

3-20-2017

# Perceptions of co-teaching in the middle school English language arts classroom

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**PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM**

by

Joseph Downey

A Thesis

Submitted to the  
Department of Language, Literacy, and Sociocultural Education  
College of Education  
In partial fulfillment of the requirement  
For the degree of  
Master of Arts in Reading Education  
at  
Rowan University  
December 14, 2016

Thesis Chair: Stephanie Abraham, Ph. D.

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## **Dedications**

I would like to dedicate this manuscript to my family and LE for all of the support throughout my graduate studies.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to express my appreciation to the teachers who took part in my study.  
Without your dedication to teaching, this would not have been possible.

## **Abstract**

Joseph Downey

### **PERCEPTIONS OF CO-TEACHING IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM**

2016-2017

Stephanie Abraham, Ph. D.

Master of Arts in Reading Education

The purpose of this research study was to investigate the perceptions of the co-teaching model in the middle school English Language Arts classroom. Data was kept over a three-week period and tracked through individual interviews with teachers in the English Language Arts department. Each interview included the same number of questions with the same prompts. These questions led teachers to discuss their experiences implementing co-teaching, working with a co-teacher and the time and effort that went into the process. As a result of the data collected, I was able to analyze the findings into specific themes including the roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching classroom, issues of co-planning, and the co-teaching relationship. These major themes were then further examined and related themes emerged such as control, lack of co-planning time, inappropriate pairing, different personalities, the uncertainty of future partnerships and the importance of trust and respect. It was concluded that lack of communication existed the most among co-teachers in the areas of responsibility, co-planning and in the co-teaching relationship.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

During my time spent as an educator, I have always been motivated to grow my craft. I am on an endless journey to acquire the best teaching practices and strategies in order to help students succeed. When I enter the classroom, my goal is to instill a passion for reading and writing through shared experiences, instruction and reflection. I also strive to be a professional resource for the teachers in my school district. I am always searching for new and innovating resources to share with teachers in order to help improve their instruction and support learners.

In 2016, I was in my third year of teaching in an upper-middle-class suburban school district in New Jersey, as the full-time English Language Arts interventionist at the middle school level. My role as an interventionist was to provide reading instruction to students who read below grade level by pushing into the classroom and occasionally pulling students out of the classroom for intense instruction. The position also required me to work with multiple teachers in grades six through eight. In the classroom, my role was to co-teach with the general education classroom teacher or teachers. I focused on the students who required extra support in reading and implemented effective reading strategies. I worked with teachers to plan and implement successful co-teaching models in order to help raise reading achievement.

The 2016 - 2017 school year was especially unique because of a new schedule change to the English Language Arts department. The change included the merger of Reading and English classes from two 42-minute classes into one 50-minute period. This merger decreased class days from nine periods to eight periods. Along with the merger

came the announcement that Basic Skills Instruction (BSI) teachers in the English Language Arts department would be co-teaching and would have to learn a brand new curriculum. The Basic Skills Instruction teachers provided additional support to students in need of reading and writing remediation and were now required to co-teach reading and English as one subject in the classroom. The majority of the reading and English teachers who had taught Basic Skills Instruction classes were master teachers in their subject areas but had little to no co-teaching experience. The co-teaching implementation caused angst among teachers leading up to the new school year. As the 2106 - 2017 school year began, teachers were given their co-teaching assignments and a grade level or levels to teach. Teachers were not allowed to choose their co-teaching partnerships and were given a minimal amount of training on co-teaching before the start of the school year. With these current issues in mind, I was interested in researching the teachers' perspectives with the new co-teaching implementation.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of the study was to examine the co-teaching perspectives of middle school English Language Arts teachers. Since Reading and English classes at the middle school level were recently merged together due to a schedule change, there was a shift towards co-teaching models. In the school district where the study was conducted, co-teaching was practiced primarily in the Special Education classrooms; however, the new English Language Arts merger required typical general education teachers to co-teach. The purpose of the study was to identify how these new co-teacher pairs perceived co-teaching given short amount of time to prepare as well as having no choice in their co-teaching partnership or grade level. In my school district, the teachers were beginning the

year in a new relationship with a new partner. Although many teachers worked closely with one another over the years, very few were required to deliver instruction in the same classroom, or make changes to their instructional practice. For progress to be made in these co-teaching settings, teachers had to learn to work together and form relationships.

Another area that my study focused on was how teachers perceive each other in regards to how much responsibility was actually shared among the classroom teachers. In a study (2001) conducted by Vance Austin, several co-teachers completed a survey based on their perceptions of co-teaching. One major finding suggested that special education and general education co-teachers believed there was a discrepancy in the amount of instruction and prep done by each teacher. With my research, I wanted to determine if these results were similar in a co-taught classroom with two general education teachers.

Previous studies suggested teacher responses would be unique to the individual experience. It was apparent that each individual teacher's situation would determine the responses my research questions evoked. With that in mind, I focused on studies that included responses of teachers who were received training with the teachers they worked with as co-teaching partners. Ploessl and Rock (2014) discussed that co-teacher relationships depended heavily upon the amount of training and planning time that went into the process. I felt it was important to focus on co-planning as a question in my interview process. By determining the amount of time teachers felt was necessary for planning, I could determine how vital planning was to the success of co-teaching relationship. I could also use this study to present findings that teachers do wish to have planning time and proper training before undertaking a large change like the one in my district.

## **Statement of Research Problem and Question**

The purpose of the study was to examine the perspectives of co-teaching through the lens of teachers in the middle school ELA classroom. Specifically, how teachers view co-teaching in a setting where there was no choice given in regards to the subject taught, the classes assigned or the teachers who they were partnered with during the school year. With these factors in mind and with a completely new curriculum, this question will be answered through several interview questions that evoke subjective responses that are unique to each teacher's situation.

## **Story of the Question**

When the initial English Language Arts merger and co-teaching assignments were given out, I had a great deal of questions and concerns. First, I wondered how the teachers would successfully co-teach without having any prior experience with co-teaching and received minimal amounts of professional development surrounding effective co-teaching models. I also questioned and worried about the amount of time being lost in reading and English instruction due to the merger of the subject areas. A significant chunk of time was taken from the reading and English classes. I also wondered how the co-teaching assignments would affect my position as I would now become the third teacher in the Basic Skills classrooms. These questions were fueled by the talk that I heard around school surrounding the English Language Arts merger and co-teaching. Teachers spoke about the issue of co-teaching before school, after school, in the faculty room and in faculty meetings. Many of the teachers were concerned about who they would be co-teaching with and some were nervous to teach a new subject area and curriculum that they never taught before.

As the 2016-2017 school year began, teachers were given their co-teaching assignments and partnerships. Teachers went into their co-teaching assignment and began teaching. After the first few weeks of the school year went by, I began to hear chatter in passing from teachers about the co-teaching experiences, both positive and negative. I was compelled to inquire more information about how the teachers felt about co-teaching after being in the classroom. For example, I wanted to know how teachers adjusted to sharing the role in the classroom and how the teachers worked together to incorporate the co-teaching models without having much experience in co-teaching. Using teacher research, I planned on interviewing English Language Arts teachers in order to gain their perspectives of co-teaching.

### **Organization of Thesis**

The remainder of the paper is a qualitative teacher research study surrounding perspectives on co-teaching. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature surrounding the current perception on co-teaching as well as what impacts teachers' views on the practice of co-teaching. Chapter Three describes the research design and context of the study. It includes information about the community, school district, classroom and participants as well as my plan for implementation. Chapter Four reviews and analyzes data and discusses the findings of the study. Chapter Five presents the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study as well as future suggestions for further research in the field of co-teaching perceptions.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

There is no one way to "do" inclusion, and it must be remembered that schools and classrooms are very complex systems. However, there are lessons to be learned from the voices of these teachers. (Keefe & Moore, 2004, p. 87)

Many teachers are delivering instruction in co-taught classrooms, meaning they work with another teacher to deliver instruction. For many years, co-teaching was done primarily in special education where both general education and special education students learned in the same classroom. With a shift towards more individualized, and a stronger focus on college and career readiness, many districts have started to implement co-teaching into the general education classroom.

The first section of this literature review will focus on why co-teaching has become popular, and how it is being implemented. The following sections are focused on roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching relationship, co-planning and collaboration, and finally training and administration's role. The themes discussed in this literature review will focus co-teaching environments and include commentary on recent research. All three areas will be examined to determine what the current perceptions on co-teaching are and what impacts how teachers view this style of instruction.

#### **Current Push for Co-Teaching**

The push for inclusion in public school districts has prompted the use of co-teaching models in the classroom in order to deliver instruction. Federal laws such as Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) and No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) required students with diverse learning characteristics to achieve high academic performance in the general education curriculum (Cramer et al., 2010).

Co-teaching is an approach that makes it possible for educators to achieve IDEA and NCLB mandates and is defined as “two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom” (Cramer et al., 2010, p. 60). In the classroom, co-teaching is usually viewed as instruction involving a general education teacher and a special education teacher working together. Jeanne Bauwens (1989) suggests that co-teaching is when both general and special education teachers are present in the general classroom, where they maintain joint responsibility for specified classroom instruction. No matter what definition used in literature, co-teaching requires two or more professionals to share instructional responsibility over a diverse group of learners.

