parallel language imbedded in the bodies of each legislative act” (p. 5). Both initiatives emphasize the opportunity for students to receive “a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high quality education” (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003, p. 1). Furthermore, the legislation emphasizes the increased need for collaborative teaching initiatives among general education, special education, and Title I educators available to targeted populations (Sharpe & Hawes, 2003).

Recent legislature like IDEA and NCLB have provided many opportunities for educators to ensure that special education programs provide meaningful educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Yell et al., 2006). At the signing of the IDEA Amendment of 1997, President Clinton summarized the progress this legislation has meant to the education of students with disabilities (as cited in Yell et al., 1998):

Since the passage of IDEA, 90% fewer developmentally disabled children are living in institutions---hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities attend public school and regular classrooms; three times as many disabled young people are enrolled in college and universities; twice as many young Americans with disabilities in their twenties are in the American workplace. (p. 227)

The events that have driven the gradual and progressive evolution of special education serve as a backdrop to understanding the foundation of the field and its ever-changing nature. The recent federal mandates have forced public schools to provide equal rights to those with disabilities, however, the general and special education systems continue to work as separate systems within the school.

General and Special Education As Separate Systems

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was put into place to give students with disabilities the opportunity to receive the same educational opportunities as their nondisabled peers. The law was not intended to create an entirely separate system of education, yet that is what happened in most schools. Special education became a place rather than educational supports (Wang, 1992).

The newest federal mandates like NCLB and IDEA have increased opportunities for students with disabilities in the general education setting, but several barriers continue to block

the full promise of the law: the continuing segregation of many students in disjointed programs, and the inconsistent system for classifying and placing these students (Wang, 1986).

Since the introduction of special education into the public school setting, general and special education have worked as separate entities. According to Skrtic (1987), the division of labor in schools of education are organized on the basis of occupations, which means that topics related to students with disabilities are assigned exclusively to departments of special education, while topics related to school organization are assigned exclusively to departments of educational administrators. “This has ultimately resulted in two separate courses within the profession: one on students with disabilities, which takes school organization for granted, and one on school organization, which avoids topics related to school effects and student outcomes” (p. 2). As the field of special education continues to evolve and programs become more specialized to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, teacher training has become more specialized as well, ultimately widening the gap between general and special education teachers (Slee, 2008).

Categorizing students into special education programs has led to the division between the two systems. Once the school system sorts and labels children as disabled or nondisabled, two separate educational systems are employed. There lies a divide among the expertise and professional development of the teachers as well as the socialization of the students (Reynolds et al., 1987). Assumed truths have existed from the onset related to the sorting of children into distinct categories of “abled” and “disabled.” Analysis of the role education and the structure of schools displays how disability is socially constructed and represented as reality (Manning, 2011). Ferri and Connor (2006) delineate that schools are not only physical spaces but also social spaces “where dynamic interactions occur between people in the classroom, as well as

among those in the larger sociopolitical context (p. 47). Schools are a reflection of the society in which we live, and are the most influential entity in shaping students for the propagation of the norms and values of this society. Ferri and Connor (2006) write, “as a microcosm of society, classrooms and schools represent the degree to which knowledge and individuals are valued” (p. 127). They maintain that because schools are representative of the dominant culture, students are both implicitly and explicitly taught about the value and world of individuals with disabilities.

The widely used *pull out* approach – removing students with special needs from regular classes - has been the predominant strategy for structuring programs to improve the educational attainment of students with special learning needs (Wang, 1992, p. 26). Although well intentioned, this pull-out method often results in the total seclusion of students with disabilities and more importantly fails to recognize the larger problem: the regular learning environment has failed to accommodate student needs. Wang (1992) has delineated that this approach is driven by the fallacy that the poor school adjustment and performance are attributable solely to characteristics of the student rather than the quality of the learning environment. Ferry and Connor (2006) use the following example to illustrate the impact on servicing students with disabilities in separate classrooms:

Each time a child with a perceived difference is removed from the classroom for special instruction or isolated from his or her peers within the classroom, the student and all of his or her classmates learn an important lesson about the educational, social, and cultural response to difference. Those who are not removed or given “special” help are assured, at least for the time being, that their status as “normal,” “regular,” “average,” or “mainstream” remains intact. Those who have been removed learn that their difference is the reason they are being separated from the majority of their classmates. Their status in

the community is changed forever, and they must learn to manage a stigmatized identity, 'spoiled' by their difference from the norm. (p. 127)

Special education was developed to allow all students equal access to education, regardless of ability or physical impairment, however it has resulted in the separation of "regular" and "special" students" (Reynolds et al., 1987, p. 391).

According to Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987), "unless major structural changes are made, the field of special education is destined to become more of a problem, and less of a solution" (p. 391). Over time, a great divide has occurred separating both the educators and the students in general and special education. This divide has hindered the full application of inclusive education and will continue to impact a school's ability to meet the rigorous standards set by NCLB. As federal laws involving students with disabilities continue to evolve, educators are being challenged to begin working together more efficiently to meet the diverse needs of all students. What follows is a definition of inclusive education and a description of collaboration between educators.

The Shift Towards Inclusive Education

Within the last several decades the public school system has undergone dramatic changes, with a thrust towards inclusive education. The concept of inclusive education applies to the entire continuum of services that places the student with a disability in a regular education classroom (MacCarthy, 2010). And inclusive education continues to gain momentum (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Today, more and more schools are adhering to federal mandates by implementing special education programs in the general education setting. Discussions about inclusion remain diverse and often controversial (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Researchers have sought to establish a clear definition of inclusion and to

examine the need for increased collaboration amongst educators. In doing so, three popular models of collaboration have been identified: consultation, coaching, and coteaching. Because there is not just one way to mainstream students into the general education setting, inclusive education often looks differently from school to school.

Defining Inclusion

Historically, teachers have worked in isolation, having only one teacher to each classroom. Over the years, however, students have slowly moved into the flow of the general education classroom, thus the use of the term *mainstreaming* was developed (Ripley, 1997). Many people use the terms *integration*, *mainstreaming*, and *inclusion* synonymously (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

The term integration “simply denotes a physical movement of a child but not necessarily a concomitant change in approach by a school” (Winzer, 1993). Integration increases the opportunities for participation of a child with a disability within the classroom, but does not guarantee full involvement.

The concept of mainstreaming gained momentum in the mid-1980s as an attempt to provide children with disabilities access to general education ("Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010). The term mainstreaming means providing every student, regardless of their disability, with an appropriate education, in the same classroom as their nondisabled peers (Bender & et al., 1995; Gokdere, 2012; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Mainstreaming has also been referred to as the process of moving students who require specialized services out of the substantially separate special education classroom into the general curriculum as frequently as possible (Gokdere, 2012). Students who are mainstreamed may spend some time in the general education classroom as well as some time in the special education classroom. Criteria

for mainstreaming individuals with disabilities were (1) diagnosis of a mild disability (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000); (2) achieving near grade level and require little academic accommodation or support ("Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010); and (3) behavior that was manageable with minimal support (Bender & et al., 1995). Typically a child would need to prove their readiness for an integrated setting, rather than the setting having to prove its readiness to accept a child (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

Although IDEA required schools to educate students in the least restrictive environment, many students with disabilities were limited to primarily physical access to the public school campus and facilities and segregated classrooms for these students were the primary means of instruction at that time ("Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010). In 1986, Madeleine Will, former Assistant Secretary of Education, introduced the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Coates, 1989; "Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Will proposed that a separate system to educate students with disabilities out of the mainstream of general education was limiting the educational achievements and experiences of those students, and all interventions occurring within the regular classroom be implemented in place of pullout programs (Coates, 1989). She envisioned a partnership between general and special education that would “enable students with special needs to be educated through the merged efforts and collaboration of general and special educators” (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000, p. 183).

Several influential court cases have refined the concept of least restrictive environment in their attempt to determine the intent of Congress when it legislated IDEA (Gruenhagen & Ross, 1995). One case in particular, *Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education vs. Rachel Holland*, opened the door for families to fight for equal access to the general education

setting. Rachel, an 11-year-old girl with an IQ of 44 had previously attended a variety of special programs in the local district when her parents requested she begin participating more frequently in the general education setting. The school district proposed a special education placement with regular class placement for nonacademic subjects and related activities. The parents refused the placement and requested due process be invoked. In the end, the courts ruled in favor of Rachel Holland, and she was enrolled full time into the general education setting and provided with some supplemental services. The Sacramento City Unified School District, Board of Education vs. Rachel Holland case of 1994 played a pivotal role in ensuring states adhered to the least restrictive environment law.

The Regular Education Initiative recognized that the readiness criteria for students to partake in mainstreaming were high, resulting in few students having the opportunity to access the general curriculum (Coates, 1989). The process of mainstreaming did not adequately serve individuals with disabilities, and thus the concept of inclusion was born (*"Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010*).

The concept of inclusion and mainstreaming are rooted in the idea of providing equal access to general education for students with disabilities. A major difference lies in the idea that mainstreaming was typically viewed as an earned privilege (*"Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent," 2010*). Inclusion is a very different practice and does not entail eligibility criteria to be met (Winzer, 1993). According to Hunt, Soto, Maier, and Doering (2003), inclusive education is postulated upon the following beliefs: (1) all children can learn; (2) all children have the right to be educated in heterogeneous classrooms, and (3) it is the responsibility of the school community to meet the diverse needs of each learner.

Inclusion has been defined as an educational approach in which students with disabilities are provided appropriate services in the general education setting alongside their nondisabled peers (Gokdere, 2012; Sacks, 2001). In inclusive practices, the general education and special education teachers must work collaboratively to provide support services in the same classroom with other students of the same age (Gokdere, 2012; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). According to McLeskey and Waldron (2007), the ultimate goal of inclusion is to make an increasingly wider range of differences ordinary in a general education classroom. Furthermore, inclusive practices focus on altering the environment to fit the student's needs rather than altering the student to fit the environment's needs ("*Encyclopedia of Educational Reform and Dissent*," 2010). For this reason, educators are being encouraged to work more closely to ensure that all students' needs are being met.

A Collaborative Approach

The popularity of the inclusive model in schools has continued to grow since the early 1990s, and new federal mandates have required districts to find ways to implement inclusionary practices within their classrooms (Austin, 2001). Many have suggested that inclusion isn't so much a delivery model as it is a frame of mind for a learning community (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). The term inclusion means different things to different people; and although no one interpretation matches the needs of all the stakeholders in the process, it is universally agreed that the key to successful inclusive practices lies in the collaborative efforts of general and special education teachers (Cook & Friend, 1993; Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). "Because effective teaching is a vital component of the educational process for both students without, and, particularly, with disabilities, it is incumbent upon collaborative teachers to provide quality instruction for all students in their classrooms" (Austin, 2001, p. 245).

Since the passing of NCLB, education has become a high stakes environment in which all students, regardless of ability, must meet adequate yearly progress indicators specified by the federal mandates (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012). According to Robinson and Buly (2007), the ever-changing roles of educators has created challenges for both general education and special education teachers and educators who have historically worked as separate entities and who may operate from “very different paradigms and belief systems” (p. 83). No longer are special education teachers able to primarily provide one-to-one instruction in pullout settings, but rather they are expected to bring the student’s accommodations into the general education setting (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). At the same time, general education teachers are not able to assume that the responsibility for the education of students with special needs lies with someone else (Robinson & Buly, 2007).

In a collaborative approach, general and special educators share the responsibility for all activities related to planning and delivering of instruction, as well as evaluating and disciplining students (deBettencourt, 1999). Essential to the success of collaboration is the need for mutual understanding between general and special education teachers in terms of instructional beliefs, time for instructional planning, and agreement on classroom norms (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Friend and Cook (1993) identified what they refer to as the defining characteristics of collaboration, which more fully explain what collaboration means:

- It is voluntary. Although teachers can be required to work in close proximity, they cannot be required to collaborate.
- It is based on parity. All stakeholders must believe that their contributions are valued equally.
- It requires a shared goal. Expertise can only be valuable when both educators are

working towards achieving the same goal.

- It requires shared responsibility for key decisions. Although educators may divide the labor when engaging in collaboration, sharing the responsibility to make decisions reinforces the sense of parity that exists among the teachers.
- It includes shared accountability for outcomes. If teachers share responsibility to make important decisions they must also be held accountable for such decisions.
- It is based on shared resources. Each participating individual is expected to share resources such as expertise, time, space, equipment, or any other assets they find valuable.
- It has emergent properties. Collaboration is based on the belief in the value of shared decision making, trust, and respect among participants. (p. 422)

Sparks (2013) states that schools will improve for the benefit of every student only when “every teacher is a member of one or more strong teams that create synergy in problem solving and provide emotional and practical support” (p. 28). Educators who expect children to support and respect one another in heterogeneous educational groupings must model similar collaborative behavior (R. A. Villa & Thousand, 1992).

Recent literature reveals three themes regarding the benefits to collaboration between general and special education teachers, (a) unique knowledge bases, (b) increased sensitivity and empathy, and (c) improved teacher performance and efficacy (Griffin, Kilgore, Winn, & Otis-Wilborn, 2008; Handler, 2006; Hunt et al., 2003; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Van Garderen et al., 2012). The importance of the collaboration between general and special education teachers is grounded in their unique knowledge bases (Van Garderen et al., 2012). Special educators typically have skills and dispositions related to individualizing curriculum and instruction based

on children's needs; whereas the general educators tend to have strong knowledge of the curriculum, standards, and desired outcomes for the group (Cook & Friend, 1995; Van Garderen et al., 2012). By combining the expertise of both teachers, outcomes have revealed instructional improvement through the use of a greater variety of teaching techniques, improved knowledge and skills for teaching, and more positive attitudes towards teaching (Van Garderen et al., 2012).

Collaboration among teachers have increased sensitivity, empathy, and have increased access to cooperative learning opportunities for all children (Hunt et al., 2003). Teachers who collaborate effectively report more awareness of individual differences and are more apt to implement peer learning activities within their classrooms (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Studies have also shown that collaboration has led to improved teacher performance and perceived efficacy (Griffin et al., 2008; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Van Garderen et al., 2012). According to a study done by Griffin et al. (2008), having another individual to "bounce ideas off of" limits the feeling of isolation teachers have historically felt. He delineates that collaborative efforts have increased trust among educators leading to more innovative strategies being implemented aimed to improve student achievement. Some believe these benefits are encouraging to administrators who strive to improve the learning for all students and are working to integrate more collaboration within their schools.

Models of Collaboration Between General and Special Educators

Current research points to three commonplace models of inclusive collaboration: (a) the collaborative consultation model, where the special educator serves as a consultant to the general educator; (b) the coaching model, which consists of the special and general educators taking turns coaching each other in their areas of expertise; and (c) the coteaching model, in which special and general educators share equitably the tasks within the classroom (Austin, 2001).

Consultation model. Special education consultation developed as a means of delivering services in much the same way as consultation had previously developed in more traditional areas of human service (Cook & Friend, 1991a). This model began to evolve when educators had more students requiring services than they could accommodate by the traditional, direct-service approach (Cook & Friend, 1991a; Fishbaugh, 1997). Much of the literature on collaborative consultation reports this model as having gained momentum in the 1980s-1990s (Cook & Friend, 1991a; Glenn & Randall, 1994; Johnson & et al., 1988).

An extensive review of literature did not discover one comprehensive definition of collaborative consultation; several themes, however, did emerge. The components of consultation include (1) voluntary participation, (2) working together towards a common goal, (3) one party having more expertise in a specific area, and (3) shared responsibility for student achievement (Coben et al., 1997; Cook & Friend, 1991a; Fishbaugh, 1997; Glenn & Randall, 1994; Johnson & et al., 1988)

Idol, Paolucci-Witcomb, and Nevin (as cited in Fishbaugh, 1997) explain consultation as a “triad in which the consultant (special education teacher) provides advice to a mediator (general education teacher) for delivery model. The consultant does not work directly with the student, but provides the information and resources necessary for successful service delivery” (p. 64). The purpose of this model is to provide the general education teacher with multidisciplinary planning support in an effort to improve the quality of instruction for students with disabilities in their classrooms (Knackendoffel, 2007). The unique knowledge held by special educators is used to provide best practices for students with disabilities and assist with the lesson planning of the general educator (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

A study done by Fishbaugh (1997) investigated at the collaborative consultation model further by examining two subcategories: mentor teacher programs, and student support efforts. Mentor teaching programs, referred to as skilled teachers, serve as guides for their apprentices or protégés. Since general education and special education teachers have different but complementary skills, the consultation model allows the general education teacher insight into the complex nature of working with students with disabilities (Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

Research done by Irvine (1985), investigated the perceptions of beginning teachers with regard to their roles. The study revealed that beginning teachers expected maximum support in their first few months, but their need for support diminished over time. Their needs included assistance with instruction, classroom management, planning, record keeping, and parent conferencing. Since Irvine's study rested on the premise that teachers develop style early in their career, the mentor program was seen as successful in developing the appropriate skills needed to effectively navigate their classroom.

Similar research conducted by Gray and Gray (1985), found that mentors serve as five main functions for their protégés: (1) exposure to opportunities, (2) sponsoring, (3) protecting, (4) challenging, and (5) coaching. The study found that the close relationship between the mentor and the mentee eventually led to more collaborative efforts on the part of both educators.

The second subcategory, consulting for student support, according to Fishbaugh (2007) has become more prevalent in the field of special education. With this model, teachers with expertise in areas of student need serve as consultants to teachers who work with the student in mainstream educational settings (Johnson & et al., 1988). In the attempt to become a resource for the general educator, the special education teacher is expected to maintain a caseload of students who are seen on a regular basis, in addition to serving as a classroom consultant for their

students as well as for others who demonstrate similar educational needs (Fishbaugh, 1997). Through this consultation method the special education teacher can provide assistance with behavior interventions, academic accommodations as well as individualized supports needed by students (Fishbaugh, 1997; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010).

Several studies have suggested that the consultation model as a form of collaboration between general and special educators has been employed for decades (Glenn & Randall, 1994; Kilanowski-Press et al., 2010). Those in favor of the consultation model suggest it has several benefits, including the numerous opportunities to develop professional skills, increase congeniality and cooperative sharing of ideas and strategies, as well as the potential for improved and cohesive services for students with disabilities (Coben et al., 1997).

Coaching model. A widespread misconception about teaching is that it is a relatively easy-to-learn profession. The growing demands on educators, to provide individualized instruction to all students has caused quite a dilemma (Knackendoffel, 2007). In fact, the diverse needs of students both with and without disabilities have raised the need for collaboration between general and special educators. The coaching model has been developed to help educators share expertise with one another in hopes of generating new ideas (Anderson & et al., 1994; Nierengarten, 2013).

“The key concept to the coaching model of collaboration is parity” (Fishbaugh, 1997, p. 86). Unlike the consultation model, where one person is an expert and the other is in need of their expertise, participants of the coaching model recognizes their complementary strengths and weaknesses. Historically, general educators have been demonstrated great strength in their content knowledge; whereas, special educators have demonstrated their strength in their

understanding of student differences and accommodations needed for student with disabilities (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

What follows is Donegan's (2000) characterization of coaching:

A confidential process through which two or more professionals work together to reflect on what they are currently doing, refine current skills and build new ones, share new ideas with one another, or solve problems in the classroom. (p. 10)

Joyce and Showers (1983) are widely considered to be the pioneers of peer coaching and have used this model extensively with teachers learning to implement different models of teaching. Coaching is the process of giving teachers structured feedback about the instructional skills they used in a particular lesson and ultimately involves instructing, training, and tutoring one another (Knackendoffel, 2007).

Garmston (1987) has documented the two most common forms of coaching: technical and collegial. Technical coaching is based on the work of Joyce & Showers (1983) and strives for transfer of training with effects on student achievement. This type of coaching is primarily done through professional development workshops. In collegial coaching, educators usually work in pairs to support one another in improving their skills (Matlock, Washington Univ, & et al., 1991). This type of coaching fosters collegial environments in which feel safe and nurture thoughtful practice. In such settings, trusting relationships develop and reflective dialogue is cultivated (McInturff, 1997).

Collaborative coaching can serve a variety of purposes (Anderson & et al., 1994). First, it seeks to build communities of teachers who continually engage in the study of their craft. Next, it develops shared language and set of common understandings necessary for the collegial study of new knowledge and skills. And it provides a structure for the follow-up to training that

is essential for acquiring new teaching skills and strategies, which promote personal growth.

Knackendoffel (2007) emphasizes the benefits to general educators to increase their expertise in working with students who have special learning needs in the classrooms.

Coaching has shown to facilitate the collaboration necessary for positive change by breaking down the barriers between general and special educators (Christen & Hasbrouck, 1995; Matlock et al., 1991). A study done by Christen and Hasbrouck (1995) found that the coaching process created numerous opportunities for collaboration among the participants and involved teachers felt it was instrumental in helping them become more successful inclusive teachers.

Research done by Anderson (1994) revealed five potential benefits to coaching on the transfer of training: (1) coached teachers generally practiced new strategies more frequently and develop greater skill in new areas, (2) teachers used new strategies more appropriately in terms of their instructional objectives, (3) coached teachers exhibit long-term retention of knowledge about the skill in which they have learned, (4) teachers are more likely to teach new strategies to their students, ensuring students understand the purpose of the strategy and the behaviors expected from them, and (5) teachers exhibit a clearer understanding regarding the purpose and use of the new strategies.

Coteaching model. What distinguishes the coteaching model of collaboration is that it is completely interactive and both teachers share teaching responsibilities equally and are equally involved in leading instructional activities (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Unlike the consulting model where one person acts as an expert, or the coaching model, where participants take turns owning or assisting with a problem, this model allows all participants the opportunity to take the lead role as situations dictate (Fishbaugh, 1997).

Beginning in the 1980s with the gradual increase of acceptance of inclusive education, the notion began to take hold that special education services could take place within the general education setting through partnerships between general and special educators (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Over time the concept of coteaching has intensified with the enactment of the NCLB and IDEA (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012; Conderman, 2011).

To understand coteaching, Friend et al. (2010), has offered the following explanation:

a partnership between professional peers with different types of expertise, coteaching can be viewed as a reasonable response to the increasing difficulty of a single professional keeping up with all the knowledge and skills necessary to meet instructional needs of the diverse student population attending public schools and the complexity of the problems they bring. (p. 11)

Coteaching can be defined as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2). This collaborative approach to teaching results in the teaming of the general educator and the special educator in an inclusion classroom setting where both teachers share responsibility for the entire student group including lesson planning, presenting, grading, behavior management, and parent communication (Hernandez, 2013; Lindeman & Magiera, 2014).

Friend et al. (2010) have outlined six instructional approaches to coteaching:

1. one teach, one observe, in which one teacher leads large-group instruction while the other gathers academic, behavioral, or social data on specific students or the class group;
2. station teaching, in which instruction is divided into three nonsequential parts and

students, likewise divided into three groups, rotate from station to station, being taught by the teachers at two stations and working independently at the third;

3. parallel teaching, in which the two teachers, each with half the class group, present the same material for the primary purpose of fostering instructional differentiation and increasing student participation;
4. alternative teaching, in which one teacher works with most students while the other works with a small group for remediation, enrichment, assessment, preteaching, or another purpose;
5. teaming, in which both teachers lead large-group instruction by both lecturing, representing opposing views in a debate, illustrating two ways to solve a problem, and so on; and
6. one teacher, one assistant, in which one teacher leads instruction while the other circulates among the students offering individual assistance. (p. 12)

Coteaching has shown positive outcomes for general and special educators, as well as for students with and without disabilities (Conderman, 2011; Keefe & Moore, 2004). A study done by Scruggs (2007) revealed that coteaching participants reported an increase of learned skills as well as a more positive outlook towards including students with disabilities into the general education population. They also found that coteachers believed their collaborative expertise did benefit all students. Research done by Magiera and Zigmond (2005) found that students taught with a coteaching model reported being more engaged in their learning. Furthermore, a study conducted by Keefe and Moore (2004) found that coteachers reported that outcomes for students were generally more positive and included less stigma for students with disabilities and more attention for other students.

As the trend of coteaching continues to gain momentum in inclusive education, general and special educators are finding ways to utilize their expertise to benefit all students within the inclusion classroom (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Shaffer & Thomas-Brown, 2015).

Coteaching fosters collaborative relationships among educators as well as provides a safe yet rigorous learning experience for all students (Hang & Rabren, 2009). Although there are many documented benefits of inclusive education, the attitudes towards mainstreaming students with disabilities remains controversial. The next section describes the varying attitudes towards inclusive education.

Attitudes Towards Inclusion

Since the 1980s, federal mandates requiring schools to mainstream students with disabilities into the general education classroom have created a controversial debate about whether inclusive education is the right choice for all students (Gruenhagen & Ross, 1995). Researchers have begun looking at teacher perceptions and challenges as an influence on the effectiveness of inclusion (Chiang, 1999; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986). If students with disabilities are going to be educated in general education classrooms, then teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion are critical to their success (Cochran, 1998; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986). Research done by Combs, Elliott, and Whipple (2010), showed that attitudes and behavior are closely related and investigating the attitudes held by educators can be useful in predicting and understanding their behavior within the classroom. Teacher attitudes and assumptions regarding inclusion are often impacted by contextual challenges in which they find difficult to overcome (Keefe & Moore, 2004).

Educator Perceptions About Inclusion

A review of literature has revealed three themes that impact the perceptions of educators

towards the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting: (1) job title, (2) amount of special education training, and (3) amount of teaching experience.

In looking at different educator roles -- specifically that of the administrator, general education teacher, and special education teacher -- the literature revealed conflicting data regarding the perceptions of inclusion. Differences in attitudes towards mainstreaming have been reported between administrators and classroom teachers with the former holding more positive attitudes (Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986).

In general, studies of principals' attitudes towards the mainstreaming of students with disabilities have revealed mixed findings. Studies have shown that principals tend to stress the benefit of social integration (Barngrover, 1971; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986; Payne & Murray, 1974) Other studies noted a lack of support for integration based on the low expectation of success in the mainstream environment (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986). Barnett (1998) revealed that collaboration among staff rated highest on the priority list for principals, which could indicate why many principals are in favor of inclusive education. The literature also suggests that principal's more positive attitudes could be attributed to their concern regarding adherence to federal mandates (Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986).

Studies examining the perceptions of special education teachers revealed more consistent results. Special education teachers were reported to have mainly positive perceptions towards the inclusion model (Cochran, 1998; Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986; Pearman & et al., 1992). It was suggested that because special education teachers typically have specialized training in working with a variety of disabilities, they feel more confident in their ability and the ability of their students to meet expectations within the general education classroom (Cochran, 1998).

Bender et al. (1995) has reported that general education teachers have historically not favored the mainstreaming of students with disabilities into the general education setting. Bender (1995) noted that this resistance typically stems from the apprehension about the quality of academic work that children with disabilities are able to produce as well as the possibility for behavioral disruption within the class. More recent research has suggested that the attitudes and beliefs about inclusion from general education teachers are changing (Bender & et al., 1995). Several studies revealed that support given by the administration directly affects general education teacher's perceptions (Bender & et al., 1995; Cochran, 1998; Gokdere, 2012). In a study done by Gokdere (2012), general education teachers reported an unwillingness to participate in the inclusive model because they felt as though their administration was not listening to their needs and the new teaching model had been forced upon them. General education teachers also reported an unwillingness to participate due to the increased workload that inclusive education requires. Research done by Cochran (1998) reported that many general education teachers are unwilling and hesitant to change their ways of teaching just because they were told to do so. Furthermore, many general education teachers feel as though they are not qualified to undertake such responsibilities (Bender & et al., 1995; Gokdere, 2012).

