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by
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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the
dissertation entitled

A MIDDLE SCHOOL CO-TEACHING PROGRAM EVALUATION IN ONE
SUBURBAN MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT: PERCEPTIONS FROM
REGULAR EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, SPECIAL EDUCATION
CO-TEACHERS, AND BUILDING ADMINISTRATORS

presented by Ashly M. McGinnis,
a candidate for the degree of doctor of education
and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of their acceptance.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to individuals who have disabilities or educational challenges. From a young age, I knew I wanted to help people who were struggling. I previously worked at a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center, a mental health counseling center, a juvenile detention center, and a handful of businesses aimed at customer service. Helping others brings me great joy and satisfaction. My passion is to fight for those at a disadvantage, the “underdog.” As a former special education teacher, my eyes were opened to a population of students that quickly won my heart. I am grateful for all of my past, present, and future students. They have taught me the importance of equality, acceptance, and perseverance. I have fought and will continue to fight to ensure students with disabilities have a voice.

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ABSTRACT

Middle school co-teachers and administrators offered information during focus groups, interviews, and surveys pertaining to co-teaching. Co-teaching in this study is defined as a special education teacher and a regular education teacher collaboratively providing instruction to a group of student with diverse learning needs. This qualitative program evaluation, conducted in a Midwestern suburban area, provides an analysis of middle school co-teaching with a focus on collaboration and professional development. The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of middle school co-teaching from those at the front lines, including special education co-teachers, regular education co-teachers, and building administrators. The conceptual framework for this study was collaboration as defined by Friend and Cook (2013). Open and axial coding were used in the data analysis process. Findings indicated a lack of consistent and ongoing professional development, concerns with collaboration between co-teachers, and confusion with roles in co-teaching.

Keywords: co-teaching, special education, collaboration, program evaluation, middle school, professional development

SECTION ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISSERTATION-IN-PRACTICE

Nationwide, the number of students who receive special education services has steadily increased since 2011 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). More than six million students across the United States received special education services, such as specialized instruction in reading, writing, math, or study skills during the 2014-2015 school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2017). Now, more than ever, students with disabilities need access to high-quality instruction and teachers must work together to ensure students' academic success (Bryant-Davis, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Cook & Friend, 1995; Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

The majority of students with a disability in the United States receive instruction in the general education classroom for more than 80% of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). In Missouri, 58% of students receiving special services are educated amongst their general education peers in classrooms with a regular education teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Many school districts across the nation support co-teaching classrooms as a method to address the educational needs of students in special education (Cook & Friend, 1995). Co-teaching has become an increasingly effective way to keep students with a disability in the general education classroom while providing necessary special services (Beyers-Brown, Howerter, & Morgan, 2013; Cook & Friend, 1995; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010).

Co-teaching is defined as two or more professional educators “delivering instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space” (Cook & Friend, 1995, p. 2). Co-teaching is commonly recognized as a regular education teacher

and a special education teacher collaborating to plan and deliver instruction, as well as assessing students' learning within a regular education setting (Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend, 1989; Friend, 2014; Friend & Cook, 2013). Co-teaching allows for students with special needs to have access to a rigorous curriculum with support of two highly qualified teachers in the least restrictive environment (Bryant et al., 2012; Conderman & Hedin, 2014). With legislative mandates of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004, schools were faced with the added pressure of improving academic achievement for all students (Beyers-Brown et al., 2013; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Drake School District supported co-teaching at the secondary level as a method to assist schools in closing the achievement gap and meeting students' academic needs. The four middle schools in Drake offered various co-teaching classes depending on students' educational needs. For example, if a student demonstrated a disability in math fluency or computation, the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) team could place the student in a co-teaching math class to receive additional assistance. In 2017, co-teaching as a service was offered for reading, writing, social studies, and math at the middle schools in Drake School District. Not every school offers each of the co-teaching classes as schools made decisions about courses based on individual student needs and availability of certified staff.

Students who were in special services enrolled in a co-teaching course as agreed upon by the IEP team. IEP teams consisted of parents of the student, at least one regular education teacher and one special education teacher, a supervisor of the agency or administrator, an individual qualified to interpret the evaluation results, and any other

professionals who may have had knowledge or expertise pertaining to the child including related services, as well as the student, whenever appropriate (Missouri Department of Secondary Education, 2017). For a student to continue receiving special education services through an IEP, the school must initiate and facilitate an annual IEP meeting with all required team members. The IEP team determines if the student needs updated academic or intelligence testing to establish the student's current level of functioning and to verify a continuous need for services (Missouri Department of Secondary Education, 2017).

Students with disabilities within Drake School District were given an opportunity to receive instruction in a co-teaching setting with two professionals who have different areas of expertise. Traditionally, one teacher was an expert of the content and the other teacher was an expert in the field of special education (Cook & Friend, 1995). Professional development and collaboration time were integrated into the daily schedule at Drake School District middle schools in an attempt to assist co-teachers in successful implementation of curriculum while being cognizant of students' diverse learning needs.

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was a gap in the knowledge base pertaining to co-teaching within the middle schools at Drake School District in Missouri. Stakeholders' perceptions of middle school co-teaching at Drake were unknown due to no prior research studies. Details on collaboration and the professional development process, as well as how well they were functioning within the co-teaching middle school model at Drake School District, were also unknown. This program evaluation revealed

perceptions in an anonymous and confidential manner to gain feedback from personnel at the frontline which was used in determining suggestions for program improvement.

Another problem within this study related to mixed results and outcomes in previous research studies (Idol, 2006; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001). While some researchers (Beyers-Brown et al., 2013; Chandler-Olcott, 2017; Idol, 2006) found co-teaching to be an effective method to address students' diverse educational needs, others (Conderman & Hefling, 2014; Kamen, 2007; Pugach & Winn, 2011) discovered co-teaching to be minimally effective, having no impact at all, or having concerns with the service. This research study aimed to contribute to the already existing literature base related to co-teaching program evaluations.

Program Implementation

The growing acceptance and popularity of co-teaching has not led to an increased understanding of how to effectively implement such a service (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013). Teachers are often placed in co-teaching classroom environments without adequate training or preparation (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Nierengarten, 2013). Successful co-teaching arrangements exist within school districts which train teachers on collaboration, communication, responsibilities, instructional strategies, and content prior to the actual implementation of co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Nierengarten, 2013).

Professional development related to co-teaching, as well as collaboration time, were provided to teachers within Drake School District middle schools during the 2016-2017 school year. However, teachers' perceptions of co-teaching at the middle schools within Drake School District were unknown. As a district, minimal feedback was

obtained pertaining to how professional development and collaboration impacted middle school co-teaching. Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) support program evaluation as a means to determine what is working and what is not working within a given program or service. Organizations use data from the evaluations to make changes to the program which allow for improvements in services or overall functioning (Newcomer et al., 2015). Despite the importance of assessing programs (Newcomer et al., 2015; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004), a thorough program evaluation of middle school co-teaching within Drake School District had never been conducted. It was unknown if the addition of professional development and collaboration time impacted co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District.

Literature Gap

In addition to issues at the local level, a noticeable gap in the literature pertaining to the effectiveness of co-teaching existed (Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001). Murawski and Lee-Swanson (2001) reported research regarding co-teaching is scarce. Of the research studies that have been conducted on co-teaching, the results are mixed. Some researchers provided data to support co-teaching (Adams & Cessna, 1991; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). Other studies documented concerns with co-teaching, most notably details related to collaboration and professional development (Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004; Pugach, Blanton, & Correa, 2011; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2011; Pugach & Winn, 2011).

Pugach and Winn (2011) found lack of a common planning time built into the school schedule served as a barrier to collaboration for co-teachers. Bruffee (1994) did extensive research in the area of collaboration and concluded that collaborative learning

allowed teachers to enhance their understanding and be better prepared for delivery of instruction in the classroom. Furthermore, Bruffee (1999) explained how collaboration amongst professionals allowed for colleagues to confront their beliefs, be exposed to challenging viewpoints, and engage in meaningful conversations that allowed growth and promoted deeper learning. Friend and Cook (1991), along with Hunter, Jasper, and Williamson (2014) emphasized collaboration time as a significant factor when looking at the effectiveness of co-teaching. Co-teachers may struggle with knowing how to collaborate with their teaching partner and benefit from an agenda or an organized system for collaboration (Beyers-Brown et al., 2013)

Cook and Friend (1995) discussed the importance of professional development for co-teachers. Professional development related to communication, collaboration skills, instructional methods, strategies for a combined delivery of content, and establishing parameters for a co-teaching environment will assist co-teachers in leading a prosperous collaborative classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995). Keefe et al. (2001) discovered professional development was an area of concern when conducting focus groups with regular and special education teachers. Pugach and Winn (2011) pointed out the importance of special education teachers who co-teach to receive professional development related to academic content knowledge. Clearly, given the mixed results, additional research was needed pertaining to the impact of co-teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of co-teachers and administrators related to how collaboration impacts co-teaching at the middle schools within Drake School District. Creswell (2014) explained how a qualitative research

study identifies “a single central phenomenon” and provides a definition for the concept (p. 137). Friend and Cook (2013) defined collaboration as “a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 6). A closer look at middle school co-teaching was gained by exploring teachers’ perceptions of the current model. Strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching were studied through the eyes of the following roles: regular education co-teachers, special education co-teachers, and middle school building administrators. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of current middle school co-teaching and, if the findings dictated, use the information to suggest recommendations for change to the Drake School District Special Education Director. In addition, feedback was used to guide decisions pertaining to professional development and collaboration time for co-teachers. Despite the numerous research studies conducted across the country on co-teaching, there were no data-based research studies aimed at Drake School District pertaining to co-teaching.

Additionally, this qualitative study aimed to fill the gap in the research currently in existence. With existing literature indicating mixed results, as previously mentioned, this research study enhanced the current knowledge base on co-teaching nationwide. A qualitative study revealed perceptions from various stakeholders and functioned as a resource for other professionals with an interest in middle school education, specifically in the areas of co-teaching and collaboration.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, Creswell (2016) suggested using research questions that are open-ended and allow participants to freely express thoughts and opinions. Two

types of research questions appear in qualitative research: the central question and sub-questions (Creswell, 2016). A central research question addresses the broad scope of the study while sub-questions support the study by narrowing the focus to a particular area (Creswell, 2016). The central research question guiding this study was: What are co-teachers' and building principals' perceptions of co-teaching at the middle schools within the Drake School District? The following sub-questions supported the central research question and narrowed the focus of the study to collaboration, professional development, and program evaluation within Drake School District:

- How do co-teachers at middle schools within Drake School District use collaboration?
- How has professional development impacted co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?

Conceptual Framework: Collaboration

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a conceptual framework serves as an “underlying structure” which guides the research study (p. 85). Researchers use the conceptual framework as the foundational groundwork which provides a lens in investigating a specific problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conceptual framework functions as the primary basis for the research study and the core of the investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework for the investigation into co-teaching at Drake School District.

Figure 1. Collaboration served as the conceptual framework for this study which provided an in-depth investigation at co-teaching at middle schools in Drake School District. Program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development acted as key variables.

Collaboration and co-teaching centered around the work of Friend and Cook. Both researchers have made valuable contributions to the field of education, specifically in the co-teaching model and collaboration (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker, Finnegan, Grillo, & Garland, 2013). Drake School District adopted the co-teaching model by Friend and Cook for professional development during the 2016-2017 school year. Program evaluation was explored from the work and guidance of Rossi et. al (2004) along with Newcomer et al. (2015). Professional development was examined from multiple researchers' perspectives.

Friend and Cook's (2013) concept of collaboration identified the following six variables as essential for collaboration to take place: mutual goals, parity, voluntariness, shared decision-making, shared accountability for outcomes, and shared resources. Ongoing collaboration is imperative for establishing and maintaining a successful co-teaching classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2013). Communication and equality between these two parties are key for establishing ground rules and routines,

clarifying roles, and even to openly discuss pet peeves (Cook & Friend, 1995). This ongoing relationship is imperative for not only the success of the co-teaching model, but success of the students as well (Cook & Friend, 1995). Collaboration must incorporate equal effort from each individual teacher including a shared responsibility for making decisions and a shared ownership for accountability of student outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaboration in co-teaching is especially important in middle school (Chandler-Olcott, 2007). Chandler-Olcott (2017) stated, “Co-teaching is particularly appropriate at the middle school level, given middle school teachers’ historically strong commitment to professional collaboration” (p. 4). Successful co-teaching includes co-teachers with mutually agreed upon goals, equal access to resources, and who voluntarily meet to collaborate with their fellow co-teacher (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cook & Friend, 1995). Friend (2015) related the co-teaching relationship to a marriage, explaining how everything is shared. The workload is shared, instruction is shared, outcomes are shared, and communication and collaboration are equally shared responsibilities (Friend, 2015). Collaboration is a critical component to co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2014; Friend, 2015, Friend & Cook, 2013; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Key Variables

Program Evaluation

Research pertaining to the evaluation of social programs began in the 1930s and rapidly evolved as more social programs were established (Rossi et al. 2004). Rossi et al. (2004) defined program evaluation as “the use of social research methods to

systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs” (p. 28).

Program evaluation is essential to assess effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004). Rossi, et al. (2004) identified five areas in which program are typically evaluated: (a) “the need for the program,” (b) “the design of the program,” (c) “program implementation,” (d) “program impact or outcomes,” and (e) “program efficiency” (p. 29). For this qualitative study, the focus of the program evaluation was concentrated in the area of the design of the program and program implementation.

Co-Teaching Model

Co-teaching has multiple definitions, numerous meanings, and can be implemented in a variety of ways (Bacharach, Washut-Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008). The general definition of co-teaching involves two or more trained individuals who have shared goals and deliver instruction to a group of students (Curry School of Education, 2012). Co-teaching, in a broad sense, is defined as two or more individuals working together in a collaborative manner to educate a group of students and accomplish more than what could have been completed alone (Wenzlaff, T., Beral, L., Wiseman, K., Monroe-Baillargeon, A., Bacharach, N., & Bradfield-Kreider, P., 2002). Roth and Tobin (2004) defined co-teaching as multiple educators sharing responsibilities for instruction of students. St. Cloud State University (2018) defined co-teaching as two teachers working together with groups of students in a shared physical space. Co-teaching includes shared planning, organization, as well as shared delivery and assessment of instruction (St. Cloud State University, 2018). Co-teaching is regarded as an instructional strategy which capitalizes on the knowledge and skills of two or more

educators in the same classroom in order to increase students' learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Wenzlaff et al, 2002).

Six Approaches to Co-Teaching According to Friend and Cook

Friend and Cook (2013) recommended six particular teaching approaches to implement in a co-teaching environment. These teaching methods do not exist in isolation as many co-teachers use a combination of the given strategies during a single lesson (Friend, 2014). Each of the approaches provide certain benefits, as well as drawbacks, but no single method is identified as the best (Friend, 2014).

The goals of Friend and Cook's (2013) six approaches to co-teaching is to, at some point, apply all six approaches in the classroom to optimize learning opportunities for students. Co-teachers must constantly analyze their instructional practices and alter approaches to improve the quality of instruction for students with diverse learning needs (Friend & Cook, 2013). Furthermore, co-teachers may utilize alternative teaching strategies or combine approaches to create a new way of delivering instruction (Friend, 2014). The six approaches from Friend and Cook (2013) are described as:

- *One Teaching, One Observing*: One teacher is instructing while the other is collecting data. Afterwards, the teachers collaborate, analyze data, and plan further instruction.
- *Station Teaching*: Teachers divide the content and students. Each teacher instructs one small group and then repeats the instruction for the next group. If needed, a third group is added as an independent station or led by a designated student.

- *Parallel Teaching*: The class is strategically divided and both educators provide the same instructional content to his or her assigned group.
- *Alternative Teaching*: One teacher instructs the majority of the class while the other takes a smaller group for re-teaching, pre-teaching, assessment, intervention, or enrichment, depending upon the needs of the students.
- *Teaming*: Both teachers deliver the same content to the class at the same time. Teachers speak one at a time, but collaborate to provide instruction to the class as a whole.
- *One Teaching, One Assisting*: One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates the rooms and provides assistance as needed.

Figure 2: Adapted illustration of the six co-teaching approaches (Friend et. al, 2010)

Professional Development

Professional development is essential and required for all teachers in education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Walsh, 2012). Effective professional development must be intensive, continuous, and collaborative (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Walsh (2012) researched school systems in Maryland over a twenty-year period and concluded that effective professional development was the link to effective co-teaching. Professional development allows teachers to become better equipped for creating a strong and genuine co-teaching classroom (Walsh, 2012). Professional development should continuously be assessed to ensure the best, research-based practices are being implemented (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Training related to inclusion and collaboration cannot be emphasized enough in the co-teaching model (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). Murawski & Bernhardt (2015) suggested providing building-wide training on inclusion to establish co-teaching as a method of best practice culture rather than just a special education service.

Design of the Study

A qualitative formative program evaluation uncovered stakeholders' perceptions of co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District. Formative evaluation is a method which focuses on gathering information that ultimately leads to program improvement (Rossi et al., 2004; Scriven, 1991). In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the meaning participants make related to personal experiences and worldviews (Merriam, 2016). The researcher aimed to reveal perceptions from co-teachers and administrators pertaining to middle school co-teaching. A program evaluation of Drake School District's co-teaching service at the middle schools was

conducted through the lens of Friend and Cook's concept of collaboration and co-teaching model (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend & Cook, 2013).

Setting

The setting for this qualitative study was Drake School District, located in a Missouri suburban city with a population of approximately 76,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Drake School District included four middle schools, grades seven and eight, ranging in size from 341 to 511 students. Each middle school employed a head principal, as well as an assistant principal who also served as the athletic director. Three of the four schools qualified for free breakfast and lunch for all students due to the high percentage of students identified as meeting federal poverty guidelines. All four schools had a predominantly white or Caucasian student population with approximately 22% being identified as African American, Hispanic, Pacific Islander, Asian, Indian, or Multiracial (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Research approval was granted for this investigation by Susan Johnson, Director of Assessment at Drake School District, and the Drake School District Research Committee.

Participants

Purposeful selection was the logical approach to selecting participants in this study due to needing input from those directly connected with co-teaching (Creswell, 2014; Newcomer et al., 2015; Seidman, 2013). Merriam (2016) specified, "Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p. 96). For this reason, Drake School District was selected as a purposeful sample. Regular education teachers and special education teachers who provide instruction in a

co-teaching setting were asked to volunteer as participants. Administrators from the four middle schools were selected based on availability. All names of participants were kept confidential. Participation was strictly on a volunteer basis and a consent form was provided (See Appendix A). Participants were contacted via email, through personal phone calls, or face-to-face interaction.

Data Collection Tools

An assortment of data collection tools, including focus groups, interviews, and a survey, were used in this study to provide participants with different means of expressing perceptions. Collecting multiple sources of data allows the researcher access to a more holistic database which can be organized, categorized, and reconstructed by the researcher to provide meaningful insight (Creswell, 2014). As suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015), focus groups consisting of five to eight various stakeholders were used to explore insights and perceptions. Regular and special education teachers who currently co-teach, as well as administrators, were asked to participate in a focus group to gain a better understanding of the current co-teaching service. Focus groups are particularly useful when a researcher is exploring a range of perceptions and trying to understand the differences in numerous viewpoints (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups lasted no longer than one hour and took place in a setting outside of the school buildings being studied. All interviews and focus groups were recorded using a professional transcription service, (<https://www.rev.com>), to best capture the participants' various views and opinions.

Individual interview sessions were offered for participants as an alternative to the focus groups. If a participant was uncomfortable with the focus group dynamics or if his

or her schedule did not allow time for partaking in the scheduled activity, an individual interview was offered. As Seidman (2013) suggested, no interviews were conducted with participants whom the researcher supervised and the location was neutral, private, as well as convenient, to the participants. Asking worthwhile questions is essential in obtaining meaningful data during an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher prepared an interview guide in advance to assist in facilitation of the discussion (See Appendix C).

A short survey was distributed to all co-teachers and administration at the middle schools within Drake School District (See Appendix B). Surveys have proven to be an effective technique to gain feedback from stakeholders, especially pertaining to program evaluations (Fink, 2017). As suggested by Fink (2017), the survey was reviewed, revised, and approved by an expert panel to increase content validity. The expert panel consisted of members with education and expertise in the following areas: K-12 learning disabilities, K-12 special reading, K-12 school administration, and/or K-12 special education administration. All members of the expert panel held graduate degrees in Educational Leadership, Special Education Administration, and/or School Administration. By gathering survey data from participants who have been interviewed, the researcher was able to compare survey and interview data to increase reliability (Fink, 2017). Confidentiality is vital in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016). All survey information was kept confidential and the identity of the respondents was not provided to the researcher.

In any research study, ethical considerations must be reflected and carefully understood (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Even though the federal government and professional agencies have policies and guidelines regarding ethical practices in research,

actual ethical conduct is the responsibility of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2016) provided several suggestions for qualitative researchers in relation to avoiding ethical dilemmas, such as obtaining college/university approval for research through Institutional Review Board (IRB), clearly communicating the purpose of the study and how the data will be used, and refraining from falsifying information, plagiarizing, and siding with participants. Personal norms and characteristics related to race, culture, religion, and gender should be learned and respected (Creswell, 2016). Ethical researchers disclose multiple perspectives, continuously remind themselves to keep personal biases in check and at bay when in research discussions with participants, and report honestly (Creswell, 2016). For this study, IRB approval was obtained through the University of Missouri and the researcher committed to completing research with integrity and the utmost ethical regard.