Schools that implement successful inclusionary practices, such as classrooms with both students in general education and special education, attempt to educate these students together with high-quality, and age-appropriate instruction (Chase et al., 1994). Co-teaching eliminates removing students for services, and provides a cooperative teaching experience where supportive services are delivered to a wide range of students. While successful co-teaching is designed to minimize problems such as students missing academic instruction, and a lack of communication and coordination between professionals, scheduling problems, and fragmentation of the curriculum, there are other issues that can occur (Chase et al., 1994). Current research suggests there are multiple factors that require attention in order for the co-teaching relationship to be successful.

## **Roles and Responsibilities in the Co-Teaching Relationship**

For many, teaching is an individual craft. As a teacher, it is important to be comfortable teaching in a specific style. When co-teaching, both teachers need to be able to use their own strengths to bring together cohesive and effective instruction. Expectations must be communicated between partners so that there is an equal stake in the classroom. However, there does seem to be issues that arise when roles and responsibilities are concerned.

Anne Chase (1997) conducted a study focused on two teachers, one general educator and one special educator that were co-teaching for the first time. The goal was to examine the impact of cooperative teaching on teachers through their shared experiences. The study focused on the perspectives of two teachers co-teaching in a kindergarten general education classroom. The teachers in the study used journal entries to track progress of the co-teaching. Both teachers had experience of more than 20 years. When discussing roles and responsibilities, the co-teachers made comments about their concerns. Sarah, the special educator, explained her first week as, "Feeling somewhat out of place in another teacher's classroom. I keep thinking 'ours' but not feeling it yet." (Chase et al., 1997, p. 5). Sarah's feelings indicated that from the beginning of her co-teaching experience, there seemed to already be a sense of ownership in the classroom. Sarah described the experience as if she was moving into a new house where she did not know where anything was. Cathy, the general educator, also expressed a similar concern when she wrote,

I feel somewhat uncomfortable about the teaming—only because it is my prior space and I want to be a team and not run the show . . . I think it will take a little time for us all (aides as well) to find our space, strengths, and comfort level. (p. 5)

In the same situation, the general education teacher was aware of the atmosphere in the room. Cathy discussed the classroom previously being her own room and this created an uncomfortable atmosphere. However, there were obvious power issues; Cathy mentioned how she hoped to learn with her co-teacher in the classroom. In the same study, both teachers discuss their roles in the classroom. Chase (1997) noted that initially the co-teachers did not address differences and apprehensions but later began to confront and discuss them. This resulted in reduced tension and apprehension, which previously existed. During the interview, Sarah noted, "We shared information and methods as we went along . . . and it just seemed to come naturally." (p. 6). As the teachers worked together they developed an understanding of each other's strengths and learned from each other.

Vance Austin (2001) conducted a survey study of one hundred thirty-nine collaborative teachers who co-taught either as the general education teacher or special education teacher. These teachers came from nine school districts in New Jersey. The co-teacher relationship was examined specifically in regards to special education teachers and general education teachers. A single survey and a semi-structured interview were used as qualitative data. One major finding Austin (2001) noted was that the special education and general education co-teachers agreed that general education co-teachers do more than their special education partners in the inclusive classroom. The data suggested that the teachers in co-taught classrooms did not have equal roles. As with Chase's study,

the inequality could stem from the co-teacher coming into another teacher's classroom, therefore causing the co-teacher to feel uncomfortable. This data suggested how negative perceptions develop because of the lack of shared responsibility.

Similar to Austin's findings in regards to the teacher's role and responsibility, Gina Harbot (2007) found similar results which suggested one teacher assumed the majority of the instructional role when co-teaching. Harbot's study was done in a co-taught high school classroom and used video observations to record co-teachers during instruction. The study focused on the behaviors teachers displayed and the instruction implemented, as well the amount of time each teacher spent delivering instruction. Some notable findings were that general educators seemed to be doing the majority of the instruction which calculated to 29.93% of observed intervals while the special educators presented material in less than 1% of observed intervals (Harbot et al., 2007). This would suggest the general education teacher was viewed in the primary role while the special education teacher seemed to take a lesser role.

The data also suggested that general education teacher participated in instructional tasks such as preparing materials, 28.33% of the time a while special educators conducted these tasks in 3.96% of the time while being observed (Harbot et al., 2007). This data suggested that when the two teachers were in the classroom together, one teacher seemed to have more of a role a traditional teacher role with the majority of instructional responsibility. While the data suggested co-teachers may not be doing as much, Harbot (2007), noted, "Another chronic problem was that during some period of the class, due to the nature of the whole-group instruction or the teaching style of the general education teachers, special education teachers were often expected to function more like a teacher

assistant than a teacher” (p. 23). When discussing co-teaching, Harbot (2007) suggested situations where there was an unfair share of responsibility, co-teaching relationships tend to produce feelings of contempt among teachers.

### **Co-Planning and Collaboration**

When dealing with a relationship between two professionals, Marilyn Friend (2008) suggested the relationship is similar to a marriage where commitment, negotiation, and flexibility are required to be successful. When two teachers delivered the instruction, the experiences students received were enhanced because of the contributions of the two teachers and these students were able to receive the curriculum in a way that supported their needs. Friend stated, “The classroom teachers should work together to combine expertise in subject areas to deliver instruction, build class management plans, understand student behaviors and focus on the pacing of instruction and rigor.” (Friend, 2008, p. 9). While this seemed to be the ideal situation, much time and effort went into the lessons that were successful.

John Luckner (1997) conducted a study between two co-teaching classrooms during one academic school year. The interactions of the teaching teams and the composition of the group of students in each class were significantly different although both classrooms had students with hearing impairments. Weekly observations and interviews were used to collect data and then the data was summarized, and presented in a descriptive manner.

From the data collected, collaboration seemed to be one of the most common themes presented. Many teachers identified co-teaching as a positive experience, however, it was important to understand the challenges associated with the practice. As

one teacher pointed out, "When we put our best together, it can multiply things; when we put our worst together, it can also multiply." (Luckner, 1997, p. 28). More findings concluded that the collaborative structure of co-teaching required a willingness to change teaching styles and preferences (Luckner, 1997). The importance of partners creating planning time was discussed and noted as very important to the success of co-teaching. However, the difficulties involved with setting aside planning time were also a major concern. Overall, this data suggested that while there were benefits to co-teaching, the process required time and flexibility to succeed.

Keefe and Moore examined the co-teaching model at the high school level. The researchers suggested that high school settings presented greater obstacles for co-teachers because of the emphasis on content area knowledge, the need for independent study skills, the faster pacing of instruction, high stakes testing, and less positive attitudes (Keefe and Moore, 2014). The data was extracted from semi-structured interview developed to get the input of teachers after the first implementation of co-teaching.

The data suggested there was no consistent method for partnering co-teachers at the high school level. One general education teacher shared that, "...She came in new and they paired her with me. I had never met her before" (Keefe and Moore, 2004, p. 81). Another general education teacher stated, "...and now when they bring new people in it's just here, you're working with so-and-so, and they don't have a clue what their job is." (Keefe and Moore, 2004, p. 81) The data suggested that in order for co-teaching to work, there needed to be a relationship formed. From both teachers' perspectives, the co-teaching relationship was put in place with no collaboration or planning ahead of time. A general education teacher stated, "It's almost more important than what you teach, it's

how you get along” (Keefe and Moore, 2004, p. 81). This speaks idea that the relationship must be present for success.

Keefe and Moore (2004) also indicated the negative effects no planning time. While teachers noted positive outcomes for special education students such as less of a stigma being taught in a different setting, many of the teachers had negative views on co-teaching as a practice. After discussing the outcomes of the co-teaching experience one participant stated, "This sounds terrible, but don't do it (co-teach) unless you're absolutely sure what you're getting into" (p. 85). The author noted for this particular teacher, the relationship with their co-teaching partner was not a good fit philosophy wise. Many of the teachers interviewed also shared negative experiences with co-teaching because of the demands of collaboration, and content knowledge. This was a reoccurring theme throughout the literature on co-teaching. Without the time and resources, these studies indicated the co-teaching relationships typically did not show success. Referencing back to Chase (1997), she noted the learning experience took time and required educators to overcome differences in philosophy, pedagogical style, and background, as well as logistical and territorial issues and concerns.

### **Training and Administration’s Role**

Marilyn Friend (2008) examined multiple studies in regards to the problems teachers faced within co-teaching relationships. Friend agreed that the relationship would struggle if teachers did not buy into co-teaching. Friend (2008) stated, “Some co-teachers express concern, though, about their relationship with colleagues, especially when teaching partners are assigned by principals rather than educators volunteering for instruction” (p. 13). Friend suggested that teachers want more choice in the co-teacher

selection as opposed to being forced to work with a colleague. In many cases however, co-teaching is not the result of volunteering rather it is implemented due to student needs.