It is important to note that the literature revealed general education teachers who participated in a coteaching model of inclusion were found to have more positive attitudes than those who did participated in other models, and agreed that it was successful in raising student achievement (Austin, 2001; Hang & Rabren, 2009). These general education teachers reported that having the support of the special education teacher in the room allowed them to learn more adaptive strategies as well as made them feel more comfortable about the workload. Many teachers reported that they did not mind the inclusive model because the special education

teacher was able to make the appropriate modifications for students with disabilities while they focused more on the content of the curriculum (Austin, 2001; Hang & Rabren, 2009).

In reviewing why educators may be hesitant towards embracing the inclusive model, researchers have begun to explore the link between teacher attitudes and the amount of special education training received (Cochran, 1998). It was found that both administrators and general education teachers who had participated in special education professional development held significantly more positive attitudes and higher teacher efficacy ratings than those that did not (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Cochran, 1998; Combs et al., 2010; Gokdere, 2012).

Teachers who have received training in the area of special education have reported to have more confidence in their ability to work with students with disabilities and differentiate instruction as needed (Combs et al., 2010; Gokdere, 2012; Monsen & Frederickson, 2004). In a study conducted by Combs et al. (2010), teachers who had completed coursework and training on teaching students with disabilities were reported to have multiple focus areas of instruction, more developed lesson plans incorporating different teaching strategies, and higher expectations for student success.

With the help of the training, these teachers began prioritized the lower level children and increased expectations for on-task behavior (Combs et al., 2010). On the contrary, teachers who had not participated in training were reported to worry more about children with disabilities getting in the way of on-task time of other children, have low expectations for students with disabilities to produce work, and lesson plans that did not account for accommodations to learning needs and styles (Combs et al., 2010).

In a similar study conducted by Gokdere (2012) teachers without special education training reported feeling more uncomfortable around children with disabilities, which impacted

their ability to work with them during classroom lessons. Similar results were reported for administrators who had not participated in special education training (Gokdere, 2012). These administrators tended to have lower expectations for students with disabilities as well as lower expectations of the success of the inclusive model (Gokdere, 2012).

Training in special education typically covers a variety of topics such as types of disabilities, adaptive strategies for instruction, and behavior management. It has been suggested that training in these areas can increase one's ability to provide more effective instruction within the classroom, resulting in more positive perceptions on behalf of the teacher (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Bender & et al., 1995; Combs et al., 2010). Historically, general education teachers make very few substantive instructional modifications in their classes, although minor modifications such as shortened assignments and preferential seating are made more frequently (Bender & et al., 1995). This literature reveals that general education teachers are not using the types of adapted and/or modified instructional strategies that would facilitate successful learning by children with disabilities. The lack of progress by students with disabilities therefore impacts the general education teacher's belief and assumptions about inclusion, typically resulting in more negative attitudes about lesson planning, student achievement, and curriculum pacing (Gokdere, 2012). Bender et al.'s (1995) study showed that general education teachers who were implementing new learning models and adjusting instruction to meet the diverse needs of the students had more positive outcomes for student achievement. As a result, these teachers had more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular education setting.

In addition to one's job title and amount of training in special education, research has shown that years of experience in teaching has been linked to teacher attitudes and beliefs about

inclusive education (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Cochran, 1998). A study conducted by Cochran (1998) revealed a notable difference in first year teachers in general and first year regular education teachers specifically to be more optimistic about inclusive education than those with more experience. According to Cochran (1998), “one explanation of this difference may be the beginning of an attitudinal trend reflecting changes in teacher education programs and philosophies regarding inclusive education. Another explanation may be between the ideal and practical that may only be gained through experience” (p. 12).

Since inclusive education is a fairly new phenomenon, it has been suggested that more experienced teachers are more hesitant to adapt to the changes necessary for inclusion (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007). A significant factor contributing to the negative perceptions and lack of membership by experienced teachers may be that their “assumptions regarding students and learning remain unchallenged and unchanged” (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007, p. 166).

Literature has also shown that administrators with less experience have been linked to having more positive attitudes regarding the implementation of the inclusive model (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998). Barnett et al.’s study also revealed that today’s leaders are being trained as transformational leaders who are finding new ways to create collaborative cultures and meet the needs of their staff and students. They add that these leaders are being trained to fulfill their responsibility of supporting the academic success of all students. Leaders who wish to improve the education for students with disabilities must identify the varying attitudes of their staff as well as explore the underpinning reasons for such attitudes.

Factors Hindering Collaboration

When teachers work collaboratively, students' potential for success are also improved (Christen & Hasbrouck, 1995). Knackendoffel (2007) argues that the benefits of collaboration do not come without risks:

Collaboration is not accomplished easily, not will teachers find it appropriate for every situation. Colleagues may not share one's enthusiasm. When collaborative efforts result in trusting relationships with colleagues and positive outcomes for students, however, the risks seem a small price to pay. (p. 3)

In looking at the barriers that exist within a collaborative culture, researchers can continue to gain valuable insight into understanding why many educators have negative attitudes towards the inclusive model. Recent literature has exposed four main obstacles that impede collaboration among educators: (1) relationships, (2) role confusion, (3) knowledge and training, and (4) time.

Relationships. According to Knackendoffel (2007), "if there is one obstacles to successful collaboration that will derail even the best developed plan, it is forcing collaboration between unwilling teachers" (p. 3). Choice and willingness to participate results in a sense of ownership and often leads to participants being more invested in the work that lies ahead (Nierengarten, 2013). An unwillingness to participate in collaborative work has been shown to negatively affect student success in the inclusive setting (Austin, 2001; M. K. Smith & Smith, 2000). A study conducted by Brownell (2006) revealed that unwilling participants typically adopt new learning strategies and adapt their instruction less frequently within the inclusion classroom, resulting in lower student achievement.

Navigating collegial relationships can be a difficult task and requires a great deal of sensitivity and understanding. No quality or characteristic is more important among its members than trust (Lencioni, 2005). When working in a collaborative relationship, each member must be

fully committed and remain accountable for all decisions; without trust this remains an impossible undertaking. Since collaboration requires substantive change, it is common for participants to feel vulnerable and fear the unknown (Harkins, 2012). Developing a trusting relationship can help overcome these anxieties (Harkins, 2012).

In addition to building trust among participants, it is essential for educators to recognize the differences that exist among their colleagues (Drago-Severson, 2009). Robert Keegan's constructive-development theory emphasizes how understanding and attending to adults' different ways of knowing "can enable us to build schools that serve as rich and dynamic contexts that support adult growth" (as cited in Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 31). Teachers must work to find ways to support themselves and teachers with differing developmental orientations and levels of experience. Finding ways to work with colleagues can be difficult as they try to navigate their roles and responsibilities collectively.

Role Confusion. Collaboration among educators is a complex activity that requires a variety of skills (Keefe & Moore, 2004; Scruggs et al., 2007; Fishbaugh, 1997). Learning how to effectively collaborate with colleagues as well as identifying best practices within one's own learning environment can be quite challenging (Keefe & Moore, 2004). Since general education and special education have historically been treated as different systems within the public schools, many educators find it difficult to identify their roles within the collaborative relationship (Skrtec, 1987).

Overall, many special and general education teachers do not feel prepared for the demands of mainstreaming students (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Special education teachers often wish they had more preparation in general education courses and specific content pedagogy, while general education teachers feel unprepared to work with children who require

specific supports and accommodations (Keefe & Moore, 2004). The one teach-one assist model of coteaching has become used frequently to adapt to such challenges (Scruggs et al., 2007). Miscommunication among partners has been identified as a common obstacle that teachers face (Scruggs et al., 2007). Griffin (2008) has explained that the specific role and responsibilities of each partner must be clearly defined prior to beginning the partnership.

Hierarchical relationships are also difficult to manage while working with colleagues (Fishbaugh, 1997). In the consultation model, the special education teacher is often looked at as a dominant figure while the general education teacher is seen as inferior in need of help (Fishbaugh, 1997). On the contrary, when implementing the coteaching model, instruction takes place in the general education classroom and therefore the special education teacher often feels unwanted and out of place (Johnson & et al., 1988). Finding balance and embracing each other's expertise has been a long-time challenge of educators (Austin, 2001; Brownell et al., 2006). Educators need to view one another's level of expertise as different not deficient (Fishbaugh, 1997; Knackendoffel, 2007).

Knackendoffel (2007) has warned educators of competitive collaborative relationships as well. "People who use the competitive style try to overpower the other person," and "focus on winning at the expense of the relationship" (p. 15). These educators typically have a "my way" mindset and become closed off to new innovative ideas (McLeskey & Waldron, 2007). These educators are often closed-minded and fail to recognize alternate methods of instruction resulting from a lack of knowledge and training.

Knowledge and training. As previously stated, the negative attitudes towards inclusion are frequently due to a lack of understanding of special education as well as a lack of support from administration (Bender & et al., 1995). In studies done by Coben (1997), Brownell et al.

(2006) and Hamilton-Jones and Vail (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014), a lack of knowledge in content area as well as insufficient training in the field of special education ranked among the top obstacles in effective inclusionary practices. General education teachers have reported having difficulty understanding the complex jargon associated with special education (Coben et al., 1997), while special education teachers are often confused by the terminology associated with specific content areas (van Garderen, Scheuermann, Jackson, & Hampton, 2009).

Researchers have proposed that teacher education programs fail to equip general educators with the knowledge about student disabilities and individual needs (Coben et al., 1997; Friend et al., 2010; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). This gap in learning can often result in negative attitudes towards inclusive education. These studies have revealed that both general and special educators lack the unique skills necessary for collaboration. According to Otis-Wilborn et al. (2005), teacher education has failed to deliver strategies for clarifying roles and building collaborations in formal and informal ways that would benefit teachers and their ability to work collaboratively. In addition to a lack of collaborative skills, many educators report a lack of time as a reason for their lack of collaboration (Coben et al., 1997).

Time. As federal mandates have raised the bar for student achievement, the demands on teachers continue to increase. In addition to the typical responsibilities educators have become accustomed to, collaboration places additional responsibilities on these educators. Having limited time to meet with colleagues has been rated among the top challenge to improving collaborative efforts among teachers (Austin, 2001; Coben et al., 1997; deBettencourt, 1999; Friend et al., 2010; Griffin et al., 2008; Johnson & et al., 1988; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Khorsheed, 2007; Nierengarten, 2013). Without common planning time, educators are unable to

share instructional practices, discuss student progress, create and adapt lesson plans, and engage in reflective dialogue (Khorsheed, 2007).

Overcoming the barriers to inclusive education will require additional training and funds, but even more importantly it will require a change of attitudes and ideals from all stakeholders. In looking to improve the collaborative relationships within schools, many will look to the administration for support. The school principal is essential in building a collaborative culture for the staff and students (Campo, 1993).

Role of the Principal in Creating a Collaborative Culture

Collaborative school cultures make an important contribution to both the success of school improvement processes and the effectiveness of schools (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). Research supports the idea that the principal plays a vital role in establishing an effective collaborative environment (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Stolp, 1994; R. Villa, Thousand, & Malgeri, 1996). The actions taken by the principal involves providing not only strong characteristics of leadership, but also effective intrapersonal skills and the ability to recognize educators' need for resources.

Importance of a Collaborative Culture

The field of education lacks a clear and consistent definition of *school culture*. The term has been used synonymously with a variety of concepts, including climate, ethos, and saga (Stolp, 1994). Parents, teachers, and students typically report that there is a unique tone or climate that permeates all activity within their school. This unique quality of each school, the school culture, affects the way people act, how they dress, what they talk about or never speak of, and whether or not they seek out colleagues for help. Schein (1990) sees culture as a shared

set of norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions, which influence the way members, look at the world. In emphasizing the importance of school culture Schein (1990) has stated that

wherever groups are formed, cultures exist. Schools have their own culture and school cultures differ. Evidence suggests that differences in the cultures of schools affect student learning, teacher productivity and well-being. The culture of a school affects how teachers view in-service training and supervision, if and how they talk about teaching practices, and the degree to which principals are allowed to influence curriculum and instruction. So, if we want to improve schools, for both teachers and students, we cannot ignore the culture. (p.120)

There is an invisible stream of feelings and activities that flow constantly within schools. This invisible, taken for granted flow of beliefs and assumptions gives meaning to what people say and do and it shapes how they interpret hundreds of daily transactions (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). Culture consists of the stable, underlying social meanings that shape beliefs and behavior over time (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994).

Although all schools are different, many schools exist as isolated workplaces where teachers work largely alone in their rooms, interacting little with their colleagues and keeping problems and practices to themselves (Barth et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2013; Kavale & Forness, 2000; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). The culture of these schools encourages teachers to struggle alone with conflicts (Hernandez, 2013; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). In these schools, teachers often feel separated from one another, seldom engaging their peers in conversation, professional sharing, or problem solving. In other schools teachers regularly engage in professional dialogue with colleagues sharing ideas and knowledge and participating in collaborative problem solving (Hernandez, 2013; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). In collaborative school cultures, the underlying

norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions reinforce and support high levels of collegiality, team work, and dialogue about problems and practice (Barth et al., 2005; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994).

Peterson and Brietzke (1994) have delineated that successful schools share characteristics such as strong instructional leadership, a clear and focused mission, high expectations, a climate conducive to learning, as well as opportunities to learn. They have stated that schools with professional collaboration exhibit relationships and behaviors that support quality work and effective instruction. These include more complex problem solving and extensive sharing of craft knowledge, greater risk-taking and experimentation, increased job satisfaction and identification with the school, and more continuous and comprehensive attempts to improve the school (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994).

Collaborative cultures are not easy to develop, but they provide substantial and meaningful settings in which teachers develop craft knowledge, a powerful sense of efficacy, and a deep connection to fellow educators, parents, and students (R. Villa et al., 1996). Collaborative cultures are professionally rewarding places for teachers where instruction and curriculum are regularly being refined, changed, and developed (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). Collegial relationships among and between staff are another important feature of these schools (Barth et al., 2005). These relationships exist when teachers discuss problems and difficulties, share ideas and knowledge, exchange techniques and approaches, observe one another's work, and collaborate on instructional projects (Barth et al., 2005; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). School norms and structure provides the purpose and the opportunity for deeper involvement and interaction on professional issues of importance for teachers (Campo, 1993; Gruenert, 2005; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Saphier & King, 1985). There is a consensus among experts that creating a collaborative workplace environment for teachers is the sole way to improve student

learning (Campo, 1993; Friend et al., 2010; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Ripley, 1997). In this regard, Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis (as cited in Bayler, Karatus, & Alci, 2015) argue that principals have critical roles in creating a collaborative environment.

Middle School Collaborative Culture

Collaboration among teachers at the middle school level is often challenging (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). Thousand, Rosenberg, Bishop, and Villa (1997) delineated that school structure at the secondary level impacts the amount of collaboration that takes place. Unlike elementary schools, where the classroom tends to be more student-structured, the middle school classroom is more teacher-centered (Shippen et al., 2011). Thousand et al. (1997) further explained the middle school culture is also more heavily focused on academic content and rigorous standards. In addition, several studies have indicated the school structure at the secondary level to be a contributing factor to the lack of collaboration among educators (Shippen et al., 2011). At the secondary level, students typically have multiple educators, each who teach a specific subject (Thousand et al., 1997). The increased number of educators required to collaborate with one another and the difference in educator subject area poses another challenge (Thousand et al., 1997). The middle school culture leads itself to a paradigm that includes teachers working alone in their content area, which is why teachers have historically not collaborated as much (Thousand et al., 1997). Teacher attitudes have also been shown to impact the collaborative culture of a school (Cochran, 1998). A study done by Villa, Thousand, Meyers, and Nevin (1996) reported that the attitudes of secondary school teachers were much less favorable towards inclusive education than their elementary school counterparts. Teachers reported scheduling and administrative support as factors that strongly impacted the negative attitudes of teachers (Richard Villa et al., 1996).

Role of the Principal

As instructional leaders, principals are in a unique position to influence collaboration that takes place among teachers. Glatthorn (1987) has argued, “strong leadership at school level is necessary if cooperative professional development is to succeed. The principal takes leadership in fostering norms of collegiality, in modeling and rewarding collaboration, and cooperation” (p. 121). The most effective change in school culture happens when principals, teachers, and students all model the values and beliefs important to the institution. The actions of the principal are noticed and interpreted by others as what is important (Stolp, 1994). Besides modeling, Deal and Peterson (1990) have stated that principals should work to develop shared vision, which is rooted in the history, values, and beliefs of what the school should be. They added that principals should hire compatible staff, face conflict rather than avoid it, and use story-telling techniques to illustrate shared values.

In order to create a collaborative environment for teachers, principals should have deep knowledge and skills about professional learning (Bayler et al., 2015). Barth et al. (2005), has claimed that the leader’s function is to provide opportunities for teachers to work together in self-managing teams to improve their own instruction, always with the expectation for improved learning. In this manner, in order to create a collaborative culture, school principals must group teachers into effective teams for effective collaboration, believe in the inherent ability of teachers to serve in leadership capacities, provide, encourage and expect participation opportunities for staff involvement in important decisions, empower leadership teams to make decisions and encourage risk-taking (Schmoker, 2005).

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) found in a combined qualitative and quantitative study that school administrators use seven broad strategies to influence school culture: (1) emphasizing

shared goals; (2) collaborative decision-making and reducing teacher isolation; (3) bureaucratic mechanisms such as the provision of money, planning, and scheduling; (4) staff development which acknowledges what one can learn from one's colleagues; (5) direct and frequent communication; (6) sharing of power and responsibilities; and (7) the use of symbols and rituals by celebrating and recognizing the work of staff and students (p. 31).

Campo (1993) delineated five key strategies principals use take to establish collaborative environments. First, principals should know how motivated and committed the teachers are, while becoming aware of their needs, feelings, perceptions, and attitudes. Second, principals need to have a clear school vision of what the school would look like if it were operating ideally. This vision should be identified and articulated within a set of goals shared by staff and should always be made visible and audible in the school. Third, principals involve teachers as fully as possible in the decision-making. Such sharing not only promotes collaboration among teachers, it also gives teachers a sense of ownership for what is happening in the school. Fourth, principals should reflect on their own behavior and actions. It is essential that they devote time to theorizing about their own effectiveness as well as to stimulate teachers to reflect on their teaching. Teachers and principals need constructive and continuous feedback in order to grow. Fifth, principals also need to make sure that all the necessary resources in order to make collaboration possible are available and accessible to teachers. Collaboration takes time; time to meet, time to talk, plan together and visit each other (Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). Creativity and flexibility are essential ingredients to make it work (Griffin et al., 2008; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994; Stolp, 1994).

Collaboration among teachers benefits the students, teachers, and the school community as a whole (Campo, 1993; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Sciallo,

2016). Flexibility, vision, emphasis on personal and individual growth and facilitating interaction between teachers appears to be important and essential ingredients of leadership that contribute to collaboration, motivation, and commitment (Gruenert, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Drake and Roe (2003) state that it is the role of the principal to emphasize, nurture, and facilitate the necessity, joy and benefits of working together.

Summary

“Historically public education in the United States has been based on the assumption that all people should be given an adequate education at public expense – all people, that is, except the handicapped and various other minority populations” (Singletary, Collins, & Dennis, 1978, p. 29). Just recently the concept of “all” has been interpreted to its fullest extent. The evolution of special education serves as a backdrop to understanding the foundation of the field of education and its ever-changing nature (Sacks, 2001).

Federal mandates such as IDEA and NCLB have changed the way in which schools are educating students. These laws have created a shift from excluding students with disabilities to mainstreaming them into the general education classrooms where they can receive their instruction alongside their nondisabled peers (Yell et al., 1998). Some educators would agree that this has opened the door to acceptance, innovation, and potential for increased student achievement, while others believe it has caused disruption to a system in which did not need to be changed (Thompkins & Deloney, 1995).

Including students with disabilities into the general education classroom has changed the role of the educator and made it more complex (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012). No longer are general education and special education considered to be separate systems within the school (Slee, 2008). Instead, all teachers are now required to work collaboratively to ensure the success

of students with disabilities (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). Today, many educators and administrators continue to hold mixed beliefs about the inclusion model and its effectiveness (Thompkins & Deloney, 1995).

Collaboration among general and special education teachers has been found to be essential to the success of the inclusion model (Cook & Friend, 1991b). Both general and special education teachers are struggling to meet the diverse demands of a collaborative culture (Cochran, 1998; Gokdere, 2012). Overcoming obstacles such as building collegial relationships, role confusion, insufficient training, and time remain an area of improvement for many administrators (Cochran, 1998; Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014; Knackendoffel, 2007; Nierengarten, 2013; Skrtic, 1987).

The underlying foundation of successful inclusive education is dependent upon a school's collaborative culture (Cochran, 1998; Peterson & Brietzke, 1994). Culture is intangible, but it is essential (Stolp, 1994). Schools all have their own climate, ethos, and culture that permeate their hallways (Stolp, 1994). Since inclusive education relies on general and special educators coming together to share ideas, expertise, and problem solve, it is essential that the school have a strong collaborative culture to foster and sustain such relationships (Brownell et al., 2006; Hernandez, 2013). As instructional leaders, principals hold a great deal of power in creating more collaborative cultures within schools (Campo, 1993; Demir, 2008; Stolp, 1994). Principals must take the time to establish school cultures that promote collegial discussion, personal reflection, and individual growth among staff and students (Demir, 2008).

As educators work towards improving the educational opportunities for students with disabilities in the general education setting, looking at the collaborative culture that currently exists within schools is essential (Austin, 2001; Robinson & Buly, 2007). Administrators need

to begin exploring the collaborative relationships that exist within their school, specifically between the general and special education teachers (Deal et al., 1990; Drago-Severson, 2012). Identifying how these educators are working together as well as what obstacles they are facing will help administrators ensure the proper supports are in place to facilitate and sustain effective collaborative cultures (Deal et al., 1990). This study has the potential to give administrators and teachers insight into the supports necessary for effective collaboration to take place between general and special education teachers.

CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

Introduction

Using a phenomenological research approach, this study examined the relationships that exist between general and special education teachers. Developing the study, I hypothesized that general and special education teachers need to better understand how to collaborate with one another to become more effective in teaching within the inclusive classroom setting. The study sought to generate information about how middle school general and special education teachers collaborate with one another and what factors promote and hinder effective collaboration.

The chapter is organized in the following manner: (a) philosophical worldview and influence of social cultural perspective, (b) overview of the research design, (c) participants, (d) development of instruments, (e) data collection, (f) data analysis, (g) trustworthiness of the study, (h) limitations and delimitations, and (i) chapter summary.

Philosophical Worldview and Influence of Social Cultural Perspective

My fifteen years of teaching in the field of special education has deeply influenced the study. From these experiences, I maintain that the actions needed to reform the education of students with disabilities must take place primarily with the practitioners. As school culture and the educational laws surrounding students with disabilities continues to evolve, educators of all licensure areas need to become better equipped to handle the diverse needs of all learners.

Throughout my tenure as a middle school special educator, I could not understand why general and special educators resisted the notion of collaboration with one another, even though their combined efforts could improve instruction and potentially make their jobs easier. My desire to learn more about what factors are prohibiting teachers from effectively collaborating grounded the study.

Acknowledging my history and personal biases regarding collaboration and inclusive education was an essential element to conducting this study. Having been part of many collaborative relationships, I entered into this journey with several hypotheses generated from my own experiences that were illuminated by my literature on the topic. To ensure validity of my research, it was pertinent to verify that my data were not purposefully skewed and I reported empirically on the findings. To do so, the process of bracketing took place throughout the study. Bracketing is the process of acknowledging one's view and setting aside all biases in order to take a fresh look at the data presented (Tufford & Newman, 2012). The steps taken to address my social cultural biases are outlined in the overview of the design, the role of the researcher, and the reliability and validity sections of this chapter.

A social constructivist worldview provided the frame for this study. Social constructionism examines the development of jointly constructed understandings (Hantzidiamantis, 2011). Understandings aren't developed separately within a person; instead, a person develops understandings by using experiences and interactions with other people (Mallory & New, 1994). In constructivism, individuals are viewed as active participants, developing their own understandings of, and knowledge about the world through experiences with their environments (Creswell, 2013). In these understandings and knowledge, different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same experience (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, this theory focuses on a person as an active meaning maker of experience, considering cognitive, affective, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences and how these aspects of experiences intersect (Drago-Severson, 2009). According to Vygotsky (1978), individuals construct meanings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. Constructivism "assumes multiple social realities, recognizes the mutual creations of knowledge

by the view and the viewed, and aims towards interpretive understandings' of participants' meanings" (Hantzidiamantis, 2011, p. 35).

The qualitative phenomenological study-allowed me to interact with the participants in order to facilitate and accurately reconstruct their voices to better understand the phenomena of how participants interact in collaborative relationships with one another.

Overview of Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach framed this study. The next section outlines (a) the rationale for a qualitative phenomenological approach, (b) the role of the researcher, (c) the research questions, and (d) the selection of participants.

Rational for Qualitative Phenomenological Approach

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the phenomenon of inclusive education and collaboration between general and special education teachers as described from the perspective of the participants. Qualitative research is interpretive, and the researcher is typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with the participants (Creswell, 2014). According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interact and interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 6). Creswell (2012) stated that qualitative research answers the "what" questions. Creswell (2012) outlined five essential components to qualitative research: (1) purposeful sampling based on information that can best help to understand a phenomenon, (2) greater access to sites and participants are needed, (3) a qualitative approach relies on general interviews and observations so that the views of participants are not restricted, (4) self-designed protocols are used to help organize the information reported by participants, and (5) the procedures of qualitative data collection are administered with sensitivity to the challenges and

ethical issues of gathering information face to face and often in people's homes or workplaces (p. 205).

Although all qualitative research is focused on uncovering perceptions and views of reality, there are different research approaches within the qualitative design (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This study sought to understand how the phenomenon of inclusive education has impacted the relationships among educators. For this reason, a phenomenological approach has been chosen.

In explaining the philosophy of phenomenology, Smith, Flowers, & Larkin (2009) have delineated this approach in the following passage:

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience. There are many different emphases and interests among phenomenologists, but they all tended to share a particular interest in what the experience of being human is *like*, in all of its various aspects, but especially in terms of the things which matter to us, and which constitute our lived world. The key to phenomenological study is that it seeks to provide a source of ideas about how to examine and comprehend lived experiences. (p. 11)

Phenomenology differs from the other approaches in that it makes a distinction between appearance and essence (Van Manen, 1997). Phenomenologists always ask the question: What is the nature or meaning of something (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Van Manen, 1997)? Phenomenology does not begin with a theory, but instead begins with a phenomenon under consideration (Husserl, 1931). The two major approaches to phenomenological research include hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Van Manen, 1997). These two approaches differ in their historical advocates as well as their methodological procedures (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger founded the philosophical movement of phenomenology (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Reiners, 2012). Husserl believed that phenomenology “suspended all suppositions, was related to consciousness, and was based on the meaning of the individual experience” (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). Husserl also said the experience of thought, memory and imagination involved what he referred to as, “intentionality”, or one’s consciousness of an object or an event (Reiners, 2012, p. 1). This type of descriptive phenomenology, known as transcendental, is where conscious experiences are described and preconceived opinions are set-aside (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Reiners, 2012).

Martin Heidegger, Husserl’s student, adopted the theory of ontology or the science of being (Reiners, 2012). Heidegger expanded hermeneutics, the philosophy of interpretation, by studying the concept of being in the world rather than knowing the world (Reiners, 2012). This type of phenomenology moves beyond the description or core concepts of the experience and seeks meaning that is embedded in everyday occurrences (Reiners, 2012). Hermeneutics requires reflective interpretation of a study to achieve meaningful understanding (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

A transcendental phenomenological approach was used in this study to document aspects of collaboration between general and special education teachers. Transcendental phenomenology is based on principles identified by Husserl (1931) and translated into a qualitative method by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology is a type of phenomenology that is less focused on interpretations of the researcher and more on a description of the experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) has explained transcendental in this context means looking at the phenomenon with a fresh eye and open mind, resulting in acquiring new knowledge derived from the essence of experiences. The

way of analyzing phenomenological data, according to Moustakas (1994) is to follow a systematic procedure that is rigorous yet accessible to qualitative researchers.

