

Rowan University

## Rowan Digital Works

---

Theses and Dissertations

---

5-16-2005

### General and special education teachers' perspectives on co-teaching practice and barriers

Kristie L. Attardi  
*Rowan University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Special Education and Teaching Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Attardi, Kristie L., "General and special education teachers' perspectives on co-teaching practice and barriers" (2005). *Theses and Dissertations*. 962.  
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/962>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact [graduateresearch@rowan.edu](mailto:graduateresearch@rowan.edu).

GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON  
COTEACHING PRACTICE AND BARRIERS

By  
KRISTIE L. ATTARDI

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
April 28, 2005

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Date Approved May 16, 2005

© 2005 Kristie L. Attardi

## ABSTRACT

Kristie L. Attardi

### GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON COTEACHING PRACTICE AND BARRIERS

2005

Dr. Mian Wang

Master of Arts in Special Education

The purpose of this study is to explore special and general education teachers' perspectives of why coteaching is not implemented effectively and how the problems can be resolved to lead to successful practice. The objectives of the study are: (a) to better understand the perspectives of both the general and special educators with respect to the barriers of coteaching, and (b) to gather information on what means the general and special teachers have used or believe should use to overcome the barriers. Sixteen teachers of the eight coteaching pairs within an elementary school participated in this study. These teachers completed a coteaching practice survey, and a follow-up interview was conducted to six of those teachers. The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistical method via SPSS and the interview responses were coded and unitized to identify themes of coteaching practice and barriers. Results show that the general and special education teachers have different opinions on many issues regarding coteaching. Not all teachers felt that their coteacher is qualified, and nor do all agree on the responsibilities and goals involved in coteaching.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to first and foremost thank my husband, Philip, for his patience and understanding during this final year of graduate school. Were it not for his support, I may have not come this far.

Secondly, I would like to thank my parents for instilling a love of education and the desire to motivate myself towards better things. I would especially like to thank my dad. If it were not for him, I may not have even enrolled at Rowan.

I would also like to thank Dr. Mian Wang of the Special Education Department for all his guidance and advice.

This thesis is dedicated to my child, whom I will meet in four months. What a wonderful reward!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	1
Significance of the Study .....	5
Statement of the Purpose .....	7
Research Questions .....	7
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
Historical Review of Coteaching .....	9
Theoretical Underpinnings of Coteaching .....	11
Important Practical Issues of Coteaching .....	16
3. METHODOLOGY .....	26
Subjects .....	26
Sampling and Procedures .....	27
Measures .....	28
Data Analysis .....	28
4. RESULTS .....	30
Quantitative Data Analysis .....	30
Qualitative Data Analysis .....	35
5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....	39
Summary .....	39

Discussion.....	40
Recommendations.....	44
REFERENCES .....	45
APPENDIX.....	48
Survey Questions .....	48



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### Statement of the Problem

There is a growing literature in which researchers focus on an array of topics with regard to theoretical and practical issues of coteaching. Weiss & Llyod (2003) define coteaching as “an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in a educationally integrated setting.” (p28) In Luckner’s (1999) qualitative study, two elementary coteaching classrooms were observed and teachers were interviewed. Luckner found that “coteaching allows teachers to respond to the diverse needs of all students, provides another set of hands and eyes, lowers the teacher-student ratio, and expands the amount of professional expertise that can be directed to student needs” (p. 27). Walther-Thomas’s (1997) qualitative research focuses on the benefits and barriers of co-teaching. This 3 year study found that co-teaching is an effective service delivery model for students with and without disabilities as well as for both the general and special education teachers.

Even though coteaching is widely regarded as an effective inclusionary practice, many barriers exist. The research results show that coteaching practice is time consuming, demanding great commitments from the teachers involved, and expecting the teachers



with completely different training to plan and work together collaboratively (Reinhiller, 1996; Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Fennick and Liddy (2001) studied coteachers' attitudes towards their responsibilities, the amount of preparation that they needed, how they were prepared in undergraduate studies and through the district to co-teach, and the amount of planning time given. They found that special and general education teachers differed on their opinions of their responsibilities for instruction and classroom management. Perceptions towards coteaching were found very positive for both general and special education teachers. But the special education teachers tend to have more positive perception of coteaching than the general education teachers. This study also found that one of the barriers of coteaching is that there is a breakdown of communication between both general and special education teachers.

Reinhiller (1996) summarized that there are ethical and professional issues, funding issues, time issues, cooperation issues, and increased work load issues with respect to coteaching. In a pull-out resource classroom or a self-contained classroom, the teacher to student ratio is low. In a coteaching classroom, the teacher to student ratio is much higher and individualized instruction can be lost. Due to this potential barrier, schools sometimes use paraprofessionals to instruct small groups of students; however, these are the least trained professionals helping the students who may be the most challenging to teach. Some teachers feel that coteaching may replace pull-out programs altogether, when some students with disabilities require more individualized instruction. The confidentiality of students also presents an ethical issue in coteaching. Each teacher

may have different beliefs towards a student's education, and this may cause great dilemmas between the two teachers. It is also found that funding is also a barrier to coteaching (Reinhiller, 1996). Having special educators to coteach with general educators costs money. In the situation where more support is needed, paraprofessionals may need to be hired and thus creates an ever-increasing budget.

In addition, common planning time becomes an issue given that many coteachers struggle with the limited time for instructional planning. Gately and Gately (2001) state that common planning time "is essential if teachers are to become truly collaborative" (p. 44). If the coteachers are working together for the first time, then a great amount of planning time is needed. Two teachers that have been working together for years may not need as much planning time, as this becomes ongoing and continuous for more experienced teams (p. 44).

Different beliefs and perceptions can cause a rift in cooperation issues. Reinhiller (1996) found that students may have difficulty understanding and accepting that both teachers in the classroom are of equal status. Grading and discipline are also factors that can become barriers if not planned and discussed between the two teachers. The special educator and general educator may have different beliefs regarding teaching content. While the general educator sees themselves as under pressure to cover the curriculum, the special educator may be more concerned with the students' individual needs.

Coteaching can also mean an increased work load for both teachers. Luckner (1999) found that "it demands that educators make decisions about the classroom climate,

what to teach, how to teach, the pace of instruction, discipline, accommodations, evaluation, and grades” (p. 28). Similar findings were reported by Walther-Thomas (1997), indicating that the barriers to coteaching included lack of planning time, scheduling, caseload concerns for the special educator, lack of administrative support, and too few opportunities for staff development.

Coteaching has great potential to provide services to students with disabilities in the general education classroom. For coteaching to remain a successful service delivery model, continuous research is needed. Both the general educator and the special educator must have a solid relationship in which the lines of communication remain open.

Although there has been research concentrating on the effectiveness of coteaching, little research has been done on the general and special education teachers’ attitudes towards one another in implementing coteaching. Monahan (1997) surveyed general and special educators, administrators, and counselors about their perceptions of inclusion that includes questions with focus on coteaching. In the study, teachers, administrators, and counselors were asked about who they felt was primarily responsible for the education of students with disabilities in a general education classroom. Fifty-one percent of teachers agreed that the primary responsibility for students with disabilities lies with the general educators. However, separate surveys were not distributed to the general and special educators, and one is unable to tell how each type of teacher responded. Therefore, there is a need to study teachers’ perspectives towards the barriers of coteaching and how those barriers can be overcome. Additionally, it is necessary to further study the perceptions of general education and special education teachers towards

working collaboratively.