Ploessl and Rock (2014) discussed the importance of teacher training before implementing co-teaching. The authors pointed out that the largest problem teachers faced with co-teaching was not being adequately prepared. However, findings proved the opposite when teachers received adequate training. In this study teacher training took an online approach to assisting teachers with the necessary training. The technology used was a webcam, Bluetooth headset, a Bluetooth adapter and Skype. Teachers had access to desktops and laptops during the training, and the study focused on what became eCoaching. Teachers were put into the classroom and given access to the materials during instruction. As teachers gave instruction, they were observed through the eCoaching system and received immediate feedback. From this data, the teachers were able to coach each other and focus on co-teaching in smaller chunks of time, 30-minute intervals. The interviews after the study concluded many teachers had positive experiences with this type of co-teaching and coaching. "One of the essential components of a collaborative classroom is planning. Our eCoaching experience allowed us to share our ideas and voice them to with our coach. Often times when planning lessons, there may be gaps that may exist that one might not see" (Ploessl and Rock, 2014, p. 208). This type of training and planning coincides with the idea that the more teachers were able to plan and collaborate, the better chance the co-teaching relationship was successful. Overall, the study yielded favorable results from the teachers in regards to increased collaboration and positive learning experience for all students; however, there are still areas within the relationship between co-teachers that could improve with more research.

Pancsofar and Petroff (2013) conducted a study on teacher attitudes in regards to co-teaching. The study focused on the perspectives of teachers who received training as a pre-service teacher, college student, and those that did not. One finding was that teachers who had student taught more recently were open to co-teaching. “Teachers with more frequent in-service opportunities in co-teaching were more confident in their co-teaching practice and demonstrated higher levels of interest” (p. 91). This evidence suggested teachers felt more comfortable with more exposure early on in their careers in regards to co-teaching than when teachers transitioned from whole classroom teachers to co-teachers. While in-service teachers seemed to have an understanding of co-teaching, many teachers reported being underprepared for inclusive education practices, collaboration and co-teaching (Pancsofar and Petroff, 2013). Teachers from the study identified an ongoing need for training in regards to strategies and skill development specific to co-teaching and different co-teaching models (Pancsofar and Petroff, 2013). The more opportunities for professional development, planning and training in best practice, the better the outcomes were for the co-teachers.

John Luckner also found data linking co-teaching success to administration participation and support. Luckner’s (1997) results indicated that most co-teachers felt they should meet with administrators and share both progress and problems. Luckner discussed this as being a major key to co-teaching being successful due to the fact the teachers involved needed support and feedback from the administration in order to reflect improve co-teaching relationship. While certain teachers felt the administration shouldn’t have the final say in who they were paired with, the data suggests teachers still wanted administration to assist the co-teaching pairs during the school year.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this literature review was to identify teacher perspectives of co-teaching by examining the roles and responsibilities in the co-teaching relationship, co-planning and collaboration, and finally training and administration's role. For many teachers, it is evident from the literature that co-teaching was a way to collaborate and deliver differentiated instruction to students. However, depending on circumstances such as time, experience, administrative support and choice in the situation, teacher perspectives varied. As the current research suggested, co-teaching is still being discussed and it is necessary that more research be done in order to identify how it is perceived in other areas besides special education inclusion classrooms.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Context**

The study site was one of three middle schools in an upper-middle-class suburban school district in Southern New Jersey. According to the 2010 United States Census, the population of the town had approximately 48,559 people, 17,287 households, and 13,327 families living in the township. Of all the households, about 34.3% had children under the age of 18 living with them. Approximately 2.6% of families and 3.9% of the total population were living below the poverty line. The racial makeup of the residents in this area were made up of 87.70% (42,588) White, 5.82% (2,825) Black or African American, 0.11% (52) Native American, 3.78% (1,836) Asian, 0.02% (9) Pacific Islander, 0.85% (415) from other races, and 1.72% (834) from two or more races. Hispanics or Latinos of any race were 3.65% (1,774) of the population.

### **School**

The study site had 674 students in grades six through eight. The racial makeup of the students was as follows: 82.6 % White, 6.8% African American, 5.8% Asian, 3.9% Hispanic, and 0.09% from Two or More Races. There were 17.7% of students who were economically disadvantaged. Of the student population, 98.1% primarily spoke English in their homes. In regards to state testing on the English Language Arts section of the test, the study site scored 42.8% in sixth grade, 52.8% in seventh grade and 47.3% in eighth grade. The state testing was an assessment that measures student achievement and preparedness for college and career. The number of full-time teachers in the building was 70 with 12 teachers instructing Basic Skills Instruction, in an ELA co-taught classroom. The student teacher ratio at the study site was 9:6.

The middle school mission statement declared its goal was to work collaboratively to assure the success of all learners by fostering a clear and shared focus on learning, based upon high academic and social expectations for our learning community. This goal was achieved through differentiation and a community of learners and teachers working toward literacy and mathematical proficiency.

### **Classroom**

The classrooms in the middle school study site contained between 18 to 28 students in General Education, Basic Skills Instruction, and Special Education. There were less students enrolled in Special Education and Basic Skills Instruction classrooms and those classes had two teachers per room using co-teaching models. In the English Language Arts classroom, both Reading and English were instructed in one period for 50 minutes. This was the first time in the school district's history that the two areas of literacy had merged.

The English Language Arts classrooms were welcoming learning places. All of the English Language Arts classrooms had one large whiteboard in the front of the room, short-throw projectors on the ceiling, student desks and chairs, two teacher workstations, and a small group instruction table with student chairs. One classroom per grade level team housed the laptop cart that was shared by the teachers on the team. The classrooms were equipped with leveled classroom libraries of books for the students to read independently. The selection of books in the classroom libraries were minimal as many teachers relied on the school's library when students needed books to read. Lesson objectives and learning goals were posted clearly on the whiteboard daily. The bulletin boards in the classrooms were centered on skills and strategies related to literacy or

showcased student work. Anchor charts were also scattered around the rooms showing evidence of student learning. Inspirational and encouraging posters clung to the walls which displayed messages about teamwork, integrity, positive attitudes and perseverance.

### **Participants**

The eight participants in this study were all teachers currently co-teaching in the English Language Arts middle school classroom at the study site. Teaching experience varied by teacher, subject and grade level. The participants were asked to volunteer to be interviewed surrounding their perceptions on co-teaching. Prior to the study, the participants signed a consent form in order to participate. They were guaranteed that their names and the study site would remain anonymous throughout the entire process. Pseudonyms were used throughout this study in order to protect individual teachers' identities. Since audio recordings of the interviews were used, the interviews were kept on a password protected laptop and deleted after they were transcribed.

The first teacher interviewed was Sara who was a seventh and eighth grade teacher at the study site. Sara worked in the district for seven years and had experience as a classroom teacher, Basic Skills teacher, and a Special Education teacher. Sara was familiar with co-teaching models as she co-taught with another teacher for the past three years. Sara had experience in teaching both Reading and English throughout her teaching career. In the 2016-17 school year, Sara co-taught with a teacher who had a strong background in teaching Reading and no experience in teaching English. Sara and her co-teacher had two classes that they taught in the school day.

Vanessa, the second teacher interviewed about her perceptions on co-teaching, was a veteran teacher with 23 years of experience as a teacher of English and Reading.

Throughout her years as an educator, Vanessa held numerous teaching positions, many of which required collaboration with another teacher. In the 2016-17 school year, Vanessa was teaching English Language Arts in a seventh grade Basic Skills classroom. Vanessa was paired with a co-teacher who primarily delivered instruction in reading only and had little knowledge about teaching English.

The next teacher interviewed was Lisa who had ten years of teaching experience in the district, and had taught mainly reading. Lisa had a strong background in reading as she recently earned her Masters of Reading with a Reading Specialist Certification. Lisa taught eighth grade for the majority of her teaching career. In the 2016-17 school year, Lisa co-taught with another teacher who also had a strong background in reading. This was Lisa's first year co-teaching in the English Language Arts classroom.

Joyce was the next teacher interviewed for this study. Joyce was a 21-year veteran of teaching and taught multiple grades over the course of her career. Joyce was Lisa's co-teacher who was interviewed previously. Joyce and Lisa co-taught eighth grade English Language Arts in the 2016-17 school year where they brought a great deal of reading knowledge to the classroom. In addition to the eighth grade class Joyce taught, she also co-taught with two other teachers in sixth and seventh grade. Joyce's other co-teachers included a sixth grade teacher named Vince who primarily taught English for the last 15 years. In Joyce's seventh grade class, she co-taught with Dara, a brand new teacher to the educational field for the 2016-17 school year.

Vince was the next teacher interviewed for this study. He was a sixth grade teacher with fifteen years of teaching experience. Vince taught English for his entire career in the district. He was passionate about teaching grammar in his classes and

considered himself a true grammarian. In the 2016-17 school year, Vince co-taught the merged English Language Arts curriculum in sixth grade with Joyce. Both Joyce and Vince brought a wealth of knowledge to the classroom as both were experienced in their own field of study. This was Vince's first year in a co-teaching environment and his first year teaching Reading.

Hogan was the next teacher interviewed. He worked in the study site school district for two years as a supplemental Reading teacher. Hogan had a background in teaching both Reading and English and he had previous experience as a classroom teacher in a district that used block scheduling. With his previous experience in block scheduling, Hogan was chosen to be on the English Language Arts merger committee. As a committee member he gave his insight on scheduling for the new curriculum. In the 2016-17 school year, Hogan was assigned to co-teach with multiple teachers at three different grade levels.

