

BARRON, TAMMY LANKFORD, Ph.D. I Do as I Do and Not as You Say: How High School Co-teachers Reconcile Professional Knowledge and Beliefs with Competing Policy Directives and Expectations. (2015)  
Directed by Dr. William D. Bursuck. 234 pp.

The purpose of this study was to understand how general education teachers and special education teachers make meaning of policy and in what way these meanings influence the work of co-teaching. The type of data necessary to address the research questions could only be gained by individually asking teachers questions related to their practice and interviewing co-teachers' partners to determine individual and shared views. Asking co-teachers about their thoughts, feelings, aspirations, fears, and opinions supported the effort of trying to understand co-teachers' perspectives. Thus, a qualitative study was used to describe the experiences of 10 pairs of co-teachers across three counties, and the primary data source for this study was interviews. The conceptual framework for this study combined an interpretivist approach to understanding teachers' experiences with Bolman and Deal's meta-framework for understanding organizational behavior. Coding procedures and data analysis providing categories of information formed the basis of the emerging themes of the study. Recurring topics emerged from analysis of the data that were examined through the lens of the four frames of organizational behavior in order to understand the meaning of policy and practice in the structure of schools. Teachers discussed how they formed expectations based on cultural understandings and professional knowledge with limited administrative directives or support regarding co-teaching practice. The implications of these findings for future practice are discussed.

I DO AS I DO AND NOT AS YOU SAY: HOW HIGH SCHOOL CO-TEACHERS  
RECONCILE PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEFS WITH  
COMPETING POLICY DIRECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS

by

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A Dissertation Submitted to  
the Faculty of The Graduate School at  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro  
2015

Approved by

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This work is dedicated to my mother, Nova Jean Lankford, who showed me the importance of faith, compassion, and determination in everything worth doing in life. I cherish the unconditional love she gave and unwavering belief she had in me.  
I “won” this one for you, Mom.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation, written by Tammy Lankford Barron, has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I extend my appreciation to my doctoral committee: Dr. William “Bill” Bursuck and Dr. Marilyn Friend, thank you for taking on the role as chair of my committee and of my academic parents. Your patience, support, and care was felt equally as much as the high expectations you maintained throughout the process. Thanks for finding the best in me. Dr. Stephanie Kurttts, thank you for your encouragement and valuable insight based on your close work with teachers in the field. Dr. Carl Lashley, thank you for talking with me through the struggles, which on occasion meant arguing when necessary as my understanding, conceptualization, and passion deepen along the way.

Thank you to my Dad, James “Lefty” Lankford who taught me to be passionate about beliefs, especially in politics and religion. Thank you to my siblings, thank you for your constant support as life has proven very difficult at times for us over the last few years. Thank you to the Barron family. Shirley and Steve, thank you for your continued encouragement and the various ways you helped with Courtney. Thank you, Jennifer and Mike Williams, for cheering me onward. Thank you to Amy D. Howell for your friendship, reassuring spirit, and willingness to read my stuff when Michael and Courtney grew tired of it.

A special thanks to my sister, April Reebel, and my brother Gary Lankford. April, my life would not have taken this course without you. You, being the first one of our family to attend a university many years ago, showed me the possibilities. Thank you for setting the direction. Thank you, most of all, for continuing to remind me of Mom’s

spirit as you have become the biggest cheerleader for my success since her passing. Gary, thank you for the supportive conversations and sharing in the excitement along the way.

I have gained much from my colleagues and friends. Thank you Meg, Sheresa, Faisal, and Natsuko, for being generous with your knowledge and support. A special thanks to Margo and Fain. Margo, thanks for the great conversations and help as we jumped the final hurdles at the end of the race. Thank you Fain, for sharing the laughter and the tears throughout the journey.

Lastly, this work would not have been possible without my daughter, Courtney and my husband, Michael. Courtney, thank you for conducting an “intervention” when needed when I had been writing way too long. Most of all, thank you for making my job as Mom easy by giving me many reasons to be proud as you have grown to such a responsible, talented, loving young lady. Michael, thank you for encouraging me to begin this journey in the first place! Knowing you would be beside me made it an easy decision. Thank you for your tolerance of my ramblings about my research when it made no sense. Most of all, thank you for keeping me smiling through the process. Thank you both for offering to do whatever was needed at any given time to help me. We truly earned this one together! The never-ending two weeks are finally over!

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## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

National attention is focused on student outcomes and the gap that exists between the achievement of students with disabilities and other students. The Nation's Report Card (2011) summarizes information from the High School Transcript Study (HSTS, 2009) that connects course-taking patterns with student achievement measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This report shows that a significant difference in achievement exists between students with and without disabilities. For example, 45% of students with disabilities who graduated in 2009 completed a below standard curriculum compared to 24% of students without disabilities. Further, according to the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2, 2011), 66% of students with disabilities failed at least one course in high school compared to 47% of students without disabilities. Course failure is predictive of failing to graduate from high school; therefore, much attention must be given to the dire outcomes presented in these studies for students with disabilities (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

These data suggest that models used for delivering special education services in the past have not led to expected outcomes for students with disabilities, and so alternative models have gained ground. The condition of education report of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015) hints at an increase of inclusive practice with a report that among all students with a disability enrolled in regular schools in 2013,

61% spent 80% or more of their day in general classes compared to 46% in 1995. Also, the 2005 National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) by Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, and Levine indicated that 27% of high school students with disabilities received all of their instruction in general classrooms. Although these data are important, physical placement in general education does not necessarily mean true inclusion has been established within the classroom for students with disabilities (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey, & Williamson, 2011; McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2010).

Perhaps more importantly, the preference for inclusive practice has become more evident in legislative efforts. Advocates for social justice in education have eagerly interpreted the inference of inclusion in the law based on the philosophy that it is socially just to educate students with disabilities alongside their peers. The connection of social justice to inclusive practice is related to civil right laws that guided practices for students with disabilities in the last quarter of the 20th century (Friend, 2013). Exclusionary practices are detrimental to students in various ways, often resulting in stigmatization and poor social and academic outcomes for students.