### Significance of the Study

In the past few decades, there has been a rise of special education students in the general education classroom. In the 1993-1994 school year, more than 2 million students with disabilities received special education services in the general education classroom (Walther-Thomas, 1997, as cited in U.S. Department of Education [USDE], 1996). Due to this increase, schools must adjust their service delivery models to accommodate students in the least restrictive environment.

The increase of students with disabilities in the general education classroom requires special educators to move into the general education classroom. General educators and special educators must now form collaborative relationships in order to meet the needs of all students. Weiss and Lloyd (2003) found that coteaching is an effective collaboration model in which, “special educators work with general educators to provide direct services in the general education classroom” (p. 27). The authors cite the report of the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (1995) which states that coteaching is the collaborative model most used in schools today.

Walther-Thomas (1997) noted that coteaching allows teachers to share the responsibilities for instruction, curriculum, modifications, activities, and assessment. While many of the structures that have been created to meet the needs of student with disabilities take place outside of the classroom, coteaching, which takes place in a general education classroom, is seen as worthy of notice by many educators and researchers.

Coteaching gives both the regular and special educator “assistance in the development, delivery, and evaluation of effective instructional programs” (p. 396).

Morocco and Aguilar (2002) point out that coteaching is “one of the most promising and intricate forms of collaboration in support of diverse learners to emerge in recent years” (p. 316). The students in the classroom are given the expertise of the specific content area from the general education teacher, while the special education teacher provides expertise in a more individualized method.

Laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990 have mandated the rights of students with disabilities to have access to the programs and services that they need and deserve. Due to the shift in placement for student with disabilities, schools must respond accordingly. Coteaching has become one of the answers to a more inclusive setting. While many researchers have pointed out that coteaching is an effective collaboration model, more research needs to be done to further refine this teaching practice. By identifying the barriers of coteaching and the means to overcome them, both general and special education teachers can develop methods to become more effective coteachers.

Each coteaching classroom is comprised of two different teaching personalities and teaching styles. Due to this, teachers have many different experiences in coteaching. Salend, Gordon, and Lopez-Vona (2002) state that for this reason “rather than assuming that cooperative teaching teams are working effectively, information on educators’ experiences and reactions to working as a cooperative team should be periodically

collected and examined” (p. 196). Giving teachers an opportunity to focus on their coteaching relationship and to provide invaluable insights can improve instruction within the classroom. Gately and Gately (2001) found that surveying teachers on their coteaching relationships can “determine the effectiveness of classroom practices and develop strategies to improve programs” (p. 47).

#### Statement of the Purpose

It is believed that coteaching has great potential to provide services to students with disabilities in the general education classroom. For coteaching to be a successful service delivery model, both the general educator and the special educator must collaborate and plan together to ensure that the needs of all students are met.

The purpose of this study is to explore special and general education teachers’ perspectives of why coteaching is not implemented effectively and how the problems can be resolved to lead to successful practice. The objectives of the study are: (a) to better understand the perspectives of both the general and special educators with respect to the barriers of coteaching, and (b) to gather information on what means the general and special teachers have used or believe should use to overcome the barriers.

#### The Research Questions

In terms of the objectives of this study, I focused my investigation on the following research questions:

1. Are general education teachers and special education teachers different in their view of supporting coteaching practice?

2. What are the barriers of coteaching in terms of general and special educators' perspectives?
3. How do general and special educators think that coteaching can be practiced effectively?

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Since 1975, Congress has required that students with disabilities receive an education in the least restrictive environment. It is reported that since 1988, U.S. schools have found the regular education classroom to be the least restrictive environment for increasing numbers of students with disabilities (National Center of Educational Statistics, 2002). The statistics in the same report also show that in 1988-89, 47% of students with disabilities spent 80% or more of their day in the regular education classroom. NCES indicates that the increase in the percentage of students with disabilities included in the regular classroom is growing faster than total school enrollment. In fact, Walther-Thomas (1997) states during the 1993-1994 school year, 2 million students with disabilities received all of their special education services in general education classroom.

In this chapter, I will summarize and synthesize the history of coteaching and how it evolved through the inclusion movement. The literature review is also focused on the theories of coteaching, how the practice is implemented in the classroom, and the practical issues of coteaching with the purpose of identifying the benefits and barriers involved in this service delivery model.

#### Historical Review of Coteaching

Classrooms today look dramatically different from those many years ago. In any given public school classroom, an observer might witness a diverse group of learners



being instructed by two teachers: a general educator and a special educator. Thirty years of efforts by politicians and educators have allowed this inclusion model to come to be and is still being developed and refined today. Coteaching takes its roots from inclusion. In 1975, the *Education for the Handicapped Children Act* (EHA), also known as Public Law 94-142, was passed by the U.S. Congress. Later in 1990, it was renamed the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). This law declared that all children with disabilities would be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent possible. IDEA provided a continuum of alternate placements which ranged from least restrictive to most restrictive. The placements are as follows: instruction in general education classrooms, special education resource classrooms, a special class program in the student's school district or in another school district, a special education program in a special school, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals or institutions (New Jersey Administrative Code, 6A:14-4.2).

In 1985, Madeline Will proposed the regular education initiative (REI) which hoped to educate student with mild disabilities within the general education classroom. This has given more responsibility to the general educators for the education of students with disabilities. The REI was to provide special education services to the students, but allow them to participate in the general education classroom (Monahan, Miller, & Cronin, 1997). The *Oberti v. Board of Education of Clementon School District* (1993) established a federal court ruling that a parent does not have to prove that their child must be mainstreamed into the general education classroom. Yell (1995) noted that instead, the school district must justify its decision to exclude a student from the general education

classroom.

This shift in education caused schools to adjust their service delivery models. Many general education teachers now have students of varying disabilities in their classrooms, and many special education teachers are giving up their small groups and heading into the general education classrooms. In response to this change in education, new collaborative relationships had to be formed. The first form of coteaching, called team teaching, began in the 1950s and 1960s. Team teaching took place in secondary schools and involved teaming up two general education teachers who delivered large-group presentations, and then later met with smaller groups for follow-up instruction (Friend & Reising, 1993).

Team teaching became more widespread in the 1970s and 1980s, but remained as a general education practice. As inclusive education became a prevalent practice in schools, general and special educators began to work together much more than in years before. By the late 1980s, co-teaching was a term primarily used for special education teachers to teach alongside a general education teacher in a general education classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995).

### Theoretical Underpinnings of Coteaching

#### *Rationale for Coteaching*

Coteaching is just one of the many service delivery models offered to students with disabilities. Reinhiller (1996) states that:

The rationales for engaging in coteaching relationships include a desire to follow

a full inclusion model for students with disabilities, improve instructional programs for included students, provide another service option in a less restrictive environment, and increase professional support and enhancement (38).