Dara was a new non-tenured teacher with no classroom experience other than her student teaching practicum. Even though Dara just recently received her degree, teaching was not her first avenue of employment. Teaching was a career change for Dara who previously was employed in the business field for many years. In the 2016-17 school year, Dara taught seventh grade where she co-taught the English Language Arts curriculum. Dara co-taught with Hogan and Joyce, both who were also interviewed for this study.

Kaitlyn was a teacher that was new to teaching at the middle school level. Kaitlyn had three years' experience as an elementary teacher prior to her middle school position. In the 2016-17 school year, Kaitlyn was assigned to co-teach seventh grade. Kaitlyn was

certified to teach Reading in Kindergarten through twelfth grade and she also had a strong background in infusing technology in the classroom.

### **Research Design/Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to examine teacher perceptions of co-teaching in the middle school English Language Arts classrooms. All of the data was collected through teacher interviews and the following sub questions helped to guide my data collection throughout this study: How do teachers adjust to sharing the role in the classroom? How do teachers work together to incorporate the co-teaching models without having much experience in co-teaching? My focus in the area of teacher inquiry was centered on an issue/problem that occurred in my school district in the English Language Arts department at the middle school level.

The research design chosen for this study was qualitative. When conducting qualitative research, the study focused on data gathered from participants. Unlike quantitative research which includes the collection of data from controlled environments and focuses primarily on percentages and statistics, qualitative research focuses on the experience of the participant. The reasons for selecting qualitative as opposed to quantitative was due to the short length of the study and the approach to data collection through interviews. With the time of the research being limited to three weeks it seemed that conducting a quantitative study would exceed current time restraints. The data was collected through teacher responses to interview questions. All of the interviews took place at the study site in a room that was free from distractions. The teacher interviews were conducted either before or after the school day and were not conducted during instructional time or during teacher contractual time. The teacher interviews did not

violate any policy within the school district. The individual teacher interviews were recorded with an audio device and stored on a password protected laptop. Later, the teacher interviews were transcribed and analyzed to identify common themes rather than a quantitative number of responses.

Teacher research is conducted to analyze a current issue or question that arises in the field of education. Teacher research usually occurs as a result of a problem a teacher may have or an inquiry based on events happening in that teacher's classroom or school district. Shagoury and Power (2012) noted that teacher research is conducted when inquiries are used to study everything from the best teaching practices to ways for grouping students and even how gender can play a role in the learning process. Ackerman (1996) acknowledged teachers often begin teacher research with questions in mind. Ackerman completed her own qualitative teacher research which required no variable groups, but was driven through observations and anecdotal notes to collect data on the growth of the students over time and help answer her original inquiry.

### **Procedure of Study**

The study took place over the course of three weeks at the middle school study site. In total, eight teachers were interviewed with a predetermined list of interview questions. In order to respect teacher's busy schedules, teachers were asked a set number of seven interview questions that were thoughtfully and purposefully constructed. Interviews were conducted during an agreed upon time between myself and the participant and did not violate any policy within the school district. Individual teacher interviews were completed in approximately 25 minutes over three consecutive weeks. Interviews were recorded using an audio device and stored on a password protected

computer. After the interviews were completed, the audio versions of the interviews were transcribed verbatim using a word processor. The individual teacher interviews were analyzed and grouped together based on common themes found across the co-teaching perceptions of the teachers.

### **Data Sources**

The data for this study was collected directly from the teacher interview sessions that I held with the participants. The teacher interviews were used as a data source in order to explore the views, experiences and beliefs of individual participants surrounding the topic of co-teaching. Once teachers answered the questions, I began to transcribe the interviews and determine common themes that emerged within the interviews. The interview questions were general but still placed an emphasis on finding the pros and cons of co-teaching in a way that did not skew the data.

Several purposeful interview questions were included that helped to further explore the perceptions surrounding co-teaching. The structured interview format provided the participants with guidance on how to express their opinions and also allowed for the participants to elaborate on their responses. The interview questions were asked in the order they appear below:

1. How long have you been co-teaching?
2. In what capacity have you co-taught? (Regular Ed? BSI? Special Ed?)
3. What are the positive experience you have had co-teaching?
4. What co-teaching models have worked well for you?
5. What co-teaching models have not worked well for you?
6. Do you regularly co-plan with your co-teacher?

7. What is your philosophy on teaching?
8. Does your philosophy on teaching differ from that of your co-teacher?

The first two interview questions identified how much experience the teacher had with co-teaching and in what capacity the teacher had previously co-taught. It was important to ask the teachers about their experience in the teaching field, especially with co-teaching as this was a strong data point throughout the data collection. The next questions, numbers three and four, were about the participant's positive experiences with co-teaching and what co-teaching models have worked well. The participants were asked about their positive experiences in order to determine their perceived benefits of co-teaching. These three questions were an essential part of this study because of the focus on teacher perceptions. Questions three, four and five probed the participants to discuss the positive experiences with co-teaching, the models believed to be most effective and the negative experiences with co-teaching. Question five discussed the area of co-planning with the co-teacher. This question provided the participants the opportunity to explain if they met regularly with their co-teacher to co-plan. This question on co-planning was created and used in the interview in order to find out how different teachers use the time to plan together. Although this question about co-planning was a closed-ended question due to its phrasing, all of the participants expanded their answers on this question without probing. The last two questions of the interview focused on the philosophy on teaching. Teachers were asked about their own philosophies on teaching and as well as how their philosophy compared to that of their co-teachers. The questions about the philosophy of teaching was included because it would elicit responses

surrounding the delivery of instruction, classroom management, and the way each teacher was utilized in the classroom. This data provided insight into the how the teachers perceive co-teaching. The data collected from the teacher interviews were used to identify teacher's experiences with co-teaching and to search for common themes that emerged from the interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The data for this study was analyzed through the identification of common themes that emerged throughout the teacher interviews. Analyzing the interview data over the course of the study helped me to draw conclusions on the perceptions of teachers, specifically in regards to their individual co-teaching experiences. The structure of the interview questions helped to identify commonalities that emerged in the teacher interviews as well as unique differences.

The data collected from the interviews provided me with the opportunity to compare and contrast the experiences of teachers to the current research in the field of co-teaching. The considerations of the data discussed were dependent on the common themes throughout the interviews. Gibbs (2007) discussed the idea of thematic coding as a way of analyzing qualitative data to establish a framework of thematic ideas. After recording and identifying passages of my interviews, I linked the common ideas and ideas to organize my data.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Data Analysis**

As I gathered data and transcribed the teacher's interviews over the three-week time period, I quickly realized new perceptions in the co-teaching field. The information recorded and transcribed from the teacher interviews allowed me to gather a sufficient amount of data in order to report my findings. By looking over the data, several themes began to emerge. These themes were: responsibility in the classroom, co-planning, the co-teaching relationship.

#### **Roles and Responsibility in the Classroom**

The roles and responsibilities for teachers in the co-teaching classroom was a major discussion in the literature review surrounding co-teaching. For example, Austin (2001), noted that in co-teaching roles where there was a general education teacher and a special education teacher, the lead teacher would typically take control and the special education teacher would assist. After interviewing eight teachers in the middle school English Language Arts department at the study site, I found that five of the eight teachers use the one teach, one assist model for co-teaching even though this method is not recommended in the literature surrounding co-teaching. The five teachers that used the one teach, one assist co-teaching model all mentioned there were issues of control and an unequal share of responsibility in the classroom. The majority of instructional responsibility rested on one teacher while the other co-teacher was more of an assistant to the teacher. For example, when interviewing Vanessa, a veteran of 23 years, she described how she was paired with a teacher who only had experience in teaching

reading. Vanessa provided her perspective on the one teach, one assist model in her classroom.

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have not worked well for you?

Vanessa: Since the beginning of the year, I implemented the one teach, one assist but it hasn't worked well. It's like one is running the show and the other one not really knowing what's going on. It's more stressful, you feel like you have more of the workload on you. Instead of releasing the responsibility and covering more kids, it just gets overwhelming.

Although Vanessa and her co-teacher shared the responsibility of all the students in the room, Vanessa was the one delivering the instruction on a daily basis. Vanessa mentioned that by using the one teach, one assist model in the co-teaching classroom it was a more stressful situation. Vanessa stated that since she had more teaching experience than her co-teacher, she felt obligated to take the lead in the one teach one assist co-teaching model. I inferred that Vanessa took the teaching lead to make sure the relationship ran smoothly but soon realized the responsibility became unequal as the school year continued.

The unequal share of responsibility was also mentioned by Joyce, a 21 year teaching veteran of both Reading and English. In the 2016-17 school year, Joyce was paired with a brand new teacher with no prior teaching experience. The pair co-taught in a seventh grade English Language Arts classroom. Joyce was very vocal about how the teaching responsibility was shared in her classroom and how Joyce was the one doing all of the work.

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have worked well for you?

Joyce: The only model that we have done in my seventh grade class has been one teach, one assist. I feel like I am responsible for everything, I don't see it as a shared co-teaching experience. In the seventh grade class, it's difficult because she's new and lacks training. She tends to watch me and doesn't really do anything else. We're both adults, so I am not going to say, "Get up and do this," but recently, though because of frustration levels, I have been more vocal in telling her what needs to be done. I don't really feel like that's my job as a co-teacher, but that is what it has come down to now. So to get back to your question I guess we haven't found a model that works well in that class.