To counter exclusionary practices, inclusive education accomplishes two desired goals: (a) creation of a socially just environment that fulfills the right to be a valued member of the school and learning community and (b) improved student outcomes through curriculum access (McLeskey et al., 2010). Despite the fact that students with disabilities are not consistently meeting the rigorous standards of today's public education system, social justice still argues that they should be welcomed members of

their school communities. The environment must be improved to support academic progress of the marginalized group of students with disabilities.

Although social justice alone would be a sufficient reason to embrace inclusion, support of inclusive practices is based on more than social justice and includes the benefits of curriculum access for academic growth. Academic goals for all students have become more rigorous in the current era of high-stakes accountability as assessment requirements have become more stringent (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2007).

Commonly known laws with an emphasis on serving students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and increased regulatory pressure for schools to show academic growth of all students offer support for more effective ways for students with disabilities to access the general education curriculum (e.g., IDEA, 2004; PL 108-446, Section 300.114(a)(2); NCLB, 2001). Federal mandates resulted in specific actions by all schools to measure the proficiency of students with disabilities, and educators began to take notice of the significant academic gaps (McLeskey, Hoppey, Williamson, & Rentz, 2004). Although the federal mandate did not require inclusive practice, some innovative educators were enthusiastic, if hasty, in their effort to create inclusive schooling to address the gap. Often such educators began to take interest in implementation of co-teaching as an inclusive practice (Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

Regulations in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) increased the rigor of the academic requirements for schools. During this time, schools addressed the federal requirements of the mandate and began the process of reporting individual student proficiency, including adding a subset to the reporting of student data to reflect students with disabilities. In

most locales, these data are used today for the purpose of evaluating the teacher as well as the school, district, and state. All categories of disability are represented by one broad sub-category to report the performance of these students. Despite some disagreement concerning the validity of all students with disabilities being treated as one group, the benefit of identifying this subset of students as a marginalized group and monitoring their progress communicates a focus on access to the curriculum for students with disabilities. For example, it has been noted that teachers' efficacy is questioned by their supervisors if students do not show progress (McLeskey et al., 2011; Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

Concurrent with the school reform efforts just outlined, debate occurred in the field of special education concerning the amount of instructional time in general education appropriate for particular students, and this debate further complicated the implementation of inclusion on a large scale. While most professionals agreed that it was important that standards and expectations remain high for students with disabilities (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Stecker, 2010; Zigmond, Kloo, & Volonino, 2009), educators disagreed as to the extent that students should be educated in the general education classroom and how they could be served effectively while there (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Roach, Salisbury & McGregor, 2002; Zigmond et al., 2009). Despite differing points of view, leaders now have embraced the overall necessity for inclusive practices and have worked diligently to improve collaboration between special and general education teachers to help all students succeed (Friend & Cook, 2013).

Today, the push for inclusion has resulted in co-teaching being an attractive special education service delivery option for teachers and administrators who see an

influx of students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Co-teaching also has gained momentum in secondary schools as administrators have re-conceptualized how to best use the skills and expertise of instructional and support faculty members due to changing definitions of highly qualified status (Dieker & Rodriguez, 2013; Rice, Drame, Owens, & Frattura, 2007; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Currently, many administrators and teachers recognize that increased student achievement can be accomplished for all students by combining the expertise of general and special educators, and so a renewed and intensive focus on co-teaching has emerged (Conderman, 2011; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Meaningful access to the same curriculum can be achieved for students with disabilities through co-teaching service delivery model (e.g., Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Deizell, 2006; Scruggs et al., 2007). The question is not whether co-teaching should be used, rather the issue is how it is to be used in various settings and how its implementation is supported or hindered.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although a comprehensive body of co-teaching research does not exist, current inquiry has identified a number of outcomes and implications specific to co-teaching in high schools, including academic and social benefits (Dieker, 2001; Zigmond, Magiera, & Matta, 2003; Murawski, 2006; Simmons & Magiera, 2007); teacher benefits by learning from each other (i.e., Murawski & Dieker, 2003; Weiss & Brigham, 2000); and the increased use of collaboration and co-planning (i.e., Parker, McHatton, Allen & Rosa, 2010; Bryant Davis, Dieker, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012).

Despite its potential benefits, three broad concerns have evolved as co-teaching has increased in middle and high schools: (a) alignment of goals of special education teachers and general education teachers in the planning process (i.e., Bryant Davis et al., 2012; Dieker & Rodriguez, 2013; Howard & Potts, 2009), (b) formal and informal policy coherence (i.e., Mastropieri et al., 2005; Russell & Bray, 2013), and (c) structures of secondary school curriculum and content (i.e., Dieker, 2001; Vaughn, Schumm, & Arguelles, 1997).

Although few in number, some studies have sought to address these concerns and provide a foundation of knowledge on which to base future research. For example, based on visits to more than 80 schools to identify the role of the special education teacher in high school science and mathematics co-taught classrooms, Dieker and Rodriguez (2013) emphasized the importance of content knowledge for special education teachers and skills in the differentiation of instruction for general educators. In their discussion, Dieker and Rodriguez suggest that content knowledge be formalized prior to co-teaching. The researchers also noted the relationship between teacher content knowledge and the co-teaching approach observed. Approaches (such as teaming) that directly support students in co-teaching classrooms are emphasized but are described as being rarely implemented. Although Dieker and Rodriguez support the use of teaming as a way to help students employ reasoning and make sense of complex concepts, they expressed concerns about the model's feasibility. Nonetheless, their points about the value of content expertise and of the ability to differentiate instruction resonate. Unfortunately, the value added of such factors has yet to be studied.