Cook and Friend (1995) pointed out that there are many reasons that make coteaching work. The four striking components to rationalize coteaching that the authors discuss are (a) increase educational choices for students, (b) improve the current program, (c) alleviate stigma for students with disabilities, and (d) lend support to teachers.

Student with disabilities that are in a coteaching classroom have the advantage of being instructed by two teachers with different instructional approaches. Friend and Cook (1992) noted that “all students, those with disabilities and those without, benefit from having two teachers in the classroom who can provide extra help and more options for learning, such as flexible grouping, hands-on experiences, and modeling of interactions” (p. 31). In her study, Walther-Thomas (1997) reported that teachers believe that a large amount of students had succeeded academically in appropriately supported inclusion settings.

The second rationale for coteaching is improving students with disabilities’ current program. In a coteaching classroom, having two teachers reduces the student-teacher ratio and can benefit from more instruction. When students with disabilities are pulled out for instruction, teaching time is lost. In addition, the special education teacher can monitor, modify, or re-teach instruction immediately. Cook and Friend (1995) stated that when the general education curriculum and special education services are separate,

and there is a lack of continuity in the curriculum.

Students with disabilities are often made to feel that there is a label attached to any child who leaves for special education pullout services. Walther-Thomas (1997) reported that “a number of teachers noted that many students with disabilities ‘lost’ their labels when the special education service delivery format changed. Teachers noted that many identified students developed better attitudes about themselves and others” (p. 399).

The third and last rationale for coteaching as addressed by Cook and Friend (1995) is that teachers feel supported by other professionals. Teaching can often be lonely, as most of the school day is spent with children and no other adults. Friend and Cook (1992) stated that “a coteacher also becomes a supportive teaching partner, someone who understands and shares both the successes and the frustrations associated with trying something new” (p. 31). Walther-Thomas (1997) reported that many teachers found it rewarding to have another professional in the classroom.

### *Coteaching Models*

While coteaching provides many benefits to students and teachers, perhaps one of the greatest assets of this inclusionary model is to have two teachers with two different sets of styles and instructional approaches in one classroom. To use coteaching to its greatest potential, coteachers can practice various models, depending on the size, age, and makeup of the students, as well as the relationship and unique ideas of the two teachers.

A review of the literature suggests that there are different approaches of coteaching (Weiss & Lloyd, 2003; Reinhiller, 1996; Friend & Reising, 1993; and

Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997). The following are common coteaching models, as summarized by Cook & Friend (1995):

#### *One Teaching-One Assisting*

In this model, both coteachers are in the classroom. While one teacher gives whole class instruction, the other observes or assists students as needed. This allows students who are struggling to have immediate assistance if needed; however, Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1997) report that some teachers feel this is not a productive use of their time. Cook & Friend (1995) state that if the teacher who is walking around the room is the special educator, that co-teacher may feel like an assistant, rather than the other teacher in the room. In addition, students may also perceive that teacher to have less authority than the general education teacher. Planning is only necessary for the teachers who s leading the lesson.

#### *Station Teaching*

In this model, the coteachers break the instruction into parts and present the lessons at different stations in the classroom. The teachers then trade groups of students, and reteach the same lesson. At times, one group of students may work independently. In this model, the teachers are usually perceived by the students to have the same authority and there is a low teacher-student ratio. Planning is essential for both teachers in this model.

#### *Parallel Teaching*

In this model, the coteachers teach the same lesson to half of the class at the same time. The heterogeneous groups receive the same instruction and have a lower student-

teacher ratio. Planning is necessary as both coteachers must complete their lessons in approximately the same amount of time.

### *Alternative Teaching*

In this model, one teacher teaches the whole group while another teacher takes a small group who may need more individualized instruction for reteaching or enrichment. Cook & Friend (1995) found that this model may pose a possible risk of stigmatization towards students with disabilities. If the same students are grouped together on a consistent basis, they may be perceived negatively by their peers. For this reason, the authors encourage coteachers to have flexible groups. Again, planning time is necessary for both coteachers to engage in this model.

### *Team Teaching*

In this model, both coteachers teach the same lesson to the whole group at the same time. Each teacher might lecture, hold a class discussion, demonstrate a concept, model an activity or process, and/or role-play a concept together. It is believed that team teaching is the most difficult model to implement. Both sets of authors found that it requires experience, trust, and open doors of communication. This model of coteaching requires the most amount of planning as the teaching involved is somewhat synchronized in nature (Cook & Friend, 1995; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997).

Weiss and Llyod (2003) provide a different synthesis of the types of coteaching which includes four types of team teaching. The first type is “tag team teaching” in which one coteacher instructs the class and then, when finished, the other coteacher follows.

The second type is “named speak and add” in which one coteacher instructs while the other coteacher adds information. The third type of team teaching is “speak and chart” in which one coteacher instructs the class and the other co-teacher records the information on a chart, overhead projector, etc. The final type of team teaching is “the duet” in which the coteachers work in conjunction with each other, completing each others thoughts and ideas.

### Important Practical Issues of Co-teaching

As with many educational issues, there are the benefits and barriers that arise when implementing a new practice. In this section, I will summarize the literature about the benefits to coteaching and how it enhances the education of all students in addition to the professional lives of the teachers involved. The barriers and challenges of coteaching will also be reviewed with the purpose of finding better methods to improve upon the practice of coteaching.

#### *The Benefits of Co-teaching*

Coteaching is widely known as an effective service delivery model for students with disabilities. Reinhiller (1996) discovered many benefits for students with disabilities. Students that used to leave the room for pull-out instruction are now able to remain in one classroom and their time in school is more focused on a continual learning experience. Walsh and Bryant (2004) found that teachers in general education classrooms were more likely to teach according to the guidelines of the curriculum rather than teachers in self-contained classrooms. In addition, the same authors state that teachers in

general education classrooms are more likely to encourage students to use critical thinking skills found on state proficiency tests than were teachers in self-contained classrooms. Students with disabilities are also being offered a variety of teaching styles due to both coteachers being in the classroom. Walther-Thomas and Bryant (1996) reported that students with disabilities are not likely to be removed from the general education classroom because of the academic and social inability to keep up with the rest of the class. They found that these successes are due to enrichment and reinforcement opportunities, more individualized attention, and better monitoring of student progress.

Students with disabilities in a coteaching classroom now have more interaction with students without disabilities. These students can serve as academic and behavioral models. Reinhiller (1997) discovered many teachers and administrators have found that there are less behavior issues in coteaching classrooms. Students with disabilities are found to have a better self-image towards themselves and their academics. Walther-Thomas and Bryant (1996) state that students with disabilities “became less critical, more motivated, and learned to recognize their own academic and social strengths” (p. 256).