In Joyce's co-teaching experience in her seventh grade classroom, she stated that she has not found a co-teaching model that has worked well. I realized from Joyce's comments about the frustration levels in the classroom that she was having a difficult time with responsibility. I inferred that there was a lack of communication present between the co-teachers since Joyce felt out of place asking her co-teacher to participate in the classroom.

Since Joyce was vocal in expressing the imbalance in the roles of responsibility in that classroom, I wanted to gain the perceptions of her co-teacher. In a separate interview, I interviewed her co-teacher Dara in order to gain further insight. Dara was a brand new teacher in the education field with no other classroom experience. Dara was asked the same set of interview questions. Dara spoke about her perspective and she also discussed the imbalance of responsibility in that particular co-teaching classroom.

Interviewer: What are the positive experiences you have had with co-teaching?

Dara: So far, it has been nice working with my co-teacher. I have been able to learn a lot from watching her. I really don't get a chance to teach many of the lessons. I feel hesitant to step forward and be an equal in the classroom. There is a sense of intimidation on my part because I second guess myself. She really has it all down, the management, the material and I feel if I step in, it would be like I was stepping on her toes.

By having Dara's perceptions of the co-teaching experience with Joyce, I noted that she felt hesitant to assume a co-teaching role in the classroom due to Joyce's many years of teaching experience. I inferred that Dara's perception of the responsibility in the classroom seemed to stem from a lack of communication with her co-teacher. Joyce felt overwhelmed with all of the responsibility that was put on her by running the entire classroom while Dara felt intimidated by the veteran teacher to participate in co-teaching models. This co-teaching pair expressed their perspectives on the role of responsibility in the classroom in a negative way.

### **Control**

Another common theme related to responsibility in the classroom was the element of control. Control was mentioned in an unfavorable way, almost like a burden for certain teachers that were in a co-teaching classroom. Specifically, teachers' perceptions on the unsuccessful co-teaching models often revolved around the element of control. Several teachers mentioned when sharing the responsibility of student growth objectives there were times when they did not want to give up the lead teaching role in the classroom. When interviewing Vince, who was in a sixth grade co-teaching classroom for the first

time in his 15-year career, he mentioned that the pressures of teacher evaluations and student growth made it difficult to let the other teacher have control of the instruction in the classroom.

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have worked well for you?

Vince: Parallel-teaching is probably the best model we have used so far. I feel like by breaking the kids into smaller groups we are able to reach more kids on an individual level. With the parallel model though, each teacher really has to know the content since both teachers are responsible. I know that some teachers in the building don't want to let other people control the instruction since so much of our evaluations are based on student growth. It gets even harder especially if the other teachers don't know the content area.

Since Vince's teaching background was solely in teaching English, I wondered if he was speaking about his own perception of his classroom when he mentioned control of the instruction. In the 2016-17 school year, Vince was paired with Joyce who had a strong background in teaching Reading. As I was listening to Vince's response, I wondered if Vince felt fully confident when Joyce was parallel teaching the English content. In order to get more information on Vince's perception on this issue of control, I asked a follow up question that I created on-the-spot.

Interviewer: How do you and your co-teacher work around the issue of control of the instruction in the parallel teaching model?

Vince: Since we both consider ourselves experts in our subject areas, we make

sure that we plan together and go over the objectives and how to reach them. We support each other and we are honest with each other about our level of comfort. If I'm not quite sure how to teach the inferencing skill in a parallel model, then we might implement another co-teaching model that works for both of us.

Vince spoke about his own personal experience of control in the classroom and provided insight about control that he witnessed when he conversed with other teachers in the building. After interviewing Vince, I determined that he was comfortable with the parallel teaching model as long as he was on the same page, instructionally, with his co-teacher. I realized that Vince wanted to make sure his co-teacher was confident about teaching the content before splitting the class up into groups otherwise control would be an issue.

In an additional interview with Lisa, the theme of control emerged once again. Lisa was teaching for ten years and had a strong background in Reading at the middle school level. Lisa was also paired with Joyce, a veteran teacher of 21 years. Together, they taught an eighth grade English Language Arts class in the 2016-17 school year. Lisa was co-teaching for the first time this school year. Lisa mentioned the aspect of losing ownership and control in the classroom when two expert teachers were paired together when asked about her experiences.

Interviewer: What are the positive experiences you have had co-teaching?

Lisa: This is my first experience in a regular classroom with a co-teacher so I feel that it is her classroom and she takes the lead. I try to contribute as much as I can. It's tough when you have two experts in one classroom and

sometimes they find it difficult to give up control and let go of things. So it's hard for my co-teacher to let go of the control and share the power sometimes since we both have strong reading backgrounds.

When Lisa described her positive co-teaching experiences, I realized that she did not mention any real positive aspects of co-teaching. Even though Lisa was an expert teacher in her field, she voiced her frustration about the co-teaching experience. Lisa felt obligated to take the lesser role in the classroom since her co-teacher took the lead in most cases. I determined that Lisa was not in favor of the unequal sharing of control and authority that seemed to naturally occur in this classroom. I realized that a lack of communication between Lisa and Joyce contributed to her frustration.

### **Knowledge of Content Area**

As in any teaching role, teachers are responsible to be well-versed in the content area they are teaching. In order to deliver effective instruction in the classroom, it is essential to be knowledgeable of the curriculum. In the 2016-17 school year, the middle school study site implemented a brand new curriculum that merged Reading and English classes together. The English Language Arts merger not only came with a new curriculum, but it also required two teachers in the BSI classroom. When the teachers were asked about what co-teaching models worked well and what models did not work well, the topic of content area knowledge emerged as a common theme. In the teacher interviews, two separate teachers discussed their perceptions on their co-teacher and knowledge of the content area. One teacher discussed both the advantages and disadvantages of having a co-teacher with a strong knowledge of the content area.

Another teacher discussed her perspective about the disadvantages of having a co-teacher not well-versed in the content area.

When interviewing Hogan who had a background in teaching Reading and teaching a block schedule of ELA, he mentioned the disadvantages of the co-teacher not being well versed in the content area. Additionally, Hogan pointed out the advantages of working with a co-teacher who had knowledge in the content area. Since Hogan was paired with three co-teachers in multiple grade levels, he offered a unique perspective about the knowledge of the content area. In Hogan's sixth grade teaching placement, he was paired with Dara who had little experience and knowledge of the English Language Arts curriculum. Hogan explained the difficulty he faced on a daily basis learning with a new curriculum and teaching strategies in the classroom.

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have not worked well?

Hogan: Teaming has not worked well for us. There is a gap in the knowledge of the content. I feel that since I have experience working in the district, my responsibility is to lend my knowledge of teaching reading into the classroom. However, with the recent merger of Reading and English, there are areas that I am not too familiar with.

Interviewer: Can you explain more about the lack of content knowledge?

Hogan: Sure, I just feel like if my co-teacher had more experience with the content area it would not been so overwhelming for myself. There is really no cohesiveness to our teaching because the students see me as the lead teacher who knows the answers. They are always asking me for help when I wish a balance existed where the students saw us both as equals. I feel as

though the students are always choosing me because my co-teacher has very little experience.

Hogan's experience with Dara, his sixth grade co-teacher showed the imbalance of responsibility in regards to lack of content area knowledge. By being paired with a co-teacher who was unable to pull her weight with the curriculum, Hogan felt overwhelmed in the classroom. He realized that the students noticed the imbalance in the knowledge of content and they relied heavily on him for support in the classroom. I determined that lack of content area knowledge made Hogan frustrated in the co-teaching classroom.

In contrast, Hogan shared a positive perception on a co-teaching partnership that thrived due to both teachers being well-versed in the content area. One of Hogan's other co-teaching placements was in a seventh grade English Language Arts classroom where he was paired with Vanessa, a 23-year veteran with experience in teaching both Reading and English. Vanessa had extensive knowledge in both content areas and offered a wide variety of skills and strategies to implement in their daily teaching routine. Hogan felt that his co-teaching experience with Vanessa was a positive one where he was able to grow as an educator and the students benefited from the partnership.

Hogan: I enjoy working with my seventh grade co-teacher because we both have areas of expertise. I am knowledgeable about Reading and she is knowledgeable in both Reading and English. It's a good experience because we can bounce off of each other. When we split off into the parallel teaching model to work in separate groups, I feel confident the groups are learning the same material. I guess in this situation I have confidence in my co-teacher.

Vanessa and Hogan had experience in the content which made Hogan feel comfortable with the teaching arrangement. Unlike his co-teaching partnership with Dara where there was gaps in teacher knowledge of content, Hogan thrived when paired with Vanessa who he felt confident in releasing the responsibility and control of the classroom.

An additional example of an advantage of having both teachers knowledgeable in the content area came from Kaitlyn's perception. Kaitlyn had three years experience teaching at the elementary level but was a new teacher at the middle school level in the 2016-17 school year. When Kaitlyn was asked about if her teaching philosophy differed from that of her co-teacher's, Kaitlyn expressed her perception of the philosophies. In her response to that interview question, she discussed the process of learning a brand new curriculum at a new school and how that aided to the knowledge of the content.

Interviewer: Does your philosophy on teaching differ from that of your co-teacher?