Data Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to ensure information was preserved for future examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The audio recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed to offer the best platform for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcription analysis allows the researcher to study documents and discover themes or patterns in the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Survey information was analyzed and coded to determine commonalities and differences. Open coding allowed the researcher to digest the interview and focus group transcripts, make notations of interesting points as well as questions along the inquiry, and be impartial to any potential themes or categories that may surface (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patterns were identified by using frequencies, as mentioned by Fink

(2017). Exploration of repeated key words in conversation from multiple participants allowed pertinent information and concepts to surface (Fink, 2017). Following open coding, the researcher used axial coding as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to group concepts in specific themes. Axial coding allowed the researcher to reflect upon the general concepts presented, interpret the meaning, and place the ideas into general themes.

Consideration was given to reliability, validity, generalizability, and trustworthiness. By inviting all administrators and co-teachers at the middle schools within Drake School District to participate in this study, rather than a selected sample, reliability was increased (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation of data is essential to ensure accuracy and validity of the interpretations made by the researcher (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity in this study was addressed by obtaining multiple sources of data, implementing focus groups, and including research-based literature studies which exposed various stances on the issue (Creswell, 2016). This study was not declared as one that is generalizable to all co-teaching environments, but rather as an isolated study which added to the already existing literature base of information related to collaboration and co-teaching at middle schools. Allowing respondents to anonymously answer questions related to Drake School District's co-teaching opened the door for upfront and honest feedback, having trust the identities of participants were kept confidential (Fink, 2017). No significant risks or harm were presented in the participation of this study.

Limitations, Assumptions, and Design Controls

Limitations

Creswell (2014) found researchers possess certain biases constructed by factors such as background, culture, and experiences. Worthwhile qualitative research studies expose these biases to allow readers honest insight into the possible influences or limitation within the study (Creswell, 2014). Due to prior working experience in the field of co-teaching, the researcher recognized bringing certain biases into this research study. The researcher has worked as a special education teacher, a special education co-teacher, a regular education teacher, and a regular education co-teacher, as well as an administrator. Although efforts were made to warrant objectivity in this study, the researcher chose to disclose these previous teaching positions as experiences from these positions can potentially result in biases which may have shaped the understanding and interpretations of the data. The former positions held by the researcher are being examined in this research study.

Additionally, Creswell (2014) cautioned about generalizability in qualitative research studies. A sample size of two focus groups and a handful of interviews may not have accurately reflected the perceptions of the entire population of co-teachers and administrators within Drake School District middle schools who participated in this study. Nor can findings of this study be generalized to represent educational institutions outside of this study.

Assumptions

Qualitative research is grounded in specific assumptions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of this research study was to understand multiple

participants' perceptions and experiences; therefore, the researcher aimed to make sense of and summarize various viewpoints. With the researcher being the main instrument for gathering and analyzing data, human error or biases may unknowingly impact the conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It is assumed participants openly shared perceptions, resulting in truthful and authentic responses. This research study was emergent, meaning the research plan could not be strictly designed as the process could change once the researcher began collecting data (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, it is assumed the researcher focused on understanding the meaning derived from the participants' expressions rather than the researcher's perspective or previous research studies similar to the topic.

Design Controls

Having particular safeguards in place prevent assumptions and limitations excessively manipulating the data (Creswell, 2014). As Creswell (2014) recommended, the researcher continuously remained cognizant of the problem statement and research questions which guided the study. Ongoing focus of these two areas allowed the researcher to keep biases at bay by concentrating on the participants' perspectives.

Quality data is dependent upon well-chosen interview and focus group questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the researcher created open-ended interview and focus group questions with follow-up probes for more details beforehand. Predetermined questions and follow-up responses increases the opportunities for a richer, more holistic, description in participants' replies (Seidman, 2013).

Fink (2017) suggested surveys as a means of obtaining valuable data as participants are sometimes less threatened to disclose thoughts and opinions

anonymously on paper rather than out loud in a group setting. For this reason, the researcher utilized a survey with the intention of capturing any missing data from focus group and interview information. Survey data was analyzed and coded along with interviews and focus groups.

Finally, analyzing and coding data are fundamental processes in determining valid and reliable interpretations (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017, Kruger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A transcription of interviews and focus groups verbatim was conducted as Merriam (2016) proposed this was the most effective process for analysis. The researcher followed suggestions by Fink (2017) and Kruger and Casey (2015) by documenting the frequency of concepts mentioned in the data collection process. As Merriam (2016) recommended, the researcher used axial coding after open coding to effectively determine themes in the data.

Definition of Key Terms

Administration – The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defined administrators as a Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal, Director, or Assistant Director (“Administrators”). These positions of leadership require graduate level educational administration education, as well as administrative certification in the state of Missouri (“Administrators”). Administrators in this study refer to building principals and assistant principals.

Co-teaching – The general definition of co-teaching involves two or more trained individuals who have shared goals and deliver instruction to a group of students (Curry School of Education, 2012). Co-teaching is regarded as a method of delivering instruction which capitalizes on the knowledge and skills of two or more educators in the

same classroom in order to increase students' learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Wenzlaff et al, 2002).

Co-teaching according to Cook & Friend – Co-teaching includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher who shared the delivery and preparation of instruction, accountability and responsibilities, and student outcomes (Friend, 2014). Co-teaching in this context includes two educators who are equally important in the instructional process and have a balance in responsibilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). Co-teaching classrooms consist of students in special services and students in general education.

Collaboration – Cook and Friend (1991) defined several integral characteristics for collaboration. Collaboration is voluntary and included shared responsibility for educational planning, instructional delivery, goals, responsibilities, and outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaboration time or planning time – In this context, collaboration time is referred to as a set aside time period, typically during the school day and usually for approximately 45 minutes, to allow teachers the opportunity to plan lessons and activities, assess students' work and progress, evaluate instructional strategies, assign responsibilities, and prepare for future instruction (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Core academic subject – For this middle school research study, core academic subject refers to the following content areas: English-Reading, English- Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.

Direct service special education class – This term represents a special education class led by a special education teacher. No general education students are placed in direct service special education classes.

Disability – IDEA states a student with one of the following disabilities is considered eligible for special education services: autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or emotional disturbance), a specific learning disability, deafness or blindness, multiple disabilities, or a young child (age three to five) with a developmental delay (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Highly Qualified teacher – The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defined a highly qualified teacher as one who has obtained certification as a teacher, holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and has demonstrated subject-matter competency by a formal assessment in each academic subject the educator teaches ("Highly Qualified Teacher").

Inclusion – Inclusion refers to the teaching approach of including students with special education needs into the school community and general education population (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – Students who qualify for special education services receive an IEP. An IEP is a legal document which details the special services deemed necessary and appropriate for an individual student ("Parent Resources"). IEP team members meet and agree upon special services provided.

Least restrictive environment (LRE) – Found in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, least restrictive environment refers to educating students within the

general education classroom to the maximum extent that is deemed appropriate (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Center, 2004). Removal from the general education environment should take place only when the child's disability, as defined under IDEA, is severe enough that even with accommodations and/or modifications in place, the student is not receiving an appropriate education (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Levels of state assessments – The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is used to assess students at the end of the year. Assessments at the middle schools are scored and categorized into the following four achievement levels: below basic, basic, proficient, advanced ("MAP Information for Parents"). The goal in Missouri is for students to reach the top two categories ("MAP Information for Parents").

Mainstreaming – A general education classroom is a mainstream setting (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004). Mainstreaming refers to placing a student with special education needs in the general education classroom (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Middle School – Middle school for this study includes grades seven and eight only.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) – MAP is a series of assessments in English Language Arts, Math, and Science administered to students at the end of the school year ("MAP Information for Parents"). MAP is used at Missouri's assessment tool administered at the end of the school year. Students in grades three through eight participate in the assessments ("MAP Information for Parents"). With this study focusing on students at the middle schools, it is important to note the required state assessment for

students in this group. Students in seventh grade are required to take English Language Arts and Math and students in eighth grade are required to take English Language Arts, Math, and Science (“MAP Information for Parents”).

Process Consultants – This position at Drake School District acts as a support and resource for special education teachers at assigned school buildings and are qualified to interpret and explain assessment results during IEP meetings.

Professional Development – K-12 teachers in Missouri are required to receive professional development to maintain licensure (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Teachers in years one through four are required to receive 30 hours of professional development over four year and teachers in years five and above are required to have 15 hours annually until becoming exempt (“Required Professional Development Hours”). A teacher becomes exempt of professional development hours after meeting two of the three following criteria: 10 years of teaching experience, national certification, or a higher-level graduate degree (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Missouri allows teachers to receive professional development through his/her school district as approved and/or required by building administration, or by taking college classes (“Required Professional Development Hours”). One college credit equals 15 professional contact hours (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Teachers at Drake School District are provided seven days of professional development during a school year.

Professional Learning – At Drake School District, professional learning for personnel is referred to as professional development. Learning Forward (2017) defines professional learning as activities that “are an integral part of school and local

educational agency strategies for providing educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet challenging State academic standards.” Learning Forwards (2017) claimed professional learning is “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused.” The goal of professional learning is to improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of academic content, as well as understanding of how students learn and how to analyze student work and progress from multiple sources of data (Learning Forward, 2017).

Special Services or Special Education – For the purpose of this study, special services and special education are two interchangeable terms.

Specialized or Direct Instruction – Specialized instruction refers to special education courses, such as reading, writing, math, or study skills which are taught by a special education teacher in a classroom with only students who receive special services.

Significance of the Study

This study provided critical information about Drake School District’s current co-teaching at the middle schools. Results revealed teachers’ perceptions of middle school co-teaching. The information gained from this study allowed perceptions of co-teaching from those who are at the forefront to be known. Data collected was used to make future recommendations for co-teaching and possibly lead to changes in current training, practices, and/or policies within Drake School District. A program evaluation provided an assessment of current co-teaching performance and effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004). Due to no such study ever being conducted within Drake School District, this research provided critical information that consequently, will lead to recommendations and

considerations for improvement. This research study aimed to invest in the success of students and teachers in a middle school co-teaching setting within Drake School District.

In addition, this research contributed to fellow scholars who are studying co-teaching. Given the research in this area was limited and contained mixed findings, information gained was pertinent to those in the field of education. The data and information gathered supports future researcher's investigations related to co-teaching, collaboration, program evaluation, and professional development.

Summary

Co-teaching classrooms have increasingly become a preferred method for providing instruction to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Conderman & Hedin, 2014). With the enactment of No Child Left Behind, schools across the country considered the most appropriate options to provide high-quality instruction that meets the learning needs of all students (Beyers-Brown et al., 2013; Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Drake School District utilized co-teaching as a means to provide students with special education needs an opportunity for exposure to rigorous curriculum with the added benefit of two teachers in the classroom.

Collaboration and professional development are major components to successful co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Keefe et al., 2001). Views on collaboration differ between educational professionals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend & Cook, 1990). Collaboration between co-teachers includes an equally shared ownership of all matters within the classroom (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend & Cook, 2013). Co-teachers jointly plan lessons, interventions, and assessments (Bauwens et al., 1989; Friend, 2014; Friend & Cook, 2013). Established and agreed upon ground rules and norms, policies, and

procedures assist in creating structure in the co-teaching classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995). Both teachers will, at times, lead whole class instruction, provide intervention to small groups, grade assignments, and collaboratively teach lessons (Friend, 2014; Friend & Cook, 2013.) In an ideal co-teaching setting, an observer cannot distinguish which teacher is the regular education teacher and which is the special education teacher (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000). Professional development is crucial to ensure teachers are highly qualified and prepared for a successful co-teaching environment (Keefe et al., 2001). Teachers need ongoing professional development to continuously master the art of co-teaching (Pugach & Winn, 2011).

Program evaluations are used to assess the effectiveness of various social programs (Rossi et al., 2004). An evaluation of a program considers how the program is operating and achieving established goals (Rossi et al., 2004). In quality program evaluations, researchers pay special attention to ethical considerations, including biases, honesty, and respect for people (Rossi et al., 2004).

SECTION TWO

PRACTIONER SETTING FOR THE STUDY

The setting for this qualitative program evaluation contained the four middle schools of North, South, East, and West, all of which exist within Drake School District. Located in a Missouri suburban city of approximately 76,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2016), Drake School District contained nearly 12,000 students from preschool to twelfth grade. Drake School District consisted of 16 elementary schools, four middle schools, and three high schools, but also an early childhood learning center, an alternative school, a technical and career center, as well as gifted and talented programs. With a mission to provide each student the tools to be successful in the future, Drake advertised as a student-centered, rigorous teaching program which offered specialized coursework, one-to-one technology services, and high-quality staff. In this section, consideration was given from a federal level and funneled down to the state and district level to provide a sound foundation for the organization's background.

History of the Organization

In the United States, education is predominantly overseen at the State and local level, however, the federal government plays an important role ("The Federal Role in Education"). States, communities, and public and private organizations establish schools, construct curriculum, and determine requirements for enrollment, assessment, and graduation ("The Federal Role in Education"). While the State, local, and private sources produce approximately 92% of the funds for education, the Federal contribution is about eight percent ("The Federal Role in Education"). Although the Federal financial influence is relatively minor, the role of the Federal government is not insignificant

(Harris, Ladd, Smith, & West, 2016; Reed, 2005; Samuels, 2017). The mission of the federal government is to support student achievement, promote educational excellence, and ensure equal access to education for all students (“The Federal Role in Education”). Federal laws that significantly impacted education include, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Individual with Disabilities Education Act, No Child Left Behind, and Every Student Succeeds Act.

Federal Education Laws

Established laws at the federal level have drastically changed education (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). In 1975, more than one million children with disabilities were excluded from public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). At the same time, four million children with disabilities attended school, but did not have access to necessary educational services due to having unnoticed disabilities or because the schools did not offer the needed services (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). With the enactment of certain federal laws, many barriers to educational services were eliminated for students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Signed by President Johnson in 1965, the goal of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was to improve educational equity for students of poverty by providing federal funds to schools (Borman, 2002). ESEA funds have been used in a variety of ways, including improving preschools, delivering professional development to teachers, providing students with access to technology, and hiring more educators to reduce class sizes (Borman, 2002; Klein, 2015). Being reauthorized eight times, the original goal of

improving education for students of low income households with a focus on high-quality instruction remains at the core of the law (Klein, 2015).

Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This Act was signed into law in 1974 and consists of two parts (“Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”). First, it allows students to review their own educational records, as well as request corrections (“Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”). Secondly, it requires consent of disclosing personally identifiable information contained in the student’s educational records (“Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”). The main purpose of FERPA is to protect the confidentiality of students’ records (“Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”). Any public or private school entity which receives federal funds is covered by FERPA (“Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act”).

Individual with Disabilities Act. Prior to 1975, nearly four million students with disabilities were denied inclusion in public education (“About IDEA”). The adoption of the Individuals with Disabilities ACT (IDEA) in 1975 was groundbreaking in opening the doors of public education for students with disabilities (“About IDEA”). IDEA guaranteed every student with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (“About IDEA”). Consequently, students with disabilities were granted access to the general education curriculum which improved inclusion, educational outcomes, and future success (“About IDEA”).

No Child Left Behind. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 aimed to close the achievement gap for students who were disadvantaged, including children in special education, minorities, and students who speak English as a second language (“Elementary and Secondary Education Act”). NCLB was signed into law in 2002 and

served as an updated version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (“Elementary and Secondary Education Act”). The sole purpose of NCLB was to ensure a fair, equal, and high-quality education to all students, and, at a minimum, achieve a level of proficiency on State academic standards and assessments (“Elementary and Secondary Education Act”). Although the intention of this legislation was to hold schools accountable for ensuring all students were at least at a level of proficiency for reading and mathematics by 2014, many states fell short and were granted waivers for the NCLB requirements (Husband & Hunt, 2015). NCLB was a step in the right direction to improve academic achievement in the subgroup areas mentioned above, yet public perception of NCLB was mostly negative; consequently, NCLB was not reauthorized in 2007 (Husband & Hunt, 2015; “A New Education Law”).

Every Student Succeeds Act. President Obama revamped the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act into Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015 (“A New Education Law”). With schools finding NCLB requirements unattainable, the Obama administration revamped ESEA and strived for a new education law that would ensure success of students and schools (“A New Education Law”). Under ESSA, all students will be prepared for college and careers through high academic standards in teaching (“A New Education Law”). Instruction and progress towards high standards will be monitored through statewide assessments (“A New Education Law”). As complaints of NCLB were mostly due to challenges of getting students considered disadvantaged to achieve unrealistic expectations, ESSA offered grants to school districts serving students in poverty and special education (“A New Education Law”). Additionally, ESSA provided grants to state education organizations specifically to

improve the quality of education (“A New Education Law”). ESSA also focused on supporting and developing local innovation in schools, improving access to high-quality preschools, and holding schools accountable for school performing below average on state assessments (“A New Education Law”).

History of Education in Missouri

The formation of the Missouri school system was established by a culmination of three entities: the New England influence, the Southern influence, and Thomas Jefferson (Drake School District, 2017; Phillips, 1911). First, people who came to Missouri from the New England States were accustomed to a dominating township organization which revealed an interest in education (Phillips, 1911). Second, due to wealth being limited to a small population in the Southern States, citizens were divided by occupations and income (Drake School District, 2017; Phillips, 1911). This division led to a system of private schools in which only the wealthy could afford (Drake School District, 2017; Phillips, 1911). When settlers from the Southern States moved to Missouri, the concept of private schooling was transferred (Drake School District, 2017; Phillips, 1911). Lastly, Thomas Jefferson believed States should be responsible for education of all citizens and his work in Virginia led to an elaborate educational structure (Phillips, 1911). Jefferson’s notions were prevalent in the Geyer Act of 1839 which was the Missouri’s Legislature’s first endeavor to provide Missouri with a general school system (Drake School District, 2017; Phillips, 1911).

In 1939, Missouri made provisions to the educational system to incorporate special schools (Phillips, 1911). Special schools were provided for students identified as deaf and blind (Phillips, 1911). However, the following special schools were also

established: Boonville Training School for Boys for boys under 18 who had committed a crime, Chillicothe Industrial Home for Girls for female students seven to 17 who were sent by a judge and found lacking socially unacceptable behavior, Marshall Colony for the Feeble-Minded and Epileptic for adults or minors identified as having lower cognitive functioning ability or epileptic, and Sedalia's Industrial Home for Colored Girls.

History of Drake School District

Public educational institutions began opening its doors in Drake in 1860 (Drake School District History Book, 2017). A group of local citizens successfully obtained a charter and the Drake Board of Public Schools was established (Drake School District History Book, 2017). The public school system started with three elementary schools for students identified as white and living within the boundaries of Drake (Drake School District History Book, 2017). In 1861, some students completed coursework from one of the three elementary schools and qualified to take more advanced classes which ultimately led to the opening of Drake High School, the second public high school to open in the state of Missouri (Drake School District History Book, 2017). By 1868, Drake School District had grown to eleven schools comprised of twenty-two classrooms and 1,766 students. With enrollment consistently increasing, the need for additional classrooms was met by renting space at various building sites inside the city (Drake School District History Book, 2017). As the population increased in Drake over the years, the community developed simultaneously (Drake School District History Book, 2017).

From the earliest days at Drake School District to today, several changes occurred. Grading systems changed from “excellent, satisfactory, medium, poor, or

failure” to a percentage-based system (Drake School District History Book, 2017, p. 90). The school day was extended by two hours, sports and arts programs were adopted, and Drake transitioned to a three-tiered system of elementary, junior high, and high school (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Policies were changed at the national, state, and district level related to education, including racial integration in schools, requirements to be a teacher, and salary schedules (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Additional school buildings were established, many tax levies were passed, and Drake School District continued to develop despite war, floods, illnesses, and inflation (Drake School District History Book, 2017).

Drake Middle Schools

The concept of middle schools began to surface in Drake School District in 1971 (Drake School District History Book, 2017). The junior high model was quickly becoming a favored method of instruction in other states for this particular age range of students (Drake School District). Between 1971 and 1973, all four middle schools, North, South, East, and West opened in Drake School District (Drake School District History Book, 2017).

All four middle schools within Drake School District serve students in seventh and eighth grades (Drake School District History Book, 2017). North Middle School began in 1971 in an old, abandoned building while its new structure was being built (Drake School District History Book, 2017). In 1973, the new North Middle School opened to serve students residing in the north end of the city of Drake (Drake School District History Book, 2017). South Middle School was previously an elementary school, but transitioned to a middle school in 1973 and served students living in the

southern parts of Drake (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Originally a school for the mentally handicapped, East Middle School transitioned to a middle school in 1973. In the early 1970s, Drake School District purchased a Catholic High School building and quickly began renovations for what would become West Middle School (Drake School District History Book, 2017). West opened in 1972 and has remained the largest middle school, both in size and student population, over the years (Drake School District History Book, 2017). As middle schooling increased in popularity, so was the notion of mainstreaming and special education services (Drake School District History Book, 2017).

Special Education at Drake School District

The education of students with special needs was a gradual and evolving process within Drake School District. In 1936, all students identified as mentally retarded were educated in one school (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Education of students with disabilities remained in an isolated school setting until 1973 when mainstreaming became the new trend in education (Drake School District History Book, 2017). In 1970, special education was announced as a new program emerging at Drake School District (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Two teachers were provided six hundred dollars to receive training in the field of special education (Drake School District History Book, 2017). Schooling for students deemed mentally retarded were educated in the present day East Middle School before it transitioned to a middle school in 1972 (Drake School District History Book, 2017).

Organizational Analysis

“Organizations are complex” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 39). An organizational leadership framework serves as a blueprint for expectations and overall functioning (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In Missouri public education, a state board governs instruction for all schools with the exception of private, parochial, and home schools (“About the State Board”). The Commissioner of Education position is just below the state board of education in the flow of power (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”). The Commissioner is appointed by the state board and responsible for upholding set standards, as well as ensuring efficiency of instruction provided in public schools within the state (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”). The Commissioner oversees the Deputy Commissioner responsible for the Learning Services division and the Deputy Commissioner responsible for the Financial and Administrative Services department (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”).