In addition to coteaching having a positive effect on students with disabilities, some studies have found that it also is beneficial for students without disabilities. Students that are struggling with academics or behavior issues, but do not qualify for special education services, are better able to succeed due to the benefits found in a coteaching classroom (Reinhiller, 1996). In a review of literature, Salend and Duhaney (1999) focus on the outcomes of inclusion on student with and without disabilities and on



general and special education teachers. These authors find that students without disabilities in an inclusion classroom performed better on reading and mathematics than did students without disabilities in a general education classroom. Overall, Walsh and Jones (2004) found that “students in cotaught classrooms perform significantly better on state minimum competency tests as compared to students in similar general education classes without coteaching”.

Coteaching is also found to benefit both the general and special education teachers. Teachers in coteaching classrooms have a unique form of communication, enriched instruction, and professional satisfaction, support, and growth (Reinhiller, 1996). When two teachers are involved in the education of students, a communication exists that gives both teachers more insight into each student. Both teachers are able to observe and work with each student from different viewpoints and then come together as a team to communicate what their students need.

Reinhiller (1996) found that general education teachers reported that “their teaching skills improved because they learned ways to individualize instruction and ways to expand on the regular curriculum by collaborating with a special education teacher” (p. 43). Special education teachers reported that coteaching gave them an opportunity to improve their skills at timing, pacing of the curriculum, and classroom management.

Teachers in a general education classroom setting are usually isolated for the majority of the school day. Coteachers, however, are able to share the classroom with another professional and communicate and collaborate daily. Due to this, teachers report that coteaching is “the best professional growth of their careers” (Walther-Thomas, 1997,

p. 401). In the research completed by Salend and Duhaney (1999), most collaborative teams felt that they had more opportunities to share their thoughts and ideas with other professionals and felt they had more professional support. "Coteaching provides teachers with a sense of shared responsibility and collegial support from someone with whom they share both successes and frustrations" (Luckner, 1999, p. 27).

### *The Barriers of Coteaching*

While many teachers report that coteaching is an effective service delivery model, various drawbacks arise that can make this inclusion practice challenging. Each classroom has its own unique obstacles because every student and every coteacher is different. However, research shows that there are common and reoccurring barriers in coteaching.

Barriers can exist in any coteaching situation. Gately & Gately (2001) point out that various barriers exist when new teachers, teachers who are beginning to coteach for the first time, teachers who feel forced to coteach, or teachers who do not get along are working together in the coteaching classroom. In these situations, communication between the two teachers is guarded as they are working on developing a relationship. General education teachers may feel that their classrooms are being intruded upon and that they are losing control over their classroom. The general education teacher may not have confidence in the special educator's ability to teach the class, which can cause special educators to feel unaccepted and excluded from the classroom. The special educator can be made to feel more like a paraprofessional rather than the other teacher in

the classroom. General education teachers may feel that modifications made for students with disabilities is watering down the curriculum. Without common planning time, the special educator may only wander around the classroom, not fully contributing to the lessons because they may not have a full understanding of the curriculum. Gately and Gately (2001) state that “not knowing how the lesson is organized and how the lesson will proceed places the special education teacher at a distinct disadvantage in being helpful to the students or the general education teacher” (p. 44). Teachers may continue to have problems if a good relationship is not developed.

Reinhiller (1996) found that five major barriers to coteaching that may exist in schools today: ethical and professional issues, funding, time, cooperation, and increased work loads. Special educators may struggle with ethical issues in the general education classroom because of the very nature of their training. Special education teachers have been trained to individualize instruction, and when students with disabilities move to the general education classroom, individualized instruction can be replaced by whole group instruction. Another ethical issue that exists is the use of paraprofessionals in the classroom. Special educators do not have the power to be in two places at once, and many schools use paraprofessionals to provide instruction or assistance to students with disabilities. In effect, schools are using the least trained professionals to assist the most challenging students to teach. Special educators also fear that coteaching may replace pull out instruction completely, when pull out instruction may be the most appropriate service delivery model for some students. Finally, the general and special education coteachers may not share the same values and ethics when it comes to their students and

this may cause a very uncomfortable situation.

Coteaching is an expensive service delivery model as two teachers are replacing one in the general education classroom. Due to this, some school districts are hiring paraprofessionals instead of special education teachers (Reinhiller, 1996). This solution could have a detrimental effect on students with disabilities as paraprofessionals are usually untrained in the field of special education.

Reinhiller (1996) found that in one study, five teachers all felt they needed more common planning time. Teachers that are not as familiar with coteaching may need more planning time than those who have more experience coteaching or for partners that have been together for an extended period of time. Vaughn, Schumm, and Arguells (1997) report that teachers need a minimum of 45 minutes a week if coteaching is to be effective. Walther-Thomas (1997) states that “finding scheduled time for coteachers to plan together during school hours is a serious problem for many schools” (p. 402). However, the same teachers did report that planning with the same coteacher over a number of years did get less difficult over time.

Lack of cooperation has great potential to create barriers in the coteaching classroom. The students in the general education classroom may not accept that both teachers have equal status. Assessment and classroom discipline are also issues of cooperation that can cause great animosity between the coteachers if not planned and discussed in advance. These are imperative topics that must be decided before the school year even begins and then frequently throughout the year. Another barrier that lack of

cooperation can cause is the contrasting belief systems that general and special educators have towards teaching. General educators are more concerned with teaching the whole class at a certain pace according to the curriculum. Special educators are more concerned with individualized instruction. Both teachers may have great difficulties changing their styles of teaching.

The final barrier is an increased work load for both coteachers. Some schools see inclusion classrooms as convenient placement for low achieving students (Reinhiller, 1996). This creates much more work for both co-teachers, and Walther-Thomas (1997) has described such problem as: "it does not take long before the word gets out about these bad situations and quickly gives inclusive classrooms a bad name" (p. 403). In addition, some special education teachers are given a large amount of caseloads and consequently have great difficulty juggling all of their duties.

Walther-Thomas (1997) also reported that lack of staff development for coteaching is a common barrier that coteachers face. Many of the teachers involved in coteaching were never actually trained to coteach. In their research, Fennick and Liddy (2001) found that "the preparations that both groups of teachers felt most useful: release time to prepare, mentoring by a collaborative teacher, and student teaching in a collaborative class, are not being experienced by many of the 168 coteachers" (p. 237).

Friend and Reising (1993) discuss reoccurring barriers in coteaching which is most likely due to lack of planning. In some classrooms, the general education teacher does not change any format of the classroom to accommodate the special education

teacher. The classroom continues to run exactly as it did before coteaching began. In other situations, the special educator is treated like a paraprofessional, instead of a certified teacher. This is a waste of the special educators' time and does not benefit the students in any way.

### *Making Coteaching an Effective Practice*

Recommendations are made to eliminate the barriers that may weaken this service delivery model and to ensure that coteaching remains an effective practice.

Friend & Cook (1992) offer the following eight suggestions for teachers:

1. Find common planning time. It is essential that general and special educators find time to plan and talk together. The more common planning time, the more likely the coteaching experience will flow smoothly. Walther-Thomas & Bryant (1996) state that coteachers should have a minimum of one 45 to 60 minute common planning time per week together.
2. Talk about your educational beliefs with each other. If both teachers hold similar ideas and views on coteaching, their instruction may be more effective.
3. Discuss everything. Both teachers should exchange views on particulars that if not discussed, could lead to friction between the two teachers during the school year. Teachers should review classroom management, routines, assessment, and pet peeves.
4. Keep parents informed. Parents of students with disabilities and without disabilities should be familiarized about coteaching in the beginning of the school year. Teachers should ensure parents that two teachers means more attention for everyone, and follow

through with this promise.