With transcendental phenomenology, before data collection begins, the researcher must practice bracketing or epoche (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). This requires the researcher to describe their experiences to shed light on their underlying feelings or biases on the topic (Bednall, 2006). The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) presented by Tufford and Newman (2012) “elucidates the multifaceted nature of bracketing and advances a systematic approach that may aid researchers in mapping out bracketing as an ongoing part of their research strategy in a qualitative project” (p.87). The framework conceptualizes how bracketing may be integrated into each of the various stages of the research process. The double-sided arrows between the researcher and bracketing signifies the repetitive process of analytical bracketing whereby the researcher enters and withdraws from the data and the bracketing process in order to obtain a clearer picture of the phenomenon, and to compare the research data with the overall cultural context (Gearing, 2004; Tufford & Newman, 2012).

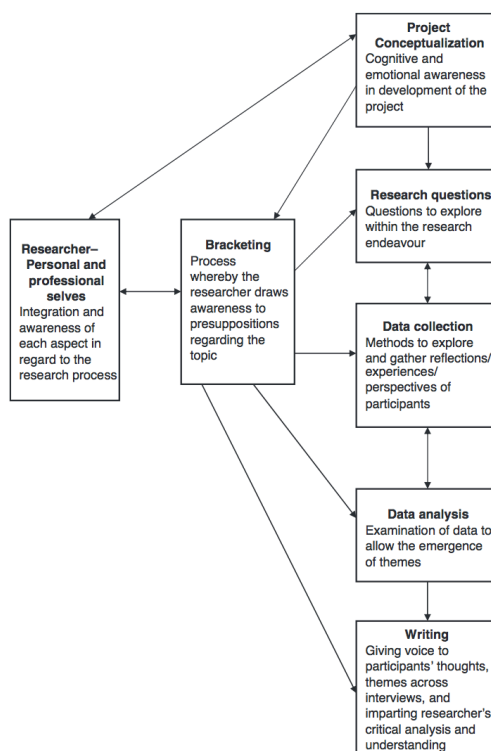


Figure 1 – The Integration of Bracketing into Qualitative Methodology.

Permission to use Bracketing Conceptual Framework granted by Tufford & Newman (see Appendix E)

The practice of bracketing allows the researcher to take a fresh perspective on the phenomenon being explored (Creswell, 2013). In this method, it is important that the researcher has experienced the same phenomenon so that the researcher's experiences and the participants' experiences can connect (Merriam, 2009). Contrary to the quantitative researchers, who distance themselves from the participants and the research questions, the qualitative researcher is participatory (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing was completed throughout the study to ensure the experiences and biases of the researcher did not compromise the study.

Role of the Researcher

To effectively document the aspects of collaboration between general and special education teachers, a qualitative survey was developed. The creations of the online survey

questions were informed by the literature as well as my own experiences. I also developed the qualitative interview questions. These questions were informed by both the literature review as well as the data collected from the online survey. I did all data collection and data analysis. Since I have personal experience with the phenomenon, bracketing occurred throughout the study.

Moustakas (1994) has stated that as a researcher, “I must first be attuned to my own being, thinking, and choosing before I relate to other’s thoughts, understandings, and choices” (p. 62). Creswell (2013) supported this notion by encouraging researchers to begin a project by describing one’s own experiences with the phenomenon and bracketing out their views before proceeding with the experiences of others. Bracketing is the researcher’s ability to set aside biases, assumptions, and prejudgments about the phenomenon they are exploring in their research (Bednall, 2006; Chan et al., 2013).

Tufford and Newman (2012) have listed several steps to ensure effective bracketing throughout the study. In the early stages of developing the study, I engaged in conversations with general and special education colleagues to become more aware of my own preconceptions and biases. I utilized a reflexive journal to record my own biases, and preconceptions of my colleagues. This journal was also used to document any questions or concerns that were generated through discussion. This journal was used to aid in the development of the guiding questions. This reflexive journal was an invaluable tool throughout the study. This journal was also utilized throughout the data collection and data analysis process.

Research Questions

The focus of this study was to examine the collaborative relationship that exists between general and special education teachers in the middle school setting. Three research questions

frame the study to examine this relationship. The design of the questions was based on the premise that general and special education historically operate as separate systems within the school. Specifically, they are designed based on the hypothesis that middle school general and special education teachers are not collaborating to the degree necessary to close the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers. The first question is intended to identify whether middle school general and special educators feel that collaboration is an important aspect of their job. It sought to identify what behaviors they exhibit to support their claim that collaboration is or is not a priority for them. The second research question was developed to identify the ways in which middle school general and special educators collaborate with one another. In looking at the various forms of collaboration, I used these data to make connections with the degree to which the participants value collaboration. The third and final research question sought to understand the factors and conditions that allow collaboration to take place and to inhibit collaboration at the middle school level.

1. To what degree do middle school general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?
2. What are various ways middle school general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?
3. What factors and conditions do middle school general and special education teachers consider promote and hinder collaboration?

These questions were explored through a participant questionnaire and interviews. The questionnaire directions (see Appendix B) and the participant interview (see Appendix C) asked participants to select or write answers that most closely described their experiences or represented their beliefs; therefore, it is assumed that participants responded to the three research

questions through the lens of their experiences and perspectives during the data collection and analysis.

Selection of Participants

In a phenomenological study, participants must be individuals who have all experienced a particular phenomenon being explored and can articulate their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative samples tend to be purposive, rather than random (Miles & Huberman, 1994). For this reason, general and special education teachers from 32 public middle schools across Massachusetts were contacted and asked to participate in the study by completing an online questionnaire. Schools were chosen using a purposeful sampling approach. Since all public schools in Massachusetts are required by law to provide students with disabilities academic services in the least restrictive environment, schools were chosen based on the grades in which they service. For the purpose of this study, a middle school is defined as a public school setting that only serves students in grades 5-8.

In addition to teaching students in grades 5-8, participants needed to be working under a general or special education teacher licensure in Massachusetts. This study sought to identify the perspectives of those currently teaching core academic classes; therefore, all administration, allied arts teachers, and special education service providers were not eligible.

To begin the study, a letter of participation (see Appendix A) along with a link to the questionnaire was distributed to public school educators via email. Teacher email addresses were identified through individual school websites. In addition, I distributed the participation letter and questionnaire to colleagues who teach in public school districts across Massachusetts asking if they would pass it along to potential participants.

Since participants had the option of remaining anonymous, the researcher has no way of

knowing exactly how many school districts are represented in the data. Of the 32 school districts that were contacted, participants from 13 different districts did respond to the questionnaire and were willing to provide their contact information to take part in a follow up interview. An explanation of the development of instruments used in the study follows.

Development of Instruments

The purpose of the study was to document aspects of collaboration between general and special education teachers. A participant questionnaire and interviews were used to elicit information from educators regarding their collaborative relationships. Questions for the instruments were developed based on an extensive literature review of teacher collaboration and collaborative behaviors.

The online questionnaire was developed using the Qualtrics software. Two questionnaires were developed for this study including one for general education teachers, and one for special education teachers. The first section of the questionnaire consisted of demographic information to determine whether individuals qualified for the study. Eligibility was determined based on (1) teacher licensure, (2) student caseload (3) years of experience, (4) grade levels taught, and (5) grade levels taught within their school. If an individual met the criteria, they were instructed to complete the remaining questions based upon their licensure as a general or special education teacher.

The questionnaire included 22 questions designed to examine three variables: educator attitudes towards collaboration, types of collaborative behavior, and frequency of collaborative behavior. The questionnaire consisted of open-response, multiple choice, and Likert Scale response questions. Response options for questions exploring collaborative behavior were as follows: (1) to a great extent, (2) mostly, (3) somewhat, and (4) not at all. Response options for

questions examining the frequency of behavior were as follows: (1) to a great extent, (2) most of the time, (3) sometimes, and (4) not at all.

Participant interview protocols for general and special educators were also designed (see Appendix D). The interview consisted of seven to ten open response questions. Interviews also included follow up questions generated from participant questionnaire responses. All interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews allowed the researcher to gather in-depth information regarding each participant's authentic experience with collaboration. Participants were encouraged to share personal stories as they explained how they collaborate with their colleagues. These anecdotal stories gave the researcher insight into each unique collaborative experience.

A pilot study was completed prior to the onset of the study. Kim (2011) defines a pilot study:

A feasibility study that comprises small-scale versions of the planned study, trial runs of planned methods, or miniature versions of the anticipated research in order to answer methodological questions and to guide development of the research plan. (p. 2)

The purpose of the pilot study was to test the research protocols. Throughout this process the methodology, data collection strategies, and an approach to data analysis were investigated. Participants in the pilot study were chosen using a convenience sampling. There were 20 participants who took part in the pilot that included 10 general educators and 10 special educators. Each participant took the questionnaire as well as took part in a 45-minute interview. The pilot study was able to help refine the participant questionnaire as well as the interview questions to elicit more detailed information regarding the relationships between general and special educators. Data from the pilot study were not included in the final data analysis. The

process of data collection is outlined in the following section.

Data Collection

Data for the study were collected using a participant questionnaire and interviews. Teachers were provided with a description of the study in the Invitation to Participate (see Appendix A) along with the questionnaire (see Appendix B). The amount of time it would take to complete the questionnaire was provided to the potential participants, as was any other further information necessary for them to make an informed decision about participating in the study. Potential participants were made aware that if at any point in the study they wished to exit the study, they could discontinue participating without any consequences to them. Potential participants were also informed that all data collected from the questionnaire would be anonymous unless they chose to leave their contact information for a follow-up interview.

The first section of the questionnaire was designed to determine participant eligibility. Eligible participants were directed to complete either the general or special education teacher survey. Participants that chose to take part in the follow-up interview were contacted within two weeks.

Data from the questionnaire were collected using the Qualtrics software. Raw data was downloaded into Microsoft Excel for analysis. The information was imported such that each participant received a unique identification number. This identification number was used to identify which responses corresponded to each participant. Participants that took part in interviews were recorded, with participant permission, using the Apple Voice Memo software. Data was transcribed onto a Microsoft Word document and later transferred into the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet using their unique identification number.

All data collected were saved on a locked computer and backed up on a secure database

called Dropbox. I had access to the data. By following these procedures, the confidentiality of each participant was maintained. The data were destroyed following the culmination of the study. The process of data analysis is explained in the next section.

Data Analysis

Using the Qualtrics software, 149 educators took the questionnaire. Of the 149 educators, 56 general education teachers and 34 special education teachers qualified for the study, resulting in a total of 90 participants.

Data collected from the questionnaire were divided into two Microsoft Excel spreadsheets: general education content teacher, and special education content teacher. Data analysis took place separately and comparatively between the general and special education teacher responses. Coding of the data took place in three phases to correspond to each research question. Topics from the questionnaire and interview were divided accordingly:

Research Q1: To what degree do general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?

- Preference of whom to collaborate with
- Percentage of time spent collaborating
- Degree to which benefits outweigh the obstacles
- Degree to which feedback is valued
- Willingness to adjust teaching based upon feedback

Research Q2: What are various ways general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?

- Degree to which participant collaborates on (1) lesson development, (2) instructional modifications, (3) exchanging resources, (4) student progress, and (5) sharing expertise

- Preferred topic during collaborative meetings

Research Q3: What factors and conditions do general and special education teachers consider promote and hinder collaboration?

- Amount of professional development in the area of (1) teaming, (2) student disabilities, (3) coteaching, (4) classroom accommodations, (5) behavior management, (6) managing conflict, (7) building trust, (8) differentiated instruction, and (9) monitoring student progress.
- Examination of colleagues (1) level or expertise; (2) availability, (3) goals, (4) shared responsibility, and (5) communication skills.
- Strategies to overcome obstacles
- Supports in place by administration

Once the data were sorted between the three research questions, coding began. Coding is the process of reviewing field notes to dissect them in a meaningful way, while keeping the relations between the parts intact (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Codes are labels for assigning descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Creswell, 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The following codes were utilized:

| Research Q1 | Research Q2 | Research Q3 |
|----------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| Priority + | Resources | Schedule + |
| Priority - | Modifications | Schedule - |
| Caseload Issue | Lessons | Personality + |
| O.O + (overcome obstacles) | Achievement | Personality - |
| O.O - | Expertise | PD + |
| Effort + | Electronic | PD - |

| | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------|---------------|
| Effort - | F-F (face to face) | Goals + |
| Seek help | SD (sit down) | Goals - |
| Benefits | Fly (on the fly meetings) | Equity + |
| Participation | Scheduled | Equity - |
| Share (time/resources) | Spontaneous | Expertise + |
| | | Expertise - |
| | | Flexibility + |
| | | Flexibility - |

Data analysis in qualitative research consisted of preparing and organizing the data (Creswell, 2013). The process of coding is essential in a phenomenological study to help identify themes, given the large amount of data collected (Bednall, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). The process of bracketing should also occur to ensure objectivity during the process (Creswell, 2013). The steps utilized to ensure the reliability and validity of the study are outlined in the following section.

Reliability and Validity

Triangulation is a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple sources of information to form themes in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation rests upon the belief that a single method can never adequately explain a phenomenon (Pandey & Patnaik, 2014). For this study, three different lenses were utilized to gain a better understanding of the data.

First, a review of literature was conducted. This literature review provided a foundation for the development of the study and gave the researcher insight into a variety of theories

surrounding the collaboration of educators. Next, the lens of the participants was used to get an in-depth understanding of the relationships that exist between general and special education teachers. Last, my lens as a special educator was acknowledged and disclosed to participants. The process of bracketing occurred to increase my ability to remain objective throughout the data collection and analysis process.

In this study, I serve as a special education teacher who collaborates with general education teachers daily. My prior experiences presented a possible bias that might have jeopardized the dependability of the study. To increase the validity of the study, I limited comments to avoid presenting bias, but in an effort to build relationships, at times my experiences were shared with participants when they asked for information.

Gathering data with the use of multiple sources also increased the validity of this study. Information was gathered through an extensive review of literature, a qualitative survey, and participant interviews. The results from the questionnaire provided demographic information and the degree to which educators take part in collaborative behaviors. The data collected from the interviews provided in-depth information regarding how and why educators collaborate, and provided participants with the opportunity to present their experiences within a larger context.

Other methods were utilized to ensure the validity and reliability during the data collection and analysis process. Although participant interviews were recorded, detailed notes were also taken. The recordings and notes were transcribed within 24 hours to certify that the correct information was captured from the participant. Regardless of the researcher's efforts to ascertain clear understanding of responses during the study, she did expect some ambiguity, which possibly impacted the study. Open-ended responses from participants were analyzed looking for themes between the general and special education educators and clarification from

ambiguous responses was sought out.

Delimitations

There are several delimitations within the scope of the study. By design, the recruited participants encompassed Massachusetts' public school educators grade levels 5-8, but excluded private and parochial schools. This exclusion was made purposefully to ensure that all participants were working under the same federal mandates related to students with disabilities. Educators who taught in grades 5-8, but resided in elementary or high school settings were eliminated to ensure that participants' experiences were in a middle school culture. Participants were also delimited to classroom teachers only and did not include allied arts teachers or special education service providers. Finally, educators working under an administrative license were excluded. The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of classroom teacher relationships, as perceived by those who currently work with students with disabilities in the classroom within the areas of math, reading, written language, science, and history.

Limitations

There were several limitations that may have impacted the study. First, the majority of schools in Massachusetts employ more general educators than special educators. For this reason, there were more general education teachers than special education teachers who participated in the study.

Second, due to the nature of the anonymous questionnaire, there is no way of knowing exactly how many school districts across Massachusetts the data represents.

Third, the data revealed a discrepancy in how educators defined collaboration. Since no clear definition was provided in the questionnaire, there is potential for answers to be skewed. For example, many educators reported that collaboration only occurs when new innovative ideas

were generated. Given this definition, they did not report in ways in which they may share resources or expertise that are not necessarily reciprocated by their colleague. Other participants, however, defined collaboration as any exchange of ideas. With this definition given, they did report behaviors that were not necessarily reciprocated by their colleague.

Fourth, the data for this study were collected during the early spring months of the school year. Given that all public schools in Massachusetts take part in the statewide testing during these months, many participants did not have the time to take part in the study. There were a large number of participants who were willing to take the questionnaire, but commented that their schedules did not permit a follow up interview.

Lastly, the special education programs offered within schools differ across districts. In addition, the schedules within schools differ across districts and buildings. For this reason, the data collected was heavily influenced by the ratio of special educators and general educators employed as well as the schedules put in place by administration.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the collaborative relationships that exist between general and special education teachers as perceived by the educators themselves. The study was designed around three guiding research questions.

1. To what degree do middle school general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?
2. What are various ways middle school general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?
3. What factors and conditions do middle school general and special education teachers consider promote and hinder collaboration?

The design of the study was a qualitative phenomenological study. The researcher was connected to the study through her background as a special education teacher who works collaboratively with general education teachers.

The chapter reviewed the qualitative data collection methods, the development of instrumentation, as well as how the data were collected and analyzed. The selection of participants was outlined and the rationale for determining the participants. In addition, how participants' confidentiality and anonymity were upheld was discussed. The chapter ended with statements regarding validity and reliability along with the delimitations and limitations of the study.

In chapter four the results and findings of the study are presented. The demographic information of the participants is described and the findings from the participant questionnaire and interviews. The chapter concludes with a rationale and summary of how the data were organized.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to document aspects of collaboration between middle school general and special education teachers. It sought to determine the degree general and special educators report they value collaboration with one another. The study also identified how middle school general and special educators report they collaborate with one another. Finally, it explored factors and conditions middle school classroom teachers reported promoted and/or hindered collaboration. The following questions guided the study:

1. To what degree do middle school general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?
2. What are various ways middle school general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?
3. What factors and conditions do middle school general and special education teachers consider promote and hinder collaboration?

Chapter Three describes how the research questions were addressed. The phenomenological study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design that included an online questionnaire and participant interviews. Data were gathered from the online questionnaire using the Qualtrics software program over a four-week window; participant interviews were scheduled over a four-week period as well. Data collection lasted a total of six weeks. Each questionnaire was reviewed to ensure that participant consent had been signed and demographic information was completed to determine eligibility. Data from the questionnaire were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet on a weekly basis. Participants that were willing to take part in a follow up interview were contacted within two weeks.

Data from the online questionnaire were imported directly into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Demographic information on each participant was analyzed first. Any participant who did not meet eligibility requirements was deleted from the spreadsheet. The remaining data were analyzed and descriptive statistics were used to describe the results.

Following the demographic analysis, the data were divided into two separate spreadsheets including one for general education teacher responses and one for special education teacher responses. Each spreadsheet was analyzed separately.

Beginning with the general education participant data, each survey question was color coded according to the guiding research question it sought to address. Each research question was analyzed separately. Multiple choice and Likert scale questions were analyzed by identifying the percent of participant responses and descriptive statistics were used to describe findings. Open-response questions were coded according to reoccurring phrases and themes that emerged from participant responses. Data were described using emergent themes, narrative language, and direct quotes from participants. Following the analysis of the general education data, the special education participant data were analyzed in the same manner.

The second phases of data collection consisted of participant interviews. Participant interviews were recorded with permission using Apple Voice Memos. Following each interview notes and recordings were transcribed within 24 hours. Data analysis followed a similar structure. Each interview question was color coded according to the guiding research question it sought to address. Questions were coded according to reoccurring phrases and themes that emerged from participant responses and descriptive statistics were used to describe the results.

Data from the online questionnaire and the participant interviews were then combined so that I could look at all of the data for each guiding question. A deeper analysis was conducted and overall themes were reported.

Finally, the data collected for general and special education teachers were analyzed comparatively. The percentage of participant responses as well as the narrative and direct quotes from participants were compared. I looked at the descriptive statistical analysis of each question looking for similarities and differences between the general and special education teachers. Overarching themes were then reported.

Chapter Four is organized in four sections. The first section presents demographic data about participants. Sections two through four presents and analyzes data according to the three guiding research questions, and proffers emergent themes and resulting findings. The chapter ends with a summary. Please note that the percentages reported in this chapter have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Demographic Information

The online questionnaire was designed to have participants provide specific demographic information. Factors included (a) types of licensure, (b) years of experience, (c) student caseload, (d) grade levels taught, and (e) the grades that reside within their school. The sample of teachers in this study was comprised of fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grade general and special education classroom teachers in the state of Massachusetts. Eligible participants needed to hold a valid teaching license as a general or special education content teacher and have at least one full year of teaching experience.

Research materials were distributed to 32 school districts. Participants had the option to leave their contact information for a follow up email. There were 13 identified school districts

represented in the interview phase of the study. One hundred and forty-nine educators took part in the online questionnaire. Of the 149 educators who took the questionnaire, 90 participants were eligible to participate in the study. Tables 1, 2 and Figure 1 provide data about the demographic subgroups of eligible participants-

Table 1 presents data about the area of licensure held by eligible participants.

Table 1

Massachusetts Teacher Licensure of Participants

| Demographic Subgroup | # of Participants | % of Participants |
|--|-------------------|-------------------|
| <hr/> Area of Licensure | | |
| General Education Teacher | 56 | 62% |
| Special Education Teacher | 34 | 38% |
| Total | 90 | |
| <hr/> Population of Students | | |
| General and Special Education Students | 72 | 80% |
| Special Education Students Only | 18 | 20% |
| Total | 90 | |

Table 1 shows that more general education teachers (56) than special education teachers (34) participated in the study. In addition, the majority of participants (72) reported working with both general and special education students on a daily basis.

Table 2 provides data that describe the number of years that participants have worked as a public school teacher in Massachusetts.

Table 2

Number of Years Participants Served as Public School Teachers

| Years of Experience | # of Participants | % of Participants |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Years Experience as Teacher | | |
| 1-4 | 13 | 14.4% |
| 5-9 | 22 | 24.4% |
| 10+ | 55 | 61.1% |
| Total | 90 | |

Table 2 shows that more than half (55) of participants reported that they had been teaching for 10+ years. Approximately one fourth of the participants (22) reported to have between five and nine years of experience, while slightly fewer participants (13) reported to have between one and four years of experience.

Figure 1 includes data describing what grade levels general and special education participants taught.

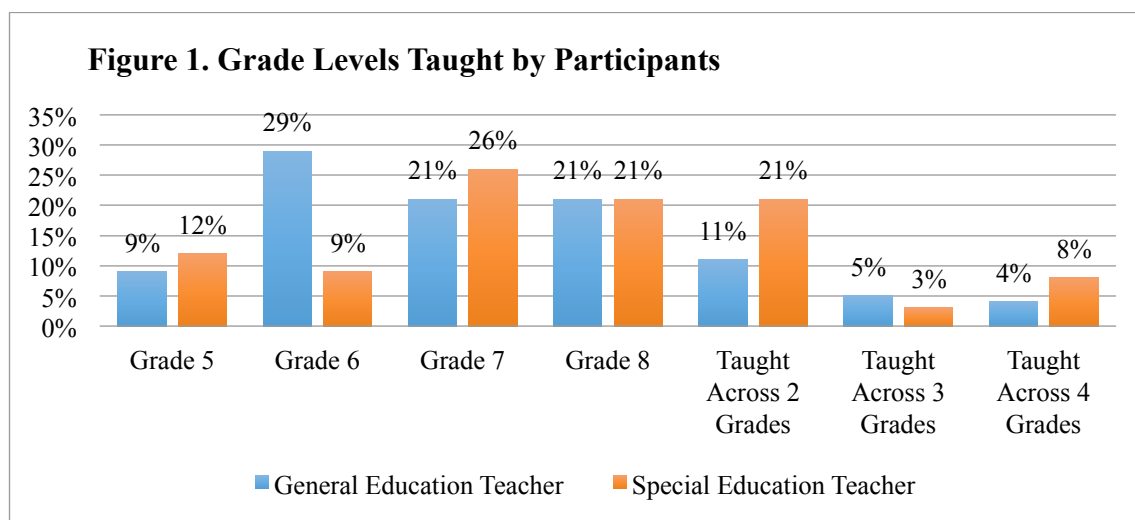


Figure 1 shows that the majority of general (80%) and special education (68%) teachers taught just a single subject. The majority of general educators (29%) reported to have taught grade seven, while slightly less (21%) reported to have taught grade eight, and only 9% taught

grade six. The majority of special educators (25%) also taught grade seven, while 21% taught grade eight, and only 12% taught grade six. Only 11% of general and educators and 21% of special educators taught across two grades, while even less educators taught across three or all four grades.

In summary, demographic information was collected from educators to determine eligibility. This data included the number of eligible participants, educator licensure, population of students taught, years of experience, and grade levels taught. The following section presents and analyzes the findings from Research Question One.

Research Question One: To What Degree Do General and Special Education Teachers Report They Value Collaboration With One Another?

According to Hernandez (2013), collaboration is not only seen as a legal mandate, but best practice and a necessary element of inclusive education. Changes in the law surrounding the education of students with disabilities now requires general and special educators to work as one cohesive team to meet the diverse needs of all students (Cochran, 1998). The first guiding research question was designed to identify the degree to which general and special educators valued collaboration with one another. Specifically, this question sought to ascertain who teachers prefer to collaborate with, for what reasons, and how often.

An extensive literature review on this topic revealed little data with regard to the degree to which educators value collaboration. To determine whether or not participants valued collaboration with one another, nine questions were developed. Question one sought to identify the degree to which collaboration was considered a priority for participants. This question was explored during participant interviews. Questions two through nine focused more on collaborative preference and behaviors, which were explored through the online questionnaire.

At the beginning of the study, I hypothesized that special education teachers would report a higher level of value for collaboration than their general education colleagues. Additionally, it was hypothesized that general education teachers would report having more negative attitudes towards inclusive education, which would impact their willingness to collaborate with special education teachers. To determine the degree to which educators value collaboration, the following subsections present and analyze data collected from the eight online questions and participant interviews.

Question 1: Do you consider collaboration to be a priority?

Question one was asked of participants during the interview phase of the study. There were 23 participants who took part in an interview. Interview participants were asked to discuss the degree collaboration is a priority for them in their current teaching role. The general educators were asked to respond specifically about collaborating with special education colleagues, and the special educators were asked to respond based on the collaboration with general education colleagues.

The majority of special educators (30%) reported collaboration to be a priority for them, while the majority of general educators (26%) reported collaboration to be somewhat of a priority for them. The following section elaborates on why general and special educators reported collaboration was or was not a priority. Twenty-three percent (23%) of general educators and 30% of special educators reported collaboration not to be a priority for them. The following section will elaborate on why educators felt that collaboration was or was not a priority within their setting.

General educators. There were mixed data collected from the general education teachers in regards to the priority that collaboration had within their current teaching role. Overall, the

majority of general educators (46%) reported that collaboration was somewhat of a priority for them, while 31% said it was a priority for them, and 23% answered that collaboration was not a priority in the current setting.

When asked during interviews to elaborate on why collaboration was or was not a priority, the participants were honest and open with their responses. One participant stated that although she recognizes the benefits of collaboration, finding the time to do so is just not always realistic in her current situation. She stated, “I have too much to do on a daily basis that it’s really difficult to schedule blocks to meet with the special educator. We try to, but more often than not it doesn’t happen for one reason or another.” It is important to note that every general educator interviewed mentioned time as a factor that impacted the degree to which collaboration was a priority for him or her.