Missouri State Board of Education

Instruction at Drake School District, and all other public schools in Missouri, is overseen by a state board of education. The Board consists of eight citizens who were selected by the Governor and approved by the Senate (“About the State Board”). Members serve eight-year terms and continue to perform until being replaced or reappointed (“About the State Board”). In an effort to obtain a diverse board, no more than four board members can belong to the same political party and no more than one board member can live in the same county or Congressional district (“About the State Board”).

The Board has a range of responsibilities, including approving and setting standards for teacher and school administrator professional programs (“About the State Board”). One significant responsibility of the Board is to define academic performance standards and decide required assessments for public schools (“About the State Board”). Meaning, the Board determines standards for curriculum, testing, support services, and minimum criteria for high school graduation (“About the State Board”). Other noteworthy responsibilities include: accrediting local school districts, establishing requirements for education, testing, assessment, as well as defining requirements for certification and recertification of all public school teachers and administrators (“About the State Board”).

The State Board supervises federal education programs and distribution of federal funds to school districts while submitting annual budget recommendation for education to the Missouri Legislature (“About the State Board”). They establish regulations for school bus safety and fiscal management for local school districts (“About the State Board”). Operation management of the Missouri School for the Blind, the Missouri School for the Deaf, and the Missouri Schools for the Severely Disabled is an additional duty of the Board (“About the State Board”).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) operates as the administrative organization for the State Board of Education (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”). DESE functions as a service agency which collaborates with educators, legislators, government agencies, community leaders, and the general public to ensure a quality public education system (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”). DESE’s responsibilities

cover students from early childhood to adult education services and the goal is to assure all community members have access to a high-quality public education (“Facts About the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education”).

November 2016

Figure 3: Organizational Structure of the State Board of Education (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2016)

Drake School District

The local Drake School District Board of Education was responsible for the creation of policies, rules, and procedures to function as parameters for the general management and oversight of the actions of personnel within the organization (Drake School District, 2017). The local Board had the duty to employ a superintendent to serve as the chief executive officer, as well as establishing salary schedules and terms,

evaluating the effectiveness of its policies, approving a financial budget for the district, and for public relations (Drake School District, 2017). In addition, the Board was responsible for establishing education goals which strive for continuous improvement of educational programs (Drake School District, 2017). Drake School District Board of Education controlled all facets of the district's operations within the limits of the law (Drake School District, 2017).

The Superintendent at Drake School District served as the chief executive officer of the Board of Education (Drake School District, 2017). This position was responsible for the execution of policies, rules, and procedures as set by the local Board of Education (Drake School District, 2017). The Superintendent functioned as the administrative head of all divisions and departments and delegates responsibilities to various personnel (Drake School District, 2017).

As Drake School District has grown, a more complex division of labor has transpired. Henry Mintzberg (Mintzberg, 1973; Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2005) described five basic parts of an organization: the strategic apex, middle line, operating core, support staff, and technostructure. In relation to Drake School District, the strategic apex was the central office administration and their staff. The middle line included all building administrators, principals, assistant principals, and managers. The operating core consisted primarily of teachers. Support staff included maintenance personnel, nutrition services, and clerical staff. Technostructure covered all staff from the technology department.

Figure 4: Adapted illustration of Henry Mintzberg's five basic parts of organizations (Mintzberg, 1973; Shafritz et al., 2005)

Special Education at Drake School District

The Director of Special Education fell within the realm of the strategic apex and was responsible for the supervision of middle school co-teaching at Drake School District. Professional development and training of special education teachers, as well as regular education co-teachers, was one of many important duties of this position. The Director of Special Education organized professional development opportunities pertaining to collaboration and co-teaching for necessary staff members, including co-teachers and building level administrators.

Building level administrators and Process Consultants were within the middle line of Mintzberg's (Mintzberg, 1971; Shafritz et al., 2005) organizational structure. Building level administrators were responsible for the initial structure of a collaboration environment for co-teachers by creating a class schedule which was conducive to a co-teaching setting. Administrators often set designated times during school work hours for co-teachers to use for collaboration and planning. Administrators and Process

Consultants assisted, supported, and trained co-teachers in what collaboration entails in a co-teaching classroom.

Teachers functioned within Mintzberg's (Mintzberg, 1973; Shafritz et al., 2005) operating core. Regular and special education teachers were responsible for collaborating to provide high-quality instruction for students in co-teaching within Drake School District. Co-teachers were held accountable for attending required professional development sessions and implementing the training into the classroom.

Leadership Analysis

Structure is essential in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Bolman and Deal's (2013) structural frame is important to consider when examining Drake School District. Max Weber (Weber, 1947; Bolman & Deal, 2013) emphasized major components of an organization's structure. First, an organizational structure allows for a set division of labor (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Tasks and responsibilities within Drake School District were divided up into departments, such as technology, human resources, special education, and administration. Departments focused on specialized needs and goals which emphasized the employee's area of expertise. Second, organizations effectively functioned under a hierarchy system (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Chain of command allowed vertical coordination in which personnel at high ranks enforced and monitored rules, policies, and performance of staff at lower levels (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Third, a set of rules which govern performance maximizes an organization's efficiency and consistency (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Policies, rules, and procedures assist organizations in limiting individual discretion, allowing consistency in how personnel

issues are handled, as well as provide standards for work performance and completion of tasks (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

Drake School District

The Board of Education in Drake School District served as the overall governing body for the school system. Drake School District operated with seven members on the Board of Education, along with two school personnel who served as the Board Secretary and Treasurer (Drake School District, 2017). Board of Education members were elected by the voters and provided general supervision to all school within Drake School District. Members of the Board ensured schools were adhering to rules, policies, and procedures set forth by the State, as well as the District. All Board of Education members were required to be registered voters in Drake, have an interest in the welfare of the Drake students, and commit to attending and participating in board meetings on a regular basis.

Northouse (2016) discussed how leadership is about one individual who influences a group to achieve common goals. Drake School District has historically been led by a Superintendent and governed by a Board of Education (Drake School District, 2017). Although the organization's leadership basis remains the same today as 1864, Drake School District has, over time, expanded its structural framework to include a multitude of departments with prescribed divisions of labor and responsibilities. Administrators focused on a specific area within the organization and encouraged fellow staff to work together to accomplish established goals.

The Board of Education was at the top of the leadership structure at Drake School District, followed by the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and various administrators. Drake School District board policy identified the Superintendent as the

chief officer of the Board of Education and the administrative leader of all departments of the school district (“School Superintendent”). The Assistant Superintendent directly supervised the Director of Secondary Education, Director of Special Education, Director of Data Management, Director of Assessment, and Director of Elementary Education.

Co-teaching at Drake School District fell under the Director of Special Education’s umbrella of responsibilities. The Director of Special Education supervised the Assistant Director of Special Education and was responsible for training and professional development within the special services department (“Programs for Students with Disabilities”). This position had the duty of educating building principals of any policy or procedural changes, safeguarding special services records and documents, and ensuring special services are provided in the least restrictive environment (“Programs for Students with Disabilities”). Other responsibilities included: monitoring compliance and implementation of special education programs and laws, collecting data and completing requested reports, supervising the district’s assistive technology team, and responding to community concerns related to special education. The Director of Special Education also oversaw Process Consultants, whose primary job was to ensure all IEP paperwork was in compliance with state and legal requirements.

Process Consultants were typically assigned to more than one school building and participated in various special services meetings with building principals, teachers, and related services personnel, as delineated by the state. Process Consultants served as a support and resource for special education teachers at their assigned school buildings and were qualified to interpret and explain assessment results during IEP meetings. Although special education teachers were supervised by building principals, Process Consultants

were a noteworthy resource and support system for the student's entire IEP team.

Process Consultants often collaborated with building principals to ensure special services teachers were performing at a high-level and receiving proper training.

Figure 5: 2017 Organizational Structure of Drake School District

The concept of middle schools in Drake increased in popularity in the 1970s (Drake School District, 2017). Four middle school were founded to serve students in the various locations within Drake (Drake School District, 2017). Students in Drake have historically been required to attend the middle school within their boundaries based off the students' home location.

During this study, Drake contained 23 public school buildings including 16 elementary, four middle, and three high (Drake School District, 2017). Each middle school had two administrators, one building principal, and the assistant principal who

also served as the athletic director. Student populations in the four middle schools ranged from approximately 341 to 511.

North Middle School

North Middle School opened its doors to serving middle school students in 1971 (Drake School District, 2017). Meanwhile, as Drake School District had recently adopted a plan for establishing middle schools, a newer, updated facility was being constructed (Drake School District, 2017). In 1973, North moved to its current location which was renamed and complimented for its modern structure and architecture (Drake School District, 2017). At the time of this study, 374 students were in attendance at North Middle School.

South Middle School

In 1967, the current South building was constructed and served as an elementary school which educated students up to eighth grade (Drake School District, 2017). South transitioned to a middle school in 1973 when the concept of middle schools was becoming increasingly popular (Drake School District, 2017). At the time of this study, South Middle School had 341 students in attendance.

East Middle School

East Middle School was originally a school for students with mental and physical disabilities (Drake School District, 2017). In the fall of 1973, East Middle School transitioned to a junior high which educated seventh and eighth grade students (Drake School District, 2017). East Middle School is typically the second largest middle school in Drake and had 494 students in attendance at the time of this study.

West Middle School

Formerly a Christian high school building, Drake School District purchased the structure, completed necessary renovations, and opened as a middle school in 1972 (Drake School District, 2017). West had historically been the largest of the four middle schools in regard to student enrollment numbers. West was the only middle school within Drake School District which did not offer free breakfast and lunch to all students due to the lower number of students in enrollment below the federal guidelines for poverty. At the time of this study, West Middle School had 511 students in attendance.

Implications for Research in the Practitioner Setting

Results from this qualitative study directly answered the research questions and assisted Drake School District in obtaining valuable information related to co-teaching at the middle schools. Creswell (2014) emphasized the usefulness of qualitative methods when little research has been conducted in a given area. With no prior research studies pertaining to co-teaching in Drake School District, findings indicated strengths and weaknesses with middle school co-teaching, and recommendations for change or consideration. Additionally, this research study served as a contribution to the existing literature base. With research studies indicating mixed results (Idol, 2006; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001), an added qualitative study assisted in understanding co-teaching, specifically at the middle schools.

Creswell (2014) suggested qualitative research methods when attempting to understand meaning from the participants' perspective. In this study, participants had an opportunity to openly share viewpoints about Drake School District's middle school co-teaching service in a confidential and nonthreatening manner. The special services

department at Drake School District benefited from knowing the opinions and insights of co-teachers and administrators. Findings aimed to elicit changes in the current middle school co-teaching model if deemed necessary by the Director of Special Services and approved by the Superintendent and Board of Education.

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions from co-teachers and building principals related to how collaboration impacts co-teaching at the middle schools within Drake School District. The outcome of this study exposed personnel's perceptions and allow Drake School District to be informed of the thoughts and opinions from those working at the forefront. Charan (2001) found employees overwhelmingly agree with their supervisor during discussions, even if they do not truly concur. Due to this finding (Charan, 2001), participants were not employees directly supervised by the researcher. As personnel are not always comfortable in expressing thoughts to superiors (Charan, 2001), findings from this study revealed genuine perceptions to be known without fear or hesitation.

Finally, this research study aimed to understand the perceptions of co-teachers and administrators related to middle school co-teaching and professional development. Results yielded meaningful implications associated with current procedures and practices, including collaboration time and professional development. Drake School District Director of Special Services was provided details and conclusions of the study.

Summary

It is important to understand the setting from a historical and holistic frame of reference (Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015). Several factors, including revised federal laws, updated policies at the state level, and changes in local district structural

organization, impact how a school district functions and operates. Understanding Drake School District's organizational and leadership structure provides important background information when conducting research. As Drake School District middle school buildings have evolved over time, so have administrative roles and special education services provided by schools.

A qualitative program evaluation of co-teaching at the middle schools in Drake School District exposed perceptions held by teachers and administrators. By conducting focus groups and individual interviews, middle school teachers and administrators had an opportunity to express their views of co-teaching, specifically the strengths and weaknesses. Participants explained their thoughts about collaboration and professional development in regard to co-teaching. Surveys were provided as an additional means of collecting information in a confidential and safe manner, and to allow triangulation of data.

The goal of this study was to uncover the perceptions from teachers and administrators related to co-teaching at Drake middle schools. Findings from this study were analyzed and summarized, and provided to the Director of Special Education in a user-friendly format for review and consideration. An informal presentation of the findings was provided to the Director of Special Services.

SECTION THREE

SCHOLARLY REVIEW FOR THE STUDY

Co-teaching can exist in a variety of contexts and in numerous way (Bacharach, Washut-Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008). Wenzlaff et. al (2002) referred to co-teaching as two or more educators working together in a collaborative manner to teach a group of students. Co-teaching is an instructional technique which capitalizes on the knowledge and skillsets of two or more instructors in order to increase students' learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Wenzlaff et al, 2002).

St. Cloud State University, a college in Minnesota, has completed extensive research in the area of co-teaching and collaboration. With the help of being awarded a five million dollar U.S. Department of Education Teacher Quality Enhancement Partnership Grant in 2003, St. Cloud created and implemented an approach to student teaching which utilized a co-teaching model. St. Cloud State University (2018) defined co-teaching as two teachers working together with groups of students in a shared physical space. Co-teaching includes shared planning, organization, as well as shared delivery and assessment of instruction (St. Cloud State University, 2018).

Co-teaching classrooms have become a common way to address the learning needs of students in special education (Brown, Howerter, & Morgan, 2013; Dieker, Finnegan, Grillo, & Garland, 2013; Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005). The majority of students in special education receive instruction in the general education environment for more than 80% of the school day (King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, & Preston-Smith, 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Co-teaching classrooms consist of one regular education teacher and one special education

teacher, along with students from various levels (Cook & Friend, 1995). Students in a co-teaching setting may have diagnosed disabilities or no documented learning needs as students from special education and general education are combined (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Co-Teaching According to Friend and Cook

Cook and Friend (1995) defined co-teaching as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single physical space” (p.2). Allowing students in special education to be instructed in a regular education setting with the power of two teachers seemingly sets the stage for a successful learning environment (Cook & Friend, 1995). In this platform, students with disabilities have the advantage of receiving education alongside their non-disabled peers from an expert in the content area and an expert in the field of special education (Cook & Friend, 1995).

In theory, co-teachers have a shared responsibility and sense of power in the classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2013). Both teachers collaborate, plan lessons together, provide and lead instruction, assist students, grade students’ work, and discuss appropriate assessments and interventions (Cook & Friend, 1995; Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Collaboration in the co-teaching context is defined as the interaction between professionals who have different areas of expertise, yet share common responsibilities and goals (Friend & Cook, 2007). In an ideal co-teaching classroom, students and observers alike cannot distinguish which teacher is the special education teacher and which is the regular education teacher (Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

The conceptual framework for this qualitative study was collaboration from the view of Cook and Friend (1991). Friend and Cook are two renowned experts in the field of co-teaching and collaboration (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker et al., 2013). As Galvan (2014) suggested for writing literature reviews, it is important to identify landmark theorists and studies pertaining to the research topic. The names of Friend and Cook frequently reappear when combing through studies and articles regarding collaboration and co-teaching (Bryant-Davis et al, 2012; Chandler-Olcott, 2017, Conderman & Hedin, 2013; Dieker et al., 2013; King-Sears et al., 2014; Murawski & Hughes, 2009; Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Simmons & Magiera, 2007; Strieker et al., 2013; Weiss & Brigham, 2000; Yopp, Ellis, & Bonsangue, 2014).

First, collaboration must be voluntary (Cook & Friend, 1991). According to Cook and Friend (1991), collaboration is voluntary and is a style of interaction between at least two individuals who are engaged in shared decision-making and working towards agreed upon goals. Cook and Friend (1991) identified important characteristics of collaboration. Educators freely choose to engage with fellow colleagues during collaboration (Cook & Friend, 1991). Administrators can mandate teachers to work together during collaboration time, but genuine collaboration takes place when teacher choose to engage on their own (Cook & Friend, 1991). Second, collaboration requires common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991). Joint participation in regard to goals is imperative for the collaboration process (Cook & Friend, 1991). Without common goals, co-teachers lack a common vision for their shared students (Cook & Friend, 1991). Third, participants in collaboration must feel valued and believe they make a worthy contribution to the collaboration process (Cook & Friend, 1991). Lastly, collaboration among individuals

requires shared responsibility, shared decision-making, shared accountability, and sharing resources (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Key Variables

Program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development served as key variables in this study. Research from Rossi, Lipsey, and Freeman (2004) as well as Newcomer, Hatry, and Wholey (2015) were used to explore program evaluation. Friend and Cook are pioneers in the field of co-teaching (Bryant-Davis, Dieker, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012). Work from these two experts, and other professionals in the field, were used to understand and further explore co-teaching. The impact of professional development was investigated through various previous research studies. Friend and Cook's (1991) view of collaboration not only served as the conceptual framework guiding this study, but it is closely intertwined in the key variables of program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development.

A program evaluation of co-teaching at the middle schools not only benefited Drake School District, but also contributed to the existing literature pertaining to co-teaching and collaboration. The problem of practice for this study related to program implementation as research indicates many schools lack an understanding of how to effectively implement co-teaching (Conderman & Hedin, 2004; Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013). Furthermore, a gap in the literature existed, including scarce studies and conflicting research studies (Deering, 2015; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001; Smith, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District and, if the findings dictated a need, make recommendations for improvement. Mixed results in previous research

studies and a lack of research on collaboration and co-teaching in Missouri caused a gap in the literature, which was an additional purpose this study addressed.

Collaboration

Collaboration is an essential element for continuous improvement in education (DeBevoise, 1986; Muijs, 2015; Tandon, Drame, & Owens; 2012). Friend and Cook (2013) defined collaboration as “a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 6). When each person feels valued and that his or her contribution is necessary to achieve the end goal, both individuals have a sense of equality and purpose (Cook & Friend, 1991). The equality component is the foundation for shared decision-making (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaboration can produce groundbreaking results (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013; Tandon et al., 2012). Goleman and Boyatzis (2013) studied the importance of collaboration from a business standpoint and leadership mindset. Research shows when professionals work together, organizations thrive (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2013). Bruffee (1999) stressed the significance and meaning collaboration can have on a learning experience. Collaboration allows people to have their thinking challenged and to learn from different perspectives (Bruffee, 1999). Bruffee (1999) mentioned how people can learn from reading, but can learn even more from talking to another person about what was read.

Friend and Cook’s Concept of Collaboration

Friend and Cook (2013) determined the following six aspects as critical for successful collaboration: mutual goals, parity, voluntariness, shared decision-making,

shared accountability for outcomes, and shared resources. Along with these factors, successful collaboration includes certain elements which must be evolving within professionals throughout the collaborative process (Friend & Cook, 2013). These elements include: an attitude that values collaboration, a willingness to experiment with the collaborative style, trust in colleagues, and a sense of community (Friend & Cook, 2013). As Friend and Cook (2013) pointed out, some of these characteristics grow over time with added experiences.

Co-Teaching Research with Collaboration Framework by Mastropieri

Using collaboration as a framework, Mastropieri et al. (2005) compared four case studies in the area of co-teaching. Data sources in these studies consisted of interviews, observations, field notes, and artifacts, such as assignments and tests (Mastropieri et al., 2005). A closer look at all four studies will provide a better understanding of how collaboration fits into a co-teaching model (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

The first study examined by Mastropieri et al. (2005) involved a seventh-grade science class containing 25 students. Of the 25 students, seven were identified as either having a learning disability or emotional disturbance, and one student had a hearing impairment (Mastropieri et al., 2005). With a collaboration frame of reference, researchers observed co-teachers having an outstanding working relationship and expertise in the content (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Common plan time built into the schedule allowed for ongoing collaboration, (Mastropieri et. al., 2005). Researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) documented how the general education teacher displayed a lead role during the majority of instruction while the special education teacher assisted students individually or in small groups.

A year-long second case study was conducted involving an eighth-grade government and civics classroom (Mastropieri et al., 2005). In this setting, the teachers were identified as having several years of teaching experience and the class contained 30 students, eight of whom had learning disabilities or emotional disturbance (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Teachers were provided a common planning session to collaborate (Mastropieri et al., 2005). This block of joint plan time was assumed not only for collaboration time, but for individual planning time, IEP meetings, and parent conferences. (Mastropieri et al., 2005). During collaboration time, researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) observed moments of what appeared to be positive, as well as obvious stages of frustration. Researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) noted how co-teachers met more frequently in the beginning of the school year, but less often as the school year progressed. Co-teachers frequently discussed upcoming lessons, target dates to complete certain curriculum, major assignment and activities, and content that may prove challenging for students (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) discovered during the beginning of the school year, the co-teachers made collaborative instructional decisions, including dividing content to take the lead teacher role. As the school year continued, researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) noticed tension between the co-teachers during collaboration time.

Researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) concluded in this study co-teachers had disagreements on co-planning, classroom management, and teaching styles. By the end of the school year, tension had escalated to the point of co-teachers splitting the class into two with each teacher taking the lead instruction for their assigned group in separate rooms (Mastropieri et al., 2005). In an interview, a school administrator explained that

he believed a personality conflict existed between the co-teachers and admitted a forced co-teaching arrangement can sometimes fail (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

The next case study examined three teams of teachers in a high school world history class (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Co-teachers in this study had three to 20 years of experience in their field (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Class sizes in this study ranged from 22 to 25 students with four to nine students identified as having a disability (Mastropieri et al., 2005). By conducting observations and interviews, the researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) determined collaboration yielded defined roles and responsibilities with an emphasis on state assessments. Researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) found collaboration allowed for co-teachers to plan accordingly and utilize one another's strengths. For example, one special education co-teacher was found to be gifted in the area of technology (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Applying her skills, she took the lead during instructional times when technology was a focus (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Special education co-teachers often took a secondary role in teaching while the general educator assumed the lead, but roles and responsibilities appeared to be accepted positively by all co-teachers (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Mastropieri et al. (2005) studied four high school co-teaching chemistry classes for over two years. The general education teacher was new in her teaching career and the special education teacher had more than 15 years of experience (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Classes ranged from 22 to 27 students with five to seven students per class identified with a disability. An effective division of tasks was observed from the co-teachers (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Co-teachers in the study demonstrated "an excellent sense of collaboration" (Mastropieri et al., 2005, p. 267). The general education teacher was the

expert in content knowledge and the special education teacher was the guru for modifications of assignments and providing additional individualized assistance to students (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Although researchers (Mastropieri et al., 2005) documented the general education teacher commonly took the lead during instruction while the special education teacher stood or sat at the back or side of the class, co-teachers communicated comfort and satisfaction with their roles and the co-teaching model. Observations indicated after direct instruction, both co-teachers circulated the classroom and assisted students during labs or with assignments, making it difficult to identify the special education teacher from the general educator (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Individual interviews with co-teachers resulted in overwhelmingly positive outcomes (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Findings indicated the co-teachers had mutual respect, appreciation for the other's unique strengths, and satisfaction with the co-teaching model (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Over the two-year span, time allowed co-teachers to become more comfortable and familiar with the fellow co-teacher's style of instruction (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

In the final study by Mastropieri et al. (2005) specifics regarding joint planning time were not provided, but collaboration was considered positive and effective. Collaboration between the co-teachers led to distinct roles and responsibilities with differentiated instruction being identified as a noticeable strength (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Feeling pressured by the district's specific timeline for covering content, co-teachers communicated an attentiveness to state assessments (Mastropieri et al., 2005). Though the district's emphasis on high-stakes state assessments encouraged co-teachers

to focus on the content timeline, co-teachers felt enormous stress to cover all content within the given window of time (Mastropieri et al., 2005).

Case Studies on Co-Teaching with Collaboration Framework

Another co-teaching case study conducted in a rural Missouri school district discovered perceptions of the program's effectiveness (Deering, 2015). The researcher in this study collected data via observations, interviews, and a survey (Deering, 2015). Coding of documents revealed four emerging themes: lack of professional development, lack of a common planning time for co-teachers, lack of consistent collaboration, and a lack of emphasis on the co-teaching process (Deering, 2015). Observations revealed teachers lacked a co-teaching model process as one educator primarily taught and the other functioned more as an assistant in the classroom (Deering, 2015).

Smith (2012) completed a case study of teachers' perceptions pertaining to co-teaching and found collaboration to be a necessary ingredient for the co-teaching process. In this study, interviews and a survey were data collection tools to discover teachers' perceptions (Smith, 2012). Careful analysis of transcribed documents uncovered key themes of: need for collaboration, importance of administrative support, and the need for professional development (Smith, 2012). Teachers specifically indicated an allocated time for collaboration would be beneficial, yet it was not feasible with the current school schedule (Smith, 2012).

Collaboration in Program Evaluation, Co-Teaching, and Professional Development

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is often used to determine the effectiveness of a social program (Newcomer et al., 2015; Rossi et al., 2004). One school district conducted a

two-year program evaluation of the co-teaching classrooms at the elementary and middle schools and found stakeholders supported co-teaching as a means of educating students with disabilities (Wischnowski, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004). However, this study (Wischnowski et al., 2004) examined perceptions and it should be noted that every survey completed by teachers indicated a need for more collaboration and planning time. Teachers expressed difficulty in providing necessary and appropriate modifications for students with disabilities with inadequate time to plan and collaborate (Wischnowski et al., 2004).

Idol (2006) completed a program evaluation on elementary and middle school co-teaching classrooms which included examining stakeholders' perceptions of the co-teaching model. The majority of teachers expressed favoring a co-teaching model over other methods of providing special services to students (Idol, 2006). Teachers and administrators at the middle schools expressed high levels of satisfaction with the collaboration component (Idol, 2006). However, interview data exposed co-teachers strongly desired additional professional development on roles and responsibilities as the special education teacher often only assisted students with disabilities and the general education teacher lacked ideas on how to better engage the special education teacher into an instructional role (Idol, 2006). Teachers expressed the need for consistent discipline measures for all students, regardless of disability (Idol, 2006). Interviews revealed teachers' perceptions of administrative support for co-teaching was mixed (Idol, 2006). Some administrators in this study struggled with visiting co-teaching classrooms frequently and balancing the roles of building leader and instructional leader while others indicated contentment with administrative support (Idol, 2006).

Rossi et al. (2004) discussed when conducting a program evaluation, it is imperative to assess whether the program is being implemented as it was intended. Newcomer et al. (2015) stressed how program evaluation does not substitute for quality program implementation. One concern with co-teaching classrooms is consistency in implementation of the service model (Conderman & Heflin, 2014; Mastropieri et al., 2005). Ideally, co-teachers have a schedule that allows for a collaboration planning period and receive professional development on the co-teaching model throughout the year (Strieker et al., 2013). However, this is often not the case, especially at the secondary level (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010; Keefe, Moore, & Duff, 2004). With little or no time for collaboration, the regular education teacher is often charged with the task of leading instruction and the special education teacher often served as more of a helper in the back of the classroom (Mastropieri et al., 2005). King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, & Preston-Smith (2014) discovered the regular education teacher leads instruction 66.6% of the time, while the special education teacher leads instruction approximately 33.3% of the time, indicating a possible imbalance of leading instruction.

Although co-teaching has become a popular method to provide special education services to students in an inclusive environment, schools continue to struggle with effectively implementing such a model (Conderman & Hedlin, 2014). Special education instructors in a co-teaching setting often lack clarity on the roles and responsibilities in a co-teaching classroom (Conderman & Hedlin, 2014; Mastropieri et al., 2005; Pugach & Winn, 2011). Another study found general education teachers spent significantly less time interacting with students who have a disability when a special education teacher was

present in the co-teaching classroom (Magiera, Smith, Zigmond, & Gebaner, 2005; Friend et al., 2010). Schools continue to demonstrate a lack of knowledge related to the effective execution of the co-teaching model (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Strieker et al., 2013).

Co-Teaching

Murawski and Hughes (2009) found collaboration was a key component to the co-teaching process. However, the assignment of two educators to a co-teaching arrangement does not ensure collaboration is actually taking place (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Kamens (2007) found teacher preparation programs are not equipping teachers-in-training with skills on how to collaborate with professional colleagues. Effective co-teachers who collaborate do so willingly with the focus being on establishing a comprehensive plan that provides intensive instruction for students in a setting conducive to meet multiple students' learning needs (Murawski & Hughes, 2009). Collaboration in a co-teaching setting allows for two teachers to jointly plan lessons and assessments, troubleshoot, create needed interventions, and strategize for an optimal learning situation (Murawski & Hughes, 2009).

Krovetz and Arriaza (2006) discussed the importance of teachers educating each other by collaboration and thinking deeply about teaching and learning practices. Skillful co-teachers intentionally plan together and have a constant focus on students' progress and growth (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006; Friend & Cook, 2007; Friend & Cook, 2013; Mujis, 2015; Tandon et al., 2012). A true collaborative relationship between co-teachers involves allocating time and resources regularly to prepare meaningful instruction tailored to students' learning needs (Krovetz & Arriaza, 2006).

Common planning time and collaboration are fundamental for co-teachers to successfully prepare for the day (Hunter, Jasper, & Williamson, 2014; Mastropieri et al., 2005). The special education teacher is often responsible for co-teaching more than one content area (Hunter et al., 2014). Expecting the special education to be a master of the content for multiple subjects may be unrealistic, especially at the middle schools (Hunter et al., 2014). Joint planning time provides co-teachers time to collaborate and determine individual responsibilities and tasks, as well as clarify any misconceptions related to content and instructional strategies (Hunter, Jasper, & Williamson, 2014). Collaboration time may be face-to-face or by utilizing technology, such as programs on Google.

Professional Development

Just like students, teachers need ongoing learning opportunities to perfect the art and skills of teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995; Idol, 2006; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Walsh, 2012). Co-teaching classrooms have unique challenges unlike regular education classrooms. Co-teaching classrooms work best when the two teachers understand each other's strengths and weaknesses, as well as styles of teaching (Keefe et al., 2004). Professional development opportunities allow teachers to not only recognize each other's abilities and various styles of teaching, but develop stronger collaboration skills (Keefe et al., 2004). Co-teachers benefit from professional development related to general strategies, such as how to collaboratively design lessons, using templates during collaboration time, and the importance of reflection of lessons (Friend & Cook, 2007; Keefe et al., 2004; Deiker & Murawski, 2003).

Strieker et al. (2013) reported the majority of teachers do not learn how to collaborate with fellow teachers in college teacher preparation programs. Yopp et al.

(2014) researched various co-teaching strategies that were offered to a group of co-teaching professionals and found the majority of participants believed the professional development opportunity to have a positive impact on their teaching practices. Yopp et al. (2014) found co-teaching educators with a research-based professional development program focused on Bacharach, Heck, and Dahlberg (2010)'s seven co-teaching strategies allowed for effective team teaching. Professional development opportunities, such as this, allowed for teachers to be equipped with effective teaching strategies in the co-teaching classroom (Yopp et al., 2014).

Professional development for co-teachers is often not offered or does not meet the needs of teachers (Striker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013). Problems with implementing the co-teaching model with fidelity results in a division between co-teachers, and ultimately, a learning environment less than ideal for students with special needs (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Striker et al., 2013). Without adequate professional development, co-teachers are not prepared to successfully manage and lead a co-teaching classroom (Bryant et al., 2012).

Differences in collaboration time and professional development opportunities amongst schools and/or school districts impact how co-teaching classrooms function (Hunter et al, 2014; Mastropieri et al, 2005; Rainforth & England, 1997). Therefore, it comes as no surprise to discover mixed results in research studies related to co-teaching classrooms and overall success. Mastropieri et al. (2005) discovered when the special education teacher was also an expert in the content, he or she was much more likely to be an active member of the co-teaching partnership, rather than an assistant in the classroom. Along with professional development, researchers (Bryant et al., 2012;

Mastropieri et al., 2005) identified the availability of common planning time impacted the effectiveness of the co-teaching model.

Professional Learning

Professional learning opportunities which spark educators' thinking and enhance knowledge on educational practices allow teachers to stay up-to-date and informed on best instructional practices (General Teaching Council, 2017). When teachers engage in rich, ongoing, and interactive professional learning opportunities, they are more likely to inspire students by providing high-quality learning experiences (General Teaching Council, 2017). According to the General Teaching Council (2017), examples of professional learning include: professional dialogue with colleagues, professionals, parents, and learners, self-evaluation and reflection, focused professional reading and research, classroom visits/peer observations, collaborative learning rounds, inquiry-based learning, action research, and online learning or blogs. Huber (2010) suggested utilizing technology as a means to deliver practical, ongoing, and meaningful professional learning opportunities. Technology tools such as social media, online forums, blogs, and applications on Google can allow school professionals to read educational research articles, and have discussions and share resources with others in the field (Huber, 2010).

Learning Forward

The professional association Learning Forward (2017) is dedicated to those who work in educator professional development. Learning Forward provides information on planning, implementing, and measuring high-quality professional learning (Learning Forward, 2017). Learning Forward (2017) defined professional learning as activities that “are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing

educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet challenging State academic standards.” The association believes professional learning which improves an educator’s effectiveness is fundamental to student learning (Learning Forward, 2017).

Learning Forward developed standards for professional learning which outline the various capacities needed to build the knowledge and skills of educators (Learning Forward, 2017). Within the standards, Learning Forwards leads professionals in the field of education in understanding what links professional learning to improved student achievement (Learning Forward, 2017). Learning Forward standards include the following areas: learning communities, resources, learning designs, outcomes, leadership, data, and implementation (Learning Forward, 2017).

Mixed Findings in Previous Research Studies

Pros of Co-teaching

Several research studies document the positive impact of co-teaching (Brown et al., 2013; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend et al., 2010). With a strong collaborative relationship between co-teachers, academic goals for students can be achieved in a co-teaching setting (Hunter et al., 2014). Co-teaching is viewed as a logical approach to teaching in a classroom with increasing numbers of students with unique instructional needs from diverse backgrounds (Friend et al., 2010). Combining skills from a special education teacher and a general education teacher allows students to learn from two professionals, each experts in their respective fields (Cook & Friend, 1995).

King-Sears et al. (2014) studied perceptions of teachers and students with disabilities within a science co-teaching classroom. Researchers (King-Sears et al., 2014)

found co-teachers had a strong working relationship and equality in roles and responsibilities. Observational data confirmed the strong working relationship and exposed effective teaching methods from both co-teachers (King-Sears et al., 2014). According to student surveys, students believed teaching was equally shared by the co-teachers and enjoyed receiving science instruction from two educators (King-Sears et al., 2014). Although student surveys conflicted with observational data related to leading instruction as evidenced by documentation of the general education teacher leading instruction 82% of the time, the co-teaching instructional methods were deemed effective and engaging for all students (King-Sears et al., 2014).

Cons of Co-teaching

Co-teaching, in some instances, was found unfavorable (Tomlinson, Callahan, Tomchin, Eiss, Imbeau, & Landrum, 1997; Vaughn & Schumm, 1994). Vaughn & Schumm (1994) conducted a year-long study on middle school co-teaching by completing observations, a focus group, and interviews. Results indicated instruction in co-teaching classrooms was not differentiated to meet the needs of the diverse learners (Vaughn & Schumm, 1994). Tomlinson et al. (1997) led a similar study and concurred with Vaughn and Schumm (1994), reporting general education teachers are reluctant or unable to appropriately differentiate instruction for students with diverse learning needs. Furthermore, both studies determined instruction was diluted rather than differentiated and did not provide quality education for students (Tomlinson et al., 1997; Vaughn & Schumm, 1994).

Wilson, Kim, and Michaels (2013) suggested co-teaching classrooms are more restrictive than a special education class due to the increased numbers of students in the

classroom. Class sizes in a co-teaching setting are typically higher than direct service special education classes (Wilson et al., 2013). Consequently, students in co-taught classrooms experience more difficulty receiving assistance from an educator (Wilson et al., 2013).

In 2011, Goodman (2011) analyzed data related to co-teaching classrooms across the state of Georgia. After a six-year period, Goodman (2011) concluded co-teaching classrooms in Georgia increased by 64%; however, the graduation rate for the students with a disability in these placements remained unchanged. Goodman (2011) reported slightly less than 30% of students with a disability who were taught in a co-teaching setting graduated from high school, indicating co-teaching is not an effective means of instruction or intervention for students with disabilities.

Certain research studies found co-teaching arrangements have little to no impact on academic achievement or state assessments (Friend et al., 2010; Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Almon & Feng (2012) compared co-teaching with solo teaching and determined solo teaching was more effective on students' math achievement related to multiplication concepts. O'Neal (2013) examined archival data on standardized assessments of 784 students with special needs and discovered no statistically significant difference for students being educated in a co-teaching classroom versus a traditional setting. For state assessments, Idol (2006) suggested schools examine scores of students in general education and students receiving special services closely and divide the two groups into separate categories for teachers. Although scores of students within a co-teaching classroom are combined when provided to the state, Idol (2006) believed scores of these students should be divided at the local level, implying scores of students in

special education will lower the general education teacher's average scores and inaccurately depict the class as a whole. Several researchers have concluded co-teaching is not an effective method for educating students with disabilities (Almon & Feng, 2012; Idol, 2006; O'Neal, 2013).

Summary

Collaboration is fundamental in the following three pillars of this study: program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development. In the studies noted above, collaboration was interwoven into each key variable. Few research studies used collaboration as a conceptual framework, making this study a unique way of studying the key variables.

A review of the existing literature indicated a gap in the literature. Previously conducted research studies indicated mixed results and perceptions varied from study to study. Another gap in the literature was the lack of co-teaching program evaluation research in Missouri, specifically in the area of Drake or suburban areas similar to Drake. Furthermore, researchers have discovered the importance of collaboration in co-teaching (Beyers-Brown et al, 2013; Bruffee, 1994; Conderman & Hedin, 2013), but no specific information was found about how often and how long collaboration should take place. The ideal amount of collaboration time in a week for co-teachers, as well as structure for collaboration, was still unknown.

Lack of information, as well as clear definitions and measures, are a concern in previous research studies (Bryant-Davis et al., 2000; Murawski & Swanson, 2001). Co-teaching classrooms can vary greatly from school to school. An analysis of co-teaching

at the middle schools within Drake School District was needed to evaluate the current service and, if needed, make appropriate recommendations for improvement.

SECTION FOUR

CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

Plan for Dissemination of Practitioner Contribution

Who: Director of Special Services and Assistant Director of Special Services

When: Between March and May

How: Face-to-Face, Email

The target for dissemination for practitioner contribution is an informal PowerPoint presentation with the Director of Special Services and the Assistant Director of Special Services. During the face-to-face presentation, the Directors will be allowed to ask questions and gain clarity pertaining to research findings. The Directors will also receive the PowerPoint presentation via email for future reference.

Type of Document(s)

PowerPoint slides will be provided to the Director of Special Services and Assistant Director of Special Services. Upon request, the full report will be provided; however, the PowerPoint presentation slides will provide important data in a concise and efficient format.

Rationale for this Contribution Type

PowerPoint presentations provide an analysis and synthesis of complex information along with highlighting the most pertinent material in a visually appealing manner (Smith, 2017). The Director of Special Services indicated this specific contribution type would be most useful and beneficial. Special Services Directors will comprehend and digest the information efficiently and have the ability to share the information with associated colleagues.

Outline of Proposed Contents

Problem Statement:
Purpose of Research:
Research Questions:
Conceptual Framework:
Collaboration:
Program Evaluation:
Co-Teaching According to Friend and Cook
Research Methodology (Design of the Study):
Participants:
Findings:
Collective Findings:
Additional Finding/Comments:
Recommendations:
References:

Presentation

A MIDDLE SCHOOL CO-TEACHING PROGRAM EVALUATION IN ONE SUBURBAN MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT: PERCEPTIONS FROM REGULAR EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, SPECIAL EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, AND BUILDING ADMINISTRATORS

by Ashly M. McGinnis
University of Missouri Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Program
Dr. Carole Edmonds, Dissertation Supervisor

Problem Statement

- Gap in the knowledge
 - Perceptions of co-teaching at middle schools were unknown
- Mixed results in previous co-teaching research studies
- Implementation of the co-teaching model
 - Lack of effective implementation (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013)
 - Lack of adequate training or preparation (Nierengarten, 2013)
 - How does collaboration and professional development function within co-teaching?

A lack of information is a knowledge gap in qualitative research (Merriam, 2016). There have been no studies conducted on co-teaching at middle schools in Drake School District. Perceptions from co-teachers and administrators are unknown.

A review of existing literature indicated mixed findings (Idol, 2006; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001). Implementation of co-teaching continue to be a challenge for school districts (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Strieker, Gillis, & Zong, 2013). Training and preparation for co-teaching is often not sufficient or continuing (Nierengarten, 2013).

Purpose of Research

- The main purpose was to discover and understand perceptions of middle school co-teachers and administrators related to how collaboration impacts co-teaching at Drake School District.
- This qualitative study aimed to fill the gap in existing literature consisting of mixed results.
- This qualitative study revealed perceptions from various stakeholders and serves as a resource for other professionals with an interest in middle school education, specifically in the areas of co-teaching and collaboration.

The purpose statement describes the focus of the entire research study (Creswell, 2014). The researcher's purpose was to learn and understand perceptions of Drake School District's middle school co-teaching from the viewpoint of special education co-teachers, regular education co-teachers, and middle school administrators. The analysis of these perceptions was used to provide Drake School District with recommendations for program improvement.

Research Questions

- Central Research Question
 - What are co-teachers' and building principals' perceptions of co-teaching at middle schools within the Drake School District?
- Sub-questions
 - How do co-teachers at middle schools within Drake School District use collaboration?
 - How has professional development impacted co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?
 - What are the strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?

Research questions narrow the focus of the purpose statement (Creswell, 2014) and concentrate on the most significant factors to the study (Merriam, 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described a conceptual framework as the “underlying structure” of a research study (pp.85). The conceptual framework provides a lens to better understand the study from a specific point of view (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Collaboration will serve as the conceptual framework for this study which provides an in-depth investigation at co-teaching at middle schools in Drake School District. Program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development acted as key variables.

Collaboration and co-teaching will center around the work of Friend and Cook. Both researchers have made valuable contributions to the field of education, specifically in the co-teaching model and collaboration (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker, Finnegan, Grillo, & Garland, 2013).

Collaboration

- Friend and Cook's (2013) concept of collaboration identified the following six variables as essential for collaboration to take place: mutual goals, parity, voluntariness, shared decision-making, shared accountability for outcomes, and shared resources.
- Ongoing collaboration is imperative for establishing and maintaining a successful co-teaching classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2013).
- Communication and equality between these two parties are key for establishing ground rules and routines, clarifying roles, and even to openly discuss pet peeves (Cook & Friend, 1995). This ongoing relationship is imperative for not only the success of the co-teaching model, but success of the students as well (Cook & Friend, 1995). Collaboration must incorporate equal effort from each individual teacher including a shared responsibility for making decisions and a shared ownership for accountability of student outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Program Evaluation

- Rossi et al. (2004) defined program evaluation as “the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs” (p. 28).
- Program evaluation is essential to assess effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004). Rossi, et al. (2004) identified five areas in which program are typically evaluated: (a) “the need for the program,” (b) “the design of the program,” (c) “program implementation,” (d) “program impact or outcomes,” and (e) “program efficiency” (p. 29). For this qualitative study, the focus of the program evaluation will be concentrated in the area of the design of the program and program implementation.