In another study referred to in middle schools, McDuffie, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2009) addressed content specific gains in co-taught classrooms. Students in co-taught classes statistically outperformed students in non-co-taught classes on basic knowledge acquisition of science. However, the study did not find growth in the learning of more complex content. Unfortunately, the study did not consider the fidelity with which co-teaching was implemented, and limited measures were used to check the fidelity of peer tutoring that was part of the intervention. One conclusion of the study was that a broader and more systematic study of the nature of co-teaching was needed.

To date, research has not addressed how concerns with roles and expectations play out in the practice of co-teaching. Some organizations and researchers have focused on the development of instruments to evaluate co-teaching, and many of the aforementioned studies mention implications of increased rigor on co-teaching practice (Council for Exceptional Children [CEC], 2012; Cramer & Nevin, 2006; Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, & Bert, 2011; Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005). Others have focused on co-teaching as the primary vehicle for inclusion and have noted a lack of fidelity of implementation and revealed questions of how to manage time and resources during implementation (Friend, 2013; Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

Despite these efforts, research could not be located concerning how teachers make sense of explicit policy messages that may be in conflict with their philosophical views, their professional knowledge, and their perception of the purpose of co-teaching. For example, how do co-teachers make sense of policies regarding class size and how students are scheduled in co-taught classes? Do they deviate from the standard given at

the state level and advocate for smaller classes that are heterogeneously formed in their school based on what they know as best practice when co-teaching? No studies could be found that addressed the interplay of formal and informal policy and practice in the co-taught setting, although many have mentioned that research should address this issue (Russell & Bray, 2013; Scruggs et al., 2007).

Another example to consider is how teachers approach their work in the co-teaching classroom if they believe strongly that co-taught classes are not for everyone and support this belief by knowledge of the continuum of services for students with disabilities when the county in which they work interprets least restrictive environment (LRE) to mean all students will be included in the co-taught classes at the high school level. Including students with moderate to severe disabilities, who are on an occupational course of study, in the co-taught classroom when it goes against a teacher's beliefs may influence the perspectives of these teachers and how they feel about their co-teaching work. This also has not been addressed in the current literature. What is demonstrated in the literature is that frustration and a high turnover rate of teachers at the secondary level of instruction often occurs in special education (Roth & Tobin, 2005). Research can help determine if policy issues, such as those described above and others, are factors in such situations.

In addition to the problems just noted, a review across all related studies shows the limited research available also lacks use of a strong theoretical framework. Hence, this study addresses the significant gap in the knowledge base necessary to further the successful implementation of co-teaching. It sought to juxtapose current laws and

regulations related to co-teaching with current classroom practice using a social justice paradigm and an organizational behavior theory lens. By doing this, the current study sought to determine underlying policy factors that support or hinder the implementation of co-teaching.

A written policy analysis was completed to determine what directives are available to teachers regarding co-teaching in their setting and how observed co-teacher behaviors aligned with these directives. The current study addressed how co-teachers reconcile expectations and regulations with their professional knowledge and beliefs about appropriate education for students with disabilities in high schools. How co-teachers make meaning of complex policy messages, given their professional knowledge and beliefs about inclusive education, may uncover potential cultural levers that support or hinder co-teaching practice.

The use of social justice as a theoretical framework allowed the researcher to take on a broad worldview that shaped the guiding assumptions and construction of procedures (Ponterotto, Mathew, & Raughley, 2013). An organizational framework by Bolman and Deal (2013) also was used through each step of the study from conceptualization to analysis of data and production of implications in order to understand the meaning of policy and practice in the structure of schools. The study comprised three research questions concerning knowledge, practice, and beliefs of co-teachers:

1. What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementing co-teaching?

2. What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?
3. How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching?

### **Descriptive Characteristics and Terminology**

Clarity of terminology is essential for rigorous research. For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

*Inclusion:* Although inclusion is often thought of as the practice for integrating students with disabilities into general education classrooms, it is far more than physical location in a school. Inclusion includes physical integration, social integration, and instructional integration (Friend & Bursuck, 2015), the belief that all students are full members of the school (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009; Salisbury, Roach, Strieker, & McGregor, 2003). Inclusive education occurs in the general education classroom whenever possible, and students have access to and make academic progress with regard to the general education curriculum. Many educators agree that instruction delivered in inclusive classrooms should be based on students' present abilities rather than their disabilities, and appropriate supports often can be delivered in the general education classroom. It can take various forms in schools. Friend and Bursuck (2015) prefer the term inclusive practice because it reflects the complex nature of inclusiveness and the multiple strategies involved to integrate students into their learning communities.

*Co-teaching:* Co-teaching is a service delivery option that supports inclusive practice in which teaching occurs primarily in a single shared classroom. General education teachers and special education teachers share instructional and related responsibilities for all or a small part of the school day. All students are full members of their co-taught class. Co-teaching is, first and foremost, the mechanism through which students with disabilities get their required specially designed instruction, and it facilitates the blending of teachers' complementary expertise to benefit all students in the classroom. Further, it provides opportunities to vary content presentation, scaffold learning of new concepts, and closely monitor students' understanding (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). Co-teachers' participation may vary as there is no set amount of time or workload required of each teacher. Co-teaching requires three components: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing. If any one of the components are missing, teachers are unlikely to truly co-teach (Murawski & Lochner, 2011).

*Specially designed instruction:* The expertise and professional knowledge of the special education teacher is specially designed instruction. IDEA describes this type of instruction as the ability to adapt content, methodology, pedagogy, and delivery of instruction to address the needs of students with disabilities to ensure access of the child to the general curriculum in order to meet rigorous education standards that apply to all students (IDEA, 2004.300.39(b)(3)). It is important to note that this does not merely mean making appropriate accommodations and modifications for students based on their individual education plans (IEPs); rather, it encompasses the entirety of the professional

knowledge and skills unique to special educators from their teacher preparation programs and experience in the field.