Another educator stated, “The demands on general education and special education teachers to keep up with their own lesson plans and create materials for the day-to-day often takes precedence over getting together and talking through what is happening in the classroom next week or down the line. This is the second year of our inclusion classroom and we still have not reached the ‘co-teaching’ bit of it; I’m not sure we ever will. I know the curriculum and she knows and supports the kids in class and in her resource block. She tends to defer to my expertise and try to assist the students in completing tasks that I have set, rather than tasks we have created and set together.”

Another educator found the question a bit more difficult to answer. At first, he reported that collaboration was a priority for him, but as he began to think about why, he quickly changed his response indicating that the situation at hand really dictated whether it was or was not a priority. “I guess it depends on the situation,” he responded, “if I know someone is an expert at

something really cool, or I know that I can be helpful I am very interested, but when I'm asked to collaborate with someone who I don't like, or don't think they can really help me, I'm not very interested at all."

The general educators, who said collaboration was not a priority at all, spoke of the difficulties with schedules and content expertise. One educator stated, "The special educator really doesn't know the content well enough to give help in developing lessons that will work for the entire class. She tries, but her ideas are so specific to one or two kids I can't implement them effectively in the larger group. I basically just stopped asking since it doesn't usually work out." Another educator mimicked that idea while adding, "The special education teacher is so used to working with just a handful of kids at a time, they really don't understand that things need to operate differently in the larger classroom."

These remarks made by the general educators infer that general educators are expecting the special educators to provide answers to specific problems, rather than having the two educators work together to develop solutions to learning problems that are affecting a significant number of both special education and regular education students. These statements suggest that educators' definition of collaboration may differ, causing tension within the relationship.

There were, however, several general educators that stated that collaboration was absolutely a priority for them. "Collaborating with the special education teacher is as much of a priority for me as keeping in touch with the other general education teachers. We collaborate on different things, but they are equally as helpful. I tend to use the other general education teachers to share lesson plan ideas and link curriculum across disciplines, while I use the special education teacher to help me make the lessons more accessible to the lower level students."

Another participant stated, “I have to keep in constant contact with the special education teacher to make sure I am following the IEP (individual education plan) correctly. I need to make sure that when a student isn’t performing in my class I have documented all the ways in which I am accommodating for the student’s disability. The special education teacher is instrumental in making sure I am covering all my basis.”

Although the theme of time was consistent across all participants as an indicator of priority, the special education teachers had very different reasons as to why collaboration is or is not a priority.

Special educators. There were 10 special educators that participated in the interview portion of the study. Collaboration was a priority for 70% of special educators, while it was not a priority for the remaining 30% (see Figure 4).

One special educator commented, “I teach in a full inclusion program. If the regular education teacher and I do not get along, share similar teaching ideology, or have time to collaborate, things will most definitely fall apart in the classroom. The kids can see right through a pair of teachers who do not collaborate well.” Several other special education teachers reported that the coteaching relationship they have needed to be a priority for similar reasons. “I can’t help the students who are struggling if I don’t understand the objective of the day’s lesson,” one special educator stated.

Another special educator spoke about how she was responsible for all students on IEP’s regardless of whether she was their classroom teacher or not. She stated, “It’s my responsibility to make sure that the teachers are following the IEP’s and that the students are being given proper modifications. Although I may not have some of these kids in class, I need to make sure they are successful in whatever learning environment they have been placed.”

Finally, another educator reported that collaboration was an essential part of her role as a special educator. “I am called a resource teacher, simply put, I’m supposed to be a resource to anyone who needs me! This means that it’s my job to make sure I am providing support to the general education teachers so they can make sure that all students are successful in the general education classroom. If I stop providing them support I will end up with a lot of initial evaluations of students who now possibly need special education services. My role is meant to be preventative as well.”

There were several participants that indicated that collaboration with the general education teacher was not a priority for them. These participants spoke about the challenges of collaboration as being such a strong barrier they chose not to do it.

One participant stated, “I have a caseload of 19 students and I teach across three grades. This makes it near impossible to find the time to sit down and have meaningful conversations with the general education teachers. Up until a few years ago, I would try. I would send them emails, leave notes in their mailbox, and share resources I felt would benefit kids in their classroom. The problem was, it was never reciprocated. It soon became clear to me that the general educators in my building just didn’t care what I had to offer, so I stopped wasting my time.”

The difficulty with finding time was addressed by other educators as well. “I teach five periods a day with one prep. I spend my prep every day grading essays, drafting IEP’s, completing special education evaluations, writing reports, and typing up progress reports. I don’t have a planning prep like all of the other teachers. I know the general education teachers wish I was available to meet to discuss student needs, but they understand that it is just not possible with my caseload and the way the schedule has been put into place.”

In summary, the majority of participants spoke of how they recognize the benefits of collaboration with one another, and tried to collaborate as much as possible within the parameters of their current situation. Some discussed how there were many obstacles associated with collaboration, for example, time, schedules, and personal relationships. These obstacles will be explored in more depth in section three of this chapter.

Question 2: Who would you prefer to collaborate with?

Participants were asked during the online questionnaire to rank their preference of colleagues with which to collaborate: (1) general educators, (2) special educators, (3) administrators, and (4) parents. Overall, the majority of participants preferred to collaborate with general education teachers.

Of the 34 general educators who answered the question, 53% preferred to collaborate with a general education teacher, while 41% preferred working with a special educator. Furthermore, 3% favored collaborating with administration, and 3% with parents. Similarly, data reported by the special education teachers indicate that 74% preferred to collaborate with general education teachers, while 26% favored to collaborate with fellow special educators. No special educators choose administration or parents. Once educators identified the degree to which collaboration is a priority to them, they were then asked to discuss the amount of time they collaborate with their colleagues. This data will be discussed in the following section.

Question 3: How much time do you spend collaborating?

In looking to determine the degree collaboration is valued, participants were asked to discuss the amount of time they spend collaborating. The general educators were asked to answer the question based upon their collaboration with special educators, and special educators

were asked to report on the collaboration with general educators. Table 3 displays the percent of time per week that educators collaborate with one another.

Table 3

Amount of Time Educators Spent Per Week Collaborating

General Educators

| Amount of Time Spent Collaborating Per Week | Number of Participants | Percentage of Participants |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 0-10% | 27 | 51% |
| 11-20% | 11 | 21% |
| 21-30% | 3 | 5% |
| 31-40% | 5 | 9% |
| 41-50% | 2 | 4% |
| 51-60% | 2 | 4% |
| 61-70% | 0 | 0% |
| 71-80% | 2 | 4% |
| 81-90% | 1 | 2% |
| 91-100% | 0 | 0% |

Special Educators

| Amount of Time Spent Collaborating Per Week | Number of Participants | Time Spent Collaborating |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 0-10% | 14 | 45% |
| 11-20% | 4 | 13% |
| 21-30% | 1 | 3% |
| 31-40% | 1 | 3% |
| 41-50% | 3 | 10% |
| 51-60% | 3 | 10% |
| 61-70% | 0 | 0% |
| 71-80% | 4 | 13% |
| 81-90% | 0 | 0% |
| 91-100% | 1 | 3% |

Table 3 shows the majority of both general (51%) and special educators (45%) spent 0-10% of their week collaborating with colleagues. It is important to note that participants who

spent more than fifty percent of their time per week collaborating also reported participating in a co-teaching relationship.

Question 4: How much time would you like to spend collaborating?

Participants were also asked during the online questionnaire to indicate the amount of time they wished they spent collaborating with their general or special education colleague.

Table 4 displays the percent of time educators wished they spent collaborating.

Table 4

Amount of Time Per Week Educators Wish to Spend Collaborating

General Educators

| Amount of Time Spent Collaborating Per Week | Number of Participants | Percentage of Participants |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 0-10% | 10 | 19% |
| 11-20% | 10 | 19% |
| 21-30% | 8 | 15% |
| 31-40% | 7 | 13% |
| 41-50% | 4 | 8% |
| 51-60% | 5 | 9% |
| 61-70% | 1 | 2% |
| 71-80% | 4 | 8% |
| 81-90% | 3 | 5% |
| 91-100% | 1 | 2% |

Special Educators

| Amount of Time Spent Collaborating Per Week | Number of Participants | Time Spent Collaborating |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------|
| 0-10% | 0 | 0% |
| 11-20% | 8 | 26% |
| 21-30% | 8 | 26% |
| 31-40% | 1 | 3% |
| 41-50% | 2 | 5% |
| 51-60% | 1 | 3% |
| 61-70% | 4 | 13% |
| 71-80% | 2 | 7% |
| 81-90% | 2 | 7% |

91-100%

3

10%

Table 4 shows that the majority of general educators (38%) wish to collaborate with their special education colleagues between 0 and 20% of the time per week, while the majority of special educators (52%) would prefer to spend between 20 and 30 percent of their week collaborating. In addition, 40% of special educators reported a desire to collaborate for 50 or more percent of their time per week, while only 26% of general educators wish to spend 50 or more percent of their time collaborating.

The majority of educators identified a discrepancy in the amount of time they do collaborate and the amount of time they would like to collaborate. Figure 2 shows the percent of educators who indicated a desire to either increase or decrease the amount of time they collaborate with their colleagues.

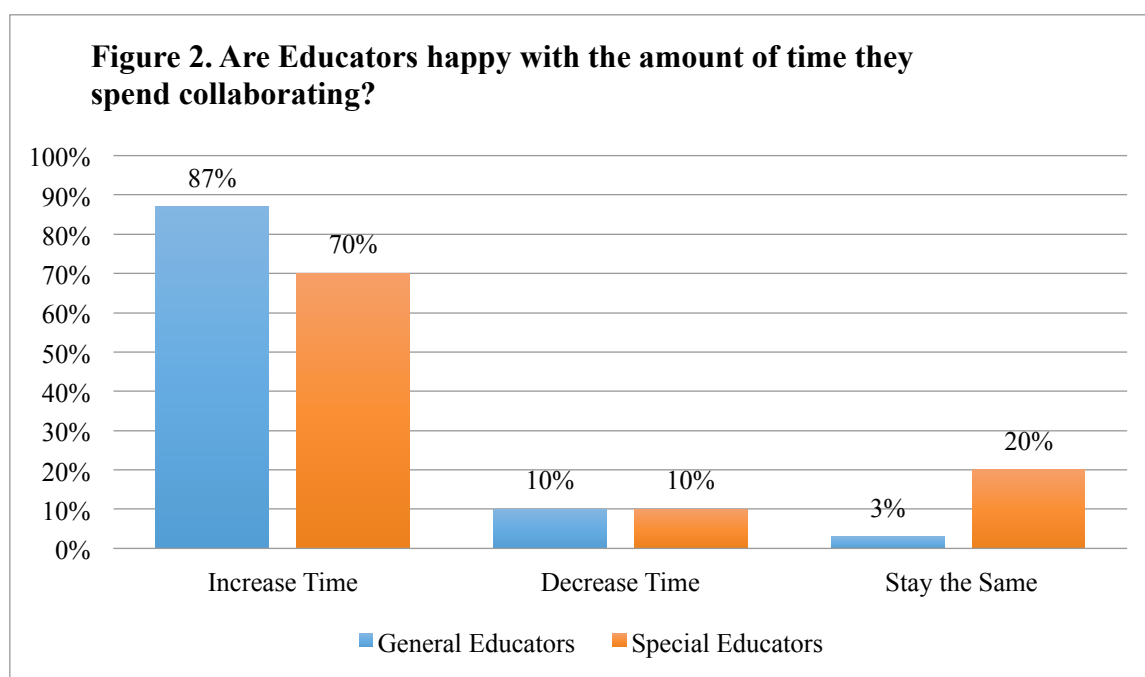


Figure 2 displays the percentage of educators who are satisfied with the amount of time they spend collaborating with their colleagues. Data indicated that 70% of general educators

wished to increase their collaboration time, while 20% were satisfied with the amount of time they spend collaborating, and 10% wished they spent less time collaborating. Similarly, 87% of special education teachers wished to increase the amount of time they spend collaborating, while 3% were satisfied with the amount of time, and 10% wished to reduce the amount of time they spend collaborating.

In looking at the data collected from the participants who wished to decrease the amount of time spent collaborating, the theme of interpersonal relationships emerged. Several of the participants had colleagues they did not get along with. Two participants stated that administration had become involved to mediate the relationship. The obstacles faced within their relationships included a lack of shared goals, personality conflicts, as well as a lack of respect for one's work ethic.

One general education teacher stated, "She never is prepared and says she will do things, but it never gets done. Her mind is in other places." Another general education teacher stated that the special educator does not have high enough standards for the students. This participant explained, "The special education teacher just complains by saying, 'the kids can't do that, it's too hard.' We never seem to agree on anything."

The special educators have more difficulty with general educators being flexible in their teaching strategies. One special educator stated, "The general education teacher is such a control freak she refuses to even listen to what I have to say." Another stated, "I would love to say we collaborate, but in reality, the general education teacher just yesses me to death, but never follows through on any of the ideas."

On the contrary, several other participants felt they could reduce the amount of time spent collaborating, not due to conflict, but because the relationship they have with their colleague is

so strong they did not really need to dedicate as much time to collaborating. These individuals had worked together for an extended period of time and had grown to know and understand one another's role. Over time, they had put supports in place and established a routine that did not warrant as much collaboration. They met often because they enjoyed one another's company and preferred to have conversations face-to-face rather than electronically.

The amount of time spent on collaboration can be indicative of the degree to which one values collaboration. Overall, the majority of both general and special education teachers spent between zero and ten percent of their time collaborating per week. In addition, the majority of participants wished to increase their time spent collaborating with their counterpart, although several obstacles did impact educators' desire to collaborate. The degree to which the benefits of collaboration outweigh the obstacles are discussed further in the following section.

Question 5: To what degree do the benefits of collaboration outweigh obstacles?

Question four was collected using the online questionnaire. All of the educators who participated in the questionnaire indicated that collaboration did come with obstacles, but there are also benefits. The benefits and obstacles will be further discussed later in the chapter.

Using a four point Likert scale, participants were asked to identify the degree they felt the benefits of collaboration outweighed the obstacles. Figure 3 shows the degree to which educators believe the benefits of collaboration outweigh the obstacles.

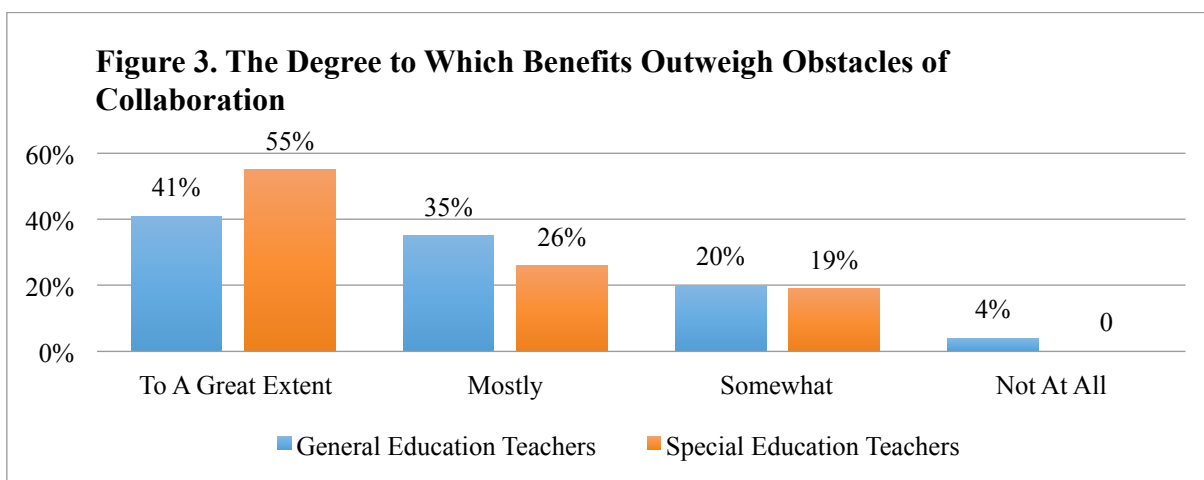


Figure 3 shows that the majority of both general (41%) and special educators (55%) agreed that the benefits of collaboration did outweigh the obstacles to a great extent, while 35% of general educators and 26% of special educators stated they mostly outweighed the obstacles, 20% of general educators and 19% of special educators stated they sometimes outweighed the obstacles, and 4% of general education teachers report they did not outweigh the obstacles.

Many educators who believed the benefits of collaboration heavily outweighed the obstacles spoke of the unique expertise of their colleague. For example, several general educators felt that although not all special educators are knowledgeable about specific content, their ability to help students access the curriculum was essential. In addition, special educators reported that the general educators' expertise in specific content areas had been quite invaluable in making sure all students are supported in class.

When examining the general education participant data on the benefits outweighing the obstacles, the theme of content knowledge surfaced. Several general educators mentioned that the special education teachers are often not comfortable in all content areas, therefore they do not feel collaborating with them is helpful. One general educator stated, "I teach math and I find that most special education teachers are not as comfortable teaching math. They would prefer to

work with their special education students in other content areas like English Language Arts. I find that I am sharing many of the approaches, strategies and knowledge about math with them.” Several general educators commented that finding special education teachers that are comfortable enough with the content to develop lesson plans is quite rare.

Several themes emerged from the special education teacher data as well, including workload and flexibility. Two participants indicate their colleagues insisted that time to collaborate was more work on their plate and refused to try. Another participant stated that the general educators in their building were not flexible in trying new approaches or strategies, regardless of the effort put forth by them. Finally, one participant discussed how, in their experience, the general educator mentality tended to be “my kids or your kids” and was unwilling to work as a team.

When looking to determine what degree the benefits of collaboration outweigh the obstacles, one must also take into account the degree they feel other teachers can help them. In summary, the majority of general and special educators believed that the benefits of collaboration were worthwhile, while some also acknowledged that the obstacles associated with working with colleagues can be daunting and impacted their desire to collaborate. The following section will outline the degree to which educators feel their colleagues are a beneficial resource in their own professional teaching and learning.

Question 6: To what degree do you value the general or special education teacher as a resource?

Both general and special educators were asked to report on the degree they valued their colleague as a resource during the online questionnaire. The majority of general (63%) and special educators (68%) valued their colleague to a great extent. General educators felt that

although special education teachers often lacked in their content knowledge, they made up for it with their expertise in individual student differences. The strategies special educators provided for individual student needs were often very beneficial. More specifically, they had the ability to design lessons to engage students with specific disabilities.

Special educators felt that although general educators were typically proficient in content area, they lacked the skills necessary to reach all learners. Several participants discussed the benefit of having different teaching styles in the classroom that allowed students access to the curriculum more efficiently. Other special education teachers spoke about how collaboration with the general education teacher helped to keep them on track with the rigorous standards and assessments that need to be conducted.

On the contrary, there were numerous participants whom indicated that their colleagues were not always a valuable resource. One general education participant spoke about the miscommunication that was frequent within her relationship. Specifically, the special educator often misunderstood the content being taught and was not able to support in lesson development. In addition, participants that somewhat valued their colleague as a resource also acknowledged that their level of expertise was a moderate problem within their relationship. In addition, several participants failed to see eye-to-eye on the goals and objectives for student learning within their relationships.

Special education teachers reported that the flexibility of the general education teacher often impacted the degree they found them to be of value. Several participants also believed their general education colleagues were biased against students with disabilities and often assumed students were just lazy, rather than struggling in the classroom due to a learning disability. Finally, two participants discussed the issue of parity within their collaborative

relationship. If new ideas were to be implemented in their classroom, these educators were responsible for creating and assessing the lessons entirely on their own.

In conclusion, the degree to which teachers value collaboration with one another is greatly impacted by their attitude towards students with disabilities as well as the interpersonal relationships that existed between them. The majority of both general and special educators valued collaboration a great deal, although they may not always collaborate to the degree they wished. The next section will explore whether educators value the feedback they receive from their general and special education colleagues.

Question 7: To what degree do you value the feedback of the general or special education teacher?

The degree to which feedback from their colleagues was valued was explored during the online questionnaire. Throughout the questionnaire, the theme of having specific expertise was continually discussed among participants. General educators believed they were content experts, while the special educators were experts in finding ways to help students access the curriculum. Likewise, the special educators reported the same. Since the majority of the participants identified their colleagues as having expertise that they lacked, it was not surprising that most participants did value the feedback they receive from their colleagues. Fifty seven percent of general educators valued the feedback from the special educators to a great extent, while 25% mostly valued their feedback, and finally, 18% somewhat valued their feedback. The majority of special educators mostly (55%) valued the feedback from the general education teachers, while 42% valued their feedback to a great extent, and only 3% somewhat valued their feedback.

It is important to note that general education teachers who reported they somewhat value the feedback from their colleague also indicated that the skill level of the special education

teacher was a minor to moderate problem. In addition, the only special educator that somewhat valued the feedback from their general educator mentioned that the general education teacher they worked with was, “inflexible and resistant to change.”

In conclusion, most general and special educators did value their colleagues’ feedback as they recognized that their colleagues have a different skill set that was essential to student learning. The following section will discuss the degree educators were willing to adjust their teaching practices based upon the feedback they receive from their colleagues.

Question 8: To what degree are you willing to adjust your teaching practices based on feedback from your general or special education colleague?

To further explore the degree teachers value collaboration, participants were asked during the online questionnaire to discuss their willingness to utilize the feedback they receive. Figure 4 shows the degree to which participants were willing to adjust their teaching strategies based upon the feedback they received from their colleagues.

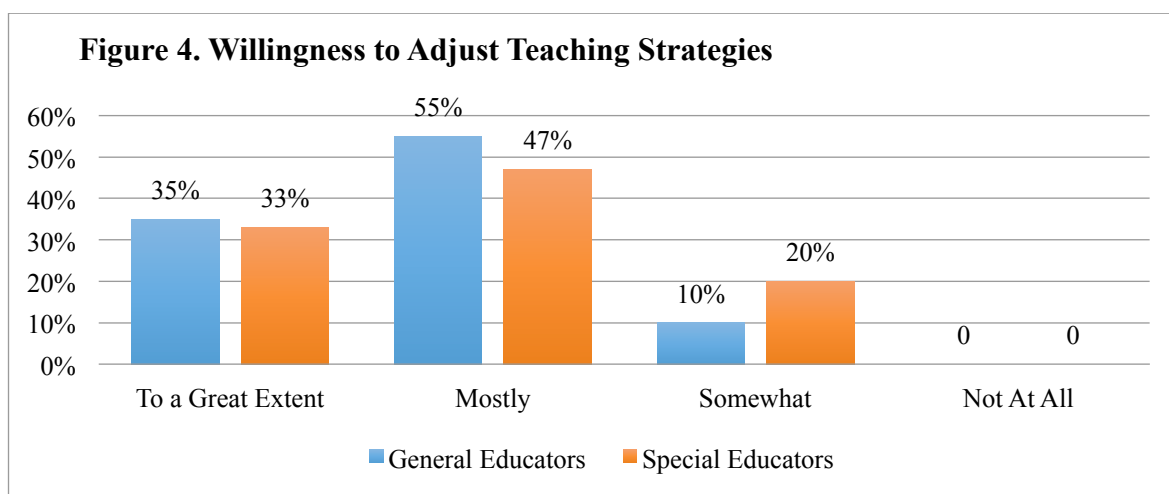


Figure 4 shows that all participants were willing to adjust their teaching practices to some degree. The majority of both general (55%) and special educators (47%) were mostly willing to adjust their strategies.

To gain more insight as to why educators are hesitant at times to adjust their teaching strategies based upon the feedback they receive, this question was followed up within the participant interviews. General education teachers reported that although the expertise of the special education teacher was helpful in making the curriculum more accessible to students with disabilities, the special educators often dismissed the curriculum demands placed on teachers by the administration and the Department of Education. These participants further explained that they did not have the luxury of spending a great deal of time on each standard due to the new, and more rigorous, state standards. One general educator stated, “The special education teacher wants every lesson to be a four day, hands-on, activity. This sounds great in theory; in reality, we just don’t have that kind of time.”

When the special educators were asked why they might be hesitant to implement new strategies into their classroom, they indicated that the general education teacher’s expectations were often set too high. “Some of the ideas they give me sound great for an average student, but would be much too difficult for my kids to break down and complete. I’ve tried some of her activities and it ended up being more work for me and less for the kids,” replied one special educator. Other participants felt the advice they received from the general education teacher did not always take into account the vast level of student needs within their classroom.

The following section will discuss the degree participants were willing to utilize resources given to them by their colleagues.

Question 9: How often do you utilize strategies and resources given to you by the general or special education teacher?

In the previous section, participants indicated the degree they were willing to adjust instructional practices within the classroom based upon the feedback they received from their

colleagues. This section will explore the extent to which participants utilized the strategies or resources given to them.

Within the online questionnaire, participants were given a five-point Likert scale to explore the frequency in which they utilize resources and strategies provided by their colleagues. The scale ranged from (1) to a great extent, (2) most of the time, (3) sometimes, (4) not at all, and (5) not at all: I am not given resources and strategies to use. The majority of both general and special educators utilized resources and strategies most of the time. This was consistent with the data regarding their willingness as discussed in the previous section.

Although no participants reported that they never implement strategies and resources that were given to them because they are unwilling, there were several percipients that were not provided with resources by their colleague to utilize.

This question was also followed up on during participant interviews. General educators indicated that they tried to implement new strategies and activities that are provided to them as much as possible, however, since the class sizes between general and special education differ, they did not always translate well. Participants also mentioned that the activities provided did not always fit the majority of student needs and felt those activities were better suited for a special education classroom.

The special education teachers provided similar responses. One participant stated that the activities provided by the general education teacher were often difficult to modify enough to use at the level her students were working. Another participant shared that in her experience the general education teachers did not do a lot of hands on work in the classroom and she doesn't feel her students will benefit from the bookwork activities she is provided.

There was one special educator who participated in the interview portion of the study that stated the general educator did not provide her with any strategies or resources to use. When asked whether she had approached this colleague about sharing resources, she responded, “No. Honestly, I don’t agree with her teaching strategies in the classroom and I really don’t think she understands the needs of special education students. I don’t think she has anything of value to offer me anyway.”

The majority of general and special educators who participated in the study were willing and did utilize the teaching strategies and resources provided to them most of the time. From speaking with several of the participants during the interviews, it was clear that the frequency they chose to utilize these resources, such as modified tests, or differentiated lessons was dependent upon the type of resource and the level of student needs within their classroom.

Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question One

Research Question One sought to identify the degree to which general and special education teachers value collaboration with one another. In looking to determine the degree educators value collaboration with one another, the collaborative behaviors of teachers were analyzed. This included their collaborative preferences, the amount of time spent collaborating, the degree they value their colleagues as a resource, the degree they value their colleagues feedback, and the degree they were willing and able to utilize strategies and resources received from their colleagues.

Overall, both general and special educators valued collaboration with one another, but the degree to which they were able to collaborate effectively was greatly impacted by their ability to overcome collaborative obstacles. The factors that were preventing educators from effectively collaborating will be discussed in more depth when research question three is presented.

In analyzing the data to determine the degree to which educators value collaboration with one another, I organized the responses according to three categories: (a) specific expertise, (b) conflict, (c) and time.

Specific expertise. Both the general and special education teachers spoke often regarding the expertise of their general or special education colleagues. General education teachers discussed the unique skill set of the special educators in regards to their ability to help students access the grade level curriculum. They discussed how special education teachers are able to provide students with specific strategies and learning models that allow students to be successful in the general education classroom. Likewise, the special education teachers held the general educators in high regards for their expertise in content knowledge. Both groups of educators discussed how their colleagues' skills were able to support their own teaching and learning in areas they lacked.