Co-Teaching According to Friend and Cook

The above adapted illustration is the six co-teaching approaches by Friend and Cook (Friend et. Al, 2010). The six approaches from Friend and Cook (2013) are described as:

- *One Teaching, One Observing:* One teacher is instructing while the other informally assesses. Afterwards, the teachers collaborate, analyze data, and plan future lessons.
- *Station Teaching:* Each teacher instructs one small group and then repeats the instruction for the next group.
- *Parallel Teaching:* The class is purposefully divided and both educators provide the same instruction to his or her assigned group.
- *Alternative Teaching:* One teacher instructs the majority of the class while the other takes a smaller group for re-teaching, pre-teaching, assessment, intervention, or enrichment, depending upon the needs of the students.
- *Teaming:* Both teachers deliver the same content to the class at the same time. Teachers speak one at a time, but collaborate to provide instruction to the class as a whole.
- *One Teaching, One Assisting:* One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates the rooms and provides assistance.

Co-teaching includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher collaboratively providing instruction to a group of students with diverse learning needs (Cook & Friend, 1995; Cook & Friend, 2014; Friend, 2014). Successful co-teaching requires a shared sense of responsibility and accountability, mutual goals, implementing the above co-teaching strategies, and collaboration pertaining to creating lessons, assessments, and grading (Friend, 2014). In an ideal co-teaching classroom, both teachers are viewed as equals (Friend, 2014).

Research Design

- Qualitative program evaluation focusing on four middle schools
- Focus groups (Kreuger & Casey, 2015), interviews (Seidman, 2013), survey (Fink, 2017)
- Open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), frequencies (Fink, 2017), axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)
- Limitations, Assumptions, Design Control

Qualitative research is about considering how people understand their life experiences and what meaning they associate with their experiences (Merriam, 2016). A formative evaluation is a process aimed at gathering information with the goal of program improvement (Rossi et al., 2004; Scriven, 1991). The setting for this research study was four middle schools in a suburban school district in Missouri.

According to Kreuger and Casey (2015), a focus group is a planned discussion with carefully selected participants to gain perceptions on a given topic. Focus groups are led by a skilled interviewer in a nonthreatening environment with the goal of gathering opinions to obtain a better understanding of how people think and feel (Kreuger & Casey, 2015). Participants often enjoy being able to express their beliefs and ideas in a confidential manner (Kreuger & Casey).

Interviews allow people to understand details from others' experiences from their perspective (Seidman, 2013). As Seidman (2013) suggested, the researcher in this study did not interview direct supervisees and interviews were continued until achieving saturation of information.

A survey was chosen by the researcher as an additional means to accumulate data. The purpose of the added measure was to allow complete perceptions to be exposed in a confidential manner. Due to the possibility of participants being uncomfortable openly discussing thoughts and opinions related to co-teaching or fellow co-teachers, a confidential survey was designed to gather authentic information. The survey also

allowed more perceptions to be known if participants were unavailable to participate in focus groups or an individual interview.

Questions for the focus groups, interviews, and survey were directly related to the research questions. All participants were provided an informed consent which outlined the details of the research project. The focus groups and interviews were recorded using an online transcription service.

The focus groups, interview, and survey transcribed documents were analyzed and coded. Coding refers to the process of making notations next to the transcribed documents that the researcher finds significant and relevant for answering the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Open coding allows the researcher to be completely open when analyzing data and drawing conclusions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). After opening coding, the researcher analyzed the documents using axial coding. Axial coding involves grouping open codes into themes or general ideas (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Calculating frequencies of themes and patterns assisted the researcher in determining which topics were most significant to the participants (Fink, 2017).

Creswell (2014) suggested disclosing and clarifying biases the researcher owns. The researcher previously served as a special education teacher, a special education co-teacher, a regular education teacher, and a regular education co-teacher within Drake School District. Although efforts were made to foster objectivity in this research study, the researcher's previous roles in education result in biases which may or may not have shaped the meaning and interpretations of the data.

Creswell (2014) warned about generalizability to research studies. The researcher acknowledges this qualitative study may not accurately reflect the perceptions of all members of the possible participants.

Qualitative research is based on certain assumptions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the researcher assumed participants openly shared honest information. It is assumed the researcher focused on understanding meaning from the participants' expressions and point of view.

As Creswell (2014) suggested, specific safeguards were established to prevent the data from being manipulated. The researcher continuously remained mindful of the problem statement and research questions of the study to keep personal biases in check (Creswell, 2014). The researcher crafted predetermined open-ended interview and focus group questions with possible follow-up probes beforehand to create a smooth, flowing discussion (Seidman, 2013). The researcher used analyzing and coding procedures suggested by experts to allow valid and accurate interpretations of data (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

Research Participants

- Focus group
 - 3 regular education co-teachers
 - 1 administrator
- Focus group
 - 2 regular education co-teachers
 - 2 special education co-teachers
- Interviews
 - 3 regular education co-teachers
 - 2 special education co-teachers
 - 2 administrators
- Surveys
 - 11 out of 25 responses gained
 - 44% response rate

Possible Participants in the Field

- 8 administrators
- 11 regular education co-teachers
- 6 special education co-teachers

Findings

Table 1
Focus Group Coding Frequency Chart

Theme	Number of times mentioned	Percentage
Professional development/training concerns	8	33%
Collaboration time concerns	5	21%
Concerns and/or confusion with roles	7	29%
Lack of admin support	3	13%
Concerns with co-teachers' relationship	1	4%
Co-teaching currently effective	0	0%

The table above concludes the open and axial coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with frequencies (Fink, 2017) of key themes which emerged during two focus groups.

Findings

Table 2
Interview Coding Frequency Chart

Theme	Number of times mentioned	Percentage
Professional development/training concerns	9	36%
Collaboration time concerns	4	16%
Concerns and/or confusion with roles	8	32%
Lack of admin support	1	4%
Concerns with co-teachers' relationship	3	12%
Co-teaching currently effective	0	0%

The table above concludes the open and axial coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with frequencies (Fink, 2017) of key themes which emerged during analysis of all interview documents.

Findings

Table 3
Survey Coding Frequency Chart

Theme	Number of times mentioned	Percentage
Professional development/training concerns	11	31%
Collaboration time concerns	9	25%
Concerns and/or confusion with roles	9	25%
Lack of admin support	2	6%
Concerns with co-teachers' relationship	3	8%
Co-teaching currently effective	2	6%

The table above concludes the open and axial coding process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) with frequencies (Fink, 2017) of key themes which emerged during analysis of all survey documents.

Collective Findings

Table 4
Combined Coding Frequency Chart

Theme	Number of times mentioned	Percentage
Professional development/training concerns	28	33%
Collaboration time concerns	18	21%
Concerns and/or confusion with roles	24	28%
Lack of admin support	6	7%
Concerns with co-teachers' relationship	7	8%
Co-teaching currently effective	2	2%

The table above summarizes all three previous tables and indicates the most significant key themes which emerged during the entire analysis process. The collective findings include analysis of two focus groups, seven interviews, and 11 surveys.

Additional Findings/Comments

Strengths

- Co-teaching being offered allows for students in special education to learn in the least restrictive environment.
- One administrator reported special education co-teachers increase rigor in direct instruction classes due to being partnered with content-expert regular education teachers.
- Effective co-teaching was noted in classrooms where both teachers have been trained, daily collaboration time exists, and relationships between co-teachers are strong and productive.

Weaknesses

- Lack of training for new co-teachers
- Lack of ongoing training
- Lack of collaboration time built into the schedule
- Co-teachers uncertain of roles and responsibilities
- Administrator support
 - Providing ongoing training and feedback
 - Protecting collaboration time

“There was a professional development specifically for co-teaching last year. My co-teacher and I both attended. It was really helpful for both of us. However, my co-teacher left the district, so I have a new co-teacher this year. I think it’s her first co-teaching job. In my opinion, I think if they hire co-teaching teachers, there should be a professional development in co-teaching before the beginning of the school year, especially those who do not have co-teaching experience.”

“I have not received any professional development on co-teaching. I would value any professional development the district might provide.”

“Unfortunately, I have two new co-teachers to the system this year, and they have not been provided any professional development.”

“The model provides an excellent opportunity for students, when it is implemented correctly. The staffing and training requirements are what provides a hindrance to my school.”

“I think the implementation is something that needs to be looked at. I want to be successful at this, but it seems there is usually a ‘lead’ teacher, and then someone who helps manage a few.”

“Honestly, I plan the lessons, and the co-teacher goes with the flow. I am responsible for all of the grading and analyzing of data. I wish it was more of a cooperative task, but it is hard to change something already happening without ruffling feathers.”

“We don’t really collaborate for co-teaching. The special education teacher pays close attention to those with IEPs and the ones we notice are struggling.”

“Shared grading and analyzing data is what we have seen as a result of implementing co-teaching.”

“Collaboration is conducted before or after school. Collaboration is also conducted quarterly to review data and growth.”

“Currently collaboration is sporadic due to first year with our co-teacher. Planning, grading, and data analysis has taken place mostly on the teacher side.”

“There is very little opportunity for collaboration and planning between the teachers in our co-teaching classroom. They meet briefly during lunch or after school to have an idea of what the regular education teacher has in mind, but there is not common planning time or scheduled time for collaboration. Unfortunately, the model we use has the regular education teacher providing the lessons and the special education teacher providing the support.”

“There has not been any (professional development) offered this year for new teachers.”

“The strengths are that all kids in the classroom benefit from two teachers. Co-teaching works for my co-teacher and I because we view it as a partnership. If both teachers are not seen as equals, then it will never work. The weakness is the grading part. It’s a struggle to decipher what is a true grade and still follow the IEP.”

“I think even having that second teacher in the room helps meet the needs of students which is our strength, but I would say we need to work more on planning, being more organized, and intentional about how we co-teach.”

“Strengths of our program are current willingness and general want to do the co-teaching program. In the past, it has been reluctance to step into and take control of the co-teaching role. Weakness of our program is availability to plan and include the co-teacher in all content planning times.”

“The strength is definitely that the students in these classes are provided with extra support and it provides a way for all accommodations in these classes to be met while the students are in the class. Unfortunately, the weaknesses include the lack of actual teaching done by the special education teacher to the whole group.”

“A definite weakness is a lack of training and a lack of going to training together.”

“PD for co-teaching is only going to be effective with appropriate admin support. If your admin is not valuing the same model and protecting that (collaboration) time, PD is irrelevant and it’s not going to be very effective.”

Recommendations

- Provide training based on the work of Friend and Cook (2007; 2013) annually
 - Co-teachers should attend training at the same time along with administrator.
 - Ongoing training and professional development with on-site visits from co-teaching experts would be beneficial for co-teachers to gain feedback.
- Revise the middle school schedule to allow time for collaboration between co-teachers. Collaboration time should be protected from distractions and other duties/responsibilities. Administrators must assist in protecting collaboration time.
- At the beginning of the school, administrators and co-teachers should meet to discuss co-teaching classroom dynamics, relationships, and strategies.
 - Co-teachers should be provided time to establish classroom management procedures.
 - Provide clear descriptions of co-teachers possible roles at the beginning of the school year for all teachers.
 - Provide a visual of the six co-teaching strategies for all co-teachers.

Recommendations

- Provide opportunities for special education co-teachers to become more knowledgeable in co-teaching content areas.
- Provide opportunities for regular education co-teachers to become more knowledgeable in learning disabilities, accommodations, and positive behavior interventions.
- Professional development should provide role modeling examples of the six co-teaching strategies.
- During ongoing professional development throughout the school year, administrators need to provide time for co-teachers to reflect and communicate about their co-teaching arrangement.
- Administrators need to provide constructive feedback to co-teachers with instructional support and guidance.

Immediate Recommendations at No Cost

- Administrators and co-teachers meet and discuss dynamics of the co-teaching classroom. Allow time for research of the six co-teaching strategies, reflection, and discussion.
- Administrator set meeting for co-teachers and conduct an ice breaker/relationship-builder activity. Administrator facilitates meeting as co-teachers establish ground rules, norms, and discuss/clarify roles.
- Administrators plan for co-teachers to observe ideal co-teaching classrooms within the district during planning period. Use video clips and technology as a resource.
- Administrators assign co-teachers to necessary content professional development.
- Administrators conduct observations and provide immediate feedback.

The above changes are necessary immediately and come at no cost to Drake School District.

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SECTION FIVE:
CONTRIBUTION TO SCHOLARSHIP

Target Journal

The target journal for publication is Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation. This journal is part of the Taylor and Francis group which is recognized as a leading publisher of several journals and textbooks in the fields of social sciences, behavioral sciences, technology, and humanities.

Rationale for this Target

Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation publishes articles pertaining to formal research and evaluating practice, including program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Topics of interest for this journal include: collaboration, consultation training, systems change, prevention, teaming, services coordination, and programing. The Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation directly relates to the conceptual framework of this research study, as well as key variables of co-teaching, program evaluation, and professional development.

Outline of Proposed Contents

Abstract
Statement of the Problem
Purpose of the Study
Research Questions
Conceptual Framework
 Co-Teaching
 Professional Development
 Program Evaluation
Assumptions
Limitations
Design Control
Key Terms
Methods
 Participants
 Procedures
 Data Analysis
Results
Discussion
Future Research
References

Plan for Submission

Who: Journal of Education and Psychological Consultation Manuscript Review Board
When: May-August 2018

How: Website

<http://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?show=aimsScope&journalCode=hepc20>

Submission-ready journal article

A Middle School Co-Teaching Program Evaluation in one Suburban

Midwestern School District: Perceptions From Stakeholders

Abstract

Middle school co-teachers and administrators offered information during focus groups, interviews and surveys pertaining to co-teaching. Co-teaching in this study is defined as a special education teacher and a regular education teacher collaboratively providing instruction to a group of student with diverse learning needs. This qualitative program evaluation, conducted in a Midwestern suburban area, provides an analysis of middle school co-teaching with a focus on collaboration and professional development. The purpose of this study was to discover perceptions of the middle school co-teaching program from those at the front lines, including special education co-teachers, regular education co-teachers, and building administrators. The conceptual framework for this study was collaboration as defined by Friend and Cook (2013) Open and axial coding were used in the data analysis process. Findings indicated a lack of consistent and ongoing professional development and training, concerns with collaboration between co-teachers, and confusion with roles in co-teaching.

Keywords: co-teaching, special education, collaboration, program evaluation, middle school, professional development

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was a gap in the knowledge base pertaining to co-teaching within the middle schools at Drake School District in Missouri. Stakeholders' perceptions of middle school co-teaching at Drake were unknown due to no prior research studies. Details on collaboration and the professional development process, as well as how well they were functioning within the co-teaching middle school model at Drake School District, were also unknown. This program evaluation revealed

perceptions in a confidential manner to gain feedback from personnel at the frontline which was used in determining suggestions for program improvement.

Another problem within this study was mixed results and outcomes in previous research studies (Idol, 2006; Murawski & Lee-Swanson, 2001). While some researchers (Beyers-Brown et al., 2013; Chandler-Olcott, 2017; Idol, 2006) found co-teaching to be an effective method to address students' diverse educational needs, others (Conderman & Hefling, 2014; Kamen, 2007; Pugach & Winn, 2011) discovered co-teaching to be minimally effective, having no impact at all, or having concerns with the service. This research study aimed to contribute to the already existing literature base related to co-teaching program evaluations.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of co-teachers and administrators related to how collaboration impacted co-teaching at the middle schools within Drake School District. Creswell (2014) explained how a qualitative research study identifies "a single central phenomenon" and provides a definition for the concept (p. 137). Friend and Cook (2013) defined collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 6). A closer look at middle school co-teaching was gained by exploring teachers' perceptions of the current model. Strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching were studied through the eyes of the following roles: regular education co-teachers, special education co-teachers, and middle school building administrators. The goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of current middle school co-teaching and, if the findings dictated, use the information to suggest

recommendations for change to the Drake School District Special Education Director. In addition, feedback was used to guide decisions pertaining to professional development and collaboration time for co-teachers. Despite the numerous research studies conducted across the country on co-teaching, there were no data-based research studies aimed at Drake School District pertaining to co-teaching.

Additionally, this qualitative study aimed to fill the gap in the research currently in existence. With existing literature indicating mixed results, as previously mentioned, this research study enhanced the current knowledge base on co-teaching nationwide. A qualitative study revealed perceptions from various stakeholders and function as a resource for other professionals with an interest in middle school education, specifically in the areas of co-teaching and collaboration.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, Creswell (2016) suggested using research questions that are open-ended and allow participants to freely express thoughts and opinions. Two types of research questions appear in qualitative research: the central question and sub-questions (Creswell, 2016). A central research question addresses the broad scope of the study while sub-questions support the study by narrowing the focus to a particular area (Creswell, 2016). The central research question guiding this study was: What are co-teachers' and building principals' perceptions of co-teaching at middle schools within the Drake School District? The following sub-questions supported the central research question and narrowed the focus of the study to collaboration, professional development, and program evaluation within Drake School District:

- How do co-teachers at middle schools within Drake School District use collaboration?
- How has professional development impacted co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching at middle schools within Drake School District?

Conceptual Framework

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a conceptual framework serves as an “underlying structure” which guides the research study (p. 85). Researchers use the conceptual framework as the foundational groundwork which provides a lens in investigating a specific problem (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The conceptual framework functions as the primary basis for the research study and the core of the investigation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the conceptual framework for the investigation into co-teaching at Drake School District.

Figure 1. Collaboration served as the conceptual framework for this study which provided an in-depth investigation at co-teaching at middle schools in Drake School District. Program evaluation, co-teaching, and professional development acted as key variables.

Collaboration and co-teaching centered around the work of Friend and Cook. Both researchers made valuable contributions to the field of education, specifically in the co-teaching model and collaboration (Bryant-Davis et al., 2012; Dieker, Finnegan, Grillo, & Garland, 2013). Drake School District adopted the co-teaching model by Friend and Cook for professional development during the 2016-2017 school year. Program evaluation was explored from the work and guidance of Rossi et. al (2004) along with Newcomer et al. (2015). Professional development was examined from multiple researchers' perspectives.

Friend and Cook's (2013) concept of collaboration identified the following six variables as essential for collaboration to take place: mutual goals, parity, voluntariness, shared decision-making, shared accountability for outcomes, and shared resources. Ongoing collaboration is imperative for establishing and maintaining a successful co-teaching classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend & Cook, 2013). Communication and equality between these two parties are key for establishing ground rules and routines, clarifying roles, and even to openly discuss pet peeves (Cook & Friend, 1995). This ongoing relationship is imperative for not only the success of the co-teaching model, but success of the students as well (Cook & Friend, 1995). Collaboration must incorporate equal effort from each individual teacher including a shared responsibility for making decisions and a shared ownership for accountability of student outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaboration in co-teaching is especially important in middle school (Chandler-Olcott, 2007). Chandler-Olcott (2017) stated, "Co-teaching is particularly appropriate at the middle school level, given middle school teachers' historically strong commitment to

professional collaboration” (p. 4). Successful co-teaching contains co-teachers with mutually agreed upon goals, equal access to resources, and who voluntarily meet to collaborate with their fellow co-teacher (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cook & Friend, 1995). Friend (2015) related the co-teaching relationship to a marriage, explaining how everything is shared. The work load is shared, instruction is shared, outcomes are shared, and communication and collaboration are equally shared responsibilities (Friend, 2015). Collaboration is a critical component to co-teaching (Cook & Friend, 1991; Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2014; Friend, 2015, Friend & Cook, 2013; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

Co-Teaching Model

Co-teaching has multiple definitions, numerous meanings, and can be implemented in a variety of ways (Bacharach, Washut-Heck, & Dahlberg, 2008). The general definition of co-teaching involves two or more trained individuals who have shared goals and deliver instruction to a group of students (Curry School of Education, 2012). Co-teaching, in a broad sense, is defined as two or more individuals working together in a collaborative manner to educate a group of students and accomplish more than what could have been completed alone (Wenzlaff, T., Beral, L., Wiseman, K., Monroe-Baillargeon, A., Bacharach, N., & Bradfield-Kreider, P., 2002). Roth and Tobin (2004) defined co-teaching as multiple educators sharing responsibilities for instruction of students. Co-teaching is regarded as an instructional strategy which capitalizes on the knowledge and skills of two or more educators in the same classroom in order to increase students’ learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Wenzlaff et al, 2002).

Six Approaches to Co-Teaching According to Friend and Cook

Friend and Cook (2013) recommended six particular teaching approaches to implement in a co-teaching environment. These teaching methods do not exist in isolation as many co-teachers use a combination of the given strategies during a single lesson (Friend, 2014). Each of the approaches provide certain benefits, as well as drawbacks, but no single method is identified as the best (Friend, 2014).

The goals of Friend and Cook's (2013) six approaches to co-teaching is to, at some point, apply all six approaches in the classroom to optimize learning opportunities for students. Co-teachers must constantly analyze their instructional practices and alter approaches to improve the quality of instruction for students with diverse learning needs (Friend & Cook, 2013). Furthermore, co-teachers may utilize alternative teaching strategies or combine approaches to create a new way of delivering instruction (Friend, 2014). The six approaches from Friend and Cook (2013) are described as:

- *One Teaching, One Observing*: One teacher is instructing while the other is collecting data. Afterwards, the teachers collaborate, analyze data, and plan further instruction.
- *Station Teaching*: Teachers divide the content and students. Each teacher instructs one small group and then repeats the instruction for the next group. If needed, a third group is added as an independent station or led by a designated student.
- *Parallel Teaching*: The class is strategically divided and both educators provide the same instructional content to his or her assigned group.