5. General education teachers should make the special education teacher feel like a partner. Both teachers should discuss how they will introduce themselves to the students and the special educator should be given their own space in the classroom.
6. Avoid making the special educator feel as if they are a paraprofessional instead of the other teacher. Having two teachers in one classroom is an opportunity to enrich instruction and should not be wasted.
7. Discuss disagreements immediately. Both teachers should realize that it is not possible to agree on everything, and feel ready to communicate and compromise. Candy, a special educator interviewed by Friend, stated that “it helps to remember that coteachers are not always going to get along, you’re not always going to see eye to eye. When that happens and you start to lose your focus, you need to remember why you’re doing this, that it’s all for the kids” (Friend & Cook, 1992, p. 36).
8. Understand that coteaching takes time and patience. As time passes, each teacher should begin to feel more comfortable with one another. Teachers should take time to discuss what is working and what needs to be fixed.

Cook & Friend (1998) found that teachers should be trained in coteaching and should be given support from administrators for coteaching to be an effective practice (cited in Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). They pointed out that teachers need to be prepared in instructional skills, collaboration, and planning. Reinhiller (1996) expressed the same view by emphasizing that “teacher education programs can assume a leadership role in

this area for both preservice and in-service teachers by offering guidance through coursework and consultation” (p. 45). School districts that provide coteaching should give teachers the opportunity to attend in-service workshops to further refine their skills.

Administrators should assist both teachers in developing and managing their schedules and providing motivation and resources. Walther-Thomas and Bryant (1996) state that “support, understanding, and involvement by principals often serve as pivotal factors in the lasting success of new instructional innovations” (p. 13). When an administrator is directly involved in coteaching issues such as, coordinating schedules and planning the classroom rosters, coteaching becomes easier for all involved. Cook & Friend (1995) feel that administrators should provide coteachers with incentives and opportunities to improve their instruction. Luckner (1999) states that schools should choose teachers who have volunteered to participate in coteaching, not teachers who have been forced to coteach. Teachers who are coteaching because they want to are more likely to be more effective. Walther-Thomas & Bryant (1996) suggest that administrators choose teachers who have cotaught in the past or are leaders in their schools. The authors state that “the process moves more quickly when new coteachers have previously developed positive working relationships, have mutual respect for each person’s professional skills, and value collaboration” (p. 258).



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Subjects

This study was conducted at Wedgwood Elementary School in Washington Township, New Jersey. Washington Township is located in Gloucester County in Southern New Jersey. Wedgwood Elementary School has students who are from Sewell, Blackwood, and Grenloch. Wedgwood Elementary School is located in Sewell, NJ. In the 2002-2003 school year, the total enrollment for grades 1-5 was 692 students. According to the New Jersey School Report Card (2003), Wedgwood Elementary School is comprised of 9.0% of students with disabilities.

Sixteen teachers who are from eight teams that coteach within Wedgwood Elementary School were recruited to participate in this study. Among the participants, there are seven female and one male general elementary educator and eight female special educators. All teachers' ages fall between 31 and 55 years of age. All teachers hold a bachelor's degree in elementary education or special education. All teachers have a minimum of two years coteaching experience and a maximum of 15 years of coteaching experience. The subjects teach within a mid-socio economic status community. All of the teachers surveyed coteach within the school. Fifteen of the teachers were female, while one general education teachers was male. All participants were Caucasian. Table 1 will present the major demographical information of participants. Both groups of teachers

had similar amounts of teaching experience. However, the special education teachers had slightly more experience in coteaching than the general education teachers. In addition, slightly more of the special education teachers hold two degrees than do the general education teachers. Overall, the results show that all teachers surveyed were very similar in their education and experiential backgrounds.

Table 1

*Frequency Table of Teacher's Demographics*

<i>Type of Teacher</i>	<i>15 years or less teaching</i>	<i>16 years or more teaching</i>	<i>1 to 3 years coteaching</i>	<i>4 or more years coteaching</i>	<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	<i>Bachelor's and Master's degree</i>
General Education	37.5%	62.5%	25%	75%	75%	25%
Special Education	37.5%	62.5%	12.5%	87.5%	62.5%	37.5%

### Sampling and Procedure

Prior to the administration of the surveys and interviews, I first asked the principal of Wedgwood Elementary School for the permission to conduct the present study in this school. In his letter, the principal stated that he was aware of the purpose of the study and that permission was granted to the research. The convenience sample method was employed, and all teachers involved in coteaching in that school were informed of the study through a written announcement. The coteachers were asked if they would participate in a voluntary survey that would be kept anonymous and confidential. Sixteen teachers who currently coteach in inclusion classrooms were selected, and then the surveys were distributed to the selected teachers with a letter of disclaimer as approved by

the Rowan University IRB board. The teachers who participated in the survey were asked to voluntarily participate in a follow-up interview, and six teachers decided to participate in the interviews.

### Measures

Surveys and interviews were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data about teachers' perceptions of coteaching and their perspectives towards the barriers of coteaching and how those barriers can be overcome in practice. The survey questions used in this study were derived from *Rural Teachers', Administrators', and Counselors' Attitudes about Inclusion* by Monahan, Robert G., Miller, R., & Cronin, D. (1997), and *Understanding Coteaching Components* by Gately, S. & Gately, F. (2001). The survey questions are presented in Appendix.

Individual interviews were conducted to six teachers who volunteered to discuss their perspectives on coteaching and how the barriers could be overcome. Table 2 presents the interview questions. The interviewer took detailed notes and the interviews were audio taped, with the participants' permission. The transcripts were made based upon the audiotapes which helped to ensure that the information gathered during the interviews were accurate and could be reviewed as needed..

### Data Analysis

The surveys were collected and categories were established according to each question. The questions focused on general and special education teachers' attitudes towards coteaching. The survey results were analyzed using the statistical computer program SPSS. This program was used to run frequency analysis and create frequency

charts. All surveys were manually checked for response completion.

Table 2

*The Interview Questions*

1. How do you feel about working in cooperative teaching team?
2. What factors contribute to the success of your cooperative teaching team?
3. What problems has your cooperative teaching team encountered?
4. What support, resources, and training have been most helpful? Least helpful?
5. What school wide and district wide policies have aided or hindered your cooperative teaching team?

The interview responses were used to provide more detailed feedback regarding coteaching. The interviews were conducted in a semi structured format. The data gathered during the interview sessions were analyzed by reviewing and sorting the transcripts of the tape recordings of each interview. The transcripts were unitized and coded to present common themes emerging in the interviews.