Conflict. Conflict between colleagues emerged as a factor that impacted the degree teachers value collaboration. Some educators experienced relationships where they did get along with their colleague. Some teachers reported personality conflicts and differences in teaching philosophy and goals. Educators who had such negative experiences indicated they did not value the collaboration with their general or special education colleague very much. On the contrary, teachers who had not experienced such conflict indicated they valued collaboration with their colleague a great deal.

Time. The theme of time surfaced throughout the analysis. Every participant indicated that time is a key factor that prohibits effective collaboration from taking place. The majority of participants reported they do value collaboration, but time prevents it from being a high priority for them. Many educators spoke about how the increased workload and demands on classroom

teachers have greatly limited the amount of time they have for collaboration. In the following section two findings for Research Question One are discussed.

Finding #1: General and special education teachers value different types and degrees of collaborating with one another.

The general and special education teachers responded positively to the question of whether they value collaboration with one another. All participants agree that collaboration has important benefits and is often what is best for student success. Participants spoke frequently of the specialized expertise of their coworker as an asset to their own professional learning and teaching. General education teachers referred to special educators as experts in helping students to access curriculum that is often too difficult for them. They spoke of how special educators often approach teaching through the lens of how a student learns, rather than what a student needs to learn. Furthermore, they acknowledged how important it is for special educators to share their understanding of specific student disabilities and how they affect each student differently.

Special educators also spoke highly of the expertise of the general education teacher. Special education teachers commented that their teacher training typically encompasses the realm of student disabilities, but often lacks in curriculum planning and development. Many special educators spoke of how they are not comfortable with the majority of the new content standards students need to be taught, and rely heavily on the content knowledge of the general education teacher to plan and develop daily lessons for students. Special education teachers mimicked the response of the general education teachers by stating that their expertise lies in helping students adapt to challenges, while the general education teacher's expertise is in delivering specific content knowledge.

The expertise that general and special educators are able to provide one another has been shown affect the degree to which educators are willing to collaborate as well. Both general and special education teachers mostly value the feedback they receive from their colleagues, therefore they are willing to utilize the feedback to inform the instruction within their classroom. This also holds true in regards to utilizing strategies and resources given to them by their colleagues.

Both general and special educators also identified the collaboration with one another as more valuable than the collaboration that takes place with parents and administration. In fact, the majority of educators reported they find greater value in collaborating with one another than with administrators and parents. The lack of collaboration between these stakeholders can have a significant impact on the learning that takes place within the classroom for all students and impacts the degree to which they value collaboration as a whole.

Finding #2: The degree to which educators value collaboration does not always correlate to the amount of time teachers spend collaborating.

General and special education teachers report that they do value the collaboration with one another, but their collaborative behaviors do not always support this claim. Data from the study indicated that the majority of teachers only collaborate between zero and ten percent of the time, although most wish they could collaborate more. This shows a significant discrepancy in the degree to which they state they value collaboration and the degree to which they do collaborating with one another. Both general and special education teachers complain that there are too many obstacles hindering their ability to effectively collaborate with colleagues.

During the interviews, the majority of participants spoke of how highly valued collaboration was, but there were too many obstacles getting in the way of effective

collaboration with their colleague. For many, having the time to meet was a major problem. “I rarely even see the special education teacher during the week,” commented one general educator, “her caseload is too large to have the time to meet with me.” A special education teacher responded similarly, “The day to day priorities are overwhelming for all the teachers. It’s not that I don’t want to meet with the general education teacher more, we just don’t have time to make it a regular thing.” Participants indicated that although collaboration did not occur as frequently as they would have liked within their current setting, they recognized the benefits and wished they were able to make it more of a priority. “When we do find the time to sit down and discuss the students, it’s clear that we can really help one another out. I am able to develop engaging lessons for the students, but I really need her help to bring the material down to the level that the student can access. When we are able to do it together things run so much smoother,” replied a general education teacher. Another general educator added, “I know how important it is to find the time to sit down with the special education teacher and get her perspective on the students, it’s just so hard to find time. It should be a priority, and we want it to be more frequent, we just can’t seem to figure out how to make it happen as often as we would like.”

Research Question Two: What Are Various Ways General and Special Educators Report They Collaborate With One Another?

With the enactment of No Child Left Behind (Bush & Department of Education, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (DOE, 2006), collaboration has been in the forefront of educational discourse (Yell et al., 2006). There has been an abundance of research done exploring the ways in which educators collaborate together, but few studies have focused on the collaboration between general and special education teachers (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend et al.,

2010; Keefe & Moore, 2004; Ripley, 1997; M. K. Smith & Smith, 2000; Van Garderen et al., 2012; Weiss et al., 2015). Research question two was designed to identify the ways in which general and special education teachers collaborate in today's schools. In determining the ways in which educators are utilizing their time together, I hoped to gain insight as to what aspects of teachers' jobs they feel they need the most support with. In addition, research question two may provide information to support question one in looking to identify the degree to which educators value collaboration.

Four questions in the online questionnaire sought to identify the ways in which educators collaborate. Questions one and four were open-ended and allowed participants an opportunity to relate their experiences with collaboration.

Based upon the literature review and my own personal experiences, I hypothesized that the general education teachers utilized the special education staff for support in implementing individual education plans (IEPs) and modifying curriculum. I also hypothesized that the special education teachers sought support from the general education teachers primarily to increase their content knowledge. The following section presents the four questions participants were asked regarding the ways in which they collaborate.

Question 1: How would you define collaboration?

Collaboration is a term that is widely used in education, but the definition varies across educators (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). This section outlines the ways in which participants define the term collaboration and how the definitions vary across educator roles.

During the questionnaire, participants were given an open-ended question asking them to define collaboration. The majority of educators identified collaboration as the act of working together towards a common goal. One educator was quoted saying that collaboration was,

“Working together to create a learning environment that puts our students needs first and allows our students to grow academically as well as personally.” Another was quoted saying, “Collaboration means having discussions regularly to determine what is in the best interest of each child.” Other common responses included, “Sharing ideas and innovation.” Several participants identified collaboration as a, “partnership between two individuals where we can share knowledge, experiences, and expertise.”

Since no two answers were identical, coding was used to organize similar answers according to seven themes. The themes included (1) working towards a common goal, (2) planning lessons and assessments together, (3) maximizing the success of all students, (4) sharing information, ideas, and expertise, (5) differentiating instruction, (6) sharing responsibilities, and (7) varying perspectives coming together. Figure 5 identifies the frequency in which general and special educators responses included these themes.

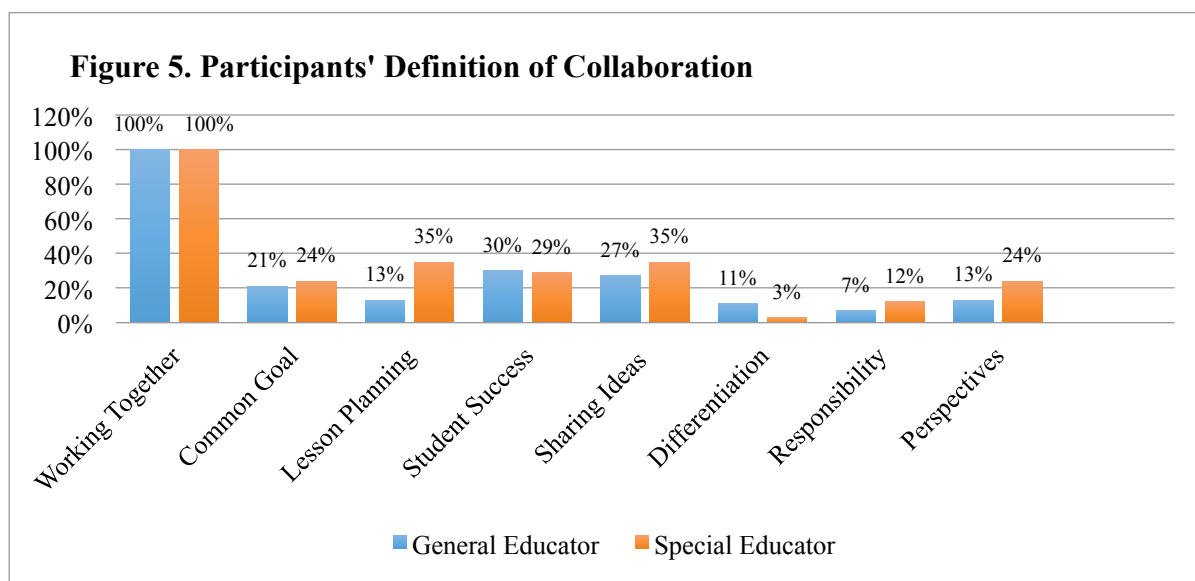


Figure 5 shows that all participants described collaboration as the act of working together. Specifically, the majority of general educators (30%) identified collaboration as working toward student success. Twenty-seven percent of general educators also believed that

collaboration is the act of sharing ideas, information, and expertise. The special educators' definition of collaboration was heavily focused on the act of mutually developing lesson plans (35%), and sharing ideas information and expertise with one another (35%). They also stressed the importance of collaboration as being what is best to support all learners in the classroom (29%)

Other themes identified within the definitions include the importance of having educators with different perspectives and pedagogical theories coming together to enhance student learning (37%) . The notion of having parity within the collaborative relationship was also expressed by 19%). The following section explores the ways in which educators reported to collaborate with colleagues.

Question 2: In what ways do you collaborate?

Within the questionnaire, participants were presented with four collaborative behaviors and asked to identify all that were applicable to their teaching situation. The four behaviors were identified based upon a research identified in the literature review. -Educators often collaborated by (a) sharing instructional materials, (b) discussing student academic and behavioral concerns, (c) developing classroom lessons and activities, and (d) discussing instructional modifications (Christen & Hasbrouck, 1995; Donegan et al., 2000; Friend et al., 2010; Van Garderen et al., 2012). Figure 6 displays the percentage of educators that spend their time collaborating to share resources, discuss student concerns, develop lessons, and modify instruction.

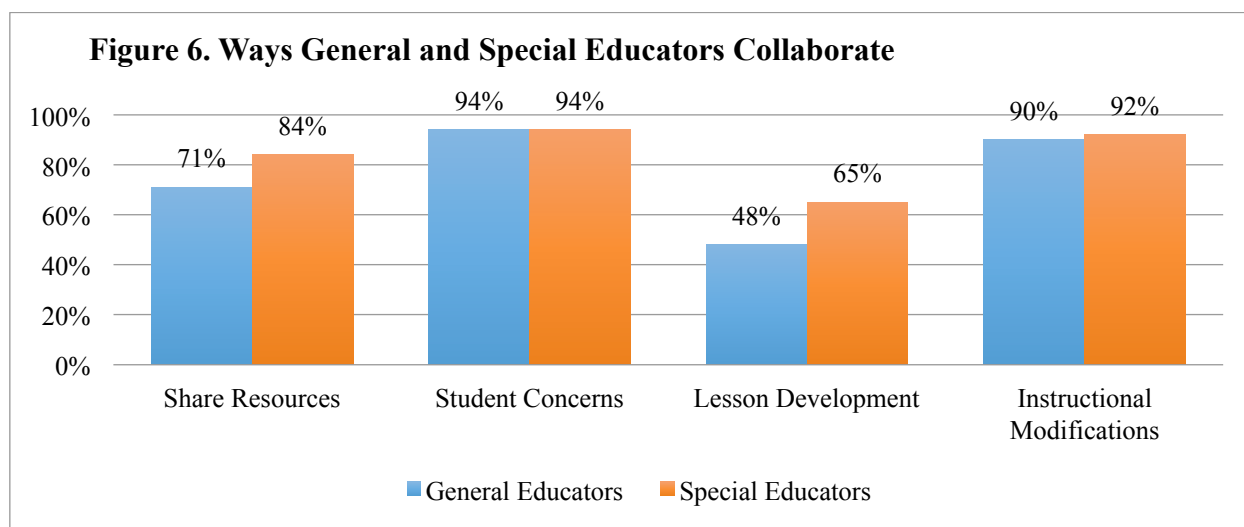


Figure 6 shows that both general and special educators collaborated in the same way. Ninety-four percent of general educators discussed student concerns with the special educators, while 92% discussed specific student modifications with the special educator. Likewise, 94% of special educators engaged in conversations with the general educators regarding student concerns, and 90% said they discussed instructional modifications with the general education teachers. A great deal of general educators (71%) and special educators (84%) also spent time sharing resources with one another. Finally, both general educators (48%) and special educators (65%) spent the least amount of time together to develop lesson plans.

The amount of time participants spent sharing resources, discussing student concerns and modifications, as well as lesson planning is explored in the following section.

Question 3: How often do you collaborate to develop lesson plans, discuss instructional modifications, exchange resources, discuss student achievement, and share expertise?

Throughout the questionnaire, participants were asked to report the frequency of their collaborative behaviors. General educators were asked to discuss the collaboration that takes place with special educators and vice versa, a four-point Likert scale was used. The behaviors

included (a) lesson plan development, (b) discussing instructional modifications, (c) exchanging resources, (d) discussing student achievement, and (e) sharing expertise.

Table 5 displays the frequency educators collaborated to develop lesson plans, discuss instructional modifications, exchange resources, discuss student achievement, and share expertise.

Table 5

Frequency of Collaborative Behaviors

| Collaborative Behavior | | % of Participants | | | | Total # of Participants |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|------------------|-----------|------------|-------------------------|
| | | To A Great Extent | Most of the Time | Sometimes | Not At All | |
| Lesson Plan Development | General Education Teacher | 8% | 8% | 41% | 43% | 51 |
| | Special Education Teacher | 10% | 17% | 56% | 17% | 30 |
| Discuss Instructional Modifications | General Education Teacher | 24% | 24% | 39% | 13% | 51 |
| | Special Education Teacher | 23% | 37% | 33% | 7% | 30 |
| Exchange Resources | General Education Teacher | 14% | 20% | 41% | 25% | 51 |
| | Special Education Teacher | 7% | 20% | 70% | 3% | 30 |
| Discuss Student Achievement | General Education | 37% | 24% | 37% | 2% | 51 |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| Share Expertise | Teacher | | | | | |
| | Special Education Teacher | 17% | 57% | 20% | 6% | 30 |
| | General Education Teacher | 10% | 26% | 43% | 21% | 51 |
| | Special Education Teacher | 6% | 33% | 57% | 4% | 30 |

Table 5 shows that the majority of general and special educators developed lesson plans, shared resources and share expertise some of the time. Special educators (93%) spent more time than general educators (87%) discussing instructional modifications, while general educators (98%) spent more time discussing student achievement than their special education colleagues (94%). The following sections further explain the data collected on each behavior.

Lesson Plan Development. The majority of general educators (43%) did not collaborate to develop lesson plans, while 41% developed lessons some of the time, 8% collaborated to lesson plan most of the time, and finally only 8% met to develop lessons a great deal of the time.

Special educators reported similar behavior. Seventeen percent of special educators collaborated to develop lessons none of the time, while 56% collaborated some of the time. In addition, 17% developed lesson plans most of the time, and only 10% lesson planed together to a great extent.

Discuss student modifications. Data collected from the general education teachers revealed that educators collaborated to discuss instructional modifications for the curriculum some of the time. The majority of general educators (39%) collaborated some of the time, while 24% collaborated most of the time, 24% collaborated to a great extent, and only 13% did not collaborate at all to discuss instructional modifications. The majority of special educators met to

discuss instructional modifications most of the time (37%), while 33% met some of the time, 23% met a great deal of the time, and only 7% did not meet to discuss instructional

Exchange resources. Both general and special educators spent some of the time exchanging resources with one another. Twenty-five percent of general educators did not exchange resource at all, while 20% did most of the time, and 14% did to a great extent. Unlike general educators, only 3% of the special educators did not exchange resources at all, while 20% spent most of their time doing so, and 70% collaborated some of the time.

Discuss student achievement. The data indicated that both general and special educators spent the majority of their collaboration time on this behavior. Thirty-seven percent of general educators spent their time discussing student achievement to a great extent, while 24% spent most of their time on this subject. In addition, 37% of educators collaborated on student achievement some of the time, while only 2% did not discuss student achievement with their colleagues at all.

The majority of special educators (57%) spent most of their time collaborating on student achievement, while 17% spent a great deal of time, 20% spent some of their time, and 6% did not spend any time collaborating on this topic.

Share expertise. The data revealed that the majority general educators (43%) spent only some of their time collaborating on this topic. Twenty-five percent of general educators spent most of their time sharing their expertise, while 10% spent a great deal of time sharing their expertise. Finally, 21% of educators did not share their expertise at all.

The majority of the special educators (57%) spent some of their time collaborating to share their expertise, while 33% spent most of their time, 7% spent a great deal of time, and only 4% do not collaborate to share their expertise.

In summary, general educators spent the majority of their time collaborating by discussing student achievement, while the special educators spent the majority of their time discussing instructional modifications. The next section discusses how educators follow up with one another after collaborating.

Question 4: How do you follow up with your colleague after collaborating?

The online questionnaire provided participants with an open-ended question in which they were asked to describe the ways they follow up with their colleague after collaborating. This question also directly relates to Research Question One: To What Degree Do General and Special Education Teachers Report They Value Collaboration With One Another?

Many educators (80%) reported that scheduling hinders the amount of collaboration that took place. For this reason, more often than not teachers did not follow up with their colleagues. Many participants spoke about utilizing hallway-passing time as an opportunity to have a quick conversation with one another when possible. One general education teacher stated, “There is no time to sit down to have real conversations, so most of the time we just find each other in the hall and have an on-the-fly chat about what is going on with the kids, what strategies that I was given have been implemented, and what isn’t working.” During the interviews, every single participant spoke of how the location of a colleague’s classroom greatly impacted the degree they were able to collaborate. Both general and special education teachers stated that by having their colleague close by they were able to collaborate with them more frequently as they pass one another in the hallway. One general education teacher stated, “Having them next door gives me constant access to report back on what is and is not working.”

Several educators (6%) indicated that they participate in a coteaching relationship and the collaboration with their colleague is ongoing throughout the day. “We tend to have a quick five

minute chat after class to debrief on what went well and what needs to be changed for the following day,” stated a special education teacher, “This happens constantly throughout the day and the week.”

Two participants had common planning time either weekly or biweekly where they sat down face-to-face with their colleague and plan out the upcoming unit. These participants stated that this planning block tended to be inconsistent.

Several participants (4%) stated they had a great deal of follow up with their colleagues despite having no time to meet during the school day. These educators used email and text as a way to keep in touch with one another. Several participants also spoke of meeting during their lunch break or before or after school.

General and special education teachers struggle to find the time to meet and follow up with their colleagues. These teachers utilized any spare time they could find to have quick conversations, send emails, or exchange notes with one another. There were only a small percent of participants that had scheduled time available to meet face-to-face to collaborate with their colleagues. For this reason, many educators were not able to follow up after collaborating.

Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question Two

Research Question Two sought to identify the ways in which general and special education teachers collaborate. General and special education teachers collaborated in the following ways: including sharing resources and expertise, lesson plan development, discussing student concerns, and discussing instructional modifications. The data revealed that educators spent most of their time (84%) together discussing student achievement, and they spent the least amount of time developing lesson plans together (61%). When asked how educators follow up with their colleagues after collaborating, many participants had quick conversations in passing,

or utilized electronic communication. Some educators had face-to-face meetings, but due to time constraints the scheduling of these meetings was inconsistent. Time available to collaborate along with other obstacles will be examined in research question three.

Having a limited time available to collaborate dominated the discussion with participants. Both general and special education teachers reported that since they had such a limited amount of time to spend collaborating, discussing student achievement was the most effective for them. Many educators (21%) expressed a desire to spend more time planning lessons, but indicated that it was quicker to have the general educator create the lesson and the special educator modify it on their own time. Educators also expressed frustration in the fact that they are often not able to follow up after collaborative meetings due to time constraints. Three findings for Research Question Two are presented next.

Findings #3: General and special education teachers broadly understand collaboration to mean working together to develop best teaching practices for all students.

The term collaboration has widely used in the field of education, yet the word has different meanings to different people. To fully understand the degree to which educators value collaboration and the ways in which they collaborate, how educators define collaboration must be identified. The term collaboration is used often in the field of collaboration; therefore, every participant had a strong understanding of the topic being studied. When asked to define the term collaboration, however, participants' responses varied slightly.

Participants in this study broadly define collaboration as two people working together to best support students. The majority of participants felt that collaboration takes place when ideas and different perspectives are shared. Some educators went further to define collaboration as sharing responsibility for classroom duties and student success. It is important to note that only

two participants discussed collaboration as two people coming together to create new ideas and solutions.

Finding # 4: General and special education teachers spend the majority of their collaboration time discussing student concerns and making instructional modifications.

The ways participants reported to collaborate connects and expands on Finding #1: participants indicated they value collaboration mainly because their coworkers have a specific skill set that they lack. General and special educators agreed that general education teachers are content experts, while special education teachers are experts in supporting students to access the curriculum.

Participants found the most value in collaborating to discuss student concerns and making instructional modifications. General education teachers indicated that they struggled to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, whereas special education teachers were quite skilled in finding strategies to work for specific students. Educators found it most helpful to have a lesson plan developed by a general educator, and then sit to modify it appropriately for specific students. Furthermore, general education teachers found these conversations helpful to prepare lessons for lower level general education students as well.

Findings # 5: General and special education teachers spend the least amount of their collaboration time developing lesson plans and sharing resources.

Since general and special education teachers agreed that special education teachers often lack content knowledge, it was not surprising they reported to spend the least amount of time together preparing lessons plans and sharing resources. Participants indicated that the special education teachers often preferred to defer to the general educator to develop lessons and they felt more comfortable making adjustments as needed. The general education teachers agreed

that they felt they were more capable of developing rigorous lessons, while they needed the support of the special educators to help modify the lessons to meet the needs of students with disabilities within the inclusive setting.

Furthermore, the general and special educators also agreed that the resources used by one another were not always appropriate for their individual classes. The general education teachers felt that the resources used by special educators were often too easy to use with the general education students, while the special education teachers felt the resources used in the general education setting were too difficult for students with disabilities.

Since general and special educators rarely work together on lesson development, the true essence of collaboration is being overlooked. Collaboration is not only the sharing of ideas and expertise, but using that shared knowledge to develop new innovative ideas. By separating the tasks within the lesson development, educators are missing out on the creation of new ideas. The factors and conditions that impact teacher collaboration will be explained in the following section.

Research Question Three: What Factors and Conditions Do General and Special Education Teachers Consider to Promote and Hinder Collaboration?

The development of greater collaboration between teachers has long been advocated in the teaching profession (Weiss et al., 2015). Specifically, the partnership between general and special education teachers has the potential to greatly impact students in the inclusive setting (Ripley, 1997). The third guiding research question explored the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration between general and special education teachers. Understanding the barriers that educators face with collaboration can provide administrators valuable information in order to facilitate more collaborative cultures within their schools.

Identifying the factors and conditions that allow teachers to effectively collaborate is also essential in fostering and sustaining collegial relationships between teachers.

The data collected from research question three is closely related to the first two guiding questions of this study. It was hoped that learning about the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration would provide insights about why educators do or do not value collaboration, and why educators choose to collaborate with colleagues the ways in which they do.

There were ten questions that sought to identify the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration between general and special education teachers. Questions one, five, six, seven, and nine were explored during the online questionnaire, while questions two, four, eight, and ten were examined during participant interviews. Question three was asked during the online questionnaire, and followed up on during participant interviews.

Based upon my own personal experiences as well as a literature review on the topic of collaboration, I hypothesized that time, parity, personality conflicts, and expertise would be identified as the factors that promote and hinder collaboration among educators.

Question 1: What are the benefits of collaboration?

During the online questionnaire, participants were presented an open-ended question regarding what they felt were the benefits of collaboration. Each participant had unique collaborative experiences, but the benefits discussed were widely similar. Participants often spoke of collaboration as allowing them to increase their ability to teach students at all levels and adapt the curriculum for individual needs, give them insight into new teaching pedagogy, and new instructional strategies. I have organized those data into four categories: (1) meeting the

needs of all learners, (2) different perspectives, (3) different types of expertise, and (4) sharing strategies.

Many general education participants reported that collaboration with special education teachers had the potential to benefit all students in the classroom. “Knowing that so many students can benefit from us working together really makes it worth it,” stated one participant. Another participant spoke of value in students recognizing when they had a team of teachers working with them. “When there are two teachers working together, students are given more access to the curriculum, and they are willing to work harder.”

Having the perspective of two educators with different backgrounds and perspectives was also a benefit of collaboration. Both general and special educators spoke of the importance of having a colleague share new ideas and receive thoughtful feedback. “The special education teacher always has innovative ways to make my lesson accessible to lower level students,” responded one general education participant. A special education teacher stated, “Sometimes I have tunnel vision and I only think about what is best for a small number of students in the room, but the general education teacher is able to help me broaden the lesson to reach more students.” According to these participants, having an alternate perspective when developing lessons and strategies to implement in the classroom was an asset to both general and special educators.

Participants elaborated on the importance of having different perspectives by specifying that the expertise of their colleague was essential in their own professional learning and teaching. The general education teachers spoke highly of the special educators’ ability to specialize instruction for specific students. “She provides a new perspective and a different way to look at ideas,” explained one general education teacher. They also appreciated their knowledge of student disabilities and the strategies that would best service student needs. Special education

teachers reported not having expertise in specific content areas and felt the collaboration with the general education teacher was essential in assuring student progress.

Finally, both general and special education teachers agreed that the ability to share resources and strategies with colleagues was helpful. General educators reported, “We are constantly sharing strategies to best teach all students,” and “Her knowledge and skill set adds to my own so we can create new engaging lessons.”

General and special educators have recognized the myriad advantages of collaboration with one another. Educators found collaboration to be useful as it allowed them access to expertise, varied perspectives on student needs, new resources and strategies, and helped them to meet the diverse needs of all students more effectively.

Question 2: What collaborative experiences have you had that were positive?

During participant interviews educators were asked to describe a time they collaborated with their general or special education colleague that resulted in great success. From those interviews, three themes surfaced: sharing expertise, time, and shared responsibility.

Sharing expertise. General and special education teachers spoke often regarding the specialized expertise of their colleagues. Having the ability to work with colleagues who are willing to share new ideas, strategies, and knowledge were said to be valuable when working with students of varying levels. One particular general education teacher spoke highly about her special education colleague as she reminisced,

The first language based special educator I ever worked with was extraordinary. She had the ability to predict where my students would struggle, but she was also good at picking my brain for ways to push students. She was always giving me ideas for the classroom and was willing to take initiative and get stuff done. I wish all teachers were like her!

This particular example of sharing professional knowledge mimicked what many educators explained as a key element to effective collaboration: the ability to work together towards a shared goal by utilizing the strengths of colleagues. In addition, utilizing the different strengths of each educator is vital for student success. For example, another general education teacher stated, “If a student is struggling with grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc., as the content specialist, I am more likely to help the student. My coteacher is more likely to help with challenges such as organization of ideas and transitional words.”

The special education teachers included that the content knowledge of the general education teachers was helpful in making sure their students were successful in all classes.

I don’t always know what to teach, but I’m really good at knowing how to teach it. The general education teacher is a big help to make sure I am hitting all the standards and using the correct vocabulary, etc. and I’m really good at making sure I’m tapping into all the different learning styles that are sitting in front of me. Together we make the perfect teacher!

By utilizing the different strengths that general and special education teachers have, educators are able to adapt their lessons more effectively to ensure student learning. The educators who spoke about using one another’s expertise noted that having the time to collaborate was an essential element to the success of their collaborative relationship.