- *Alternative Teaching*: One teacher instructs the majority of the class while the other takes a smaller group for re-teaching, pre-teaching, assessment, intervention, or enrichment, depending upon the needs of the students.
- *Teaming*: Both teachers deliver the same content to the class at the same time. Teachers speak one at a time, but collaborate to provide instruction to the class as a whole.
- *One Teaching, One Assisting*: One teacher leads instruction while the other circulates the rooms and provides assistance as needed.

Figure 2: Adapted illustration of the six co-teaching approaches (Friend et. al, 2010)

Professional Development

Professional development is essential and required for all teachers in education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Walsh, 2012). Effective professional development must be intensive, continuous, and collaborative (Darling-Hammond &

McLaughlin, 1995). Walsh (2012) researched school systems in Maryland over a twenty-year period and concluded that effective professional development was the link to effective co-teaching.

Professional development allows teachers to become better equipped for creating a strong and genuine co-teaching classroom (Walsh, 2012). Professional development should continuously be assessed to ensure the best, research-based practices are being implemented (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Training related to inclusion and collaboration cannot be emphasized enough in the co-teaching model (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015). Murawski & Bernhardt (2015) suggested providing building-wide training on inclusion to establish co-teaching as a method of best practice culture rather than a just a special education service.

Program Evaluation

Research pertaining to the evaluation of social programs began in the 1930s and rapidly evolved as more social programs were established (Rossi et al. 2004). Rossi et al. (2004) defined program evaluation as “the use of social research methods to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs” (p. 28). Program evaluation is essential to assess effectiveness (Rossi et al., 2004). Rossi, et al. (2004) identified five areas in which programs are typically evaluated: (a) “the need for the program,” (b) “the design of the program,” (c) “program implementation,” (d) “program impact or outcomes,” and (e) “program efficiency” (p. 29). For this qualitative study, the focus of the program evaluation was concentrated in the area of the design of the program and program implementation.

Limitations

Creswell (2014) found researchers possess certain biases constructed by factors such as, background, culture, and experiences. Worthwhile qualitative research studies expose these biases to allow readers honest insight into the possible influences or limitation within the study (Creswell, 2014). Due to prior working experience in the field of co-teaching, the researcher recognized bringing certain biases into this research study. The researcher previously worked as a special education teacher, a special education co-teacher, a regular education teacher, a regular education co-teacher, as well as an administrator. Although efforts were made to warrant objectivity in this study, the researcher chose to disclose these previous teaching positions as they can potentially result in biases which may have shaped the understanding and interpretations of the data.

Additionally, Creswell (2014) cautioned about generalizability in qualitative research studies. A sample size of two focus groups and a handful of interviews may not accurately reflect the perceptions of the entire population of co-teachers and administrators within Drake School District middle schools. Nor can findings of this study be generalized to represent educational institutions outside of this study.

Assumptions

Qualitative research is grounded in specific assumptions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The focus of this research study was to understand multiple participants' perceptions and experiences; therefore, the researcher aims to make sense of and summarize various viewpoints. With the researcher being the main instrument for gathering and analyzing data, human error or biases may unknowingly impact the conclusions of the study (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It was assumed

participants openly shared perceptions, resulting in truthful and authentic responses. This research study was emergent, meaning the research plan could not be strictly designed as the process could change once the researcher began collecting data (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, it was assumed the researcher focused on understanding the meaning derived from the participants' expressions rather than the researcher's perspective or previous research studies similar to the topic.

Design Controls

Having particular safeguards in place prevent assumptions and limitations excessively manipulating the data (Creswell, 2014). As Creswell (2014) recommended, the researcher continuously remained cognizant of the problem statement and research questions which guided the study. Ongoing focus of these two areas allowed the researcher to keep biases at bay by concentrating on the participants' perspectives.

Quality data is dependent upon well-chosen interview and focus group questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the researcher created open-ended interview and focus group questions with follow-up probes for more details beforehand. Predetermined questions and follow-up responses increase opportunities for a richer, more holistic, description in participants' replies (Seidman, 2013).

Fink (2017) suggested surveys as a means of obtaining valuable data as participants are sometimes less threatened to disclose thoughts and opinions anonymously rather than out loud in a group setting. For this reason, the researcher utilized a survey with the intention of capturing any missing data from focus group and interview information. Survey data was analyzed and coded along with interviews and focus groups.

Finally, analyzing and coding data is a fundamental process in determining valid and reliable interpretations (Creswell, 2014; Fink, 2017, Kruger & Casey, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A transcription of interviews and focus groups verbatim was conducted as Merriam (2016) proposed this was the most effective process for analysis. The researcher followed suggestions by Fink (2017) and Kruger and Casey (2015) by documenting the frequency of concepts mentioned in the data collection process. As Merriam (2016) recommended, the researcher used axial coding after open coding to effectively determine themes in the data.

Key Terms

Administration – The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defined administrators as a Superintendent, Principal, Assistant Principal, Director, or Assistant Director (“Administrators”). These positions of leadership require graduate level educational administration education, as well as administrative certification in the state of Missouri (“Administrators”). Administrators in this study refer to building principals and assistant principals.

Co-teaching – The general definition of co-teaching involves two or more trained individuals who have shared goals and deliver instruction to a group of students (Curry School of Education, 2012). Co-teaching is regarded as a method of delivering instruction which capitalizes on the knowledge and skills of two or more educators in the same classroom in order to increase students’ learning (Ferguson & Wilson, 2011; Wenzlaff et al, 2002).

Co-teaching according to Cook & Friend – Co-teaching includes a general education teacher and a special education teacher who shared the delivery and

preparation of instruction, accountability and responsibilities, and student outcomes (Friend, 2014). Co-teaching in this context includes two educators who are equally important in the instructional process and have a balance in responsibilities (Cook & Friend, 1995). Co-teaching classrooms consist of students in special services and students in general education.

Collaboration – Cook and Friend (1991) defined several integral characteristics for collaboration. Collaboration is voluntary and included shared responsibility for educational planning, instructional delivery, goals, responsibilities, and outcomes (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Collaboration time or planning time – In this context, collaboration time is referred to as a set aside time period, typically during the school day and usually for approximately 45 minutes, to allow teachers the opportunity to plan lessons and activities, assess students' work and progress, evaluate instructional strategies, assign responsibilities, and prepare for future instruction (Cook & Friend, 1991).

Core academic subject – For this middle school research study, core academic subject refers to the following content areas: English-Reading, English- Writing, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies.

Direct service special education class – This term represents a special education class led by a special education teacher. No general education students are placed in direct service special education classes.

Disability – IDEA states a student with one of the following disabilities is considered eligible for special education services: autism, traumatic brain injury, another health impairment (such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder or emotional

disturbance), a specific learning disability, deafness or blindness, multiple disabilities, or a young child (age three to five) with a developmental delay (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Highly Qualified Teacher – The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education defined a highly qualified teacher as one who has obtained certification as a teacher, holds a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and has demonstrated subject-matter competency by a formal assessment in each academic subject the educator teaches ("Highly Qualified Teacher").

Inclusion – Inclusion refers to the teaching approach of including students with special education needs into the school community and general education population (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – Students who qualify for special education services receive an IEP. An IEP is a legal document which details the special services deemed necessary and appropriate for an individual student ("Parent Resources"). IEP team members meet and agree upon special services provided.

Least restrictive environment (LRE) – Found in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, least restrictive environment refers to educating students within the general education classroom to the maximum extent that is deemed appropriate (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Center, 2004). Removal from the general education environment should take place only when the child's disability, as defined under IDEA, is severe enough that even with accommodations and/or modifications in place, the student is not receiving an appropriate education (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Levels of state assessments – The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is used to assess students at the end of the year. Assessments at the middle schools are scored and categorized into the following four achievement levels: below basic, basic, proficient, advanced (“MAP Information for Parents”). The goal in Missouri is for students to reach the top two categories (“MAP Information for Parents”).

Mainstreaming – A general education classroom is a mainstream setting (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004). Mainstreaming refers to placing a student with special education needs in the general education classroom (Missouri Protection and Advocacy Services, 2004).

Middle School – Middle School for this study includes grades seven and eight only.

Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) – MAP is a series of assessments in English Language Arts, Math, and Science administered to students at the end of the school year (“MAP Information for Parents”). MAP is used at Missouri’s assessment tool administered at the end of the school year. Students in grades three through eight participate in the assessments (“MAP Information for Parents”). With this study focusing on students at the middle schools, it is important to note the required state assessment for students in this group. Students in seventh grade are required to take English Language Arts and Math and students in eighth grade are required to take English Language Arts, Math, and Science (“MAP Information for Parents”).

Process Consultants – This position at Drake School District acts as a support and resource for special education teachers at assigned school buildings and are qualified to interpret and explain assessment results during IEP meetings.

Professional Development – K-12 teachers in Missouri are required to receive professional development to maintain licensure (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Teachers in years one through four are required to receive 30 hours of professional development over four year and teachers in years 5 and above are required to have 15 hours annually until becoming exempt (“Required Professional Development Hours”). A teacher becomes exempt of professional development hours after meeting two of the three following criteria: 10 years of teaching experience, national certification, or a higher-level graduate degree (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Missouri allows teachers to receive professional development through his/her school district as approved and/or required by building administration, or by taking college classes (“Required Professional Development Hours”). One college credit equals 15 professional contact hours (“Required Professional Development Hours”). Teachers at Drake School District are provided seven days of professional development during a school year.

Professional Learning – At Drake School District, professional learning for personnel is referred to as professional development. Learning Forward (2017) defines professional learning as activities that “are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet challenging State academic standards.” Learning Forwards (2017) claimed professional learning is “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused.” The goal of professional learning is to improve and increase teachers’ knowledge of academic

content, as well as understanding of how students learn and how to analyze student work and progress from multiple sources of data (Learning Forward, 2017).

Special Services or Special Education – For the purpose of this study, special services and special education are two interchangeable terms.

Specialized Instruction – Specialized instruction refers to special education courses, such as reading, writing, math, or study skills which are taught by a special education teacher in a classroom with only students who receive special services.

Methods

A qualitative formative program evaluation was used to uncover stakeholders' perceptions of co-teaching at the middle schools within Drake School District. Formative evaluation is a method which focuses on gathering information that ultimately leads to program improvement (Rossi et al., 2004; Scriven, 1991). In qualitative research, the goal is to understand the meaning participants make related to personal experiences and worldviews (Merriam, 2016). The researcher aimed to reveal perceptions from co-teachers and administrators pertaining to middle school co-teaching. A program evaluation of Drake School District's co-teaching service at the middle schools was conducted through the lens of Friend and Cook's concept of collaboration and co-teaching model (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend & Cook, 2013).

The setting for this qualitative study was Drake School District, located in a Missouri suburban city with a population of approximately 76,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2016). Drake School District included four middle schools, grades seven and eight, ranging in size from 341 to 511 students. Each middle school employed a head principal, as well as an assistant principal who also served as the athletic director. Three

of the four schools qualified for free breakfast and lunch for all students due to the high percentage of students identified as meeting federal poverty guidelines. All four schools had a predominantly white or Caucasian student population with approximately 22% being identified as minorities (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2017). Research approval was granted for this investigation by Susan Johnson, Director of Assessment at Drake School District, and the Drake School District Research Committee.

Participants

Purposeful selection was the logical approach to selecting participants in this study due to needing input from those directly connected with co-teaching (Creswell, 2014; Newcomer et al., 2015; Seidman, 2013). Merriam (2016) specified, “Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 96). For this reason, Drake School District was selected as a purposeful sample.

Regular education teachers and special education teachers who provided instruction in a co-teaching setting were asked to volunteer as participants. All building administrators from the four middle schools were provided an opportunity to participate in this study, but were selected based on availability. All names of participants were kept confidential. Participation was strictly on a volunteer basis and a consent form was provided (See Appendix B). Participants were contacted via email, through personal phone calls, and face-to-face interaction. Surveys were completed anonymously and did not require a name to participate. Survey responses were kept confidential.

Procedures

An assortment of data collection tools, including focus groups, interviews, and a survey, were used in this study to provide participants with different means of expressing perceptions. Collecting multiple sources of data allowed the researcher access to a more holistic database which was organized, categorized, and reconstructed by the researcher to provide meaningful insight (Creswell, 2014). As suggested by Krueger and Casey (2015), a focus group consisting of five to eight various stakeholders was the goal to explore insights and perceptions. Regular and special education teachers who currently co-teach, as well as administrators, were asked to participate in a focus group to gain a better understanding of the current co-teaching service. Focus groups are particularly useful when a researcher is exploring a range of perceptions and trying to understand the differences in numerous viewpoints (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Focus groups lasted no longer than one hour and took place in a setting outside of the school buildings being studied. All interviews and focus groups were recorded using a professional transcription service, (<https://www.rev.com>), to best capture the participants' various views and opinions.

Interview sessions were offered for participants as an alternative to the focus group. If a participant was uncomfortable with the focus group dynamics or if his or her schedule did not allow time for partaking in the scheduled activity, an individual interview was offered. As Seidman (2013) suggested, no interviews were conducted with participants whom the researcher supervises and the location was neutral, private, as well as convenient, to the participants. Asking worthwhile questions is essential in obtaining

meaningful data during an interview (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher prepared an interview guide in advance to assist in facilitation of the discussion (See Appendix C).

A short survey was distributed to all co-teachers and administration at the middle schools within Drake School District (See Appendix B). Surveys have proven to be an effective technique to gain feedback from stakeholders, especially pertaining to program evaluations (Fink, 2017). As suggested by Fink (2017), the survey was reviewed, revised, and approved by an expert panel to increase content validity. The expert panel consisted of members with education and expertise in the following areas: K-12 learning disabilities, K-12 special reading, K-12 school administration, and/or K-12 special education administration. All members of the expert panel held graduate degrees in Educational Leadership, Special Education Administration, and/or School Administration. By gathering survey data from participants who have been interviewed, the researcher was able to compare survey and interview data to increase reliability (Fink, 2017). Confidentiality is vital in qualitative research (Creswell, 2016). All survey information was kept confidential and the identity of the respondents was not provided to the researcher.

In any research study, ethical considerations must be reflected and carefully understood (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Even though the federal government and professional agencies have policies and guidelines regarding ethical practices in research, actual ethical conduct is the responsibility of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2016) provided several suggestions for qualitative researchers in regards to avoiding ethical dilemmas, such as obtaining college/university approval for research through Institutional Review Board (IRB), clearly communicating the purpose of the

study and how the data will be used, and refraining from falsifying information, plagiarizing, and siding with participants. Personal norms and characteristics related to race, culture, religion, and gender should be learned and respected (Creswell, 2016). Ethical researchers disclose multiple perspectives, continuously remind themselves to keep personal biases in check and at bay when in research discussions with participants, and report honestly (Creswell, 2016). For this study, IRB approval was obtained through the University of Missouri and the researcher committed to completing research with integrity and the utmost ethical regard.

Data Analysis

Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded to ensure information was preserved for future examination (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The audio recorded interviews and focus groups were transcribed to offer the best platform for analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Transcription analysis allowed the researcher to study documents and discover themes or patterns in the discussion (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Survey information was analyzed and coded to determine commonalities and differences. Open coding allowed the researcher to digest the interview and focus group transcripts, make notations of interesting points as well as questions along the inquiry, and be impartial to any potential themes or categories that surfaced (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Patterns were identified by using frequencies, as mentioned by Fink (2017). Exploration of repeated key words in conversation from multiple participants allowed pertinent information and concepts to surface (Fink, 2017). Following open coding, the researcher used axial coding as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to group concepts in specific themes. Axial coding allowed the researcher to reflect upon the

general concepts presented, interpret the meaning, and place the ideas into general themes.

Consideration was given to reliability, validity, generalizability, and trustworthiness. By inviting all administrators and co-teachers at the middle schools within Drake School District to participate in this study, rather than a selected sample, reliability was increased (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Triangulation of data is essential to ensure accuracy and validity of the interpretations made by the researcher (Creswell, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Validity in this study was addressed by obtaining multiple sources of data, implementing focus groups, and including research-based literature studies which exposed various stances on the issue (Creswell, 2016). This study was not declared as one that was generalizable to all co-teaching environments, but rather as an isolated study which added to the already existing literature base of information related to collaboration and co-teaching at the middle schools. Allowing respondents to anonymously answer questions related to Drake School District's co-teaching opened the door for upfront and honest feedback, having trust the identities of participants were kept confidential (Fink, 2017). No significant risks or harm were presented in the participation of this study.

Results

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of middle school co-teaching from special education co-teachers, regular education co-teachers, and building administrators. After two focus groups, seven interviews, 11 survey responses, and careful analysis of the data, three main themes emerged: (a) Lack of or inconsistency in professional development, (b) concerns with collaboration time, (c) confusion with co-

teaching roles, with two minor themes of (d) relationship issues, (e) and issues with support from building administrators. Table 1 outlines specific categories that were discovered within the themes during the data analysis process.

Table 5

Themes About Co-Teaching, Collaboration, and Professional Development

Theme	Frequency	Categories included
Lack of or inconsistent professional development	28	No PD for new co-teachers No PD offered this school year Wanting ongoing PD Need classroom management PD PD needs to be with both co-teachers One day PD last year, no follow-up Wanting to observe strong co-teaching
Concerns with collaboration time	18	Collaboration is not interactive Schedule does not allow collaboration No time to collaborate, no common plan
Confusion with co-teaching roles	24	Regular education teacher is lead teacher Unequal division of labor Special education co-teacher has paperwork Lack of understanding roles One teacher, the other only assists Lack of content knowledge for co-teacher Lack of understanding students' levels No clear roles identified Grading, analyzing data should be shared Sped teacher is a support role, no initiative
Relationship issues	7	Personalities of co-teachers are important Personality differences Value, respect, getting along
Issues with support from building administrators	6	Admin needs to support the model Admin should protect collaboration time Strategically place co-teachers Admin is supportive of the model

Professional Development

Concerns with professional development was mentioned more than any other topic throughout the data collection process. Participants continuously expressed frustration or discontentment with the lack of professional development. Several participants expressed value in professional development, specifically in the six co-teaching strategies by Friend and Cook (2013), but reported the learning opportunity was not provided to new co-teachers this year. One participant reported finding no value in last year's professional development pertaining to co-teaching based on Friend and Cook (2013). One participant (who is a regular education teacher) shared the following:

“There was a professional development specifically for co-teaching last year. My co-teacher and I both attended. It was really helpful for both of us. However, my co-teacher left the district, so I have a new co-teacher this year. I think it's her first co-teaching job. In my opinion, I think if they hire co-teaching teachers, there should be a professional development in co-teaching before the beginning of the school year, especially those who do not have co-teaching experience.”

Another participant (who is a special education teacher) expressed frustration with the professional development provided last year and stated, “Did I find it beneficial? No. Once again, it was a hit and miss. One hit, one day wonder. It felt like to me here's eight hours of PD. Take it and run with it. See how it works and it then just never came back to it. New teachers now haven't been trained.”

Again, the overwhelming consensus among participants was a need for ongoing professional development. Participants communicated the importance of receiving co-teaching professional development together to discuss and reflect during the learning

opportunity. As mentioned above, participants expressed the desire for ongoing learning to keep the co-teaching strategies fresh in their minds and allow for co-teaching to be continually improved upon. To add to this theme, one survey participant reported, “A definite weakness is a lack of training and a lack of going to training together.”

Collaboration Time

Collaboration time was an additional theme which emerged from analyzing the data. Concerns in this area related to a lack of time to collaborate and collaboration not being an interactive effort from both co-teachers. The researcher found the statements from participants below as useful in understanding the variety of perceptions.

One survey participant responded, “We don’t really collaborate for co-teaching. The special education teacher pays close attention to those with IEPs and the ones we notice are struggling.”

An administrator discussed thoughts on collaboration for one building,

“It’s shared planning. They’re all designing everything together. It’s not just dividing the roles. It’s real focused with designing the lessons.”

Another participant reported (via survey),

“There is very little opportunity for collaboration and planning between the teachers in our co-teaching classroom. They meet briefly during lunch or after school to have an idea of what the regular education teacher has in mind, but there is not common planning time or scheduled time for collaboration. Unfortunately, the model we use has the regular education teacher providing the lessons and the special education teacher providing the support.”

Another participant (who is a general education teacher) indicated his thoughts on collaboration,

“The other math teacher and myself talk daily, and then I would say once every two weeks, the special education teacher will be sitting there and will kind of get involved in that discussion of where we want to go or listens to that discussion. I would not say inputs anything into that, but is kind of sitting there as the other math teacher and myself kind of talk about what we’re doing, where we want to go from here, what ideas do you have.”

Role Confusion

This theme was derived from a variety of statements made by participants related to the teachers’ roles in the co-teaching classroom. One category frequently mentioned was the regular education co-teacher being the “lead teacher” and the special education co-teacher serving in a support role only. Other categories included: an unequal or unfair responsibility of classroom tasks, lack of content knowledge for the special education co-teacher, the regular education co-teacher not completely understanding the educational level of students in special education, the special education co-teacher completing special education paperwork during class time, and simply not having established, clear roles for both co-teachers. A survey respondent replied,

“I think the implementation is something that needs to be looked at. I want to be successful at this, but it seems there is usually a ‘lead’ teacher, and then someone who helps manage a few.”

Another participant (who is a regular education teacher) reported,

“Honestly, I plan the lessons, and the co-teacher goes with the flow. I am responsible for all of the grading and analyzing of data. I wish it was more of a cooperative task, but it is hard to change something already happening without ruffling feathers.”

A survey participant added,

“The strength is definitely that the students in these classes are provided with extra support and it provides a way for all accommodations in these classes to be met while the students are in the class. Unfortunately, the weaknesses include the lack of actual teaching done by the special education teacher to the whole group.”

One uncharacteristic survey response claimed,

“Shared grading and analyzing data is what we have seen as a result of implementing co-teaching.”