In the interviews, questions focused on general information about teachers' perspectives on coteaching. Teachers were asked how they felt about coteaching, the factors that they felt contributed to the success of their own coteaching team and to describe the problems that their team has encountered. The final questions inquired as to what resources have been most or least helpful in aiding or hindering their coteaching team.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of data analysis in terms of the surveys to eight special education and eight general education elementary teachers who engage regularly in coteaching and as well as interviews to three special educators and three general educators. The results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis in the study are presented in terms of research questions.

#### Quantitative Data Analysis

The following section addresses the survey question results according to each major research question. The results analyze if general education teachers and special education teachers have different views of supporting the coteaching practice. It also addresses the barriers of coteaching in terms of general and special educators' perspectives and how general and special educators think that coteaching can be practiced in a more effective manner.

#### *General and Special Education Teacher's Attitudes Towards Coteaching Practice*

When asked if general education teachers were comfortable in coteaching with special education teachers, 87.5% of general education teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that they were comfortable with the practice. However, the results were more widespread among the special education teachers. Only three special education teachers (37.5%) responded as agreed or strongly agreed that general education teachers were

comfortable teaching with special educators in the coteaching practice.

A larger majority of general educators felt they are qualified, whereas only a small group of the special educators agreed. Table 3 shows the percentage of both groups of teachers who disagreed that a general educator has the knowledge and ability to be qualified to teach special education students. This attitude could negatively effect the classroom environment and coteaching relationship. However, when asked if special education teachers were familiar with the methods and materials of the general curriculum, 75% of general educators and 87.5% of special educators replied that special educators are usually aware of this necessary information. It appears that both groups of teachers have different views on each groups' abilities. While both groups of teachers felt that special educators have a good understanding of the content in the general education classroom, both groups do not agree that general educators are, in turn, as qualified to teach special education students.

Table 3

*Attitude towards general education teachers' knowledge and skills to teach students with special needs*

	<i>General Education Teachers</i>	<i>Special Education Teachers</i>
Agree	62.5%	25%
Neutral	12.5%	25%
Disagree	12.5%	37.5%
Strongly Disagree	12.5%	12.5%

Not surprisingly, other differences showed when teachers were asked if planning was the responsibility of both teachers. A large 87.5% of the general education teachers responded that planning is sometimes the responsibility of both teachers, while only 50% of special education teachers' stated that it is sometimes the responsibility of both teachers. It seems that many of the coteachers have very different views on coteaching.

#### *General and Special Educators' Perspectives of Barriers of Coteaching*

General and special educators were asked if both coteachers agree on the goals of the classroom. There was a great disparity in responses. An overwhelming 100% of general educators stated that both teachers usually agree on the goals of the classroom, while only 62.5% of the special educators were in agreement with this statement. It seems to the researcher that this result shows a breakdown in communication.

When asked if time was allotted for common planning time, 50% of the general educators and 62.5% of the special educators stated that it was usually provided. It was somewhat surprising to see that the two groups answered even slightly differently as they all teach in the same school and they are all provided with the same amount of common planning time. This gives us some insight into the importance of the perspectives of each group of teachers.

Differing students' perspectives of each teacher's status in the classroom is known to cause barriers in the classroom. When asked if two teachers in the classroom cause problems with authority, both groups of teachers responded differently. Table 4 shows that special educators do feel that having two teachers may cause a problem, while none of the general educators felt this way. Another barrier frequently mention in the literature

is an increased work load of both teachers. These results showed that both groups of teachers did somewhat agree. When asked if coteaching decreases the instructional load, 62.5% of special educators and 75% of general educators disagreed or strongly disagreed stating that it did not make their work load lighter. This shows that coteaching usually increases the workload of both the general and special educator.

Table 4

*The problem with “who is in charge” in the classroom*

	General Education Teachers	Special Education Teachers
Agree	0%	50%
Disagree	75%	25%
Strongly Disagree	25%	25%

*General and Special Teachers’ Opinions on Effective Coteaching Practice*

In the survey, teachers were asked if communication between their coteachers was open and honest. Seventy-five percent of special educators and 87.5% of general educators replied that communication is usually open and honest. Communication is part of the key to coteaching.

For coteaching to be effective, it is believed that coteachers should be trained. Seventy-five percent of regular educators and 62.5% of special educators agreed that they are interested in learning more about coteaching. However, only 37.5% of both groups strongly agree that in-service is necessary for coteaching to work. These two statistics seem to conflict. While a large percentage of teachers are interested in gaining more



knowledge about coteaching, only a small percentage think it is necessary for coteaching to be a success.

For coteaching to be a successful inclusionary practice, both coteachers must believe that it is, indeed, a worthwhile method for all involved. Table 5 shows that both groups of teachers feel that, overall, coteaching is valuable for all students. Another method in creating a successful coteaching classroom is for general education teachers to make the special education teacher feel as if they are the other teacher, not a paraprofessional. When asked if both teachers move freely about the room, 100% of general educators and 87.5% of special educators responded that this usually took place in the classroom. These results show that both groups of teachers feel comfortable to move about and work with students. While this result is encouraging, a similar question was asked of both groups, and the teachers responded differently. Teachers were asked if the chalk passes freely between teachers, meaning that both teachers feel comfortable in teaching in the classroom.

Table 5

*Coteaching benefits the students in my class*

	<i>General Education Teachers</i>	<i>Special Education Teachers</i>
Strongly agree	75%	50%
Agree	25%	25%
Neutral	0%	25%

General education teachers responded that 87.5% feel that usually both groups do feel

free to teach. Only 50% of special education teachers responded that both groups feel comfortable in teaching the class. These results again show a breakdown in communication and a difference in perception.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative information is again categorized according to the research questions. The information here elaborates on the research questions in that teachers were able to speak freely and give more detailed information. Teachers provided information about their feelings towards coteaching and what makes coteaching successful. Most teachers were better able to express and elaborate on their perspectives on the barriers to coteaching rather than on what makes coteaching successful. As the research shows, due to a lack of training, teachers provided limited information on how coteaching can be practiced effectively.

#### *General Education Teachers and Special Education Teacher's Attitudes Towards the Coteaching Practice*

When asked how they felt about coteaching, two groups of teachers responded differently. Most of the general educators enjoyed working as a team, and felt their teaching was improved through the collaborative process. The special education responses were varied. Some found the variety of children and routine refreshing, while others cotaught only because they were directed to do so.

Most teachers felt that flexibility and communication were the keys to a successful coteaching team. Each teacher must be open to ideas and be willing to talk about any problems that are encountered. The teachers that volunteered to coteach had

much more positive attitudes in all aspects of coteaching than the teachers who were directed by administration to become part of a coteaching team. Some teachers, mostly general education teachers, said they would rather coteach than teach alone.

*General and Special Educators' Perspectives on the  
Barriers of Coteaching*

Many barriers existed within these coteaching teams. There were common themes and a few individual complaints. Most of the teachers complained that scheduling was a problem. General education teachers were bothered by the special education teachers not showing up to the classroom at the appropriate time. Some of the general education teachers were bothered by the spread of academic abilities among their students. They felt that helping all the students in the classroom was virtually impossible and created a lot of frustration among the teachers, students, and parents. One general education teacher felt that the special education teacher was not meeting the modifications as directed by the Individualized Education Plans (IEP). This same teacher also felt that she and her partner had completely different philosophies on teaching and they could not see eye to eye in any situation.