Time. All participants identified time as an important factor that leads to effective collaboration. The majority of special education teachers who spoke of having strong collaborative relationships explained they had the opportunity to work with a smaller number of general education teachers. By limiting the amount of teachers they needed to collaborate with they were able to build stronger bonds, and dedicate more time to each relationship.

For example, one special education teacher commented,

I feel like this year has been the most effective in terms of collaborating with the general education teachers. In the past I did push in services in all subjects, but this year we departmentalized and now I only work with the math and reading teachers. Now that I only have to collaborate with two teachers it is so much easier to be focused and get stuff done. I've also gotten to know these two teachers much better than I had in the past. Having the time to spend with them has really improved our ability to work alongside on another.

Many educators spoke about having the opportunity to work with the same colleague over a long period of time led to more effective collaborative experiences. One teacher stated, "time and longevity help a relationship a lot. I've had the opportunity work with the same colleague for 10 years now and we are now able to work as one unit. Working together for a long time has helped our classroom relationship immensely." Educators explained that by working with the same colleague over a longer period of time they were able to get to know the person's teaching style and their personality better. The longer they worked together the more apt they were to let themselves be vulnerable, trust one another, as well as try new strategies. For many educators, the longer they worked together the more likely they were to share responsibilities within the classroom as well.

Sharing responsibility. Teachers identified having a colleague willing to share responsibility as a factor in a successful collaborative relationship. Both general and special education teachers agreed that having a general educator who is willing to create activities and assessments, and a special educator who is willing and able to modify those to meet the needs of specific students makes their work easier. This collaboration ties into their ability to utilize one

another's unique skill set. These educators spoke about how time consuming each of their roles as a teacher is, and having the ability to split their work with a colleague is very helpful. One particular special educator discussed how she is able to split the workload even when time prevents face-to-face collaboration:

Last year we started a Chromebook initiative at my school and a great deal of teachers started using Google Drive and Google Classroom. This has been great since we don't have a lot of time to sit and meet. The teachers have shared their folders with me and put me on as an administrator for their Google Classroom. Having a shared folder allows me to view past assessments, study guides, assignments, and PowerPoints. I am able to access and pull the information I need to create effective review materials for my students without having to go "bug" the teacher for it. As an administrator on their Google Classroom sites, I am able to view who has and has not turned in work, and actually view the work they passed in.

Other examples of sharing responsibility included lesson development and implementation. Many teachers reported how nice it was when their colleagues would split the workload with them. For example, they may take turns in developing new instructional lessons, or create new classroom games or activities to use as supplemental material. The majority of participants indicated that they found it helpful not to be responsible for planning the entire curriculum independently. In addition, these educators also expressed gratitude when their colleague was willing to take turns leading classroom lessons, as it provided a way to serve more students.

This year the general education math teacher wanted to try something new and develop a schedule where she would get to see all the fifth-grade students on Fridays. She asked

me if I would be interested in helping her out to make Fridays an opportunity for kids to work through a variety of math centers to review concepts. Our rooms are adjoining so we open up the doors and I take some groups in my room and some stay in her room. The door stays open and the kids just rotate through the centers. This has been great because now I also get to work with some of the general education kids and she gets to see more of the students on IEPs. The kids have really loved it and they also get to see how we work together. Having two people to create all these centers has also saved us both a lot of time.

All the participants interviewed were eager to share the positive experiences they had collaborating with their colleagues. The stories included trying out new ideas, creating engaging lessons, finding creative ways to share resources, and letting themselves be vulnerable by asking for support. For some, this was the only story of success they have had collaborating, but it left a powerful mark on them, and has driven them to continue to strive for more collaborative experiences with their colleagues. Along with the invaluable benefits, participants also spoke often about the challenges associated with collaboration. The challenges that educators have encountered will be discussed further in the next section.

Question 3: What obstacles do you face when collaborating?

Five common obstacles of collaboration were identified through the literature review and pilot study. The inhibitors included (1) time, (2) expertise level, (3) personality, (4) shared goals, and (5) communication. The online questionnaire asked participants to report the degree each obstacle was a problem in their collaborative relationship. Communication skills and the amount of equity within collaborative relationships were also explored.

Table 6 shows the degree to which educators reported each collaborative obstacle to be a

problem within their current setting.

Table 6

Degree to which educators find obstacles to be a problem in their setting

| Collaborative Obstacles | | Problematic Indicator | | | | Total # of Participants |
|-------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|---------------|------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|
| | | Not a Problem | Minor Problem | Moderate Problem | Serious Problem | |
| Time | General Educator | 17% | 20% | 20% | 43% | 51 |
| | Special Educator | 37% | 23% | 17% | 23% | 30 |
| Expertise Level | General Educator | 64% | 22% | 10% | 4% | 51 |
| | Special Educator | 93% | 7% | 0% | 0% | 30 |
| Personality | General Educator | 75% | 13% | 8% | 4% | 51 |
| | Special Educator | 80% | 7% | 13% | 0% | 30 |
| Shared Goals | General Educator | 60% | 24% | 14% | 2% | 51 |
| | Special Educator | 50% | 40% | 7% | 3% | 30 |
| Shared Responsibility | General Educator | 53% | 31% | 10% | 6% | 51 |
| | Special Educator | 37% | 47% | 9% | 7% | 30 |

Table 6 shows that of the five obstacles presented, time was the most problematic for educators to overcome as 43% of general educators and 23% of special educators rated it as a

serious problem. On the other hand, the majority of participants indicated that expertise level, personality, sharing goals, and sharing responsibility was not very problematic. The following sections elaborate on the data found for each obstacle.

Time. For the majority of participants, time was a serious problem. Almost half of the general educators (43%) and 23% of special educators found the lack of common planning time to prevent effective collaboration from occurring. During participant interviews, all 23 participants spoke of how time was problematic. In addition to not having common planning time to meet with their colleague, many participants spoke of the demands placed on special educators as a factor that also limited collaboration. Several general educators said they try not to bother the special education teacher because they had so much on their plate already. Likewise, the special education teachers spoke about the amount of paperwork associated with their role, which limited the amount of time they had available to meet with teachers.

Several educators did indicate that they had a common planning block scheduled during the day, but other priorities often got in the way of meeting with their colleague. General educators spoke about using that time to return parent phone calls, correct student work, and complete school wide initiatives. Special educators spoke of using the time to complete special education testing, conduct IEP meetings, and write student progress reports.

Whether time was not permitted during the day, or the time needed to be utilized for higher priorities, educators were struggling to find opportunities to collaborate with one another. It is important to note that many participants that complained of time as an obstacle also spoke about how they wished they had more opportunities for collaboration as they saw their colleague as a valuable asset.

Expertise. During the pilot study and the literature review, it was discovered that

teachers often looked at the general educators are content experts, while special educators were experts at helping students access the curriculum. Looking at whether participants felt the skill and expertise level of their colleague was a problem can be helpful in determining factors that prohibit collaboration as well as why educators may or may not identify collaboration as a priority. The questionnaire revealed that the majority of both general and special educators did not feel that the expertise level of their colleague was a problem. While 64% of general educators did not feel it is problematic, 22% did report the expertise level was a moderate problem, 10% was a minor problem, and 4% was a serious problem. In comparison, 93% of special educators reported the expertise level of the general education teacher was not a problem, but 7% indicated it was a minor problem. No special educators felt it was a moderate or serious problem.

In looking at the 22% of general educators that felt the special educator's level of expertise was a moderate problem, the topic of content knowledge surfaced. Throughout the questionnaire and the interviews, many general educators spoke about how the special educator lacked in-depth knowledge of the content standards. General educators expressed frustration that the special educators were not able to provide more support because they were not comfortable with the content. Some educators expressed understanding by explaining that special education prep programs were not heavily focused on content classes, whereas general education prep programs were heavily focused on content classes.

During participant interviews, the topic of work ethic arose. Several participants discussed how their colleagues were not able to perform to the level in which they desire. These participants were asked to clarify whether their colleague lacked the expertise to perform at such a level, or whether their work ethic was in question. All participants indicated that their

colleagues' work ethic was not a problem, but instead they lacked the skills as a result of their schooling or the types of professional development they had participated in.

The majority of general and special education teachers (80%) understood that the roles of their colleagues differ greatly, as do the requirements for teacher licensure. Participants expressed some frustration that some colleagues did not have as much expertise as they wished, but they recognized that they too lack in some areas. For many educators, being able to recognize the strengths and weaknesses within themselves and their colleagues impacted the degree to which they valued their collaborative relationships. Personality conflicts between colleagues can also hinder collaboration and impact how educators view collaboration.

Personality. Since collaboration requires two people to work closely with one another, conflicts can occur as a result of personality differences (Knackendoffel, 2007). The majority of participants (77%) did not feel that the personality of their colleague was problematic. Seventy five percent of general educators did not feel the personality of the special educator was a problem, 13% reported it to be a minor problem, 8% felt it was a moderate problem, and only 4% described the personality of their colleague to be a serious problem. Similarly, 80% of special educators did not feel personality is problematic, 7% found it to be a minor problem, 13% felt it was a moderate problem, and no participants reported it to be a serious problem.

The topic of personality conflicts was addressed during participant interviews as well. Several interview participants indicated that the personality of their colleague was problematic at times. Teachers spoke about the work ethic of their colleague and their inflexibility as factors that impact the degree they get along.

Several general and special education teachers discussed how their colleagues were not always willing to share the workload in class. One particular teacher spoke about how her

special education colleague was not willing to contribute while in her classroom. He was unwilling to help develop lessons, grade papers, and implement lessons when asked:

I had this one special education teacher who told me he went into sped because he never had to worry about the kids being smarter than him. From that day on I just had no respect for him. He never put lessons together or offered to help in any way. Even when I asked him to do something, it just never got done. I knew he wasn't here for the right reasons, and he never tried to prove me wrong.

Another teacher spoke about how her colleague spent the majority of her time complaining about her work rather than getting any of it done. She also spoke about the frustration of having to work with a colleague who, in her words, "is here for a pay check, not for the kids." Her frustration was evident as she was quoted saying:

I know the special education teachers have a lot of work on their plate, but I'm so sick of her telling me how difficult her job is. All she does is complain that she has progress reports to write and she never gets prep time because she has so many kids to test. I feel like telling her to look around, we all have big caseloads and are overworked. All she does is complain and I really don't think she even cares how her kids are doing. I try to avoid her whenever possible. I know there are a lot of people in the building who get annoyed with her too, because she never follows through and gets anything done.

In both of these examples, the participant's frustration stemmed from the fact that their colleague was not willing to put in effort to ensure that their students were successful. Other examples of personality conflicts included having a colleague who was inflexible. Participants spoke about how difficult it is to work with someone who is unwilling to listen to new ideas or try out new strategies. One special education teacher expressed her frustration as she explained:

One of the general education teachers in my building is getting close to retirement. She has taught for so long and is so stuck in her ways that she refuses to acknowledge that anyone younger than her could ever have better ideas. She has made it clear to me that she knows what she is doing and doesn't need my help.

Contrary to this negativity, some participants described their collaborative relationships as being very positive because of the individuals they were able to work with. Several participants spoke about how their view on collaboration improved once they found colleagues who were on the same page as them. One educator explained how her outlook on collaboration became more positive once she was able to get to know her coworkers on a deeper level. She stated, "I have really gotten to know him as a person and genuinely enjoy working alongside him. We even get together for drinks after work sometimes. Becoming friends has really allowed us to become better teachers in the classroom." Another participant spoke about how his colleagues were all very dedicated to the profession and their shared passion helped bring them closer together. He explained that having other educators who were as eager to improve student achievement has increased his desire to collaborate:

The science department in our school has always had a very strong collaborative relationship. Due to scheduling across grades we rarely have free time during the day to meet, so for the past five years we have met before school every Friday morning. We switch off who brings in breakfast and who creates the agenda. During the meetings we discuss student progress, unit plans, and other classroom issues. Until last year it was only general educators who came to these meetings, but last year one of the special education teachers asked if they could stop by. Since then two other special education teachers have come to a few meetings as well. Their input into our unit plans has been

helpful and they have also been able to bring some of our conversations into the meetings with the other general educators. Over the past year I have even teamed up with the English Language Arts teacher to create a unit. That would never have been possible if it weren't for the help of the special education teacher. She is always willing to go the extra mile and really loves her job. She is just very approachable and easy to work with.

After hearing the stories of the participants, it was evident that the personality of the general and special education teacher they work with greatly impacts the degree to which they value collaboration. Those who spoke of having positive experiences had grown to appreciate their colleagues' contributions as well as learn from others' expertise. Those who have had negative experiences with their colleagues were less apt to value collaboration and are less willing to work to overcome the obstacles. The following section discusses the extent to which general and special educators have shared goals within the classroom.

Shared goals. Another obstacle to collaboration that was identified during the literature review was that educators do not always have a shared vision. The degree to which general and special education teachers have shared goals was explored during the questionnaire. The majority of general education (60%) and special education (50%) teachers did not feel that it was a problem within their collaborative relationship. During participant interviews, many educators described their colleague as "being on the same page" most of the time. Another educator was quoted saying, "We want the same things, although we don't always agree on how to get there."

Several general educators (24%) and special educators (40%) expressed that having shared goals was a minor problem in their relationship. One general educator described her relationship as being "full of disagreements," and explained that, "our philosophies about teaching are just too different. We never agree on anything." Several special educators also

discussed the philosophy and perspectives of their general education colleagues to be so different they have had difficulty finding common ground. In discussing the goals within the classroom, educators also spoke of the roles and responsibilities of each teacher.

Shared responsibility. Working collaboratively with colleagues requires educators to share responsibility for the work (Fishbaugh, 1997). During participant interviews, some educators spoke about how they divide up the workload equally with their colleague, while other educators spoke about how they felt their colleagues did not always put forth enough effort in contributing to the workload. Participants were asked to identify whether sharing responsibility equally among individuals was problematic within their collaborative relationship.

The majority of general education teachers (53%) reported that it was not a problem in their collaborative relationship, while the majority of special education teachers (47%) indicated that it was a minor problem. Ten percent of general and special educators report that it was a minor problem, whereas only 6% of general and special education teachers reported it to be a serious problem.

This topic was followed up during participant interviews. Two general education teachers explained that their special education colleague put forth as much effort as they could, and they understood there were more demands placed on special education teachers, which is why they were not always available. Two special education teachers who spoke about responsibility as being a minor to moderate problem in their relationship talked about how the general education teacher expected them to do all the work. “If I have an idea that I think will help support the kids, I am expected to do all the planning and implementation for it. She basically says if it is my idea, it is my problem.” Another special education teacher talked about how the general education teacher expected her to help support all the students in the classroom

who struggle, but was unwilling to support the students on IEPs since they were not “her kids”.

When working collaboratively with colleagues having conversations regarding the classroom expectations and responsibilities can be beneficial (Murawski & Dieker, 2008). The degree to which educators feel their colleagues communicate effectively will be further discussed next.

Communication. Participants were asked to describe the degree they felt their colleagues were able to effectively communicate their ideas to them. According to the general education teacher responses, 39% believed their colleagues effectively communicated to a great extent, 35% said mostly, 24% reported somewhat, and only 2% felt they are not good at communicating. Thirty-three percent of special educators felt that general education teachers communicated to a great extent, while another 33% felt that they somewhat communicated. Finally, 30% reported they mostly communicated, while only 4% said their colleague did not communicate at all.

The reasons behind what promotes and hinders communication between general and special education teachers was not explicitly addressed during this study, but will be discussed further in chapter five. An individual’s ability to effectively communicate with colleagues can be impacted by many factors. The following section will address the negative experiences participants have with collaboration.

Question 4: What negative experiences have you encountered with collaboration?

During participant interviews, educators were asked to describe a time they collaborated with their general or special education colleague that was not successful. The majority of negative experiences discussed by participants included issues regarding a lack of time during the school day, scheduling conflicts, differences in pedagogy or teaching philosophy, and

personality conflicts with colleagues. The data have been organized into three categories: (1) time, (2) work ethic, and (3) inflexibility. The majority of negative experiences discussed by participants included issues regarding a lack of time during the school day, scheduling conflicts, differences in pedagogy or teaching philosophy, and personality conflicts with colleagues.

Time. All participants addressed the issue of not having adequate time to collaborate. During the interviews, several general education teachers spoke about how the amount of time the special education teacher has available for collaboration was problematic. One teacher in particular spoke about how her special education colleague, “never follows through on anything,” and is “unreliable.” Her comments were followed up with an explanation of how her colleague has “too much on her plate.” Another participant mimicked this complaint by adding, “I know she wants to be helpful, but she’s never around!” Both of these educators expressed frustration with their colleague’s absence, yet acknowledged that their inability to collaborate effectively was due to a large caseload and not an unwillingness to complete their share of the work.

One special education teacher also agreed that time has been a contributing factor to their inability to collaborate effectively. “I do what I can with the time I am given, but at this point the general education teacher doesn’t even bother asking because no matter how hard I try thing’s never worked out.” In addition to time, the work ethic of individuals was brought up as a problem leading to ineffective collaboration.

Work ethic. The majority of participants indicated that the work ethic of their colleagues was not problematic, but there were two cases where educators felt this was a major problem. One general educator spoke about how her inexperienced special education colleague “wasn’t there for the right reasons.” She expressed distaste for this individual as she explained

that his priority during class time was to charge his phone and grade papers. “He never helped develop a lesson, ignored the students, and made it clear he had no intention of working outside of the school day,” she stated. In addition to his questionable work ethic, this educator explained that he would often have inappropriate comments to make in regards to the students. “He told me he went into sped because he knew he’d always be smarter than the kids,” she explained. This general education teacher identified this colleague as someone she had little respect for and eventually refused to let into her classroom.

Another example came from a frustrated special educator. This participant spoke about her general education colleague as “unwilling to acknowledge her responsibility for the special education students.” She discussed the relationship as “one sided,” and said that her colleague refused to follow students IEPs or make adjustments to her lessons to meet their needs. During the interview she explained, “She told me it’s my job to deal with the sped kids, she just doesn’t have time for it.” This special educator described her colleague as being “lazy and disrespectful.”

In both examples, the participants felt that their colleague’s unwillingness to share responsibility and split the workload prevented them from having a collaborative relationship. Other participants did express some frustration with their colleague’s unwillingness to “pitch in” with the workload, but did not feel that it was especially detrimental to their collaborative relationship. In addition to questioning colleagues work ethic, the topic of inflexibility.

Inflexibility. In discussing negative collaborative experiences, several special educators spoke about the inflexibility of their general education colleagues. Several general educators were said to “lack understanding and patience” when it comes to special education topics. “She refuses to acknowledge that she needs to change the way she teaches to meet the needs of all

learners,” one special educator stated. “Instead, she argues with me that she is implementing every single accommodation in the IEP and it’s not her fault if the student isn’t performing.”

Several special educators also spoke about how their general education colleagues were unwilling to share ideas or resources that would be beneficial for the special education students. “She is so territorial over her lessons. She refuses to show me assessments before she gives them to the kids, because she believes that modifying a test is cheating,” expressed one participant. “She is so stuck in her ways that collaboration will just never happen,” responded another participant.

It is important to note that the theme of inflexibility was only addressed by special educators and was not brought up as a prohibiting factor by general educators. The next section will discuss the degree educators feel comfortable approaching their colleague and how this can impact collaboration between educators.

Question 5: How comfortable are you approaching your colleague to collaborate?

Using a four-point Likert scale, participants were asked on the questionnaire to identify the degree they feel comfortable approaching their colleague for support. Overall, the majority of both general (67%) and special educators (48%) felt comfortable approaching their colleague to a great extent.

With further analysis, the data revealed that the general education teachers are slightly more comfortable than their special education colleagues in seeking support. Fourteen percent of general educators indicated they were mostly comfortable, while 17% were somewhat comfortable, and only 2% were not comfortable at all. On the contrary, 42% of special educators reported to mostly be comfortable, while 10% were somewhat comfortable and no special educators felt uncomfortable seeking support.

Finally, in looking to evaluate the obstacles that teachers face when collaborating, the question of equity within the relationship was explored.

Question 6: To what degree is there equity within your collaborative relationship?

Thus far, the expertise, personality, goals, responsibility, and communication skills of educators have been discussed. In looking at these factors as a whole, participants were asked to describe the degree to which they felt there was equity within their collaborative relationships within the online questionnaire. The majority of both general (39%) and special education (47%) teachers reported that there was somewhat equity within their relationship. Twenty-seven percent of general educators had equity to a great extent in their relationship, while 24% had mostly equitable relationships, and 10% had no equity within their relationships. Seventeen percent of special education teachers reported that there was equity to a great extent, while 33% mostly had equity, and 3% did not have equity at all within their collaborative relationship.

It is important to note that the participants that indicated they did have equity within their partnership also discussed communication as being a priority as well as sharing responsibility. These participants reported that they did not have any problems with shared goals or personality conflicts. The participants who reported no equity within their relationship also indicated that they encountered problems with communication, responsibility, and personality with their colleagues.

In summary, educators reported many obstacles that hinder effective collaboration between general and special education teachers. Such obstacles included dealing with time constraints, levels of expertise, personality conflicts, shared goals, shared responsibility, communication, and equity. In further analyzing those with positive and negative collaborative

experiences, the topic of professional development was explored to determine whether there was a correlation among them.

Question 7: How much professional development have you received?

Data collected from the literature review and the pilot study indicated that the type of professional development given to general and special education teachers often differs (Hamilton-Jones & Vail, 2014). In looking at the factors that promote and hinder collaboration between these educators, the type of professional development as well as the amount of time educators spent working with these topics was explored during the online questionnaire. Table 7 shows the amount of time educators receive on the topics of (a) teaming, (b) student disabilities, (c) coteaching, (d) classroom modifications for students with disabilities, (e) behavior management, (f) overcoming conflict with colleagues, (g) building trust with colleagues, (h) differentiated instruction, and (i) monitoring student progress.

Table 7

Amount of Professional Development Taken By Educators

| Type of Professional Development | | Hours Spent on Topic | | | | Total # of Participants |
|----------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| | | 0 hours | 1-5 hours | 6-12 hours | 12+ hours | |
| Teaming | General Educators | 46% | 18% | 27% | 9% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 45% | 34% | 7% | 14% | 29 |
| Student Disabilities | General Educators | 9% | 45% | 21% | 25% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 3% | 30% | 20% | 47% | 30 |
| Coteaching | General | 34% | 27% | 25% | 14% | 56 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|
| | Educators | | | | | |
| | Special Educators | 25% | 29% | 23% | 23% | 31 |
| Classroom Accommodations for Students with Disabilities | General Educators | 14% | 45% | 21% | 20% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 10% | 32% | 26% | 32% | 31 |
| Behavior Management | General Educators | 21% | 41% | 18% | 20% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 16% | 45% | 29% | 10% | 31 |
| Overcoming Conflict with Colleagues | General Educators | 77% | 13% | 5% | 5% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 75% | 16% | 6% | 3% | 31 |
| Building Trust with Colleagues | General Educators | 61% | 21% | 13% | 5% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 68% | 19% | 10% | 3% | 31 |
| Differentiated Instruction | General Educators | 3% | 20% | 34% | 43% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 4% | 19% | 45% | 32% | 31 |
| Monitoring Student Progress | General Educators | 11% | 46% | 25% | 18% | 56 |
| | Special Educators | 19% | 45% | 20% | 16% | 31 |

Table 7 shows that general educators received more professional development than special educators in the areas of monitoring student progress (8% more), building trust with colleagues (7% more), behavior management (5% more), teaming (1% more), and differentiated

instruction (1% more). On the contrary, special educators received more professional development than general educators in the areas of coteaching (9% more), student disabilities (6% more), classroom accommodations for students with disabilities (4% more), and overcoming conflict with colleagues (2% more).

Data collected revealed that general education teachers received the majority of their professional development in differentiated instruction (43%), student disabilities (25%), classroom accommodations for students with disabilities (20%), and monitoring student progress (18%). Special educators received the majority of their professional development in differentiated instruction (32%), student disabilities (25%), coteaching (23%), and classroom accommodations for students with disabilities (20%). Both general and special educators received the least amount of professional development in the areas of teaming, building trust with colleagues, and overcoming conflict with colleagues.

Upon further analysis of the data, there were several topics of professional development in which special educators received significantly more time than their general education colleague. Special educators received more professional development in the areas of student disabilities (22% more) and classroom accommodations for students with disabilities (12% more). In areas where general educators received more professional development than the special educators, the difference was not as significant.

Question 8: Would you describe your school as having a strong collaborative culture?

Participants that took part in the interview were asked about the degree they felt their school had a strong collaborative culture. The majority of educators felt that their school did have a fairly strong collaborative culture. Participants talked about how educators are typically willing to share resources and help one another one when asked. Most educators recognized that

their administration encouraged collaboration among educators, but it was not always enforced. “The principal strongly encourages us to collaborate, but finding the time and figuring out how to collaborate is really left to us,” one educator said.

Many educators agreed that within their school most teachers collaborate well, are very generous with their time and resources, and are willing to do whatever it takes to promote student success. These educators also agreed that there are teachers within the school who feel collaboration is more work, are inflexible, and territorial about their resources and ideas. “You just have to find the teachers who are willing, and ignore the rest,” one general education teacher commented.

Based on the majority of the participant answers, teachers did feel like their school had a strong collaborative culture. They felt that the teachers were doing the best they can to meet the needs of the students and getting help when necessary. All of the participants spoke about the obstacles associated with collaboration as well as what needed to happen to be able to overcome those obstacles. The following section discusses how teachers respond to the obstacles they face.

Question 9: What strategies do you use to overcome the obstacles of collaboration?

During the questionnaire, participants were asked how they dealt with situations where their colleagues were resistant to collaboration. The majority of general education teachers (50%) reported they were not experiencing resistance with the special education teacher. Thirty-five percent of participants just ignored the special education teacher and did their own thing. Finally, the remaining 5% of general education teachers persevered by trying new strategies or looking for common ground with their colleague.

The special education teachers reported having more difficulty with resistant teachers. Only 13% of special education teachers did not encounter resistance from their colleagues. The

remaining 87% of special educators used a variety of strategies. These strategies included modeling new strategies, asking the general educators what supports they could provide them to help, consistently reaching out and offering help, and trying to master content to prove to their colleague they can be valuable. Several special education teachers spoke about having conversations regarding the legality of IEPs as well as having administrators step in to mediate.

In the follow-up interviews, participants were asked to discuss the supports they have put into place to deal with the many other obstacles they faced with collaboration. Since the majority of educators spoke about time being the reason collaboration did not happen, they discussed the various ways they met with their colleagues. This included having on the fly conversations, using electronic communication, and asking the administration for additional time during planned professional development. The role of the administrator in facilitating a more collaborative culture is discussed next.

Question 10: What strategies should administration put into place to facilitate collaboration?

During participant interviews, educators were presented an open-ended question that asked what supports they felt administration should put into place to facilitate effective collaboration between general and special education teachers. Every general education teacher who answered the question responded that time needs to be given to teachers. They commented that finding time to sit down face-to-face to meet is extremely limited. “We teach different grades and work on completely different schedules” commented one participant. They also spoke about the amount of time it takes to develop lessons for a wide range of student needs. “I have over 100 kids on my caseload and trying to create multiple lessons for each class is just impossible,” a general education teacher reported. In addition, several general educators wished

they had more professional development in the area of collaboration. They felt it would be helpful to learn how to work more effectively with the special education teachers. One educator stated, “I know collaboration is a good thing, but no one has ever really showed me how to do it, or what end products can result from good collaboration.” Other participants spoke about how the administration needs to shift the culture to be more collaborative. They suggested the administration emphasize the importance of collaboration as well as become models for the staff. One general educator was quoted saying, “Our administration is always talking about collaboration as being so important, yet he can’t even get along with the vice principal! I think he should try modeling what he preaches.” Finally, a few participants commented that having the special education staff split across so many subjects and grades makes it difficult to get teachers’ attention. They suggest that special education teachers be limited to a single grade or subject.