*Formal policy:* For the purpose of this study formal policy means all official written directives from governing bodies that relate to implementation of co-teaching. This includes laws, directives, and letters of guidance including federal and state directives that impact implementation of co-teaching.

*Informal policy:* Unwritten policy consist of rules and interpretation of formal policy that exist within the culture of the school that affect what teachers do and how they make meaning of co-teaching in their setting. In this study, informal policy includes, but is not limited to, perceptions of teaching roles and responsibilities, administrative directives regarding co-teaching implementation and how teachers are assigned, and school-based understandings of expectations regarding co-teaching.

*Organization behavior theory (OBT):* This study uses the simplistic definition described by Kouzes and Posner (2012) of OBT as the interface between human behavior and the characteristics of the organization.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Teachers today work in an environment that holds them accountable for student achievement. At the same time, the number of students with disabilities in their classrooms has steadily increased (NCES, 2015). Many schools have implemented co-teaching as the preferred practice to build inclusive schools and best meet the academic needs of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Friend & Cook, 2013). Much has been learned concerning best practices regarding serving students with disabilities in general education, especially in elementary schools (Friend & Bursuck, 2015). Studies of implementation in secondary education have uncovered unique characteristics based on organizational structures and the rigor of academic material specific to high schools (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). Co-teaching in high schools also requires special attention because of differences in contextual factors (Cramer, Liston, Nevin, & Thousand, 2010; Murawski, 2015; Zigmond & Kloo, 2009).

Much can be learned when applying a theoretical framework to the body of knowledge of co-teaching current in the field. Specifically, application of two theoretical perspectives as the basis of co-teaching research is informative and necessary to fully understand the nuances of practice (a) education for social justice and (b) Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames of organizations. A social justice paradigm illuminates the importance of co-teaching as a means of addressing injustice and exclusionary practice

within inclusive classrooms. An organizational framework provides a structure to understand how systems and cultural dynamics affect implementation of an innovative practice. Further, examining the interaction of organizational behavior with a social justice paradigm can aid in the application of such structures in research.

The dearth of evidence related to secondary co-teaching and the influence of policy on it represents a significant gap in the existing knowledge base. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear conceptual framework informed by relevant theory and to apply knowledge gleaned from the current literature to provide a rationale for this study. The particulars of formal and informal policy directives and administrative expectations that relate to co-teaching are highlighted, in addition to the knowledge base regarding students' academic and social outcomes in co-taught settings.

Additionally, this chapter explicates the reliance on co-teaching in secondary settings, including the increase use as a supportive mechanism for inclusive practice and highlights the unique issues related to content, structure, and diversity in the high school setting.

### **Framework for Understanding the Intersection of Co-teaching and Policy**

Social justice and an organizational framework offer a combined lens that can be used to interpret the concepts presented in this study. *Social justice* is a phrase used by researchers and educators in various ways to address the general notion that diversity should be celebrated and learning communities should include all stakeholders. It can be found in mission statements, policy reform proposals, and research articles. Sometimes such broad use of a term can lead to an imprecise definition. To counter this problem, the

technical meaning of social justice within this study is discussed. Similarly, clarifying the critical characteristics of Bolen and Deal's organizational framework and applying it to the co-teaching environment helps conceptualize the purpose of this study.

### **Social Justice Theory**

Social justice theory is mentioned repeatedly in the special education literature as well as in the literature of a wide range of fields (e.g., McKenzie et al., 2008; Borrero, 2009; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; North, 2006). This has resulted in a somewhat vague interpretation of the term and has caused controversy regarding its precise definition (Bieler, 2012; Hytten & Bettez, 2011).

In fact, much has been written regarding the lack of a specific definition of social justice. One professional education organization described social justice as a goal, a theory, a stance, pedagogy, a process, and a framework (Banks, 2009). Zeichner (2009) describes social justice as an ambiguous term used to describe a disposition. Novak (2000) argues that social justice is used with an assumption that people will infer what is meant by the term. The difficulties of defining social justice may be due to the term's use to support divergent political endeavors.

Despite the confusion, or perhaps because of it, some researchers have sought to advance the knowledge base for social justice by defining and identifying its appropriate use. For example, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) described social justice as a theory of practice and teacher preparation made up of equity of opportunities, respect for social groups, and acknowledgment of tensions within learning communities. North (2006) used social justice theory to conduct a discourse analysis of high school English teachers'

lesson plans over a three-year span. A limitation of the study was that he only examined written lesson plans so elaboration of teachers' thinking was not possible. Despite this limitation, North suggests that hidden oppression was evident when lesson plans were examined with the social justice lens. These studies demonstrate that social justice includes creating diverse learning communities and identification of oppression. In schools, systemic oppression restricts access and is sometimes pervasive, hierarchical, and complex (Young, 2011).

Understanding oppression helps researchers clarify how justice is measured and how socially just practice in education would look concerning students with disabilities. Political theory helps identify how hidden oppression operates at various levels within schools and informs the need for social justice advocacy. Leaders are called to reject ideologies and practices based in traditions that are often biased (Cooper, 2009).

In efforts to create a vision for just schools, L. R. Carlisle, Jackson, and George (2006) offered a model of social justice built on five principles. A socially just school would (a) promote inclusion, (b) hold high expectations for all students, (c) develop community relationships, (d) involve a system wide approach, and (e) entail direct social justice education and intervention. Such a vision gives direction to school reform that would hold educators to a higher standard than traditional practice and create a culture that would support inclusive practice of students with disabilities.

Extending the knowledge base beyond education, Hytten and Bettez (2011) reviewed related studies to identify how social justice is used in research across diverse fields of study, identifying strands that describe how social justice theory is applied.

Strands enabled these researchers to categorize commonalities and differences of use and thus contributed to an understanding of what social justice is and why it is important.