Kaitlyn: I think that our philosophies are similar. We both want to reach as many students as we can at their level so they show progress. With having a new curriculum to follow this year, I feel like it's a fresh start. We both bring different ideas to the table which is great and bounce off ideas off each other about how to deliver the instruction. If there are gaps in our knowledge or if we aren't quite sure how to teach something we ask each other first for ideas. If we can't create a lesson, then we go online and share the resources that we find with each other.

Kaitlyn mentioned that her and the co-teacher both contributed to the knowledge of the content area. Similarly, to what Hogan said, they enjoyed bouncing ideas off of each

other. I realized that Kaitlyn and her co-teacher were open with each other about their knowledge of the content. It seemed that if they were unsure of something they had no shame in asking each other for assistance or seeking out resources online. Kaitlyn's perspective proved that with an open-mind and communication, a successful partnership could exist when the teachers know the content area even if there are gaps in the knowledge.

Overall, the roles and responsibility in the co-teaching classroom emerged as a theme in the teacher interviews. Teachers, regardless of their experience or grade level mentioned the imbalance of responsibility that was present in the classroom. Teachers discussed control in the classroom as a burden and how it seemed to fall more on the teacher who had the most teaching experience. Along with control, knowledge of the content area was viewed as both an advantage and disadvantage depending on the teacher's experience and background. I noticed that when teachers discussed the imbalance of responsibility and unequal sharing of control, there was a lack of communication present between the co-teachers. Vanessa a teaching veteran of 23 years, offered insight to the co-teaching experience when she included her thoughts on responsibility and control within her philosophy of teaching.

Interviewer: What is your philosophy of teaching?

Vanessa: You have to learn to give and take. Being in this school for years and working with different co-teachers, you learn that communication is key. It's truly a give and take relationship. You need to be open to their feedback, respectful of each other's opinions and work together. At the

end of the day it's really doing what best for the kids and coming together respectfully to meet the needs of the learners.

This statement from Vanessa described that communication was essential for the co-teaching model to work effectively in the classroom. Through communication, the relationship could grow and help diminish the imbalance of responsibility and control in the classroom.

### **Co-Planning**

During the interview sessions, teachers were asked about co-planning time in the classroom. The topic of co-planning elicited long and passionate responses from teachers and included the advantages of co-planning. However, most of the perspectives on co-teaching mentioned the disadvantages of not having enough co-planning time. Luckner (1997) discussed the importance of partners creating planning time and the difficulties of setting planning time aside. Teachers in this research study offered much insight into how they felt about the allotted time of co-planning they received and how they created their own planning time.

When interviewing Kaitlyn, effective co-planning was discussed. Kaitlyn was new to the middle school level and was getting familiar with co-planning in the block schedule. In her co-teaching placement, she learned from the co-teacher in regards to co-planning and management of the class. Kaitlyn and her co-teacher planned via email and spent time discussing plans through Office 365, which was a service they used to share lesson plans and work on documents simultaneously. Kaitlyn and her co-teacher discussed what materials to use for the week and what skills and strategies to use to

instruct the students. When asked about co-planning time, Kaitlyn mentioned her positive perspective on co-planning in her co-teaching partnership.

Interviewer: Do you regularly co-plan with your co-teacher?

Kaitlyn: Yes, we are able to regularly co-plan. Generally, I will look at the curriculum guide and have some ideas already in my mind before we meet. We pick one day a week where we meet after school to co-plan. This day stays the same unless we're off from school or one of us gets tied up. We always know that Wednesday is our planning day. Our families know that we stay late on that day in order to plan. We plan, get our copying done and then we're all set and ready. It takes dedication but that's what teaching is all about--being dedicated to the students.

Kaitlyn indicated that within her co-teaching partnership, they developed their own individual schedule. Since Kaitlyn mentioned that time during the school day was not allotted for co-planning time, they agreed on a schedule that worked. I determined that Kaitlyn encountered a positive co-planning experience due to the fact that her schedule and her co-teachers schedule allowed them to use their personal time to co-plan.

### **Lack of Co-Planning Time**

Throughout the interview process, the majority of the teachers discussed the lack of co-planning time given to them by the district and how that greatly affected their roles. Contrary to Kaitlyn's perception, not all teachers believed that they should stay after contractual time to complete lesson plans. The school district did provide the teachers with co-planning time. The teachers were all scheduled once a marking period to co-plan. On that co-planning day, teachers were given a half day to plan for roughly eight to nine

weeks of instruction. Teachers discussed their perceptions on the allotted time available for them to co-plan and the after effects of the lack of co-planning time.

When I interviewed Sara, who taught at the study site for seven years, and asked her about the co-planning schedule she expressed her perception. Since Sara previously taught in the special education field, she was familiar with co-teaching models. Sara spoke about her eighth grade co-teaching placement in regards to co-planning. Sara mentioned that she considered herself the co-teacher in the partnership who was in the room to assist the regular teacher.

Interviewer: Do you regularly co-plan with your co-teacher?

Sara: I am never consulted on what we are going to be doing the next week, I am told what we are doing. We don't have a common planning time. We are scheduled to plan once a marking period. It's difficult for us to plan a time to meet up. Our schedules are so different. In the beginning of the year, I tried to reach out to plan but she always had the plans done already. So I figured she would do them. Since then, she just emails me the plans and I am there to help in any way I can. I wish we had a set time where we could meet. I really want to be involved in the planning but the lack of time we have available is tough. I feel that it appears like I am not interested in teaching the class and that is not the case. The district really needs to give us more time like on a half-day or something.

Sara mentioned that the lack of co-planning time caused her to feel as though she was not pulling her weight in the co-teaching partnership. I realized that by not being involved in the co-planning time, Sara felt guilty. For example, Sara mentioned that she sensed that

the co-teacher did not feel like Sara was dedicated to teaching the class. Sara offered a suggestion in the interview on how to improve co-planning time when she mentioned co-planning on a half day. Sara suggested since there was a half-day every month, time should be given for co-teachers to co-plan. I determined that Sara did care about teaching the class and was interested in co-planning but due to lack of co-planning time she was unable to participate.

Vince shared a similar perspective of co-planning during his interview. Vince co-taught with Joyce in a sixth grade English Language Arts classrooms. Both teachers were experienced and spent their entire teaching careers in the district at the study site. During his interview, Vince provided his perspective on co-planning with Joyce.

Interviewer: Do you regularly co-plan with your co-teacher?

Vince: Yes, we co-plan but not as much as I like. We are scheduled once a marking period to co-plan. Officially, that is considered the planning period for us but we informally consult and co-plan daily. We co-plan before or after class, via text, via email, over the phone or any extra time.

Vince mentioned how formal co-planning was difficult to do since teachers were scheduled only once a marking period. Therefore, he relied on informal co-planning with his co-teacher in order to provide instruction. Vince explained how informal co-planning was problematic because it occurred during his personal time. During the interview, he referenced a time when he was out of town and did not see an email from his co-teacher about making changes to a lesson plan. When he entered school on Monday he was surprised to see a new plan in place for that day.

Vince: It's like I always have to be "on-call," even on the weekends. I'm not

complaining about when my co-teacher contacts me, it's usually a great idea or suggestion to do but sometimes I just want to shut off work and not check my email until Monday.

Vince discussed that co-planning during his personal time was something that he did not enjoy. I realized that even though Vince knew it was necessary to informally co-plan in order to be successful in the classroom, he also yearned for a common planning time during the school day. However, due to the lack of planning time, Vince was forced to continue to coordinate lessons plans with Joyce on his personal time after school and on the weekends. Since the co-teachers has different schedules, Vince was frustrated with the current co-planning situation.

For Dara, the newest teacher in the district, learning the new curriculum and implementing it was a difficult task. When put in a situation to work with a veteran teacher, the process became much more difficult, especially with the lack of co-planning time.

Interviewer: What are the positive experiences you have had co-teaching?

Dara: I do not feel there are many positives during the periods I co-teach. I feel that I am getting experience but the co-teaching models are not really present. We have no co-planning time in our schedules so I never really know what's coming next. My co-teacher will email me what we're doing. For example, she will say this week we're working on inferencing or this week we're working on main idea.

Much of the ineffectiveness of Dara's co-teaching relationship had to do with co-planning. Dara and her co-teacher informally communicated via email but rarely

discussed how the instruction would be delivered or what materials would be used. I quickly realized that due to lack of co-planning time, Dara and her co-teacher were forced to send plans via email. By the using email to plan, it eliminated the back and forth conversational aspects of planning where they could have discussed the approaches for implementation of the content and materials.

Lack of co-planning time emerged as a theme in yet another interview, this time with Vanessa. I was curious to find out Vanessa's perspective on co-planning since she was one of the most experienced teachers at the study site. Vanessa primarily used the one teach, one assist model in her co-teaching classroom. Her role in the co-teaching partnership was the teaching role and her co-teacher would assist her during the class period.

Interviewer: Do you regularly co-plan with your co-teacher?

Vanessa: Not on a regular basis there's not enough time given to us. Since we are teaching the new infused ELA curriculum there are more lessons we are creating from scratch. Parts of it I have taught before but it's a lot of creating things from the beginning which is a lot of work. We are trying create lessons and work together. It's a lot going on at once and with no time for co-planning it becomes really informal. I usually just wind up writing the lessons myself and having my co-teacher approve them.