Special education teachers also discussed the importance of time as a factor in facilitating collaboration. Similarly, the majority of them they spoke about the importance of providing all educators professional development to increase their knowledge-base in collaboration and how to work with students with disabilities. Frustrated with the lack of content training, a special educator responded:

The general educators look at me as if I have no content knowledge at all. It’s frustrating. Since I am certified to teach so many grades and subjects it is impossible for me to be an expert in them all, but that doesn’t mean I don’t know what I am doing. It would be nice if we had some professional development together, that way the general education teachers can see that I’m learning the same stuff they are.

Several participants recognized that having similar philosophies and goals are important and would like administration to be more mindful when pairing teachers to work together. Finally, several special education participants discussed the role of the administration as being the leaders of collaboration within the building. They felt it was their job to make collaboration a priority among all staff.

Summary of Data Analysis for Research Question Three

Research Question Three was intended to identify the factors and conditions that promote and hinder collaboration. All participants agreed that there are benefits to collaboration, and several were willing to share their stories of effective collaboration. Along with the stories of success, came stories of challenges. Participants agreed that there were many obstacles that educators faced to overcome to collaborate. Both general and special education teachers reported that the number one factor that hinders effective collaboration was time. Participants complained that there was little to no common planning time to meet with colleagues. Teachers spoke about the demands on special educators as a factor that prevented them from having time to collaborate. Other obstacles discussed included the expertise of their colleagues, personality conflicts, shared goals, shared responsibility, communication, and equity within the collaborative relationship.

Finally, the administrators' role in facilitating a collaborative culture was presented. Data collected indicated that the general and special education teachers did believe that the administration has the ability to create more collaborative cultures by making changes within the school. These changes included scheduling, providing professional development, and creating a collaborative vision for teachers to follow. During data analysis of factors that promote and

hinder collaboration four reoccurring categories emerged: expertise, time, shared responsibility, and personality.

Throughout the online survey and the participant interviews, the topic of expertise was continually discussed. Both general and special education teachers emphasized that the content knowledge of the general educators and the knowledge about specific disabilities of the special educators was highly beneficial to one another. For this reason, teachers often initiated and sustained collaborative relationships with colleagues who they felt were able to share the expertise they lacked. On the contrary, educators who felt they were equally knowledgeable as their colleagues were less likely to engage in collaborative partnerships.

Many educators also spoke about their desire for more professional development in the areas where they felt their colleagues excelled. For example, many special educators wished they had more experiences with content and lesson development, whereas the general educators felt they needed more professional development to learn about the different disabilities of their students, how to effectively implement an IEP, and how to address the diverse needs of the special education students in their classroom. In addition to more knowledge, time was discussed as another essential component of collaboration.

Having the time to collaborate continued to occur as a factor that can promote and hinder effective collaboration. More specifically, educators felt that time was the number one reason why they were or were not able to collaborate with colleagues effectively. Participants that felt they had adequate time reported to have stronger collaborative experiences than those who struggled to find the time.

Sharing responsibility for student success as well as classroom responsibilities was also discussed frequently among participants. Participants that reported having equity within their

collaborative relationships reported having stronger collaborative experiences, while those who struggled with parity within their relationship reported to have more negative experiences with collaboration. Finding ways to share responsibility tied into the theme of personality differences among teachers.

Finally, many educators expressed the importance of having colleagues whom they respect and are able to get along with when trying to collaborate. When forced to work alongside a colleague where teaching styles or philosophies differed, most educators struggle to find common ground. Two findings for Research Question Three are presented next.

Finding #6: General and special education teachers recognize there are significant benefits to collaboration.

All participants agreed there are significant benefits to collaboration, and the benefits outweigh the obstacles to some degree. Educators recognize that both teachers and students benefit when collaboration takes place. General and special education teachers report that having time to work collaboratively with colleagues is invaluable and allows them the opportunity to share ideas, expertise, and gain insight that they otherwise lack. Collaboration provides educators with a variety of lenses when looking at individual student needs. Teachers also report that collaboration between general and special education teachers directly impacts student achievement. General and special education teachers reported the main benefits of collaboration to be that it helps meet the needs of all learners, it allows educators to share different perspectives and philosophies on teaching and learning, it allows educators to share their expertise, and allows educators to share and develop new strategies to utilize in the classroom. The benefits of collaboration are directly linked to Finding #1: General and special

education teachers value different types and degrees of collaboration with one another, as the reason why educators find value in collaborating with their colleagues.

Finding #7: The majority of general and special education teachers struggle to overcome obstacles to collaboration.

Throughout the questionnaire and the participant interviews, collaborative obstacles were a reoccurring topic. The majority of participants indicated they had a high level of frustration with the topic of collaboration for a variety of reasons. Even participants that reported very positive experiences also reported to have encountered some negative experiences.

Overall, teachers reported time as being the number one problem that hinders effective collaboration. For some participants, the lack of common planning time hindered their ability to communicate with their colleagues, while others indicated that the size of their caseload impacted the time available to collaborate. Other obstacles found to hinder effective collaboration included personality conflicts, different teaching philosophies, lack of communication, expertise level of colleague, and lack of shared responsibility.

Participants reported that these obstacles greatly impacted the degree to which they collaborate and how effective their collaborative relationships are. Many participants discussed strategies they utilize to overcome such obstacles, but for many teachers these obstacles often prevent collaboration from taking place at all. Participants also indicated that they have been given limited professional development in the area of teacher collaboration, which they felt could positively impact their collaborative relationships.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four presented the approach to the research study along with the analysis of data collected. Data were collected through an online questionnaire and participant interviews.

Descriptive data were presented that informed the reader about the participants and qualitative data collected from the questionnaire and interviews were organized and presented according to the three guiding questions.

Descriptive data indicated that 149 educators completed the questionnaire and 90 qualified to participate in the study. Fifty-six of these participants held a general education teacher license, while 34 participants held a special educator licensure. Twenty-three of the participants agreed to take part in a follow-up interview as well.

Participants were asked to report their level of experience. Sixty percent of participants taught for 10+ years, 24% taught between 5 and 9 years, and 16% of participants had been teaching between 1 and 4 years. All participants were middle school teachers ranging from grades five through eight. Seventy-six percent of the participants taught a single grade, while the remaining 24% taught across multiple grades.

Participants defined collaboration as two educators working together. More specifically, participants spoke about how collaboration included the sharing of ideas, resources, perspectives, and responsibilities. Other participants reported that collaboration entailed working towards a common goal and providing lessons that are facilitate success among all students.

Research Question One sought to identify the degree middle school general and special education teachers value collaboration with one another. To determine the level educators value collaboration, a variety of collaborative behaviors were analyzed. Both general and special educators preferred to collaborate with general education teachers. For general education teachers, collaboration was mostly a priority, while special educators report that collaboration was a high priority for them. Although most educators agreed that collaboration was important, the majority of participants only collaborated with their colleagues between 0 and 10% of the

time. Most participants indicated that they wished they had more time to collaborate. Overall, the data revealed that educators did value their colleagues and recognized their specialized skill set as an asset to their own professional learning and teaching. Specifically, general education teachers were referred to as content experts, while special educators were referred to as experts in helping students access the curriculum effectively. The data also showed that both general and special education teachers valued the feedback they received from their colleagues and were mostly willing to adjust their own teaching based upon that feedback. Research Question One led to the following findings: (1) General and special education teachers value different types and degrees of collaboration with one another, and (2) The degree to which educators value collaboration does not always correlate to the amount of time teachers spend collaborating.

Research Question Two was designed to identify the ways in which middle school general and special educators collaborate with one another. Four types of collaboration were presented: (1) discussions regarding student concerns, (2) lesson plan development, (3) sharing expertise and resources, and (4) instructional modifications.

Both general and special education teachers reported they spend the majority of their time collaborating to discuss student concerns, while they spent the least amount of time developing lesson plans together. Participants were also asked to describe how they follow up after collaborating with colleagues. Many participants discussed how follow up rarely happened due to time constraints. Those who do find time often utilized quick hallway chats, electronic communication; or they met before school, after school, or during their lunchtime. Research Question Two led to the following findings: (1) General and special education teachers broadly understand collaboration to mean working together to develop best teaching practices for all students, (2) General and special education teachers spend the majority of their collaboration

time discussing student concerns and making instructional modifications, and (3) General and special education teachers spend the least amount of their collaboration time developing lesson plans and sharing resources.

Finally, Research Question Three examined the factors and conditions that promoted and hindered effective collaboration between middle school general and special education teachers. The data presented clearly identified specific factors and conditions that support and impede collaboration between general and special education teachers. These factors included having time to collaborate, specialized expertise, similarities and differences between individual personalities, shared goals, sharing responsibility, effective communication, and administrative support.

Both general and special education teachers agreed that time was the most important factor impeding effective collaboration. Participants struggled to find common planning time and finding time within all the other demands placed upon them as educators. Several participants identified not having similar goals and philosophies as their colleagues, which prevented them from collaborating effectively. Similarly, some educators had conflicting personalities and did not get along well with their colleagues.

Aside from the many obstacles discussed by participants, many teachers agreed that collaboration was valued within their school. Many spoke of having a strong collaborative culture that was fostered by the administration. Some educators did express a desire to get more time to collaborate and more professional development in the area of collaboration to increase their ability to effectively collaborate with their general and special education colleagues.

Research Question Three led to the following findings: (1) General and special education

teachers recognize that there are invaluable benefits to collaboration, and (2) The majority of general and special education teachers struggle to overcome obstacles to collaboration.

Chapter Five includes (a) a summary of the study, (b) discussion of the findings, (c) possible research topics stemming from this study, and (d) final reflections.

CHAPTER FIVE: STUDY SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, FUTURE RESEARCH & FINAL REFLECTIONS

The chapter begins with an introduction that restates the context for the study, a summary of the study, and a discussion of conclusions stemming from data analysis. Recommendations for administration, teachers, and institutions of higher education are included. Future research about this topic, and final reflections conclude the chapter.

Introduction

Twelve years ago I started my career as a middle school educator. I was hired as a special education teacher to work in resource and inclusion classrooms. On the first day I was introduced to my general education coteacher. Over the next several years, I found myself working with three different coteachers and my experiences and relationships varied greatly between these classrooms. Although I didn't know it at the time, these experiences would eventually be the foundation for my desire to take on an incredible research project on the topic of teacher collaboration.

My first year teaching was as overwhelming as one would expect. As a 22-year old first year teacher, I worried that my more experienced colleagues would not be willing to take me seriously. I came in enthusiastic, open-minded, and determined to support students with disabilities in any way I could. I worked in a very diverse district and found it quite easy to get settled into my new role. The first coteacher I was partnered with had been working in an inclusion classroom for quite some time. She was experienced in special education and was excited at the prospect of working with a new teacher. Over the course of the year we met regularly to plan out new units and quickly settled into a routine. Our teaching styles and expertise were very diverse, yet we embraced the differences and inspired one another to learn

and grow. Our lessons were engaging and our ability to work together in the same classroom was flawless. It seemed as though we had the perfect coteaching relationship.

The following year, I was told that I would be teaching an additional inclusion classroom and began working with a new teacher. This particular general educator was not familiar with the inclusive model and had little experience with special education students. At the start of our relationship boundaries were set that allowed us split the caseload and the planning. This particular teacher did not want to plan lessons together; rather each one of us planned and taught our own unit alternating as the year went on. I would often defer to my colleague for support on curricular items, while he would defer to me when dealing with special education issues.

The flow of this class ran very differently than what I was used to. While I was teaching my unit, my coteacher would often be sitting at his desk rather interacting with the students. I did not find this routine to be as effective as my previous coteaching relationship, however, my colleague and I got along quite well, and we had a mutual respect for one another's teaching styles and expertise.

As my third year teaching approached, I was told that I would be working with yet another coteacher in the upcoming year. Having had two very different coteaching experiences thus far, I was enthusiastic, yet nervous, about what the year would bring. This coteacher was a former special education teacher, so I was expecting to have little difficulty in finding a routine. What I did not know at the time was that this teacher had made it clear to the administration that she did not want to teach an inclusion class. As the year began I was greeted by a cold shoulder and my time spent in the classroom was very uncomfortable. Many days I would be told I was not needed and I should retire to the teachers' room to get a cup of coffee. When I suggested new ideas to implement, I was told that due to my inexperience she would take care of the lesson

planning. Unfortunately, this continued over the course of the year. When the year concluded, the principal decided that inclusion with this individual was not going to work and he ended our relationship.

These very different experiences were challenging yet rewarding. Over the course of the three years, I grew as a teacher as well as a colleague. I began identifying how different teaching styles impact student achievement and how to navigate the culture of middle school. Socially, I had amazing relationships with all three colleagues, but professionally I faced many different challenges when working alongside them. The most important lesson I learned from these three years was that learning how to collaborate with colleagues was difficult; but to ensure that all students in the classroom were supported, it was necessary. I realized that I needed to put my personal feelings aside and work diligently to build these relationships in order for the inclusive model to be effective.

At the start of this research journey, I entered into my twelfth year of teaching. I have moved schools several times and worked across seven different grades. Today, I find myself back in the middle school where I began my career, working as an inclusion teacher with many of the same colleagues as before. Having now worked in both an elementary and middle school setting, I found myself comparing my collaborative experiences across these cultures. I also began wondering if other special educators were having similar experiences with their general education colleagues.

As my curiosity continued to grow, the premise for this research project emerged. I feel strongly that collaboration across general and special education is essential; yet based on my experiences, I feared that many educators did not share my belief. The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the collaborative relationships that exist between general and special

education teachers. Primarily, I was interested to determine whether general educators found value in working alongside their special education colleagues, or if the majority of special education teachers were also being told to grab a cup of coffee instead. In addition, I wanted to identify how general and special education teachers are working together in the classrooms. Finally, I wanted to identify what factors and conditions are promoting and hindering these collaborative relationships from being effective in today's schools.

What follows in this chapter is a summary of the study I conducted to address issues about regular and special education collaboration, a discussion of the findings, areas for future research, and final reflections.

Summary of the Study

I have come to realize that the challenges I have faced collaborating with general education teachers are extremely common in the field of education. Teachers come into the field at different ages, with different learning styles, teaching styles, personalities, and goals. As we often tell our students, we are not always given a choice as to whom we have to work alongside. I do believe that individuals that go into teaching all have students' well-being as a priority; but at times the challenges educators are faced with often prohibit them from making the best choices. One example is taking advantage of collaborative opportunities with colleagues. Today's schools are evolving every day, and so are the needs of the students. As the push for inclusive education continues to grow, the need for educators to come together and collaborate is essential. The problem many schools face is that the word collaboration has a broad interpretation, and today's teachers are expected to collaborate often and effectively with little or no training, as I too experienced.

I began this study with my own collaborative baggage. The study's purpose stemmed from both the positive and negative experiences I have had collaborating with general education teachers. The question of whether general and special education teachers value the collaboration with one another was the heart and soul of this project. I believe that if educators do not find value in one another's expertise students with disabilities will continue to struggle in the classroom and the inclusive model has no chance of being effective. This study was guided by the following essential questions:

1. To what degree do general and special education teachers report they value collaboration with one another?
2. What are various ways general and special educators report they collaborate with one another?
3. What factors and conditions do general and special education teachers consider promote and hinder collaboration?

These three research questions could stand alone, but together they had the ability to delve deeply into the collaborative relationships that exist within middle schools to better understand how general and special education teachers are handling the evolving changes with inclusive education. I decided an online survey and participant interviews were the most effective way of gathering data to answer these guiding questions.

In order to capture the lived experiences of teachers, I designed a transcendental phenomenological study. This design was chosen to allow me intimate access into the experiences of today's teachers. I wanted to understand the dynamics that exist when general and special education teachers are forced to work side by side. Most importantly, I wanted to

understand the point of view that general and special education teachers hold on inclusive education and their forced collaboration with one another.

I chose to only include classroom teachers of general and special education into this study. My goal for this study was to identify the perspectives and understand the lived experiences of teachers who were in a collaborative relationship. For the purpose of this study, I did not want outside perspectives from administrators, as I felt they could not fully understand the dynamics of the collaborative interactions their teachers were experiencing. I chose to focus on the middle school culture for several reasons. First, my experiences working in inclusive education at the middle school level were much more challenging than those at the elementary level. I found the teachers to be more isolated, and at times unaware of events occurring outside of their classroom. Contrary to this situation, teachers I worked with at the elementary level seemed to work at a slower pace, were more open to change, and eager to collaborate with colleagues. Finally, I delimited the study to teachers working in Massachusetts. Although the majority of regulations regarding students with disabilities are at a federal level, state mandates do impact the way schools structure their special education programs.

As I began planning this study, I was nervous that I would be unable to find participants willing to take time out of their busy schedule to speak with me. As I began blind emailing teachers across Massachusetts, I was incredibly gratified by the positive response rate. Within two days of receiving my request, over 50 strangers had taken time to complete the survey, many offering to meet for an interview as well. Despite what I had believed, teachers seemed eager to speak with me regarding their collaborative experiences, many commenting what an incredibly important topic of discussion I had chosen for this project. In the end, over 150 educators had completed my survey, 90 qualifying for the study.

As the data collection stage came to an end, I was eager to begin the analysis phase. As previously stated, identifying whether general and special educators value one another as collaborative resources was really the heart and soul of this study. Since many of my experiences have lent themselves to feeling invaluable among my colleagues, I was incredibly surprised and overjoyed to learn that the majority of educators do value collaboration and recognize the benefits of collaborating with their general and special education colleagues. Many of the findings for this study, however, were not as positive; and, as I have been for so long, I was disheartened to hear that many educators are struggling to build their collaborative relationships. It was clear that many educators had different definitions for what collaboration was, and their perspectives on how they should be collaborating varied greatly. Many spoke about how they want to collaborate, but they struggled to find the time to overcome the barriers associated with collaboration. The majority of teachers spoke about their collaboration as quick hallway conversations; rather than in-depth collegial discussions. Unfortunately for most, the desire to collaborate isn't enough to make collaboration a priority within their classrooms.

The following section describes the findings of this study in more depth, providing recommendations for teachers, administrators, and institutions of higher education.

Discussion

Collaboration is a term with which all educators are familiar. They hear fellow colleagues and administrators talk about it, and most would say it's something that every teacher does. Many would agree that there is not one recipe for effective collaboration, and each relationship is unique. With that being said, there is not one specific way to define collaboration or one precise way to collaborate with colleagues. For this reason, it is no surprise that today's teachers have such a difficult time defining the purpose and the parameters of collaboration. In

fact, it has become evident that today's teachers are not equipped with the tools and strategies necessary for effective collaboration.

Extensive research has been done on the topic of collaboration in education, and studies have shown that when done effectively, collaboration between teachers has the potential to greatly improve student achievement and positively impact a school's culture (Gruenert, 2005). General and special education teachers have historically worked as separate systems, teachers entering the field with very different skills and expertise (Reynolds et al., 1987; Wang, 1992). With the mandates of inclusive education changing, today's educators are finally recognizing that the unique skill set of their general and special education colleagues could be quite beneficial in helping them to navigate the evolving demands of their classroom (MacCarthy, 2010; M. K. Smith & Smith, 2000).

General education teachers are finding it difficult to keep up with the wide range of abilities and types of disabilities they are seeing within their classrooms (M. K. Smith & Smith, 2000). They are becoming more reliant on the special education teachers for support on special education topics including implementing IEPs, legal mandates, and strategies to work with different disabilities (Garvar-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1986). Similarly, today's special educators are finding themselves overwhelmed with the shift towards 21st century learning objectives (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014). Unprepared for the new rigorous curriculum standards, special educators are looking towards general educators for support in developing lessons that will support students with disabilities in meeting the new state benchmarks (Gerst, 2012). It's clear that today's teachers are being asked to accomplish more than ever before, and the stakes are higher for teachers and students alike. With all the changes being made in the education system, it's great to see that general and special educators are finally starting to recognize they

can no longer work as separate systems. Instead, teachers are realizing the depths of these demands are not feasible to accomplish alone, and the need to work together is stronger than ever. General and special educators recognizing the value in collaborating with one another is a giant step in the right direction, but saying one value's collaboration isn't enough to support the needs of today's students.

When asked to discuss the topic of collaboration, the majority of teachers responded with a sigh. The most common response heard is, "I know how important it is, and I want to collaborate more, I really do, but it just isn't possible." These general and special education teachers were quick to discuss the benefits of collaboration, citing the unique skills their colleagues possess; skills they need, don't have, and are quite envious of. But identifying the value of collaboration and citing its benefits are not helping these educators improve the educational experiences of today's students. In fact, the majority of general and special education teachers surveyed expressed great value for collaboration, but they admitted that they spend little to no time collaborating with colleagues. Instead, these educators were quick to list off a myriad of excuses as to why collaboration is not taking place in their classroom.

Time was among the top complaint of educators as to why collaboration is not occurring. They blame principals for not creating schedules conducive to collaboration. They complain of caseloads too big to handle alone. And they point the finger at their colleagues for not being flexible and wanting to collaborate more. But, what these educators are not citing as a reason for the lack of collaboration is themselves. Teachers today are too quick to place blame on the factors and conditions that surround them; rather than looking inward to realize they have complete control over their collaborative relationships. What is even worse is that administrators are allowing these excuses to continue, rather than becoming proactive to overcome them.

Today's principals and administrators are equally to blame for the lack of collaboration taking place between general and special education teachers. Many principals talk about collaboration, include the word in their schools' mission statement, and encourage their staff to collaborate with one another; but for many, the conversations stop there. In order for collaboration to become a priority in the classroom, I believe principals need to take charge and mandate their staff to begin working more closely to build these collaborative relationships. Collaboration should be as much of a requirement for teachers as lesson planning and grading papers. If a teacher stopped creating lessons to deliver to their students, or stopped showing up to parent meetings, administrators would immediately take action. So why are today's administrators so relaxed about their staff's lack of collaboration? It is essential for the academic success of all students that collaboration becomes a top priority among educators.

Although the majority of general and special educators are not collaborating to the degree necessary for improved student success, teachers are reporting some collaboration is taking place. The problem lies in the ways in which educators are reporting they collaborate. Teachers reported spending next to no time together to develop new lessons or share instructional materials. Instead, the majority of their collaboration consists of quick hallway discussions or administrative led meetings where school agendas are discussed. It is clear that teachers do not have a clear definition of what collaboration is nor what it should look like in the classroom. As mentioned previously, there is no one clear-cut definition for collaboration; but the foundation of collaboration lies in the joining of ideas and expertise to create new understanding, new knowledge, and new innovation. These improvements in collaboration cannot be done while discussing school agendas or engaging in generic conversations in the hallway. Collaboration needs to consist of in-depth collegial discussions and debates. It needs to be ongoing and

consistent for it to have a true impact in the classroom. General and special education teachers should be utilizing their expertise in curriculum and differentiated instruction to create classroom lessons that are engaging, rigorous, and yet accessible. They should be utilizing their expertise to solve classroom management issues that may arise, or develop plans on how to improve the home-school connection with parents and the community. Collaboration is more than just relaying updates on students or passing emails about school issues. The key to collaboration is building new ideas that were not possible when working alone.

The educational community needs to recognize that the push for inclusive education is not just a passing fad. The rights and regulations around special education are demanding schools to make changes, and teachers' coming together to collaborate is just the beginning. If improving academic achievement of all students is the goal, collaboration between general and special educators is essential. Teachers also need to recognize that collaboration is a job requirement and not just something they are encouraged to try.

For an inclusive model to be effective, teachers, administrators, and institutions of higher education need to come together and develop a plan of action. First, teachers need to stop allowing excuses to prevent them from taking responsibility for their collaborative responsibilities. Both general and special educators need to become more proactive about making collaboration a priority, regardless of the factors and conditions preventing it. They need to engage in collegial discussions with colleagues about how collaboration can work within their setting, and what their personal goals and objectives are within the classroom. They need to be willing to put in the effort, be open-minded, and develop a willingness to work with new individuals. Collaboration can be incredibly challenging, but teachers and students will directly reap the benefits when done effectively.

It is my belief that teachers do have the capacity to greatly impact the collaborative culture of a school, but it cannot be done alone. Principals and administrators must also begin taking action. Findings from this study, along with existing research on collaboration clearly show that administrators have the ability to impact the collaborative culture (Nicolas, 2015; Sciullo, 2016). I feel that administrators must begin listening when teachers relay their collaborative concerns. Specifically, developing schedules and structure within their school that allow for collaboration to take place is essential. This study also shed light on the fact that educators need additional professional development. These teacher trainings should focus on collaboration and explicitly teach educators how to collaborate with colleagues as well as clearly defining what collaboration should look like in the classroom. Most importantly, this professional development needs to be ongoing and continually support teachers throughout their career. School principals also need to be consistent in their push for collaboration. This includes continually expressing the importance of collaboration, and its requirement as part of their job duties. Principals should not be required to micromanage the collaborative relationships within their schools, but following up with educators is important and principals should make themselves consistently available for support.

Finally, it clear to me institutions of higher education also need to take part in the advocacy for collaboration between general and special education. It has become abundantly clear that teachers today are not equipped with the collaborative understanding and skills necessary to navigate the 21st century classroom demands. College and universities need to begin offering courses that discuss the urgency and necessity of teacher collaboration. These courses should help students understand the foundation of collaboration as building new innovative ideas, skills, and knowledge. These courses should focus on exposing students to the

many barriers of collaboration they will encounter as well as how to persevere when these barriers become overwhelming. Finally, these courses should explicitly teach skills and strategies educators could implement when navigating new collaborative relationships. In addition to courses of collaboration, it is also important that college and universities recognize that general and special education are no longer working as separate systems. They should begin looking at the programs they offer for general and special education licensure and develop ways to have these programs overlap, encouraging collaboration from the start.

The findings from this study clearly show that general and special education teachers are working together more closely than ever before, but their collaboration is not yet effective. General and special educators are finally realizing that collaboratively they have the ability to improve the education for students with disabilities, but this collaboration is not yet a priority for most educators. It has become evident that today's educators are not equipped with the skills necessary for effective collaboration and they are not always willing to put in the effort to overcome the collaborative barriers they face within their relationships. The success of inclusive education relies on the ability of today's teachers to put aside their differences, stop making excuses, and take responsibility for their part in the collaborative culture of the school.

The final section of the discussion includes possible action steps for teachers and administrators to take to improve the collaborative culture in schools. In order for the inclusive model to reach its full potential, teachers and administrators need to begin working diligently to make collaboration a priority within the classroom. Building a strong collaborative culture can be challenging, but each individual has the potential to positively impact their school's culture. Based on the findings from this study, the following are recommendations for teachers and

administrators that wish to begin making immediate contributions to the collaborative culture within their schools.

When done effectively, collaboration between teachers can be an incredibly powerful tool (Weiss et al., 2015). Although support from administration is helpful, there are a great deal of things teachers can begin doing on their own to improve the collaborative relationships they have with their general and special education colleagues.

Allowing oneself to be vulnerable and open to new ideas can be challenging, but has the potential to improve collaboration. No individual teacher is fully equipped with the skills needed to meet the diverse needs of every student in the classroom. Collaborating with a colleague is not about showing off your skills or judging the weaknesses of others. Instead, think of collaboration as an opportunity for you to utilize your strengths as an educator, while building upon your weaknesses. Taking time to recognize both your strengths and weaknesses as a teacher may help you to identify colleagues whom you may be able to learn from and help. Allowing yourself to be vulnerable by expressing these strengths and weaknesses to others will open you up to new learning experiences.