The strands Hytten and Bettez (2011) noted are these: philosophical, practical, ethnographic narrative, theoretically specific, and democratically grounded. The philosophical and theoretically specific knowledge strands allow a deeper understanding of social justice in the context of co-teaching. Within these strands, Hytten and Bettez focus on political theory, which is particularly relevant to this study.

**Political theory and social justice.** Political theory adds precision to the defining characteristics of social justice. Political theorist Young (2011) connects social justice with social interactions and relations and explains it can be used to articulate and defends ideas and principles. Political theory places social justice in the context of norms and underlying assumptions within institutional rules and the consequences of following those rules. The choices people make are informed by the perceived consequences or results. In this way, oppression can grow in an organization when informal or unwritten policies dictate how others are treated. School leaders recognize the importance of focusing on school culture when considering a paradigm shift because of the connection between power in an organization and beliefs of its members. Young focuses on defining oppression to identify contributing elements in an organization. Oppression results in the creation of powerlessness of certain groups through exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, and violence. Some or all of these characteristics can operate within various systems and levels of an organization and allow oppression to be hidden within the context of institutional rules.

Awareness of oppression often is limited and internalized, which results in hidden injustice within a system (Ottesen, 2013). Creating a socially just school requires a change in the approach to educating students from diverse backgrounds; however, social justice is not just about theories and expectations. Educators need specific skills to make a socially just environment a reality in the classroom. For example, educators must have the ability to be reflective in order to analyze and act on teacher-generated research data, be able to collaborate in order to build relationships, be effective at arranging learning environments, and be proficient in using technology as a learning tool.

Further, Grant and Gillette (2006) observed that teachers need to be culturally responsive in the classroom, know themselves and be open to change, hold a well-developed philosophy of education, and have substantial pedagogical content knowledge to maintain a multicultural educational psychology that connects education to the world outside of school. Such a paradigm shift requires knowledge of the change process schools must embrace to become socially just. It is well known that general educators and special educators enter the profession of teaching with noble intentions. Many possess a desire to educate students and help them reach their full potential. Fullan (2007) makes the point that there exist barriers in the system of schools that hinder the mission of many teachers to make a difference in children's lives.

Teachers rely on learned pedagogy and meaningful curriculum to accomplish their goals in the classroom; however, they often must address challenges related to bureaucratic issues, financial concerns, and policy directives (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011). Many of these issues require teachers to contend with ever changing

and endless policies, procedures, and paperwork. Given the strenuous working conditions teachers face, a study that encompasses not only what teachers do but how they align pedagogy and policy to work within the organization to achieve the goal of educating students with disabilities in general education classes is worthy of careful examination.

### **Four Frames of Organizations**

Little need for organizational behavior concepts existed in the early years of education when individuals and communities mostly managed the educational structure and practice of the local school. The proliferation of complex organizations has made most enterprises including businesses, government agencies, schools, and churches more formalized than they once were (Bolman & Deal, 2013). As schools have become more interconnected and organizationally complicated, consideration of a framework to understand their complex nature and anything that occurs within is warranted. Kouzes and Posner (2012) describe an organization as an entity that can provide opportunities and support to workers within to accomplish extraordinary things. It is important that we carefully examine how these opportunities and supports are given in schools.

A framework is key to this effort because it adds understanding of the issues within an organization and supports innovative solutions. The four frames model developed by Bolman and Deal (2013) has been described as a meta-framework because it consolidates major schools of organizational thought and research into one comprehensive framework that includes four distinct perspectives. The four frames are

structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. In essence, Bolman and Deal's organizational model requires multi-frame thinking. A brief overview of each frame gives insight into how the meta-framework can be used to gain a deep understanding of an organization.

**Structural frame.** The structural frame consists of the technology, roles, goals, and policies that make up an environment. The basis for this frame relies on two principal intellectual roots. The first is the work of industrial analysts and the second comes from sociologists and economists.

Prior studies in industry such as those of Frederick W. Taylor (1911), who was the father of time-and-motion studies, advanced the idea of task analysis. Taylor founded an approach that he labeled "scientific management" which consisted of breaking tasks into minute parts and retraining workers to get the most from each motion and moment spent at work. Other theorists who contributed to industry based on Taylor's work in an attempt to increase efficiency by breaking down task include Gulick (1937).

At the time, formal organization was a new concept and patriarchy was still the primary organizing principle. A patriarchal Patriarchal approach to management means the manager is a father figure with almost unlimited authority and boundless power to dominate the organization.who dominated in organizations. In this view, the supervisor or boss could reward, punish, promote, or fire based on personal whim. Seeing an evolution of new models in late-nineteenth-century Europe, Weber described a new idea to the field called "monocratic bureaucracy" as an ideal form that maximized norms of rationality. His model outlined several major features which include:

- A fixed division of labor
- A hierarchy of offices
- A set of rules governing performance
- A separation of personal from official property and rights
- The use of technical qualifications (not family ties or friendship) for selecting personnel

Additional work in this field of study focused on employment as primary occupation and long-term career. Later, others (i.e., Perrow, 1986) advanced Weber's ideas as they examined relationships among the elements of structure, looked closely at why organizations choose one structure over another, and analyzed the effects of structure on morale, productivity, and effectiveness.

Based on the prior work in the field, Bolman and Deal describe this frame as a blueprint for formally sanctioned expectations and exchanges among internal players (executives, managers, employees) and external constituencies (regulating agencies, and clients). Bolman and Deal describe this frame as a focus on the architecture of the organization including the design of elements and rules that determine actions. This frame is concerned with putting people in the right roles and relationships. Bolman and Deal share assumptions that support the frame including the idea that organizations exist to achieve established goals and work best when rationality prevails of personal agendas. Other assumptions include the idea that efficiency and enhanced performance can be acquired through specialization and division of labor and that coordination and control ensure that individuals and units work well together.