The vast majority of responses included a sense of the regular education co-teacher taking the lead instructional responsibility while the special education co-teacher provided assistance and support. One response from a survey participant stated,

“Planning, grading, and data analysis has taken place mostly of the (regular education) teacher side.” Another focus group participant (who is a regular education teacher) directly stated, “This year, it looks like me teaching with a special education teacher watching.”

Relationship Issues

This theme was not widely mentioned throughout the data collection process, but the researcher found the direct statements from participants worthy of including in the findings to provide a holistic view of the perceptions. Relationships issues include

categories related to personality differences between the co-teachers, the co-teachers getting along, and respect or value between the co-teachers. One focus group participant (who is a regular education teacher) responded,

“I previously had a co-teacher sit down and get busy doing paperwork and not even be engaged in the classroom. I had to have a very difficult conversation. Be engaged with the class. Why should kids have to be engaged when you’re not? Personalities, that’s huge. Pet peeves, quirks. This year, it’s kind of scattered, organizational issues, but that’s part of his quirks and personality.”

One administrator reported on relationship issues,

“We had two teachers in mathematics. You had one who was great, a relationship builder, wants to laugh and joke. You had the other who was very black and white, desks in a straight row. So, that one tended to stand in the back and just yell at kids, catch them as a police officer. The other one was relationship based. It was really a bad situation and we didn’t have personalities to put that (co-teaching model) together, so that’s why we didn’t have it (co-teaching) for a couple of years.”

One survey participant responded,

“Teachers must be able to work together, collaborate, and share, which is a strength.”

One focus group participant (who is a special education teacher) reported,

“On the side of relationships, the regular education teachers need to understand that the special education teachers are there as another lead teacher. They are an

equal. If you don't have a content teacher who values the special education teacher in that role, it's not going to work. There should be mutual respect."

Another focus group participant (who is a special education teacher) shared,

"The biggest thing is relationships between the two teachers because if you don't have a decent relationship, how are you ever going to work towards a common goal of educating kids? Our kids aren't dumb. They pick up on these people don't like each other. They don't get along. I think relationships is the biggest thing with co-teaching. A weakness (for co-teaching in my building) is that we've had some people who don't get along and it's very noticeable and the kids picked up on it."

Administrator Support

Administrator support was another theme that was not strongly cited during transcription analysis; nonetheless, the researcher found the comments from participants noteworthy. A focus group participant (who is a regular education teacher) suggested,

"If your admin is not valuing the same model and protecting that (collaboration) time, PD is irrelevant and it's not going to be very effective."

Another focus group participant (who is a special education teacher) reported,

"Our building administrators have observed and provided support."

Lastly, a focus group member (who is a regular education teacher) suggested administrators strategically place teachers in co-teaching arrangements. This teacher discussed basing co-teaching assignments on skill level, content knowledge, and personalities.

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to reveal perceptions of regular education co-teachers, special education co-teachers, and building administrators pertaining to middle school co-teaching. This study examined how collaboration and professional development functioned within the middle school co-teaching model. Focus groups, interviews, and surveys allowed perceptions, as well as strengths and weaknesses, of middle school co-teaching at Drake School District to be known.

Although the majority of perceptions from the participants described undesirable conditions, the feedback was beneficial in making recommendation for program improvement. Many participants described concerns with professional development, collaboration, and clearly defined roles, which are the three major themes in this study. Relationships between co-teachers and building administrator's support were viewed as minor themes, but relevant to the overall conclusions. These findings, along with recommendations for changes, were provided to the Director of Special Education as suggestions to consider.

Professional development is mandatory and crucial for teachers to remain experts in the field of education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Walsh, 2012). Successful professional development must be intensive, ongoing, and collaborative (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Walsh (2012) identified effective professional development as the link to effective co-teaching. Professional development should continuously be assessed to ensure the best, research-based practices are being implemented (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Despite the importance of professional development, a lack of ongoing training and professional learning pertaining

to co-teaching was the primary concern noted by participants in this study. Training and/or professional development concerns were mentioned 28 times by participants during the data collection process, resulting in the most notable criticism at 33% of the data.

Concerns or confusion with co-teachers' roles was documented 24 times (or for 28% of the data) by participants which was the second largest theme and recognized issue. Establishing clearly defined roles which leads to an equitable and fair division of tasks between the co-teachers is often challenging, but also one of the most imperative components to co-teaching (Conderman & Hedlin, 2014; Cook & Friend, 1995; Idol, 2006; Pugach & Winn, 2011). In this study, a frustrating characteristic of the current state of co-teaching frequently discussed was the regular education co-teacher being the "lead teacher" and the special education co-teacher serving in a support role or simply being a warm body in the classroom. Other noteworthy items of discussion include: an unequal or unfair responsibility of classroom tasks, lack of content knowledge for the special education co-teacher, the regular education co-teacher not completely understanding the educational level of students in special education, the special education co-teacher completing special education paperwork during class time, and simply not having established, clear roles for both co-teachers.

The next major theme and third most mentioned concern for this study was collaboration amongst the two co-teachers. Collaboration between co-teachers is vital for the success of the co-teaching arrangement (Friend & Cook, 1991; Hunter, Jasper, & Williamson, 2014; Muijs, 2015; Tandon, Drame, & Owens, 2012). Six variables are necessary for collaboration to take place and set the stage for an effective, successful co-

teaching classroom: mutual goals, parity, voluntariness, shared decision-making, shared accountability for outcomes, and shared resources (Friend & Cook, 2013). In this study, participants identified a lack of collaboration time built into the daily schedule and failure for both co-teachers to engage in the interactive collaboration process as the two main factors in collaboration issues. These concerns were expressed 18 times by the participants resulting in 21% of the total data.

Although concerns with co-teachers' relationships and building administrator support were identified as minor themes, the researcher found both issues relevant and noteworthy. Co-teachers must have a certain level of compatibility to create a successful co-teaching classroom (Cook & Friend, 1995; Friend, 2015). Concerns with the personal relationship between co-teachers was indicated seven times resulting in 8% of the collected data. Having the support of the building administrator is an important factor in successful co-teaching (Idol, 2006). In this study, a lack of support from the building administrator was mentioned six times (7% of the collected data).

During the data collection process, participants were asked to describe strengths and weaknesses of middle school co-teaching at Drake School District. On two occasions and for 2% of the data, participants described the current co-teaching model as effective. One administrator reported co-teaching has allowed the special education co-teachers to increase the rigor in direct instruction classes due to being partnered with content-expert regular education teachers. A special education teacher also described how the rigor in the direct instruction classes had increased for the same reason. It was also noted how co-teaching at middle schools in Drake School District allowed for students in special education to be educated in the least restrictive environment which is

extremely valuable and necessary for students in special education. Weaknesses within Drake School's District co-teaching included the three major themes and two minor themes discussed above: lack of professional development and ongoing training, concerns or confusion with roles, collaboration time, concerns with co-teachers' relationship, and lack of building administrator support.

Future Research

With the results of this study indicating needs for improvement and with few studies examining co-teaching from the collaboration lens, the findings should be used for the following:

- program planning- partnering co-teachers, hiring practices, school schedule design with collaboration time
- professional development or professional learning planning
- exposing perceptions from co-teachers and building administrators to the Director of Special Education with recommendations for changes
- improving collaboration between co-teachers
- encouraging administrators to provide timely feedback to co-teachers related to classroom observations
- fill the gap in literature and provide a foundation for future studies

The researcher proposed suggestions for future researchers who are interested in the field of co-teaching. One suggestions was to observe co-teaching classrooms. With perceptions coming from co-teachers and building administrators alone in this study, the

actual act of co-teaching in a classroom environment was not experienced or observed. Future researchers would certainly benefit from such a learning opportunity.

With this study being qualitative, the researcher was limited to the responses from participants. The researcher suggested future studies to include multiple observations of co-teaching classrooms which would offer a different perspective. The researcher also suggested having multiple researchers involved with a future study to provide a look into co-teaching from various viewpoints. Professional educators' perspectives may differ based on previous experiences, background, and training. These differences in viewpoints would provide a richer description and depiction of the co-teaching classrooms. Adding a quantitative measure to the study would serve as an added benefit in understanding the complex dynamics of co-teaching.

Action research studies within Drake School District or similar school districts would yield beneficial information and contribute to the field of co-teaching. Future researchers should consider mixed methods studies or quantitative studies to add to the existing literature base. The researcher suggested using a Likert scale in surveys to collect quantitative data related to co-teaching perceptions. The researcher would volunteer for an opportunity to conduct an action research study with professional colleagues in the field of co-teaching who may be interested.

The researcher suggested having all participants complete a confidential survey before the focus groups and interviews. The researcher's intent behind completing a survey after the focus group and interviews was to capture any information a participant did not feel comfortable disclosing in a public setting. However, survey responses indicated reflection and thought pertaining to the specific questions. Surveying

participants before focus groups and interviews may have allowed perceptions to be exposed without influence from other participants.

After reflection of this research study, the researcher concluded three additional areas worthy of examination in future research studies. The first area included a study which examines ideal co-teaching classrooms with exceptional professional development, including benchmark visits to other co-teaching classrooms or schools, and regular assessments from co-teaching experts, as well as feedback from building administrators. The perceptions from stakeholders in this type of setting would be beneficial as the world of education is constantly changing and attempting to improve educational practices. Specific information on collaboration, professional development or professional learning, classroom dynamics, and the relationship between the co-teachers would be useful in applying to Drake School District as well as other school districts who provide co-teaching.

The second area the researcher would like to know more about is related to professional development and/or professional learning experiences itself. The value and importance of professional development is widely known in the field of education (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Pugach & Winn, 2011; Walsh, 2012). Providing co-teachers with unique, powerful learning experiences impacts educational practices and success in the classroom (Learning Forward, 2017). Research studies in the area of effective professional development or professional learning would provide valuable information in a variety of educational topics, specifically co-teaching and collaboration.

With 100% of the interview and focus group participants in this study indicating a need for professional development, providing training and learning opportunities was absolutely imperative for Drake School District. Building administrators must ensure professional development opportunities are meaningful, ongoing, and highly effective (Learning Forward, 2017). Professional learning opportunities greatly influence the educator's classroom practices and instructional delivery to students (Learning Forward, 2017). It is important to ensure educators are well-prepared for the diverse learning needs of students in co-teaching classrooms at Drake School District and schools across the nation.

Lastly, with technology continually improving and developing, the researcher was interested in discovering how the use of technology could be utilized as a means of collaboration between co-teachers. Future researcher studies should explore how and if technology could improve collaboration between co-teachers and if the online method of collaboration positively impacts the co-teaching classroom instruction. A mixed methods research study on technology as a collaboration tool and its influence on co-teaching practices would make a significant contribution to the field of education, specifically in the area of co-teaching and special education.

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SECTION SIX:

SCHOLARLY PRACTITIONER REFLECTION

President Harry S Truman is accredited for stating, “It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit” (McKee, 2016, p. 51). This well-known quote is painted on a wall at the school building where I have worked for nine years. Passing this wall multiple times, I have thought about these meaningful words in various contexts. During the past three years, I have been challenged with rigorous amounts of reading and writing, viewing issues through different lenses, and collaborating alongside individuals from backgrounds and perspectives different than my own.

This educational experience has forced me to get out of my comfort zone, think outside of the box, and learn through interaction and discussions with others. I have a newfound appreciation for people who bring opposing viewpoints and opinions. Every person has a story with unique experiences. I have learned everyone I meet knows something I do not, and listening is important to not miss the lesson.

Collaboration and teamwork effectively improve organizations, as all members of a team have something to contribute (Levi, 2014). I am grateful for the authentic and practical learning opportunities I have been provided through this educational program. Time after time, throughout this leadership and educational experience, I have contemplated and grappled with President Truman’s words noted above. These words have humbled and transformed me into a team-oriented leader who values others’ thoughts and opinions. I am a work in progress, but this quote, along with my family, colleagues, and friends, keep me grounded and focused on the leader I strive to be. I

purposely chose the University of Missouri's cohort program to be challenged. Being a rather quiet, reserved individual, this cohort experience has stretched me to lean on others as a resource and grow through interactions with my colleagues.

Leadership Theory and Practice

Extensive research has been conducted in leadership theories, specifically personality traits, behaviors, and styles, yet none of these studies have identified an exact profile needed to be considered an exemplary leader (George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2011). What characteristics define an effective leader? Although I find this question highly debatable, I consider strong communication skills, ethical behavior, and acceptance of differences in backgrounds and viewpoints as traits observed in all great leaders.

Communication is fundamental in leadership (Drucker, 2004; Goleman, 2011). Leaders should listen before speaking and sincerely consider the concern or problem brought forth by any follower. Listening should involve an attempt to understand the problem from the follower's point of view and possibly brainstorm options or solutions. Communication from the leader should be clear, consistent, and factual. As Drucker (2004) suggests, I find it imperative to "think and say we" and communicate in team-friendly terms to promote unity within the organization (p. 35).

Ethics and Diversity

Ethics play a major role in leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Caffarella & Daffron, 2013; Ettling, 2012; Northouse, 2016). Leaders make choices and respond to situations based on their ethics (Northouse, 2016). In my 23 years in the workforce, the last 10 in education, I have certainly experienced my fair share of leaders on both sides of

the spectrum regarding ethical behavior. In the world of education, I recommend all decisions be based with the students' best interest in mind. Leaders should strive to be role models of integrity and ethical behavior. I consider this old adage to be accurate: *You are the company you keep*. People notice the ethical example, or lack thereof, set by their leaders. Knowing followers tend to mirror the example behavior and moral conduct of the organization's head, leaders should maintain the highest degree of ethical behavior.

Along with ethical behavior, acceptance, inclusion, and promotion of ideas and thoughts from people of diverse backgrounds is rarely observed; however, it is necessary and found in the finest leaders (Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugh, 2013). People often surround themselves with others who have similar backgrounds whether that be socioeconomic level, race, education level, or sexual orientation. It is human instinct to gravitate towards like-minded individuals because it is more comfortable. Tatum (2003) emphasized people simply are uneducated when it comes to discussing racial differences. I have learned through the cohort process to be more aware of my own biases. I now make a conscious effort to sit at a table of complete strangers during professional development, talk to others at a leadership conference whom I do not know, and engage unknown individuals in conversation when I am at church or community sporting events. Again, every person has unique life experiences which have shaped individual perspectives. I now view interaction with others, especially people different than myself, an opportunity for me, as a leader, to learn and grow.

Matthew Kelly (2004) asserted the people in our lives either raise or lower our standards, and that people naturally, over time, adapt to the behavior to which they are exposed. I have observed this firsthand with various leaders for whom I have worked. In

my experience, when leaders arrive to work on time, make moral decisions, and display decent and respectful human conduct, followers mimicked the same types of behavior. On the contrary, when leaders demonstrated a sense of entitlement, blurred the lines between right and wrong, and promoted self-interests, followers began to mirror the leader's questionable behavior and lowered their own standards. Ethics should be at the core of a leader's heart and mind regardless of the leader's defined style, background, and beliefs. I think ethical decision-making is necessary for organizations to be healthy and productive working environments. The two leadership theories that come to mind when discussing ethics are servant leadership and transformational leadership.

Servant Leadership

I have often heard leaders, particularly in education, refer to themselves as servant leaders. Servant leaders are described by Northouse (2016) as people who know the needs and concerns of the followers, listen before speaking, show a commitment to growth and development, and prioritize the followers' needs over his or her self-interests. Robert Greenleaf established servant leadership as a way to lead and attract followers in a caring, empathetic, and empowering manner (Northouse, 2016). Although I know several professionals in education classify themselves as servant leaders, I think servant leadership is an overused term and a popular theory inaccurately owned by many in the field. Professional colleagues of mine have referred to me as a servant leader, although I identify best with the transformational leadership philosophy.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders invest in their followers by establishing relationships, as well as engaging and motivating individuals to make personal or professional changes

that ultimately benefit the organization (Ettling, 2012; Northouse, 2016). This style of leadership requires a high level of self-awareness as to how one's personal values may influence perspectives, along with exhibiting humility as a leader who can admit faults (Ettling, 2012). Transformational leaders are relatable, trustworthy, and create a healthy dialogue with followers that empower individuals to transform into a more productive member of the organization (Ettling, 2012; Northouse, 2016). The groundwork for this learner-centered style of leadership was set by Downton, Burns, and Bass (Northouse, 2016).

I believe in transformational leadership, as I, myself, am constantly reflecting, assessing, and changing as a school leader based on my interactions with other professionals. Most importantly, relationships are essential in leadership. John Maxwell (1993), a well-known leadership author and speaker stated, "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care" (p. 7). No one wants to take advice from a leader who does not demonstrate care, empathy, and respect. Communicating care sets the stage for in-depth, constructive conversations. I find great satisfaction in working with a teacher in an individual setting to raise his or her level of consciousness regarding performance, awareness of the building's goals and mission, and to empower the teacher to rise above self-interests for the greater good of students and our community. I am no expert at this undertaking, but working to help educators be better teachers is something I find vital for school entities and rewarding as a leader. Continuous self-reflection and improvement is key to my professional growth and the ongoing development of others within the organization.

Organizational Analysis

Organizations are complex, but the most effective organizations have a clear mission and vision, resources, high-quality products or services, a connection with the community, and leadership that is continuously improving (Gill, 2010). A culture of learning, developing, and changing is evident in successful organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Gill, 2010; Kofman, F & Senge, P, 1993). Bolman and Deal (2013) suggested examining organizations through the lens of the following four frames: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Each of these frames possesses a different viewpoint on the organization as a whole. Applying the four frames to my current practice as an educational leader has allowed me to evaluate and deepen my understanding of the organization and my leadership skills.

Structural Frame

From a structural standpoint, I consider rules, procedures, and norms necessary in school buildings for safety reasons, as well as overall functioning. When followers, whether teachers or students, understand their roles, responsibilities, and expectations, job performance is enhanced (Bolman & Deal, 2013). For myself, I thrive when I understand the expectations and guidelines. Across various titles and roles, I adhere to the concept every person serves a unique function within an organization, and all parties must have clarity regarding the goals, division of labor, specific duties, and the process to ensure accountability and efficiency.

Human Resource Frame

People are the focal point through the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Organizations benefit from workers who find their jobs rewarding and

meaningful (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In my opinion, it's crucial for leaders to invest in their employees by empowering individuals, providing quality professional development, and fostering a positive and healthy workplace culture. Great organizations understand the importance of treating all employees well, regardless of title, race, gender, or other demographic label (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As an educational leader, I want to continue improving upon my ability to show appreciation for staff members and to promote diversity and acceptance. I believe in the power of positivity and how a simple act of kindness or appreciation can be incredibly impactful for an individual. In my experience, all members of an organization have different strengths, but it takes the combination of skills and backgrounds working together to yield a successful workplace.

Political Frame

Power and resources are major components of the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013). During my 10 years in education, I have worked alongside some leaders who abused their power and used personal agendas to promote self-interests. However, I have also witnessed productive conflict which led to new ideas and better ways to operate our school district. I have experienced times when resources were plentiful and times when resources were scarce. As changes occurred in top administration, transformations trickled down to school buildings and personnel. As funding sources flourished, new and innovative programs emerged, but when the money was no longer rolling in, programs were eliminated. Although the political lens is my least favorite to consider, I have learned the following: change is inevitable in education, educational organizations are highly reactive, and flexibility and adaptability are important. Before entering this

program, I had no interest in educational politics, but now I regularly watch our school board meetings and stay abreast regarding district and state issues.

Symbolic Frame

Through the symbolic frame, images, stories, and rituals shape the organization's character and culture (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As I reflect upon this particular frame, I recall the writing portion of the entrance exam for the doctoral program which specifically related to a principal preparing to change the school's mascot and logo while receiving no input from stakeholders. This exact incident took place in my educational career. While transforming the mascot or logo may seem like a minor adjustment, it was the tradition and meaning behind the symbol that caused some resistance for change. The stories and culture tied to the symbol involved emotions and a tradition that some didn't want to relinquish. As new leadership decided, the logo was changed without feedback from stakeholders, and a sense of the organization's culture was lost. This experience has stuck with me and allowed me to see the importance of obtaining feedback, maintaining a team-oriented approach to leadership, and rallying stakeholders to support initiatives.

Leadership Theory and Style

With new research, updated technology, and a fluctuating financial situation, schools are constantly changing. Schools today not only compete against one another for sports, but also for attendance, test scores, graduation rates, and lower discipline numbers. With the stakes higher, school leaders must continuously reevaluate and lead with change in mind. I found Kotter's (2011) suggestions for leading change in alignment with my own personal leadership style. A vision is necessary for

implementing changes in an organization, but communicating the vision and having support from staff members is just as important as creating a vision (Kotter, 2011).

I prefer a team-oriented approach to leadership, especially when considering making changes in an organization; it takes a team for a school building to function as a well-oiled machine. Leaders gaining support from followers is crucial to the success of any change initiative. Followers must understand the vision, buy in, and be empowered to take action steps that lead to positive changes within the organization. This cohort and dissertation process has encouraged me to strongly consider issues from others' perspectives, especially those which differ from my own. Because of the University of Missouri's Educational and Leadership Policy Analysis program, I embrace working with staff members who have opposing viewpoints and ideas as the dialogue has led to a holistic examination of workplace issues.

Policy Analysis

Policies exist to provide a road map of rules, regulations, requirements, and expectations (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). In essence, policies provide guidance and structure while protecting rights of individual parties (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). Policies can stem from the federal government, the state of Missouri, our local school board, or the school building itself. Bardach and Patashnik (2016) claimed, and I agree, policy creation, implementation, and modification result from problems that surfaced. When a problem presents itself in an organization, a policy assists in ensuring a proper process for handling the situation. Newly exposed problems including bullying, employee leave time, and attendance for students have initiated updated policies within our school district.