Today's teachers need to become more creative in finding ways to collaborate with one another. Many teachers cite class schedules and personality conflicts as challenges that prevent them from collaborating. There are no formal rules on how to collaborate. In fact, collaboration does not always come in the form of one-on-one sit-down meetings. Classroom teachers tend to have very different schedules, routines, and ways of organizing. General and special education teachers need to become more creative in the ways they are able to make collaboration happen. This may come in the form of daily emails where new ideas are exchanged, the use of the Google Classroom to develop and modify classroom lessons, or creating a schedule ahead of

time for planned meetings to discuss upcoming tasks. It is important for teachers to engage in discussions with their colleagues regarding their goals for collaboration ahead of time and brainstorm ways in which they will each be able to contribute to their collaborative relationship.

Just because the school principal does not mandate collaboration take place between two individuals does not mean that collaboration is not an important aspect of their job. Teachers need to become aware that collaborating with colleagues is an essential component to educating all students to the best of their ability. It is time for teachers to not only hold themselves accountable for their contributions to the collaborative culture, but hold one another accountable as well. This may come in the form of weekly reminders about collaborative opportunities, or blocking out specific time each week for collaborative meetings. Collaboration can only work if teachers are willing to make time.

Being respectful coworkers is also an essential element in creating a collaborative culture. Collaboration is challenging and can often leave individuals feeling frustrated and defeated. It is essential that teachers show respect for their colleagues' ideas and perspectives. The most innovative ideas are often generated when conflicting views are merged together. It is important for teachers to remember that the lens in which they view teaching is neither right nor wrong, and can vary from teacher to teacher. In order to make the most out of the collaborative experiences individuals need to be open-minded and respectful to one another's views and ideas. It is also important to find ways to show appreciation to colleagues when possible. Teachers are more apt to share new ideas and resources when they feel valued and appreciated.

Teachers should be constantly striving to improve, even when things are going well. Teachers should never be satisfied with the status quo, and always work to raise the bar in their classroom. This includes raising the bar within their collaborative relationships. The

collaborative culture of schools, student needs, and statewide benchmarks will continue to change and progress over time, so the ways in which educators collaborate will need to evolve over time as well. It is important for teachers to try new things and recognize the way they have historically done things, may not always be the most effective.

The divide between the skills and expertise of general and special education teachers has become very clear, but it is time for teachers to begin supporting one another to overcome this barrier. General education teachers should work to find ways to help support special educators in better understanding and working with the new state curriculum. This may come in the form of curriculum reference sheets, a list of references and supplemental materials grouped by core subject, or meetings to discuss curricular changes. In addition, special educators need to find ways to support general education teachers in their quest to help students with disabilities in the classroom. This may include explanations of how to read and implement IEPs, a list of strategies to help a variety of disabilities, suggestions on how to modify student assignments, or suggestions on how to handle behavior difficulties in the classroom. As teachers begin supporting one another more often the educational experiences of students will improve, and student achievement is likely to increase.

As teachers begin taking the necessary steps to make collaboration a priority, it is essential that school principals and administrators also begin taking action. There is an abundance of research that delineates the importance of school principals and district administrators in shaping school cultures (Deal et al., 1990; Gruenert, 2005; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009; Nicolas, 2015). Findings from this study indicate that general and special educators often look towards administrators for support in building collaborative relationships.

It is essential for teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders to have a clear understanding of what collaboration is, what it should look like within the school, and what the expectation surrounding collaboration are. By including all stakeholders in the collegial discussion, individuals will feel more accountable and are likely to be willing to take part in the collaborative culture being established. This vision for collaboration should be clearly aligned to the school's mission statement.

If school principals and administrators expect teachers to begin working more closely, it is essential that they lead by example. Administrators should continually engage in collegial discussions with teachers regarding their collaborative needs, and ongoing support should be available to teachers. In addition, administrators should remain open-minded when listening to the collaborative challenges teachers are struggling with. It is essential for administrators to recognize the lens in which they view the collaborative relationships may differ greatly from the lens in which the teachers experiencing these challenges are viewing them. Finally, it is essential that school principals and administrators remain flexible in their willingness to make changes within the collaborative culture.

School principals and district administrators have a great deal of responsibility tending to school structure. Having a lack of shared time was among the biggest challenge teachers reported when collaborating. School principals should be aware of this barrier while attending to teacher schedules, primarily general and special education teachers who service students with disabilities. If common planning time is difficult, it is essential for administrators to find ways of providing teachers adequate time during the week to collaborate. The physical proximity of teachers should also be considered when planning out the school's structure. This includes the

placement of teacher classrooms, and assigning school-wide duties. The more interaction individuals have with one another the more likely collaboration will take place.

Both general and special education teachers indicated that a lack of knowledge and understanding often leads to a lack of collaboration among teachers. Furthermore, teachers expressed a strong desire for more support in the form of professional development in the areas of collaboration, special education, and curriculum development. It is essential for administrators to engage in deep discussions with teachers to determine what areas of professional development would be most useful for their staff. This professional development should be ongoing, and should include both general and special education teachers. It is important for general and special educators to begin having more professional development together to give them more collaborative opportunities.

It is the responsibility of school principals and administrators to make sure that teachers are fulfilling their job requirements. Collaboration is an essential element to school-wide success, therefore teachers must be held accountable for their collaborative relationships (Cook & Friend, 1993). It is important that administrators relay a strong message to teachers that collaboration is not just suggested, but mandated. School principals should work to oversee the collaboration that is taking place within the school, providing additional supports when necessary.

Establishing and sustaining a collaborative culture is challenging, but can benefit all stakeholders involved (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). It is my belief that teachers, principals, and district administrators all need to begin taking responsibility for their part in the collaborative culture that exists within their schools.

Based on the literature review and the findings from this study, several areas of further research have been identified.

Future Research

Concluding this project is bittersweet. I have put my blood, sweat, and tears into this topic, and I am proud to have a finished product to share with the education community. But, the truth is, this project is far from finished. The findings from this study along with the research already in existence clearly indicate that collaboration is an essential component to student success, and it is not being done effectively in schools. Based on the findings from this study, I have identified three areas for further research:

1. Understanding the principal's role in facilitating collaborative relationships between general and special education teachers.

Findings from this study indicated that general and special education teachers do not feel adequately supported to meet the collaborative demands being placed upon them. Specifically, teachers felt that the school principal should be more involved in providing collaborative support. Teachers indicated that principals should provide more professional development and be more proactive in addressing scheduling needs.

The purpose of this study would be to explore the principal's role establishing a collaborative culture in schools. This study would seek to gain the perspective of the principals and identify the level of support they feel is necessary to improve the collaboration between general and special education teachers.

In order for changes to be made to the collaborative relationships that exist between general and special educators, teachers and principals need to be working together to facilitate and sustain collaborative relationships in schools, rather than expecting one another to take full

responsibility. This study has the potential to provide insight into the varying roles and responsibilities of teachers and administrators as perceived by school principals. Furthermore, it has the potential to generate new discussions between principals and teachers regarding what steps can be taken to improve schools' collaborative culture.

2. From teacher isolation to teacher collaboration: A need for collaborative skills among educators.

A misconception among the educational community is that collaboration is an innate skill that teachers possess. This study found that there are many misconceptions among educators as to what collaboration is and how teachers should collaborate with one another. Furthermore, this study exposed the lack of collaborative skills that general and special education teachers have.

The purpose of this study would be to further examine the collaborative relationships between general and special education teachers to identify what specific skills teachers possess or lack that promote and hinder effective collaboration.

By identifying the necessary skills to improve collaboration, teachers, administrators, and institutions of higher education can provide educators with specific training in these areas to better prepare them for future collaborative experiences. This study has the potential to help teachers acquire the necessary knowledge to improve their ability collaborate effectively in the classroom while directly improving the educational experiences of students with disabilities.

3. Collaboration across school cultures: A comparison of elementary and secondary collaborative cultures

An abundance of research has been done that indicates the collaborative cultures of elementary, middle, and high schools differ greatly (Conderman, 2011; Godzicki, Godzicki,

Krofel, & Michaels, 2013; Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). This study seeks to identify the specific differences in how general and special education teachers collaborate at each of these levels. Specifically, this would be an extension of my research, looking to determine the degree to which general and special educators value collaboration, how they collaborate, and what factors and conditions promote and hinder collaboration. This comparison would help to identify the degree to which school culture impacts the ways in which educators collaborate, and how inclusive education differs across these cultures.

This study has the potential to dig deeper into the impact that school culture has on collaboration and generate discussion among the educational community in how to better prepare educators for collaborative cultures. Furthermore, this study can provide institutions of higher education valuable insight to use when preparing new teachers to enter into elementary or secondary schools.

Final Reflections

If you Google the term teacher collaboration, you will find hundreds of articles written, journals published, and dissertations completed. The truth is, the topic of collaboration isn't new or overly exciting, but it's a topic of discussion I have been plagued with having for the last 12 years. Since my first year as a special education teacher, I have been forced to work alongside many different general education teachers. Some eager to learn from my expertise in special education, some intrigued by my unique knowledge, and many annoyed at the topic of inclusive education. Several years ago, I entered into a Ph.D. program, not to prove to anyone that I was intelligent enough, not to necessarily to achieve something great, but my desire to take on this journey was because I was sick of hearing general and special education teachers complain about one another. Over the course of my career, I have taken on many administrative roles in addition

to my role as a classroom teacher, so I do have some experience sitting on the other side of the desk. With that being said, I was no better than my colleagues and often was quick to place blame on others when I was frustrated and things weren't going my way. But, what made me stand apart was that my desire to be a better educator always took precedent over my desire to take the easy way out and point fingers. Finally, I decided that rather than listening to the complaints, or ignoring them completely I needed to be more proactive and learn how to help my fellow classroom teachers and myself. The segregation between general and special education has gone on far too long, and its time that educators take a stance and come together as a community to do what is right for our students; educate them all to the best of our ability. This desire ultimately led me to this dissertation journey.

This research topic took on a life of its own over the past year took many turns; some up, some down, and many were unexpected. I have never hidden my passion for inclusive education and collaboration between teachers. My colleagues know me as an outspoken advocate, one who will never stop speaking on behalf of struggling students. I hope my passion and enthusiasm will carry over to my colleagues and the many teachers who are struggling to overcome the barriers of collaboration between general and special educators.

The purpose of this study was to provide new insight on collaborative relationships to the educational community, but what I was able to learn from this journey is invaluable. Through my recent interactions with teachers from all over Massachusetts, I have come to realize that my assumptions regarding the attitudes of general education teachers towards inclusive education were vastly wrong. It was ignorant of me to make assumptions that this population of teachers was mostly against inclusive education just based on my own personal experiences. Likewise, it was equally as ignorant of me to assume that all special educators were working tirelessly trying

to collaborate with general educators for the well-being of their students. This too proved to be wildly incorrect.

The truth is, several of the findings from this study shocked me, while others were expected and continue to frustrate me. But, rather than continuing to complain about the divide between general and special education, or to allow my fellow colleagues to allow the overwhelming and challenging barriers of collaboration to hinder progress, I will take the findings from this study and develop actions steps for improvement. Whether my title is classroom teacher, principal, or special education administrator, I have come to realize I have the power to make an impact on the collaborative culture that exists within my setting. I vow to continue my fight to improve the collaboration between general and special educators. I will continue to advocate for teachers, seek support from administrators, and find ways to promote success collaboration among colleagues. Furthermore, although my study has come to an end, my journey has not. This study is just the beginning, and my desire to learn about collaboration and improve the collaboration between general and special educators has just begun.

What has resonated with me the most from this study is the fact that general and special education teachers have come to recognize that the inclusion classroom is just like every other classroom. It is not something new or something to be afraid of, and teachers have come to embrace these changes. With that being said, educators have also begun recognizing how important their general and special education colleagues are in the success of the students sitting in front of them. This may be the most exciting revelation yet!

I hope that my fellow teachers and administrators will take the findings from this study and recognize the urgency for action. As an educational community, we need to begin working together to improve our collaborative culture. If teachers continue to allow the challenges and

excuses to prevent them from collaborating, and administrators continue to look the other way and refuse to become more proactive in mandating collaborative change, the future for our students looks bleak. The challenges our students will face in schools will continue to gain momentum so the time to take charge and make changes is now.

Every year, schools around Massachusetts gather to discuss the latest benchmark testing. Administrators are frustrated and teachers continue to feel defeated. What I find confusing is that even as these benchmarks change, educators are afraid to change their teaching methods. As the saying goes, “insanity is doing the same thing over and over again, expecting different results.” The findings from this study validated what most educators already believe, and that is that fact that teachers working together will always improve the educational experience for students.

I leave you today with a plea of help and a glimpse of encouragement. The next time you see a struggling student, seek out a colleague to collaborate with. Make the time, ignore the differences in opinion, and find a way to make it work. In the end, watching a student succeed will always outweigh the obstacles you faced and is guaranteed to leave you with a satisfying smile! As cliché as it sounds, you have the power to impact a child’s life in the most spectacular and lasting way.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate

Dear Colleague,

I am a special education teacher with the Quincy Public School District. At present I am also a graduate student at Lesley University working towards a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership. I am writing to you to ask you to help me in my efforts to improve inclusive education for students with disabilities.

My research is focused in the area of collaboration between general and special education teachers and has the potential to improve educational practices for teachers working with this diverse group of students. Have you ever struggled to meet the needs of a student with disabilities in your classroom? Have you ever wished you had more support when working with students with disabilities? Here is a chance to help us understand the barriers teachers are facing when working with students with disabilities.

All responses to the survey, which will not take more than 15 minutes (link below), will be confidential, and I will make every effort to preserve your anonymity by assigning each participant an identification number so that your name will not appear on any documents. All documents associated with this study will also be kept in secure data files and locations. Taking part in the study is your decision. You may also stop participating in this study at any time or decide not to answer any question you are not comfortable answering.

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at 774-218-8254; or write my faculty advisor, John Ciesluk (jciesluk@lesley.edu), if you have study related questions or problems. You may also contact the Lesley University IRB at irb@lesley.edu

To complete the survey, please click the following link:

https://lesley.col.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1TBtkswlMKxN4ln

Thank you for your support,
Kerri Olore
Ph.D. Candidate, Lesley University

Appendix B

Participant Survey

Dear Colleagues,

Your participation is vital in understanding the relationships that exist between general and special education teachers. Your input has the potential to improve the collaborative culture in schools across Massachusetts. The survey will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Please begin by completing questions Q1 through Q5. If you are a general education content teacher continue on and complete the **Survey for General Education Content Teacher *only***. If you are a special education content teacher skip the **Survey for General Education Content Teacher** and complete the **Survey for Special Education Content Teacher *only***.

Your responses will be kept strictly confidential, and digital data will be stored in secure computer files. Any report of this research that is made available to the public will not include your name or any other individual information by which you could be identified. There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu. Please feel free to print a copy of this consent page to keep for your records.

Clicking the “yes” button below indicates that you consent to having the data from this survey used in my research on teacher collaboration.

- a. Yes, I understand that my participation is voluntary and that data from this survey will be used for scholarly research on teacher collaboration.
- b. No, I would not like to participate in this survey.

1. What type of students do you currently service?

- ☐ General Education Students Only
- ☐ Special Education Students Only
- ☐ Both General and Special Education Students

2. How many full years experience do you have working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

- ☐ 0
- ☐ 1-4
- ☐ 5-9
- ☐ 10+

3. What grade(s) do you currently teach? Choose all that apply.

- ☐ 5
- ☐ 6
- ☐ 7
- ☐ 8
- ☐ Other

4. Does your school also service any students in PreK-4 or grades 9-12?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. What certification are you currently working under?

- ☐ General Education Content Teacher
- ☐ Special Education Content Teacher
- ☐ Special Education Service Provider (Speech Therapist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, etc.)
- ☐ Allied Arts (Music, Physical Education, Art, etc)
- ☐ Administration
- ☐ Other

Survey for General Education Content Teacher *Only*

6. How would you define collaboration?

7. Please rank your preference in collaborating with others (1 being most preferred and 5 being least preferred).

- _____ I prefer to collaborate with a general education teacher
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with a special education teacher
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with administration
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with parents

8. What percent of time (in increments of 10 from 0% to 100%) during a week do you spend on the following?

- _____ Collaborating with the special education teacher

9. Under ideal circumstances, what percentage of time (in increments of 10 from 0% to 100%) during a week would you like to spend on the following?

- _____ Collaborating with the special education teacher

10. Describe the ways in which you collaborate with the special education teacher (choose all that apply).

- ☐ Share Instructional Resources
- ☐ Discuss Student Concerns
- ☐ Lesson Plan Development
- ☐ Discuss Classroom Modifications
- ☐ Other _____

11. What are the benefits of collaborating with the special education teacher?

12. What are the obstacles of collaborating with the special education teacher?

13. To what degree do the benefits outweigh the obstacles?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

14. To what degree do you feel comfortable approaching the special education teacher for support?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

15. To what degree do you value the special education teacher as a resource?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

16. Please indicate how much professional development you have received on the following topics:

| | 0 hours | 1-5 hours | 6-12 hrs | 12+ hours |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Teaming | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Student disabilities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Coteaching | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Classroom accommodations for students with disabilities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Behavior management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mastering conflict with colleagues | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Building trust among colleagues | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Differentiated Instruction | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Approaches to monitoring student progress | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

17. What supports do you believe should be put into place to facilitate collaboration with special education teachers?

18. To what degree do you value the feedback you receive from the special education teacher?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

19. How often do you collaborate with the special education teacher?

| | Not at All | Sometimes | Most of the Time | To a Great Extent |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| To develop lesson plans | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To discuss instructional modifications | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To exchange resources | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To discuss student achievement | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To share your expertise in content knowledge | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

20. To what degree are you willing to adjust your teaching strategies based on feedback you receive from the special education teacher?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

21. How do you collaborate with special education teachers who are resistant?

22. Please indicate how you feel about your current collaborative relationship(s) with the special education teacher(s).

| | Not a Problem | Minor Problem | Moderate Problem | Serious Problem |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The skill/expertise level of the special education teacher(s) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Time available to meet face to face with the special education teacher(s) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having shared goals with the special education teacher(s) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sharing responsibility with the special education teacher(s) for student outcomes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The personality of the special education teacher(s) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

23. To what degree do you feel the special education teacher is effective at communicating their ideas to you?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

24. How often do you utilize resources/strategies given to you by the special education teacher?

- ☐ Not at all (I do not wish to utilize resources/strategies given to me)
- ☐ Not at all (I am not given resources/strategies to utilize)
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Most of the Time
- ☐ To a Great Extent

25. How often do you give the special education teacher resources to use in their classroom?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Sometimes
- ☐ Most of the Time
- ☐ To a Great Extent

26. In what ways do you follow up with the special education teacher after collaborating?

27. To what degree is there equality in your collaborative relationship with the special education teacher?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

28. If you are willing to give your consent to participate in a one-hour interview, please provide your name and contact information in the space below. All information will remain confidential.

I appreciate and value your time. Thank you very much for completing and submitting the survey on teacher collaboration.

Survey for Special Education Content Teacher *Only*

6. How would you define collaboration?

7. Please rank your preference in collaborating with others (1 being most preferred and 5 being least preferred).

- _____ I prefer to collaborate with a general education teacher
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with a special education teacher
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with administration
- _____ I prefer to collaborate with parents

8. What percent of time during a week is spent on the following?

- _____ Collaborating with the general education teacher

9. Under ideal circumstances, what percentage of time during a week would you like to spend collaborating?

_____ Collaborating with the general education teacher?

10. Describe the ways in which you collaborate with the general education teacher (choose all that apply).

- ☐ Share Instructional Resources
- ☐ Discuss Student Concerns
- ☐ Lesson Plan Development
- ☐ Discuss Classroom Modifications
- ☐ Other _____

11. What are the benefits of collaborating with a general education teacher?

12. What are the obstacles of collaborating with a general education teacher?

13. To what degree do the benefits outweigh the obstacles?

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- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

14. To what degree do you feel comfortable approaching the general education teacher for support?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

15. To what degree do you value the general education teacher as a resource?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

16. Please indicate how much professional development you have received on the following topics:

| | 0 hours | 1-5 hours | 6-12 hrs | 12+ hours |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Teaming | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Student disabilities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Coteaching | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Classroom accommodations for students with disabilities | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Behavior management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Mastering conflict with colleagues | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Building trust among colleagues | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Differentiated Instruction | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Approaches to monitoring student progress | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

17. What supports do you believe would be put into place to facilitate collaboration with the general education teacher?

18. To what degree do you value the feedback you receive from the general education teacher?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

19. How often do you collaborate with a general education teacher?

| | Not at All | Sometimes | Most of the Time | To a Great Extent |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| To develop lesson plans | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To discuss instructional modifications | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To exchange resources | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| To discuss student achievement | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Share your expertise in special education topics | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

20. To what degree are you willing to adjust your teaching strategies based on feedback from a general education teacher?

- ☐ Not At All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

21. How do you collaborate with general education teachers who are resistant?

22. Please indicate how you feel about your current collaborative relationship(s) with the general education teacher(s).

| | Not a Problem | Minor Problem | Moderate Problem | Serious Problem |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The skill/expertise level of the special education teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Time available to meet face to face with the special education teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Having shared goals with then special education teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Sharing responsibility with the special education teacher for student outcomes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| The personality of the special education teacher | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

23. To what degree do you feel the general education teacher is effective at communicating their ideas to you?

- ☐ Not at All
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
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25. How often do you give the general education teacher resources to use in their classroom?

- ☐ Not at All
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- ☐ To a Great Extent

26. In what ways do you follow up with the general education teacher after collaborating?

27. To what degree is there equity in your collaborative relationship with the general education teacher?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ Somewhat
- ☐ Mostly
- ☐ To a Great Extent

28. If you are willing to give your consent to participate in a one-hour interview, please provide your name and contact information in the space below. All information will remain confidential.

I appreciate and value your time. Thank you very much for completing and submitting the survey on teacher collaboration.

Appendix C

Interview Informed Letter of Consent

Title: Documenting Aspects of Effective Collaboration Between General and Special Education Teachers in Middle Schools

Investigator: Kerri L. Olore, Graduate Student for Ph.D. in Educational Leadership

There is a Standing Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University to which complaints or problems concerning any research project may, and should, be reported if they arise. Contact the Committee Chairperson at irb@lesley.edu.

Description:

This study will investigate

1. What do general and special education teachers report they are doing to promote successful collaborative relationships?
2. What factors and conditions promote and hinder collaboration between general and special education teachers?
3. What are ways in which the special education teacher is considered a resource for the general education teachers?

This study seeks to document aspects of collaborative relationships that exist between general and special education teachers. If you choose to participate in this study you will be asked to complete a brief survey to determine if you meet the criteria for participation. Qualifying participants will be asked to participate in an interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The questions asked during the interview will focus on the collaborative relationships you have with your colleagues. Participants will also be given an option to participate in an observation documenting a collaborative interaction on site. Participants may also volunteer to share documents with the researcher that illustrate collaboration between general and special education teachers.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no perceived risks of participation in this study. The benefits include contributing to the knowledge base of the collaboration that takes place between general and special education teachers.

Voluntary Participation:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. There are no payments or college credits for participating.

Confidentiality:

Results from the study will be reported as summative data. Interviews and observations will be assigned a pseudonym that will be used to represent your name, and a number will be used to represent the school district in which you work. All information will be recorded anonymously.

Only the investigator will know your name, but will not divulge it or identify your answers to anyone. All information will be securely locked, and will only be accessed to the researcher.

Right to Withdraw:

You are free to refuse to participate in the research and to withdraw from the study at any time. You will receive no penalty for choosing to withdraw. If you wish to withdraw from this study please contact the investigator at kolore@lesley.edu.

Audio Recording:

In order to capture responses from participants accurately and completely, the investigator may ask to audio record face-to-face interviews or telephone conversations. The investigator will make no audio recording without your knowledge and consent.

Informed Consent:

I

(Please print name)

have read the description including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The investigator has explained each of these items to me. The investigator has answered all of my questions regarding the study, and I believe I understand the terms and conditions. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the investigator.

(Signature)

(Date)

Appendix D

Draft Interview Protocol and General Education Teacher Interview

1. Would you consider collaboration to be a priority for you within your current teaching role?
 - a. Please explain why or why not
 - b. If Yes
 - i. Would you say that collaborating with special education teachers is as much of a priority as collaborating with other general educators, administrators, or parents? (question may vary based on survey answer of prioritizing collaborative efforts).
 - ii. Please explain why.
2. Of all the ways in which you collaborate with the special education teacher, please describe what you feel is
 - a. The most effective
 - b. The least effective
3. In the survey, you mentioned (insert answer) as the obstacles you face when collaborating with the special education teacher(s). Please discuss what steps you have taken to overcome these obstacles.
 - a. How effective are these strategies?
4. Describe a time when you felt you had the most effective collaboration with the special education teacher.
 - a. Were there specific supports in place that you believe impacted your ability to collaborate effectively?
5. Describe a time when you attempted to collaborate with the special education teacher, but it ended in disaster.
 - a. Were there specific supports that were missing that you feel impacted your ability to collaborate effectively?
6. Would you describe your school as having a strong collaborative culture? Please explain why.
7. Discuss the supports put into place by the administration that allow you collaborate with the special education teacher.

*Additional questions may be added based on survey results

Special Education Teacher Interview

1. Would you consider collaboration to be a priority for you within your current teaching role?
 - a. Please explain why or why not
 - b. If Yes
 - i. Would you say that collaborating with general education teachers is as much of a priority as collaborating with other special educators, administrators, or parents? (question may vary based on survey answer of prioritizing collaborative efforts).

ii. Please explain why.

2. Of all the ways in which you collaborate with the general education teacher, please describe what you feel is
 - a. The most effective
 - b. The least effective
3. In the survey, you mentioned (insert answer) as the obstacles you face when collaborating with the general education teacher(s). Please discuss what steps you have taken to overcome these obstacles.
 - a. How effective are these strategies?
4. Describe a time when you felt you had the most effective collaboration with the general education teacher.
 - a. Were there specific supports in place that you believe impacted your ability to collaborate effectively?
5. Describe a time when you attempted to collaborate with the general education teacher, but it ended in disaster.
 - a. Were there specific supports that were missing that you feel impacted your ability to collaborate effectively?
6. Would you describe your school as having a strong collaborative culture? Please explain why.
7. Discuss the supports put into place by the administration that allow you collaborate with the general education teacher.

*Additional questions may be added based on survey results

Appendix E
Permission For Bracketing Conceptual Framework

Lea Tufford

April 29, 2017 at 9:22 AM

LT

Re: Bracketing in Qual. Research Question

To: Kerri Olore

Hello Kerri,

Thank you for your email. I am glad to hear the article was so helpful. Yes, you have my permission to use the conceptual framework.

Best wishes for your research,
Lea

Lea Tufford, PhD
Assistant Professor
School of Social Work
Laurentian University

130 Bell Farm Road Units 2 & 3
Barrie, ON L4M 3X9
Tel: 1-855-675-1151 ext. 6717
Email: LTufford@laurentian.ca
<http://laurentian.ca/program/social-work>

Research Gate URL
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Lea_Tufford/

>>> Kerri Olore <kerri.jacques@gmail.com> 4/29/2017 9:08 AM >>>

[See More](#) from Kerri Olore

p.newman@utoronto.ca

April 29, 2017 at 2:27 AM



Re: Bracketing in Qual. Research Question

To: Olore, Kerri

Hi Kerri,

I am glad you find it useful. Yes, it is published and available for your use. I would only ask that you duly cite where the conceptual framework comes from. If you have not done so, would you kindly email the first author. You can let her know we've already had this interchange.

Good luck with the dissertation!

Peter A. Newman, Ph.D.

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Quoting "Olore, Kerri" <kolore@lesley.edu>:

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