**Human resource frame.** The human resource frame consists of needed supports, skill development, and relationships among individuals within the organization. Bolman and Deal explain that this frame allows for a deep understanding of people. It explores their strengths, reason and emotion, desires and fears. Assumptions of this frame include that the organization exists to serve human needs including careers, money, rewards, and opportunities and that organizations need ideas, energy, and talent from its members. A good fit benefits both the individual and the organization.

**Political frame.** The political frame relates to the power, conflict, and competition found within organizations. It constitutes the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in an organization with divergent interests. Bolman and Deal focus on the organization as a competitive arena that has limited resources and competing aims. Assumptions of this frame include the idea that organizations are coalitions of different interest groups and, therefore, have different values, beliefs, information, and perceptions of reality. Other assumptions include the idea that goals and decisions emerge from negotiation among people in conflict who compete for scarce resources.

**Symbolic frame.** The symbolic frame includes the culture, meaning, rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs found within organizations. Bolman and Deal explain that this frame addresses meanings people in the organization make and places culture at the heart of the organization. The assumptions related to this frame include the idea that what is most important is not what happens but what it means for the organization and that culture forms bonds within organizations that unite people and help support the desired

goals of the organization. Additional assumptions include that meaning people make is dependent on their interpretations and that when facing uncertainty people create symbols to resolve confusion. This frame allows the organization to be seen as a constantly changing entity that is defined by its symbols including the vision, myths, and value that give it a deep purpose and resolve.

The four frames provide a multifaceted view of the organization of schools and the forming of inclusive environments that support co-teaching. Bolman and Deal (2013) explain that well-known organizational behavior theories are found within the meta-framework across some of the frames. One example is Herzberg's theory (1968). Herzberg is cited within the human resource and political frames by Bolman and Deal.

**Herzberg's equity and expectancy theory.** Herzberg's equity and expectancy theory (1966) is one among many that Bolman and Deal use to support the notion that motivation is not necessarily hierarchical and offers a way to examine how people make meaning of their environment. Herzberg's is noted as a theory that others have extended. Therefore, understanding Herzberg can deepen the understanding of the human resource and political frames in the meta-framework and the application of such framework to the study of how teachers work within the co-taught class.

Herzberg proposed a theory based on the belief that an individual's relation to work is vital and that one's perception of satisfaction can determine success or failure for the individual as well as for the organization as a whole. Herzberg is credited for recommendations that relate to continuous improvement processes and greater worker responsibility in planning and implementing innovative ideas into other people's work in

the field (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Herzberg's theory allows for understanding how teachers perceive their work within the organization of schools. Herzberg's theory enables exploration of aspects of schools as organizations and understanding how factors interconnect to influence practice and organizational health and performance.

In summary, Herzberg's theory allows us to read deeply into the most intricate aspects of the co-teaching experience related to teacher beliefs and interpretations and how they fit in the political arena described by Bolman and Deal. Combining lenses to achieve a comprehensive approach is important to understanding organizations more thoroughly. Bolman and Deal's four frames can address multiple perspectives of a complex system.

### **Inclusive Practice in Public Education**

Policies and legislation can help shape practices in special education and influence the use of inclusive practices with students with disabilities in the general education classroom. One attempt to remedy inequity within education as an organization has been the legislative precept of educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Policy has emerged at times as a supportive mechanism necessary to the implementation of improvement efforts (e.g., Cohen & Ball, 1990; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Teachers in inclusive classrooms have reported policy as one of many obstacles of implementation educational practices that would benefit students (e.g., Louis et al., 2005; Salisbury & McGregor, 2002). Incoherence of policy is linked to negative outcomes and lower student achievement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Ramanathan, 2008). Conversely, shared values

and unity of purpose have been shown to be important conditions for collaborative practice and improved student learning (Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; Price, 2012; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

### **Traditional Model of Inclusion: Social Benefits**

The first primary federal legislation that governed the education of people with disabilities began with Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and followed a decade later with the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHCA) or Public Law 94-142 of 1975. The common purpose of each law was originally derived from a civil rights perspective based on social justice principles to protect the educational rights of children and youth with disabilities. Although this legislation essentially gave birth to contemporary special education and determined that students with disabilities should be part of the education system, much work is yet to be completed to build a truly inclusive environment in schools,

Throughout the past several decades, legislation has been a catalyst for larger-scale school reform efforts that have come to include all students, including those with disabilities. For example, Madeline Will, Assistant Secretary of Education in 1986, proposed a Regular Education Initiative (REI) as an answer to concerned parents advocating for rights for their children in Title I schools. The parents' view was that, although their children were now part of the education system, that system was excluding and stigmatizing students within it. The idea was that simply being part of the education system was not sufficient and that students should be full members of their schools. Such a view resonated with many students, educators, and parents.

The advantages notwithstanding, the change was not systemic, and so students with disabilities continued to be served in separate and isolated settings in high numbers (McLeskey et al., 2011). Even so, this initiative provided a basis for a paradigm shift in how students with disabilities could be served.

### **Reconceptualization of Inclusion: Academic and Social Benefits**

The concepts in legislation continue is somewhat limited in regards to inclusive practice as we know it today. Federal law has been the basis for inclusive practice but does not directly address inclusion. In fact, it was not until the reauthorizations of federal legislation that operational statements were made concerning inclusive practices. Inclusive practices offer students the opportunity to have increased access to the core curriculum and specialized instruction in a supportive environment, resulting in improved academic outcomes (Newman et al., 2011).

Responding to the dual pressures of meeting the needs of students in special education within the context of more rigorous accountability for all students, educators made structural changes to the education system. These changes included enrolling more students in general education courses and moving special education teachers out of self-contained classes. The No Child Left Behind Act (currently ESEA) is a standards-based mandate that received bipartisan support and incorporates standardized testing to measure performance. All states are required to administer yearly assessments in reading and mathematics in grades three through eight, the results of which are publicly disseminated. Attendance rates and scores of students from subgroup categories relate to race, socioeconomic class, language, and exceptionality are used to determine if schools met

adequate yearly progress (AYP). Rewards and punishments are attached to meeting AYP goals. As a result, educators are often compelled to reevaluate how students with disabilities are being served in schools (Bryant Davis et al., 2012).