Vanessa's perspective on co-planning time was similar to Vince's perspective in that there was not enough time given in the day for teachers to plan, therefore planning became very informal. Similarly, to Sara's co-teacher, Vanessa also found it easier to write the plans and have her co-teacher look them over. Vanessa discussed the difficulty

of not having a time to co-plan especially when teaching a brand new curriculum. She mentioned that now, more than ever, co-planning time should exist for teachers. I determined from the collective responses of Sara, Vince, Dara and Vanessa that due to lack of co-planning time provided by the district, teachers were unable to collaboratively plan instruction.

### **Differentiation**

Another theme related to co-planning that was mentioned in the teacher interviews was differentiation of the material in the classroom. Some teachers shared their positive perspectives on how co-teaching models helped them plan for better differentiation in the classroom. Teachers expressed that co-teaching and co-planning gave them the ability to reach more students on an individual level. Also, teachers mentioned the use of certain co-teaching models were better than others for planning to differentiate the content in the classroom. For example, Kaitlyn described her experience with positive co-teaching models and added that using those models created more of an opportunity to plan for differentiation in the classroom.

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have worked well for you?

Kaitlyn: Having two teachers in the classroom makes it easier to incorporate co-teaching models such as parallel teaching, station teaching and one teach, one pulls a small group. Those have worked best for my co-teacher and myself. I think it is beneficial for the students to have multiple viewpoints in the classroom. It allows for more differentiation for the students. They have a better chance of understanding what the teachers are

saying if it's coming from different perspectives, teaching methods and groupings.

Kaitlyn expressed that co-teaching models could be a positive experience but required planning to use those models that allowed for differentiation. After I listened to Kaitlyn's perception, I realized that both co-teachers must be willing to work with each other and plan effectively to use the models for differentiation.

When I interviewed Dara who was a new teacher with no prior teaching experience, she expressed that even though not much differentiation happened in her co-teaching partnership, she was aware of the benefits of successful co-teaching models. Dara shared her perception on differentiation when asked about co-teaching models:

Interviewer: What co-teaching models have worked well for you?

Dara: My co-teacher and I are still working on how to do a whole class lesson in the parallel model. It's not something we have figured out yet. Now, we do the one teach, one assist. I feel as though it doesn't do much for the students. There is a lot of lecture that happens in the class. I can see the students zoning out and I will go over and tap them on the shoulder or whisper to them to pay attention. I feel like if we could split up the class in groups, the students would be more engaged and we would do a better job of differentiating the content.

Dara was aware that the one teach, one assist co-teaching model did not offer enough opportunities for differentiation in the classroom. Since Dara was paired with Joyce, a veteran teacher, Dara often felt undermined in her authority and ability to make decisions in the classroom. After listening to Dara's perspective on co-teaching models, I

realized that Dara was knowledgeable about differentiation. However, I noted that Dara was unable to implement those effective models in the classroom because she felt intimidated in her co-teaching partnership.

### **The Co-Teaching Relationship**

Co-teaching allows for two teachers to merge their knowledge of content and teaching strategies together in order to deliver effective instruction. In any collaborative relationship, there must be a solid foundation built around effective communication skills, trust, and respect so the co-teaching partners see themselves as equals. Friend (2008) discussed the co-teaching relationship and compared it to a marriage. The partners in the relationship needed to display traits similar to that of a married couple which included commitment, flexibility and negotiation in order to be successful (Friend, 2008).

Across the interviews conducted in this study, the importance of a co-teaching relationship emerged as a theme among teachers. Under the umbrella of the co-teaching relationship further themes were examined such as inappropriate pairing, uncertainty of future partnerships and trust and respect. All of themes related back to aspect of the co-teaching relationship.

### **Inappropriate Pairing**

Another common theme that was present in the teacher interviews was the inappropriate pairing of teachers for co-teaching assignments. Teachers stated that they did not have any choice in their co-teaching assignments or partnerships. They were assigned their grade level teaching assignment and co-teaching partnership by the administration which included the Principal and Vice Principal at the study site. During the interviews, teachers individually mentioned the negative effects of inappropriately

pairing teachers together. Specifically, teachers discussed the inappropriate pairing of co-teachers in regards to experience in teaching the content.

When I interviewed Joyce, a 21 year teaching veteran in Reading and English, she mentioned the theme of inappropriate pairing when she was asked about her positive experiences with co-teaching. Joyce mentioned that positive experiences in her co-taught classes varied from co-teacher to co-teacher. She then digressed from the original question and discussed her perspective on one of her unsuccessful co-teaching partnerships. Since Joyce was paired with a teacher that lacked experience teaching in the content area, Joyce passionately expressed her disapproval in the partnership. Joyce commented that the administration at the study site should have sent out a survey in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the co-teaching pairings. Since the co-teaching implementation and English Language Arts merger was new, she felt that someone should have asked how things were progressing or if there were any major conflicts.

Joyce: No one has really checked in on us or asked us how the co-teaching relationships have been going. My co-teacher has no clue about how to teach the content. You have a human element involved in here with co-teaching. What if we really had an issue and here we are four months in, with all this tension in the classroom, and no one even knows about it. I think that is the role of administration. They should focus more on understanding their staff members and what areas they are qualified in, that way you can have better matches. You can see, if they weren't matched up correctly, how that could be stressful for teachers and students.

Since Joyce encountered both positive and negative co-teaching experiences with inappropriate pairing of co-teachers, she discussed the value of administrators getting involved in making sure teachers were paired appropriately. Joyce's frustration occurred due to inappropriate pairing. She wanted the administration to be more involved in the co-teaching relationship, especially since they were the ones to pair the co-teachers. Luckner (1997) discussed administration in playing a major key in the success when implementing co-teaching. Luckner stated that when administrators had an active role in the co-teaching process, teachers were able to express their progress and any conflicts that arose. Joyce understood importance of having the administration active in the pairing process.

Similarly, when I interviewed Sara, she shared her own perspective on the inappropriate pairing done by administrators surrounding experience with teaching the content. Sara had a strong background in Reading and did not have any experience teaching English. Sara was paired with a fellow teacher who also had a background in teaching Reading. When I asked Sara, "What co-teaching models have not worked well for you?" she discussed her experience using the teaming co-teaching model. The teaming co-teaching model is where the teachers teach together and then jump in or bounce ideas off of one another while teaching. After Sara discussed why teaming did not work well for her in the classroom Sara brought up how she was inappropriately paired with her co-teacher. Sara mentioned she often felt that when teaching English that she and her co-teacher had little knowledge about the content. Sara expressed her perception on being paired with a teacher who also had extensive knowledge in teaching Reading. She discussed the inappropriate pairing in regards to the administration.

Sara: One of the biggest mistakes that they made was the pairing of the teachers. They should have paired Reading and English together. It would have alleviated some of the stress. If you were an English teacher and you never taught reading it's extremely overwhelming and vice versa. I don't see the benefits of putting two Reading teachers together because when the writing part comes up in the curriculum, I know we don't spend enough time in the writing. The truth is we really don't feel comfortable teaching it yet.

Sara expressed strong concerns about the co-teaching pairs in regards to the teaching of the co-teacher. She felt that when co-teaching the new English Language Arts curriculum, there should have been an equal balance of a Reading teacher and an English teacher. I determined that Sara felt overwhelmed with learning a new subject area along with a new curriculum. I realized that some of Sara's stress came from not having support in teaching the English curriculum. Even with two teachers in the room and having knowledge in Reading, Sara felt the overwhelmed with teaching English.

After analyzing the responses from Sara and Joyce surrounding inappropriate pairing, I noted that both teachers mentioned being stressed and overwhelmed with the demands of the content. I realized the gaps in content knowledge put a strain on the co-teaching relationship. This strain on the relationship added to the perception of the co-teachers not seeing each other as equals in the classroom. Joyce did not see herself as being an equal match in regards to content knowledge in comparison with her co-teacher, therefore creating a sense of inequality. In Sara's situation, the lack of content knowledge on both teachers' part resulted in her feeling overwhelmed by not being able to

adequately cover the required material. When looking back at the pairings of the teachers who participated in this study and those additional teachers at the study site, I realized that the administration tried to pair Reading and English teachers together. There was evidence of Reading teachers paired with English teachers. However, due to the number of teachers and areas of certifications, it was not possible for everyone to receive a perfect match of Reading and English.

### **Different Personalities**

During the teacher interviews, different personalities emerged as a theme in relation to inappropriate pairing. Teachers mentioned that in addition to being inappropriately paired with a co-teacher in experience in teaching content, teacher personalities often clashed in the classroom. Teachers discussed their perspectives on being paired with someone who had a different personality and how that affected their relationship and instruction. For example, Lisa had ten years of experience teaching Reading and she was paired with a teacher that she did not really interact with a lot at the study site.

Lisa: I have to pull back sometimes because it stresses her out. We have different viewpoints on how to instruct but at some point there has to be some type of agreement. For us we have never worked together before, and I didn't know her very well. It's also a matter of figuring out what our personalities were like.

Lisa's mentioned that differing personalities were an unfavorable factor in the co-teaching relationship. She described that when two teachers had different viewpoints on how to instruct, it could hinder the result of the instruction. From Lisa's perspective, I

realized that compromises were made in order to get along with the co-teacher. When Lisa mentioned she had to “pull back” during instruction because it created stress with her co-teacher, I realized that she was not able to teach to her full potential.