Current Policy Issues

Bullying has become an extremely hot topic in the world of education. State and local laws, along with school district policy changes, have emerged in an effort to increase students' safety and avoid a potential lawsuit. Our district has detailed procedures on handling bullying issues. Timelines for action and documentation procedures have become stricter in the last year. Last spring, I was a member of our district's volunteer committee which discussed how our school buildings were handling bullying reports. We also researched anti-bullying computer programs to be used for improvement of our tracking process. Results of this committee were analyzed, and our Board of Education recently approved purchasing an online tracking program to ensure bullying reports are processed consistently throughout our district.

Employee leave time is a particularly important issue for personnel within our district. Last year our district made changes to combine sick days and personal days into one category of employee leave days. The former policy also stated employees must use at least two personal days as they would not be rolled over to the next school year. It did not take long for our human resources director to realize this policy was encouraging personnel, who may have otherwise not missed any work days, to be absent from work two days during the school year. Furthermore, common sense tells us students learn better from their certified teachers rather than substitutes, so this policy quickly became a topic to reconsider for the upcoming school year. Consequently, all employee leave days being rolled over to the next school year was recently approved by our Board of Education.

School attendance is another problem in Missouri that has prompted a policy change. Missouri law states students must be enrolled in school and attend 90% of school year (Definitions for School Report Card Pages, n.d.). As attendance in our district gradually declined, the superintendent kicked off a new campaign initiative, encouraging all stakeholders to assist in getting at least 90% of students to school 90% of the time. This updated policy informed parents of school attendance being calculated by the minute rather than day with hopes of students attending partial days even when personal appointments are scheduled. Our district contracted with the local police department and acquired officers to visit students and parents who school administration deemed a truancy concern. Falling short of the 90% of students at school 90% of the time or more this past school year, and working in conjunction with community organizations, our Board of Education approved an updated attendance policy for the upcoming school year. The new policy is suggesting to strive for only missing five days of school in a school year as research indicates there is a direct relationship between consistent school attendance and student learning (London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016).

Approach to Analyze Policies

Bardach and Patashnik (2016) presented an eight-step approach to policy analysis. First, the problem should be defined and understood, but then steps of acquiring evidence, creating alternatives, choosing criteria, projecting outcomes, considering trade-offs, and making a decision should take place before sharing the story (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). In relation to the above three policy issues, I think our district could improve upon making changes to policies in a systematic method. At times, policy

modifications appear to be made in a rushed manner with little feedback from stakeholders. Significant issues that may result in a lawsuit seem to entail a more thorough policy analysis process. Other times, small committees are formed to problem-solve and analyze the policy. In these situations, I question if we consistently have the right people at the table when examining policies. I think it is important to incorporate key players of the organization, including those with challenging viewpoints. Establishing a group with the right people helps to keep potential biases at bay and provide different perspectives from those with various backgrounds (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Legal issues in education arise rapidly and can change quickly. In my last three years of administration in public education, I have experienced some of the latest issues that have, or soon will, require an established policy. From social media to transgender bathroom issues to concussions and practice rules, policies provide guidance and direction for individuals within an organization (Bardach & Patashnik, 2016). I think it is imperative for educational leaders to become involved in policy issues, which is why I regularly watch our school district's board meetings and work sessions via live streaming. From the comfort of my home, I can tune in to the board meeting discussions and stay up-to-date with many policy-related issues. I always learn something new from listening in on the discussion. In addition, I regularly attend professional development opportunities regarding policy issues. I recently attended the Great Northwest Leadership conference in Maryville which included a speaker on current legal issues. Furthermore, I belong to a professional leadership organization which provides monthly articles related to policy changes in education.

Content and Context for Learning

Adults are constantly learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014; Nonaka, 1994). As a matter of fact, I just accessed the Internet to learn the quickest route for my family's summer vacation. With technology, multiple resources are readily available for acquiring knowledge with minimal effort. Learning today seems to occur almost without thoughtful intention, as society has adapted to the wealth of knowledge conveniently at our fingertips. Whether to achieve a specific goal, research a particular topic, or learn about current events, access to new knowledge simply requires motivation to learn (Merriams & Bierema, 2014). Adults, just like students, have diverse learning styles (Gill, 2010).

Learning Styles

Gill (2010) suggested understanding your own personal style of learning to better assist others in learning how to learn. I prefer to learn by watching or listening, and then doing. When learning the Cha Cha Slide for an upcoming middle school dance, I preferred to watch a video and play it repeatedly while I practiced simultaneously. I appreciate coaching that provides guidance along the way, but if I do not tackle the task myself, I do not grasp the concept as well. A few months ago, I needed to execute a unique report on our district's computer program, PowerSchool, for a work-related task. I asked the secretary for assistance and knowing my personal learning style, she coached me through the process on my computer. I made all the clicks with her instructing me through the process. I have found forcing myself to jump in and learn a new task is the best way for me to remember how to complete the task again in the future. Perhaps a variation of this learning approach will be transferable to others in the field.

As an educational leader, it is crucial to recognize followers have different learning styles (Gill, 2010). There is no one-size-fits-all approach to learning; followers should be exposed to different learning methods (Gill, 2010). Not only does this appeal to the diverse learning approaches of the followers, it also provides instructional strategies for teachers to consider incorporating into the classroom. Teachers, too, must be sensitive to the different learning styles in the classroom.

Establishing a Culture of Learning

Effective organizations establish a culture of learning (Gill, 2010). During my past 10 years in education, I have encountered a strong learning culture and a weak learning culture. From my experience, the leadership sets the tone for the level of adult learning that takes place within an organization. Under quality leadership, I participated in individual learning activities, partner and team collaboration, discussions in various settings, whole organization learning, and structured professional development opportunities. During school years with weak leadership, if any learning occurred at all, it took place in isolation with self-interest being the only motivator. I think adult learning is important in all organizations, but essential in education.

How does an organization create an effective learning environment? First and foremost, I think leaders who understand the importance of adult learning is key. In addition, for teachers to be receptive to adult learning in an organization, they must respect the leader. In my opinion, no one wants to learn from someone they do not respect. Leaders must be willing to not only communicate the importance of ongoing learning, but to create time and space for learning opportunities (Ettling, 2012). Effective leaders who support and encourage adult learning provide structured activities and allow

time for collaboration in various forms (Ettling, 2012). Followers should serve as resources to each other and encourage one another's growth. Leaders in effective learning organizations serve as role models by listening to others and being open to new ideas. In a successful adult learning environment, trust is established between the leader and followers, and a candid dialogue exists between all staff members without reservations.

Leaders must communicate how taking risks is acceptable in learning. Failure is a great learning method. Learning from mistakes allows us to continuously perfect our craft. In my first year of administration, I struggled with phone calls from frustrated parents which is a reoccurring event for an administrator. It took repeated practice for me to understand that often times a parent just wants to be heard. Sometimes parents need to express their frustration before they can accept and process the problem. Typically, the situation frustrates the parent, and it has nothing to do with me personally. After several failed attempts of handling phone calls of this nature, I learned to be more patient and listen. With feedback from my supervisor and personal reflection upon my past failed attempts, I have learned to take my time with parents who are upset.

Feedback and reflection are crucial factors in adult learning (Gill, 2010). I consider feedback essential in facilitating adult learning; adults need to be made aware of strengths and weaknesses. I think it is beneficial in an organization to gain feedback from multiple sources, if possible. In my experience, open, honest, and direct communication in an individual setting with a teacher has prompted reflection and growth, as well as great follow-up conversations. Throughout my entire adult life, I have blossomed from feedback. It can be reassuring, motivating, thought-provoking, and

tremendously useful in encouraging constant growth and development. Conversations may be somewhat awkward or difficult if there is no established relationship. I strive to build relationships before having tough conversations. Once followers know you care and truly have not only their best interest, but the organization's best interest in mind, conversations are more comfortable.

Conclusion

My biggest takeaway from the cohort experience is that I have been stretched to consider all ideas from various perspectives. I have grown from working with professionals who have different experiences. My appreciation for diversity in all settings, not just workplace issues, has multiplied. In everyday life, I now naturally consider situations from different angles. Careful attention to various perspectives gives me balance and a foundation for making decisions in a fair and equitable manner.

Thinking back on President Harry S Truman's quote, "It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit" (McKee, 2016, p. 51), my way of thinking has transitioned from an individual to a holistic perspective. Quite honestly, my selfish ways and biases have been exposed. The cohort experience has humbled me to be a valuable member of a team with no need for individual recognition. In the end, it does not matter who completed each individual task. The people and the process are important. Quality leadership and successful organizations are about collaboration and teamwork. What makes a difference is how the team worked together to move the organization to a higher level of functioning.

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Appendix A

Participant Cover Letter

Date: _____

Dear Participant:

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding middle school co-teaching. This study, titled *A Middle School Co-Teaching Program Evaluation in One Suburban Midwestern School District: Perceptions From Regular Education Co-Teachers, Special Education Co-Teachers, and Building Administrators*, is being conducted as a research project in the University of Missouri's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program as part of the dissertation requirements. The following information is provided to assist you in making an informed decision on participation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate perceptions of co-teachers and administration related to how collaboration impacts co-teaching at middle schools. This study will gain feedback and insight into middle school co-teaching which will be used as part of a program evaluation. Your feedback on middle school co-teaching will be valued and greatly appreciated.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and no compensation will be provided. As a participant, you will be asked to provide your thoughts and/or opinions in a focus group setting or individual interview, as well as complete a short survey. The focus group and interviews will be audio recorded and sent to an online transcription service, (<https://www.rev.com>), for a transcribed document of the conversation. However, if you elect to not be audio recorded, please notify the researcher of this

request. Focus group members will be asked to maintain confidentiality of other participants' identities and expressed communication. Information you disclose during the focus group being released by other participants is a potential risk. If you wish to refrain from the focus group due to the possibility of your feedback being exposed, an individual interview with the same questions will be offered at a later date.

If you choose to participate in the study, your identity and input will be kept confidential. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity and place of employment. The school will be referred to as "Drake School District" and all four middle schools will be referred to as "North," "South," "East," and "West" to ensure confidentiality. If you agree to participate in this research study, you will be required to sign an informed letter of consent beforehand. A copy of the consent form will be provided to all participants.

You may withdraw from participation at any time, including during the focus group or interview. Furthermore, if after participation you decide you do not want your input included in the study, please contact the researcher immediately and your feedback will be excluded. If you have additional questions or concerns, you may contact the researcher, Ashly McGinnis, at 816-752-6045 or by email: eashly80@yahoo.com. You may also contact the University of Missouri IRB at 573-882-9585.

Thank you for your consideration,

Ashly McGinnis, University of Missouri Doctoral Candidate

Appendix B

CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Researcher's Name(s): Ashly McGinnis

Project Number: 2009641

Project Title: A MIDDLE SCHOOL CO-TEACHING PROGRAM EVALUATION IN ONE SUBURBAN MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT: PERCEPTIONS FROM REGULAR EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, SPECIAL EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, AND BUILDING ADMINISTRATORS

This consent may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the investigator or the study staff to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This research is being conducted to understand the perceptions of co-teachers and administrators pertaining to co-teaching at middle schools. When you are invited to participate in research, you have the right to be informed about the study procedures so that you can decide whether you want to consent to participation. This form may contain words that you do not know. Please ask the researcher to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

You have the right to know what you will be asked to do so that you can decide whether or not to be in the study. Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to be in the study if you do not want to. You may refuse to be in the study and nothing will happen. If you do not want to continue to be in the study, you may stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

This research is funded by Ashly McGinnis

WHY IS THIS STUDY BEING DONE?

The purpose of this research is to understand the perceptions of co-teachers and administrators pertaining to co-teaching at middle schools.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL BE IN THE STUDY?

About 15 people will participate in this study at the University of Missouri.

WHAT AM I BEING ASKED TO DO?

You will be asked to participate in a focus group or individual interview. You will also be asked to complete a brief anonymous survey. All information will be kept confidential by the researcher.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THE STUDY?

This study will take about one hour to complete. You can stop participating at any time without penalty.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

Benefits of participating in this study may include allowing perceptions of middle school co-teaching to be known and a possible recommendation for a program change, if deemed appropriate and necessary.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There is a possible risk of colleagues using the disclosed information during the focus group and breaking confidentiality, resulting in an embarrassment or conflict. No other risks have been identified.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF BEING IN THE STUDY?

There is no cost to you.

WHAT OTHER OPTIONS ARE THERE?

You also have the option of not participating in this study, and will not be penalized for your decision.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information produced by this study will be stored in the investigator's locked file and identified by a code number only. The code key connecting your name to specific information about you will be kept in a separate, secure location. Information contained in your records may not be given to anyone unaffiliated with the study in a form that could identify you without your written consent, except as required by law.

In addition, if audiotapes taken during the study that could identify you, then you must give special written permission for their use. In that case, you will be given the opportunity to view or listen, as applicable, to the audiotapes before you give your permission for their use if you so request.

There is a possible risk of colleagues using the disclosed information during the focus group and breaking confidentiality, resulting in an embarrassment or conflict.

WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

You will receive no payment for taking part in this study.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study.

You will also be informed of any new information discovered during the course of this study that might influence your health, welfare, or willingness to be in this study.

A participant's participation may be terminated by the investigator without regard to the subject's consent if a participant becomes volatile and/or aggressive during the focus group or interview.

WHO DO I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS, CONCERNS, OR COMPLAINTS?

Please contact Ashly McGinnis if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the research.

WHOM DO I CALL IF I HAVE QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS?

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research and/or concerns about the study, or if you feel under any pressure to enroll or to continue to participate in this study, you may contact the University of Missouri Campus Institutional Review Board (which is a group of people who review the research studies to protect participants' rights) at (573) 882-9585 or umcresearchcibr@missouri.edu.

You may ask more questions about the study at any time. For questions about the study or a research-related injury, contact Ashly McGinnis at 816-752-6045.

A copy of this Informed Consent form will be given to you before you participate in the research.

SIGNATURES

I have read this consent form and my questions have been answered. My signature below means that I do want to be in the study. I know that I can remove myself from the study at any time without any problems.

Subject

Date

Participant Informed Consent Form

I, _____ (please print), agree to participate in the program evaluation study conducted by Ashly McGinnis, doctoral student in the University of Missouri's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program. This study will benefit Drake School District middle schools and other professionals in the field of education by providing data related to middle school co-teaching and collaboration. I understand the following guidelines:

1. Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants do not have to answer questions that make them feel uncomfortable. Participants may end the discussion and leave at any time. There will be no payment or incentive for participation in this study.
2. There are no known risks or benefits involved in participation of this study.
3. Interviews and the focus group discussion will be audio recorded. The audio recordings will be transcribed using Rev.com, an online transcription service. These transcribed document will be used for data analysis in this research study. All discussions will be kept confidential and no actual names will be identified in any report.
4. Survey data will be kept confidential. Names will not be necessary for participation in the survey.
5. Questions pertaining to this study may be directed to Ashly McGinnis via email (eashly80@yahoo.com) or phone (816-752-6045).

Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix C

Interview/Focus Group Questions

Introduction/General Information

- Please share your current role and how many years you have been in education.
- If you are a co-teacher, please share your content area and how many years of experience you have in co-teaching specifically.
- What does co-teaching look like in your classroom or building?

Collaboration

- What does collaboration time look like in your building? How long and how often are co-teaching able to collaborate?
- If I were to walk in to a collaboration period, what would I see? What happens during this time?

Professional Development

- What, if any, professional development do you receive for co-teaching? Do you find professional development useful?
- With co-teaching in mind, what areas do you think need to be covered in professional development?
- What training should co-teachers receive before being placed in a co-teaching classroom?

Strengths and Weaknesses

- Tell me the strengths of co-teaching in your school building. What is working well?

- Tell me the weaknesses of co-teaching in your school building. If you could change something, what would you change?

Appendix D

Survey on co-teaching

1. Please describe your thoughts and opinions related to middle school co-teaching?
2. How is collaboration conducted? Please be specific. How much time is spent daily or weekly on collaboration? What does collaboration look like with co-teachers? Who is responsible for various tasks (grading, analyzing data, etc.)?
3. What professional development is provided pertaining to co-teaching? Is professional development useful? What professional development is needed for co-teaching?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching offered at your middle school?

Appendix E

Executive Summary

A MIDDLE SCHOOL CO-TEACHING PROGRAM EVALUATION IN ONE SUBURBAN MIDWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT: PERCEPTIONS FROM REGULAR EDUCATION CO-TEACHERS, SPECIAL EDUCATION CO- TEACHERS, AND BUILDING ADMINISTRATORS

Statement of the Problem

The problem in this study was a gap in the knowledge base pertaining to co-teaching within the middle schools at Drake School District (DSD). Previous research studies related to co-teaching included varied results and outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions of co-teachers and administrators related to how collaboration impacts co-teaching at the middle schools within the DSD.

This qualitative study aimed to fill the gap in the research that is currently in existence. No previous research studies on middle school co-teaching at DSD.

Conceptual Framework

Collaboration as defined by Friend and Cook (2013)

Key Variables

- Program Evaluation (Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004; Newcomer, Hatry, & Wholey, 2015)
- Professional Development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Walsh, 2012)
- Co-teaching model (Cook & Friend, 1991; Friend, 2015)

Design of the Study

Qualitative Formative Program Evaluation – Formative evaluation is a method which focuses on gathering information that ultimately leads to program improvement (Rossi et al., 2004).

Focus Groups/Interviews – Conducted with co-teachers and administrators of the middle schools at DSD (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Surveys – Sent to all co-teachers and administrators at the middle schools at DSD. Surveys have proven to be an effective technique to gain feedback from stakeholders, especially pertaining to program evaluations (Fink, 2017).

Research Question

What are co-teachers' and building principals' perceptions of co-teaching at middle school within DSD?

Research Sub-questions

1. How do co-teachers at middle schools within the DSD use collaboration?
2. How has professional development impacted co-teaching at middle schools within the DSD?
3. What are the strengths and weaknesses of co-teaching at middle schools within the DSD?

Limitations

- Researchers possess certain biases constructed by factors such as, background, culture, and experiences (Creswell, 2014).
- Sample size may not accurately reflect the perceptions of the entire population of stakeholders within the DSD middle schools.
- Not generalizable to all co-teaching settings.

Delimitations

- This study included 2017-2018 middle school administrators and co-teachers at DSD.
- Open-ended questions with follow-up probes
- Survey was reviewed, revised, and approved by an expert panel to raise content validity (Fink, 2017)
- Transcription analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)
- Open and axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016)

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because it provided critical information about DSD's middle school co-teaching. Results of this study were used to recommend changes and discover strengths and weaknesses of DSD's middle school co-teaching. Results revealed teachers' perceptions and satisfaction of middle school co-teaching. The data and information gathered support future researchers' investigations related to co-teaching, collaboration, program evaluation, and professional development.

Findings

Theme	Times Mentioned	Percentage
Professional development/training concerns	28	33%
Collaboration time concerns	18	21%
Concerns and/or confusion with roles	24	28%
Lack of admin support	6	7%
Concerns with co-teachers' relationship	7	8%
Co-teaching currently effective	2	2%

Discussion

Implications for Policy – Co-teaching allowed for students in special education to be educated in the least restrictive environment.

Implications for Practice – Ongoing professional development and training was a critical need. Co-teachers need clearly defined roles and time for collaboration for co-teaching to be successful.

Recommendations

- Provide ongoing professional development based on the work of Friend and Cook (2007; 2013)
- Revise the middle school schedule to allow time for collaboration between co-teachers.
- At the beginning of the school, administrators and co-teachers should meet to discuss co-teaching classroom dynamics, relationships, and strategies.
- Provide clear descriptions of co-teachers possible roles at the beginning of the school year for all teachers.
- Provide a visual of the six co-teaching strategies for all co-teachers.
- Provide opportunities for regular education co-teachers to become more knowledgeable in learning disabilities, accommodations, and positive behavior interventions.
- Professional development should provide role modeling examples of the six co-teaching strategies.

Immediate Recommendations at No Cost

- Administrators and co-teachers meet and discuss dynamics of the co-teaching classroom. Allow time for research of the six co-teaching strategies, reflection, and discussion.
- Administrator set meeting for co-teachers and conduct an ice breaker/relationship-builder activity. Administrator facilitates meeting as co-teachers establish ground rules, norms, and discuss/clarify roles.
- Administrators plan for co-teachers to observe ideal co-teaching classrooms within the district during planning period. Use video clips and technology as a resource.
- Administrators assign co-teachers to necessary content professional development.
- Administrators conduct observations and provide immediate feedback.
- Allow time for reflection and communication about co-teaching arrangement.

Future Research

The following suggestions are recommended for future research studies pertaining to co-teaching:

- Include action research studies with co-teaching classroom observations, mixed methods research
- Survey participants before focus groups and interviews to reduce potential influences and biases
- Use a Likert scale survey to add a quantitative component
- Include multiple researchers in the study to allow for different perspectives/viewpoints
- Research effective co-teaching classrooms and gain perceptions from stakeholders
- Research use of technology as a means for collaboration
- Study and observe successful co-teaching classrooms with exceptional professional development
- Study effective professional development models in various school district

VITA

The author of this qualitative study, Ashly McGinnis, began her college career at Highland Community College in Highland, Kansas. She earned a bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master of Science degree in Mental Health Counseling from Emporia State University. After serving as a licensed professional counselor for three years, Ashly transitioned to a special education teacher while simultaneously attending the alternative certification program through Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri. After completion of the alternative certification program, she obtained a Master of Science degree in Educational Leadership through Northwest Missouri State University and transitioned to a teacher of mathematics and algebra. Ashly is currently completing a Doctorate in Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis from the University of Missouri and working as an administrator at a high school in Northwest Missouri.