The high stakes environment created by NCLB has affected inclusive practices in that many administrators for the first time are directly accountable for students with disabilities learning specific content in reading and math. Although testing accommodations are allowed, modifications and alternate testing are no longer permitted. Table 1 shows the comparison of the two primary pieces of legislation and the differences and similarities in aims and goals of each mandate.

Table 1

Comparison of ESEA (NCLB) and IDEA as Written

|  | <b>ESEA (NCLB)</b>   | <b>IDEA</b>  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Goals and Aims</b>                    | All students meet grade level proficiency standards                                | Individual child receives a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) |
| <b>Assessments and Require Reporting</b> | Alternate Assessments<br>Annual Reports  | Alternate Assessments<br>Annual Reports—may include reports required under ESEA.                             |
| <b>Targets</b>                           | All students   | Students with disabilities   |
| <b>Levers and Incentives</b>             | Annual assessments<br>Public reporting<br>Consequences for failure to meet targets | Individual Education Plans<br>Specialized Instruction<br>Lawsuits  |

Table 1

(Cont.)

|                          | <b>ESEA (NCLB)</b>  | <b>IDEA</b>  |
|--------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Accountability</b>    | Schools held accountable for meeting AYP targets on state test for both aggregated and disaggregated student populations. | School districts and educators are held accountable for ensuring all students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment |
| <b>Pedagogical Focus</b> | Standardization   | Individualization  |

Some professionals within the field of special education believe that many that many students with disabilities can acquire academic skills in inclusive classrooms but that it could only be achieved when students with disabilities had meaningful access to the same curriculum as other students with needed supports. This professional stance led to a renewed and intensive focus on inclusive practice that includes co-teaching implementation by some schools (Conderman, 2011; Dieker & Murawski, 2003; Murawski, 2015).

**Inclusion as a preferred practice.** Although the amount of focus on inclusive practice continues to be determined by state and local rules and regulations, there is a strong insinuation that inclusion is the preferred practice. The alignment of legislative purpose between IDEA and NCLB made a stronger statement and further advanced the importance of increased access. Currently, both ESEA and IDEA are in the reauthorization process. IDEA reauthorization occurred approximately every five years

up until 2004. Ten years have passed since the last reauthorization. Debates have been raging regarding the best way to improve educational outcomes of students. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have passed legislation and are working towards a mediation process in committees to create a bill that both can agree addresses concerns regarding NCLB through reauthorization of what is now called ESEA (CEC, 2012).

### **State Policy and Guidance Regarding Inclusive Practice**

Although the aforementioned legislative efforts can be interpreted and are often used to support inclusion and co-teaching, the fact remains that the federal government has been silent in defining and implementing inclusive practices. States and districts are left with the work of interpreting and expanding on federal inferences and determining how to make students with disabilities full members of the general education classroom and meet their individual needs. States interpret *access* in IDEA and ESEA in various ways. How states infer meaning seems to matter and may help determine if co-teaching is emphasized as part of an inclusive education.

For example, Muller, Friend, and Hurley-Chamberlain (2009) collected data from State Education Authorities (SEAs) regarding the use and implementation of co-teaching as a way of providing access. Seventeen SEAs reported adopting specific terminology related to co-teaching in their regulations while ten reported creation of written guidelines pertaining to the practice of co-teaching. Regulations and guidance information differed in detail and suggested use.

In addition to similarities and differences between state data collection and guidance, issues were noted specific to the implementation of co-teaching. State personnel identified barriers related to existing regulations, including confusing guidelines on class size and make-up as well as the legal obligation to offer a continuum of placements.

Also, a lack of formal, explicit guidance and administrative leadership was noted on surveys of SEAs. Co-teaching was seen as the primary vehicle for inclusion, although SEAs noted a lack of fidelity of implementation and questions emerged regarding how to manage time and resources.

Given these issues, an analysis of written information gathered through personal communication and the websites of six states including North Carolina, Kentucky, New York, Louisiana, Virginia, and West Virginia was completed to understand context. The analysis sheds light on how states have deciphered federal policy and provide varied supports for inclusive practices. For example, it became clear that North Carolina is a state that aligns its policies with federal guidelines and, when none are explicit, little guidance is provided to local districts. Each of the other five states reviewed had specific guidelines to address interpretation of federal law unique to their state.

For example, the policies governing services for children with disabilities booklet by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI, 2014) provides insight on its position regarding co-teaching. The term *inclusion* is explicitly explained in context. The explanation of LRE requirements specifically denotes NCDPI's interpretation of the federal policy. The document reads:

The term “inclusion” does not appear in IDEA. However, IDEA assumes students with disabilities will be served and included in the general education setting, unless due to the nature and severity of their disabilities the IEP Team decides otherwise. The following are not acceptable reasons for placement decisions: Category of disability condition; configuration of the service delivery system; available of educational or related services; available of space and administrative convenience. (NCDPI, 2014, p. 24)

The absence of the term “co-teaching” in the entire 253 page document hints that support of the practice is not a priority. Also, NCDPI issued letters of guidance, which local LEAs use to determine operating procedures based on policies and/or laws on various topics, shows misunderstandings of best practice regarding co-teaching. For example, one of the letters of guidance from North Carolina indicates that up to 80% of students enrolled in a co-taught class could be students with a disability (NCDPI, 2015). This is almost three times the recommended percentage range of from twenty to 30% of the class and makes heterogeneous grouping impossible to attain (Friend, 2013). The NCDPI website also provides a video for parents and teachers that encourages the delivery of related services such as speech and occupational therapy in the natural school environment as a way to meet the LRE component of IDEA. However, there is no mention of how or where students will receive special education services.