Another example of co-teachers inappropriately paired concerning their different personalities was discussed by Hogan. In the 2016-17 school year, Hogan co-taught with multiple teachers. He was exposed to various personalities in his co-teaching classrooms. Hogan shared his perspective on a co-teacher who had a different personality than his own.

Hogan: When I first heard that I was co-teaching with this person and I would tell people that knew me, laughter was the first reaction because our personalities are so different. In the beginning, we did stumble through getting use to each other’s personalities but we are both professionals. I know that you are not going to be best friends with everyone in the workplace but you do need to learn how to work together. Administration doesn’t give much consideration to personalities when they match teachers. Some do great together while others are not so great.

Hogan mentioned that he was inappropriately paired with his co-teacher. However, Hogan realized that professionalism had to be the overriding factor in the co-teaching relationship. Even though his personality greatly differed from that of his co-teacher, he still had to be professional and learn how to work together with his partner. From Hogan’s response, I determined that he was aware that the administration did not consider personalities but he still displayed professionalism and put his personal feelings aside.

## **The Uncertainty of Future Partnerships**

In regards to the co-teaching relationship, many teachers went on to discuss their perceptions on not being guaranteed the same co-teaching partnership next year. The administration at the study site did not indicate whether the teachers would be paired together in the future. As a result, many teachers were concerned about having to start the process of building a relationship and rapport over again. Joyce, a 21 year teaching veteran expressed her concern regarding uncertainty of future co-teaching partnerships during the interview.

Joyce: Another problem with co-teaching is that the partnerships change all the time. If I were to stay with her year after year after year we would work better together. But it seems that every year you're with different people. It's like you finally get comfortable with each other routines and quirks and the next year you're with someone else. So it would be better for our situation if we could stay with that person and had time to build that trusting relationship.

I was able to infer that Joyce's perspective on the uncertainty of future co-teaching partnerships came from prior experience she had over the years of changing partners in the school. Joyce understood the movement in the co-teaching partnerships. Joyce's perspective coincided with the research that was done on the co-teaching relationship. For example, Keefe and Moore (2004) discussed a similar issue of teachers constantly being placed with new teachers each year and how it diminished the possibility of building a stable relationship.

Vanessa, another teaching veteran of over 20 years shared her similar perception on the co-teaching relationship. Vanessa mentioned the uncertainty of co-teaching partnerships in the future.

Vanessa: I believe that co-teaching in the regular education classroom has been a shift for all of us. If it's really going to work and be successful, there needs to be some sort of consistency present. Let us know that we're going to stay in this role for a while so we can learn to understand our partner's personality and teaching style. A lot of us want to know the schedule. I don't see the benefit of keeping us in the dark.

Vanessa's perception added to the concern about the uncertainty of co-teaching assignments. Vanessa knew the importance of having the time to understand the co-teaching partner and get use to each other's teaching style. I determined that Vanessa was unclear about the future of the co-teaching partnership. By not knowing their future teaching assignments, it caused angst for both Vanessa and Joyce.

### **Trust and Respect**

In regards to the co-teaching relationship, the theme of trust and respect emerged at various times throughout the interview sessions. Teachers discussed the importance of building trust with the co-teacher and creating a mutual respect for each other was essential. Vince shared his perspective on trust in the co-teaching classroom.

Vince: I really have to trust that she is going to instruct in an accurate way and vice versa. With the new curriculum, it's all a learning curve and the relationship has to be strong enough to go through that stress and pressure.

Vince discussed his perspective on trust in the relationship as being something to fall back on when the pressures of the classroom are exceptionally high. Kaitlyn's perception was similar when she referred to the co-teaching relationship as a bond between two teachers.

Kaitlyn: When thinking about my philosophy on co-teaching, it really centers around building the relationship. I see it as forming a bond with the other person. When there is trust and respect in the relationship, I feel that the class runs smoother. Trust is hard to build and take time but once it's there, it's a beautiful thing to witness in the classroom.

As a result of the data collected, I was able to analyze the findings into specific themes of role and responsibility in the co-teaching classroom, issues of co-planning, and the co-teaching relationship. These major themes were then further examined and related themes emerged such as control, lack of co-planning time, inappropriate pairing, different personalities, the uncertainty of future partnerships and the importance of trust and respect. Chapter five discusses the conclusions of the study, limitations and implications for the field of research.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary**

As my research study concluded, I gained a better understanding of how teachers perceived co-teaching in my school district. I had more information on how teachers felt about certain issues that arose as a result of the co-teaching experience such as the roles and responsibilities of co-teachers, co-planning and the co-teaching relationship.

Information about my study was shared across the school district. Administrators reached out to me about discussing the results of the teacher's perspectives. By sharing this valuable information with administrators, they could gauge the effectiveness of co-teaching so far this school year. They would also gain insight on what areas need improvement and they could plan professional development workshop around the issues.

### **Conclusions**

The findings of my research study have concluded on teachers' perceptions on the co-teaching experience. Many of the negative perceptions about co-teaching existed due to a lack of communication among co-teachers. After analyzing the data collected, I concluded that lack of communication among teachers was present in all three major themes that emerged. First, in the theme of roles and responsibility in the classroom, lack of communication resulted in an unequal sharing of the teaching responsibility. Since teachers did not communicate properly about roles and responsibility of each teacher, an imbalance occurred. This imbalance led to teachers feeling overwhelmed and stressed out from the pressure of running a classroom while the other teacher did not participate equally in the teaching role. As a result, control emerged as an additional theme in the co-teaching classroom. The unequal sharing of responsibility gave one of the teachers more

control than the other. Control became an issue in areas such as knowledge of the content. Teachers expressed their concern about the co-teacher not being able to teach the content correctly, therefore the other teacher exhibited more control over the groupings. This lack of communication led to an uncomfortable situation for both co-teachers involved.

Additionally, teachers expressed their perceptions on co-planning and mentioned that they were not given enough time from the district to successfully co-plan. The time allotted for planning was unrealistic and did not meet the needs of the majority of the teachers interviewed. As a result of this study, I concluded that in addition to lack of district time provided to co-plan, a lack of communication existed in the co-planning areas as well. The lack of communication made co-planning even harder to complete. For example, when co-teachers did not communicate about planning the lesson, the cooperating teacher felt unaware of their teaching role. This led back to the unequal sharing of responsibility and the imbalance of control.

When teachers practiced effective communication, it helped foster the overall co-teaching relationship. When using effective communication skills, there was less confusion about the role and responsibility of each teacher in the classroom. Teachers were able to both contribute to the knowledge of the content and co-teaching models. Additionally, I concluded that when communication was open there was a better chance of implementing teaching models that fostered differentiation of the content. This provided the students with a more individualized plan for learning and gave them more chances to engage with the content.

I also concluded that the co-teachers needed to have the opportunity to establish a relationship with their partner. When co-teachers did not have successful pairings, frustration occurred. The teachers felt that the administration needed to appropriately pair teachers based on teaching experience and personalities. I concluded that when there was a Reading teacher paired with an English teacher there was less stress and frustration when delivering the content. When an unequal pairing occurred, such as two expert teachers in the same field, it took a toll on co-teacher relationships and the instruction.

In order for teachers to have successful co-teaching relationships they needed the opportunity to build trust and respect. Teachers required the assurance that the co-teaching partnership would continue in the future. I concluded that teachers felt more comfortable building a relationship with another teacher knowing that they would be paired together the following year. Stronger relationships could be obtained by keeping successful pairs of co-teachers together so they could continue to develop a strong rapport with each other.

### **Limitations**

The limitations of this study included the length of time and limited participants. In regards to time, the study was limited to three short weeks. The lack of time to interview teachers made it difficult to create a schedule to meet with teachers. With the most of my research occurring during the month of November and early December, there were many days off from school such as the NJEA convention days, Election day, Thanksgiving break, and parent conferences. Due to the amount of days out of the classroom, it was difficult to find common time off where an interview could be

conducted. On the days the teachers were in school, time was precious and I made sure to conduct interviews on those days.

Another limitation of this study was the amount of limited participants. I would have liked to interview more teachers who co-teach in the English Language Arts department. Even though a total of eight teachers were interviewed, I would have liked to learn about the perspectives of all English Language Arts co-teachers at the study site. I was curious to find out if their perspectives were different than those of the participants interviewed.

### **Implications for the Field**

As the co-teaching model continues to be implemented, there are several areas of interest that could be continued to be researched surrounding co-teaching and perspectives of teachers. The first is the idea of alternate ways to co-plan. With time being one of the biggest deterrents of constructive planning time, alternate planning methods may be needed to keep co-teaching partnerships positively growing. Whether planning take place via skype, mobile device or using a live document, I think there could be other ways to get planning done efficiently.

Another area for the field of co-teaching to be considered is possible ways to get training to teachers. With this being the first year of co-teaching for many teachers, more opportunities for co-teaching should be offered. Research could identify how successful the relationships were prior to the training and then after. Also, another area for the field of research for co-teaching might be to conduct a qualitative study on co-teachers in other content areas. This could be useful in determining which content areas lend themselves to making co-teaching more applicable and which do not.

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