The special education teachers found that teachers who were not willing to give up their space in the classroom caused them to feel very uncomfortable throughout the school day. They felt they were used as a paraprofessional, instead as an equal partner. Other special education teachers felt that the general education teachers were more concerned with what they teach, rather than how they teach the material. In some of the interviews, special education teachers felt curriculum was more of a concern with general

education teachers than how each child learns best. All of the teachers interviewed stated that common planning time was a real issue that needed to be addressed. In this school, teachers are given one forty minute period per month to meet. Both teachers are taken out of the classroom during the school day and replaced with one substitute teachers. All teachers felt uncomfortable with being taken out of their classrooms, away from the students, to plan together. They felt it was not enough time, nor the right time for planning to take place.

Another barrier mentioned by each teacher interviewed was lack of administrator support and lack of training. All the teachers felt that there was a complete lack of guidance from all levels of administration. One teacher puzzled over how something as important as coteaching could have such a lack of supervision. The teachers felt that the administrators themselves were truly unaware of how coteaching works, and therefore, could offer no support. The teachers also expressed frustration with the lack of training provided by universities and school districts. Most teachers interviewed were either never trained or minimally trained in coteaching.

#### *General and Special Educators' Opinion of Effective Coteaching Practice*

For coteaching to be successful, teachers felt that the coteaching team must have similar teaching styles and flexibility. Each teacher must feel comfortable in the classroom and openly and honestly discuss conflict when it arises. As obvious as this may seem, coteachers must both like children and be willing to help any child in the room. Teachers also felt that a sense of humor was vital to a happy working environment. Special education teachers emphasized that when they are made to feel

like an equal, a rapport develops that creates great accomplishments. All teachers also felt that common planning time was a necessity even though no one indicated how much time was really needed.

When asked what resources, training, or district wide policies were most helpful in furthering the successes of coteaching, a disappointing response was given from almost all interviewees. The teachers felt completely untrained and unsupported by the district, but did find ways on their own to further their own knowledge. Many teachers found time on their own to get together with other coteaching teams in the school or in the district to exchange ideas. Other teachers sought out workshops outside of the district. Overall, they felt that the greatest resources were one another.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary

The perspectives of both the general and special education teachers were better understood through the results of the surveys and interviews. It appears that the general and special education teachers do not see eye to eye on all issues in coteaching. Not all teachers felt that their coteacher is qualified, nor do all agree on the responsibilities and goals involved in coteaching.

Most of the teachers agreed on the barriers involved in coteaching. Many felt that common planning time is an integral part to making coteaching effective, yet most did not feel enough time was provided, nor was it provided during appropriate times during the school day. In this school, teachers are pulled out during the school day to meet with their coteacher and replaced by a substitute for a forty minute period. The teachers felt that this took away from academic instruction and was not an effective method to providing common planning time. However, no suggestions were given as to when a better common planning time could be arranged. Teachers also agreed that coteaching creates more work for both teachers involved.

Communication is the key to coteaching. While 75% of special educators and 87.5% of general educators feel they have excellent communication skills with their counterparts, the research results speak differently. The teachers seemed to disagree on

their roles in the classroom, which could create a major issue in the coteaching classroom. General educators seemed to feel that there was equality between the two teachers, while special educators felt that they were not as involved or had as much authority as was perceived by the general educators. This research shows that a difference in perceptions and communication can create true barriers within the coteaching classroom.

The majority of teachers felt that for coteaching to become effective, training is necessary. None of the teachers that were interviewed were trained to coteach in their undergraduate or graduate studies. In addition, most were not given training through their districts to further their knowledge and understanding of coteaching. The teachers interviewed, however, felt that they had learned enough through experience and collaboration, and that after coteaching for a number of years, training was no longer necessary, but still a valued method in furthering themselves as teachers. Teachers also expressed frustration with lack of administrative support and feel this is integral to shaping coteaching. They felt that the administrators were oblivious to the relationships between the partners in each coteaching team and the barriers that each team faced. Overall; the majority of teachers felt that coteaching was a successful inclusionary practice.

## Discussion

### *Barriers of Coteaching*

As noted by Cook and Friend (1995), coteaching is not necessarily an arrangement that is preferred by all teachers. It demands that teachers share responsibilities, possibly change their style of teaching, work closely alongside another coworker, and throughout

all of this, remain flexible. The coteaching teams surveyed had varying perspectives on coteaching. The surveys show that 87.5% of general educators appear comfortable with coteaching. This result is not surprising, as coteaching takes place in a general education classroom. General educators have been trained to teach in this type of environment and the environment and makeup of the classroom usually reflects that it is the possession of the general educator. When interviewed, a general education teacher stated that, "I think it's nice to have support from another teacher and it's nice to have someone else to collaborate with." However, Weiss and Llyod (2003) found that special educators felt that had no choice when asked to participate in coteaching because of outside influences, such as administration and the community. Most of the interview results support this finding as a special education teacher stated that, "I would rather work in the resource room by myself, but I do it because I'm asked to."

Delegation of responsibilities and equity of authority in a classroom are other barriers that many coteaching teams must tackle. Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1997) note that the daily routines that have not been discussed can cause problems for coteaching teams, and special educators are often unsure about what role they play in the classroom. Weiss and Llyod (2003) also found that there can be a miscommunication in the delegation of responsibilities in addition to a power struggle between the two teachers in the classroom. The survey results show that all of the general educators do feel the classroom goals have been discussed, while a smaller percentage of special educators agree. The authors also state that classroom management should be agreed upon before the year even begins. When asked to describe the barriers for their coteaching team, none



of the teachers felt that classroom management was an issue.

A barrier frequently mentioned in much of the literature is a lack of common planning time for coteachers. Three out of the six teachers interviewed felt that common planning time was an issue that has yet to be resolved in their school. The survey results show that at least half of both groups of teachers felt that common planning time was provided, but the survey did not allow the teachers to elaborate on this topic. The teachers interviewed felt that a 40 minute period once a month was not enough. This supports the findings of Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles (1997) who found, through their research, that a 45 minute period per week is most effective for coteachers to plan. Interestingly, one special educator felt that common planning time was not an issue because she and her coteacher had been together for seven years and the classroom was running smoothly. This is a common finding based on Reinhiller's (1996) research. This author noted that more experienced teams need less planning time.

Reinhiller (1996) found that different sets of ethics and training of teachers can create an uncomfortable climate in the coteaching classroom. Most special educators are trained to providing instruction individually according to what that student needs. When placed in the general education classroom, this instruction is transformed into whole class instruction. The survey results show that the special educators do not have confidence in the general educators' instructional skills and training to be capable to teach students with special needs. In one interview, a special educator stated, "I think the general education teachers are more concerned with what they teach than how they teach."

The literature and survey results show that increased work load is a barrier in

coteaching. However, none of the teachers interviewed felt it was a major cause for concern. While all the teachers acknowledged that the work load increased, none of the teachers felt it would deter them from being involved in coteaching.

### *Effective Practices in Coteaching*

Cook & Friend (1998) found that that teachers need to be prepared in instructional skills, collaboration, and planning and that they should be given support from administrators for coteaching to be an effective practice (cited in Weiss & Lloyd, 2003). The teachers surveyed support the research in that the majority of teachers were interested in learning more about coteaching. However, they did not believe that training was necessary for coteaching to be effective. The teachers interviewed expressed that they had little to no training in their educational background or through the district. More disturbing were the interviews regarding administration. When asked what school or district wide policies aided or hindered their cooperative teaching team, none of the six interviewees stated that they knew of any existing policies. One teacher simply stated, "We are on our own." Another teacher stated that the least helpful resource was administrators, and many agreed with this statement. One regular education teachers stated, "I'm not sure too many of them [administrators] really know how coteaching should work. While they don't try to hinder you, they really don't know how to support you either. They don't really understand, administratively, the unique needs of the situation."

As noted by Friend & Cook (1992), to create a successful coteaching environment, teachers should discuss their educational beliefs with one another and keep

the lines of communication open. The survey results support this research. The majority of both groups of teachers felt that their communication is usually open and honest. One general education teacher and one special education teacher believed that if communication had been better achieved, that their coteaching team would have been more successful. Another special educator stated that coteaching is effective if the team has “the ability to work together, the ability to plan, to have similar standards, and similar teaching styles.”

### Recommendations

This study explored the barriers of coteaching and how these barriers can be overcome. There are some limitations to this study. Although most of the research findings support the literature, it is important to remember that a small population of teachers from a small geographic area was used to complete this research and their responses may not be representative of teachers from all areas of the country. Continued research with a larger, and more diverse group of coteachers may be more helpful in determining how to improve upon coteaching.

To address the issues of training, it would be interesting to further study how universities are preparing their education students in coteaching. Additional research is also needed to determine the perspectives of administrators, what they feel are the barriers to coteaching, and how coteachers are selected to work together.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

- Cook, Lynne & Friend, Marilyn. (1995). Co-Teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, v28, 1-16.
- Dyck, N., Sundybe, N. & Pemberton, J. (1997). A Recipe for Efficient Co-Teaching. *The Council for Exceptional Children*, v30, 42-45.
- Fennick, E. (2001). Coteaching: An Inclusive Curriculum for Transition. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, v33, 60-66.
- Fennick, E & Liddy, D. (2001). Responsibilities and Preparation for Collaborative Teaching : Co-Teachers' Perspectives. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, v24, 229-240.
- Friend, M. & Cook, L.(1992). The New Mainstreaming. *Instructor*, v101, 30-36.
- Friend, M. & Reising, M. (1993). Co-Teaching: An Overview of the Past, a Glimpse at the Present, and Considerations for the Future. *Preventing School Failure*, v37, 6-10.
- Gately, S.& Gately, F. (2001) Understanding Coteaching Components. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33, 40-47.
- Luckner, J. (1999). An Examination of Two Coteaching Classrooms. *American Annals of the Deaf*, v144, 24-34.
- Monahan, Robert G., Miller, R., & Cronic, D. (1997). Rural Teachers', Administrators', and Counselors' Attitudes about Inclusion. Retrieved October 5, 2004 from ERIC

Database (ED406099).

Monihan, R. & Marino, S. (1996). Teacher Attitudes Toward Inclusion: Implications for Teacher Education in Schools 2000. *Education*, v117, 316-320.

Morocco, C. & Aguilar, C. (2002). Coteaching for Content Understanding: A Schoolwide Model. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, v13, 315-247.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (n.d.) Inclusion of students in regular classrooms. Retrieved October 4, 2004 from <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2002/section4/indicator28.asp>.

Reinhiller, N. (1996). Coteaching: New Variations on a Not-So-New Practice. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, v19,34-48.

Salend, S., Gordon, J.& Lopez-Vona, K. (2002). Evaluating Cooperative Teaching Teams. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, v37, 195-200.

Walsh, J. & Jones, B. (2004). New Models of Cooperative Teaching. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, v36, 14-20.

Walther-Thomas, C. (1997). Co-Teaching Experiences: The Benefits and Problems That Teachers and Principals Report Over Time. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, v30, 395-407.

Walther-Thomas, C. & Bryant, M. (1996). Planning for Effective Co-Teaching. *Remedial and Special Education*, v17, 255-266.

Walther-Thomas, C. & Carter, K. (1993). Cooperative Teaching: Helping Students with Disabilities Succeed in Mainstream Classrooms. *Middle School Journal*, v , 33-

38.

Weiss, M. & Lloyd, J. (2003). Conditions for Co-teaching: Lessons from a Case Study.

*Teacher Education and Special Education*, v26, 27-41.

## APPENDIX

### Survey Questions

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

1. Regular education teachers have the instructional skills and educational background to teach students with special needs.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

2. Special education and regular education teachers should demonstrate collaboration with all students with special needs in the regular education classroom.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

3. The regular education teacher receives little assistance from special education teachers in modifying instruction for students with special needs.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

4. Bringing special education teachers into regular education classrooms can cause serious difficulties in determining "who is in charge".

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

5. Regular education teachers are comfortable co-teaching content areas with special education teachers.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

6. Special education teachers provide educational support for all students.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

7. The special education teacher only provides assistance to those students with special needs.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

A	B	C	D	E
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree

8. Regular education teachers have the primary responsibility for the education of students with special needs in their classroom.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

9. The redistribution of special education resources into the regular education classroom decreases the instructional load of the regular education teacher.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

10. I am interested in learning more about coteaching.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

11. Non-specific education students would benefit from coteaching.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

12. In-service training is necessary for coteaching to work.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

13. Coteaching benefits the students in my class.

A	B	C	D	E
---	---	---	---	---

Respond to each question below by circling the number that best describes your viewpoint:

1: Rarely	2: Sometimes	3: Usually
-----------	--------------	------------

1. I can easily read the nonverbal cues of my coteaching partner.	1	2	3
---	---	---	---

2. Both teachers move freely about the space in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
---	---	---	---

3. My coteacher understand the curriculum standards with respect to the content area in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
---	---	---	---



4. Both teachers in the cotaught classroom agree on the goals of the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
5. Planning can be spontaneous, with changes occurring during the instructional lesson.	1	2	3
6. My coteaching partner often presents lessons in the cotaught classroom.	1	2	3
7. Classroom rules and routines have been jointly developed.	1	2	3
8. Humor is often used in the classroom.	1	2	3
9. All materials are shared in the classroom.	1	2	3
10. The special educator is familiar with the methods and materials with respect to this content area.	1	2	3
11. Planning for classes is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3
12. The “chalk” passes freely between the two teachers.	1	2	3
13. Test modifications are commonplace.	1	2	3
14. Communication is open and honest.	1	2	3
15. There is a fluid positioning of teachers in the classroom.	1	2	3
16. I am confident of the special educator’s knowledge of the curriculum content.	1	2	3
17. Time is allotted (or found) for common planning time.	1	2	3
18. Behavior management is the shared responsibility of both teachers.	1	2	3