Conversely, the components of the guidance letters of some states appear to try to align policy to practice or at least give specific actions that districts and schools should take to implement both IDEA and ESEA. Similarities can be seen by examining the guidance given by New York, Louisiana, West Virginia, and Virginia on Table 2.

Table 2

## State Guidance for Co-teaching

|   | New York  | Louisiana   | Virginia  | West Virginia  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
| Terms   | Integrated co-teaching; Direct CTT; blended class; Inclusion class  | Co-teaching; inclusion  | Co-teaching   | Co-teaching  |
| Definition  | The provision of specially designed instruction and academic instruction provided to a group of students with disabilities and non-disabled students. | Use Friend and Cook (2013) definition.                              | A service delivery option with two or more professionals sharing responsibility for a group of students for some or all of the school day in order to combine their expertise to meet student needs | Use Murawski (2015) and Friend (2013) definitions. Only uses Team teaching; Parallel teaching; Station Teaching; and alternate teaching models. - “switch roles often, switch students often, and switch approaches often” - |
| Maximum capacity of students with a disability in classroom | Not to exceed 40% of the total class register or a maximum of 12 students.  | Not to exceed 10-33% of the class register based on level of needs. | Not to exceed 14 when students are at level 1; Not to exceed 10 when students are at a level 2.   | Natural proportion for students with disabilities in the class is 25-30%.  |

Table 2

(Cont.)

|                      | New York   | Louisiana   | Virginia   | West Virginia  |
|----------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Personnel            | A sped teacher who is co-teaching in core<br>Additional supplementary personnel assigned to the class may not serve as the special education teacher | A sped teacher who is co-teaching in core academic.<br>Additional supplementary personnel | Consistently offered   | A sped teacher who is co-teaching in core academic area within the model described above must be HQ in the core content area being taught. |
|                      | Consistently offered at LEA level and school level   |   |  | TIS-SE for middle and high school sped. 40 days of pd by Office of Special Ed. Offered state, regional, local levels.                      |
| Continuum of Service | Detailed criteria amongst other related forms of specific services including “push in” consultative, and “CT” that uses para or other support staff. | Based on Level 1 or Level II needs  | Not required to be on continuum but highly recommended<br>Based on Level 1 or Level II needs | Solely up to IEP team—Not required to be on continuum but highly recommended   |

Sources: New York- State Department of Education; website April 10, 2014; West Virginia- Exceptional News Journal (2006); State Department Virginia- State Department website April 10, 2014; Louisiana state department website April 24, 2014

The letters of guidance from each state explicitly define or give reference to the definition of co-teaching provided in the operating procedures and guidelines given to special educator administrators and available on each state's website. The term *co-teaching* is defined in a way that is comparable to the most commonly used definition in the literature base, and the states make decisions about class capacities and make-up based on best practice.

Additionally, each of the five states recommend the class be a heterogeneous mix of students and limits the number of students identified with a disability to 30% or less of the class. The choice to provide limited guidance at the state level may have a negative effect on co-teaching implementation in North Carolina. For example, personnel shortages and fiscal challenges related to staffing to achieve adequate teacher-student ratios and natural proportions were seen as a major concern in Muller and Friend's study. According to Paula Crawford, Section Chief of Program Improvement and Professional Development of NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI), North Carolina has made an effort to increase professional development over the last two years to aid with co-teaching implementation with fidelity (personal communication, January 13, 2015). Despite this worthy effort, a substantial difference can be seen when comparing professional development in North Carolina to a neighboring state such as Kentucky. To illustrate this point, a close examination of actions Kentucky is taking is warranted.

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has created a Co-teaching for Gap Closure (CT4GC) initiative with monies received as part of a State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) to support implementation of co-teaching

([www.education.ky.gov](http://www.education.ky.gov), 2015). The state works closely with partners from University of Kentucky (UK) and the University of Louisville (U of L) to provide resources and training materials with an emphasis on research based practices. The initiative is comprised of a system of coaching from the state level to the classroom level including a core state team, regional consultants, district coaches and school internal coaches. In the other states noted for efforts to establish co-teaching, guidance varied in intensity.

Analyzing written policy makes it apparent that the amount and frequency of professional development is higher in states with more state-level guidance and policy. Therefore, professional development offered in the specific area of co-teaching can be seen as an indicator of policy support of the practice. For example, teachers in Kentucky had multiple venues to receive professional development from the state throughout the school year and in summer workshops. New York, West Virginia, Virginia, and Louisiana each have a system of expectation and support at the state level although they do not have the extensive coaching structure that Kentucky has established.

With little guidance from the federal government, it is no surprise that alignment of policy does not unilaterally occur in the same ways at the state level. To complicate matters, the dire financial situations of some states and the lack of federal full funding of IDEA means states have to be purposeful and passionate about aligning policy to support co-teaching while dealing with competing priorities (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lashley & Boscardin, 2003; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Dezell, 2006). When local educators face common expectations for broad policy goals they may form inaccurate interpretations based on how they prioritize expectations.

### **Implications of Formal Policy Disjointed in the Co-taught Classroom**

When alignment is not reached at the federal or state level, interpretation at the school level affects implementation of co-teaching in even more diverse ways. Crafting policy understanding in schools is a dynamic process through which teachers negotiate how to incorporate external demands into their practice and includes interpretation and responses to policies that alter their original intent (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Russell & Bray, 2013). Interpretations of policy vary by the specific roles professionals hold and influence how educators make meaning using prior practices, experiences, and worldviews (Coburn, 2003; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004).

In efforts to create coherent pedagogical practices in their classrooms, teachers may struggle with the challenges associated with implementing conflicting and unclear mandates and experienced frustration and fears that students suffered unintended consequences. For example, in an exploratory study, Russell and Bray (2013) interviewed teachers, principals, and math and literacy coordinators across 20 elementary and middle schools in six districts over the course of three years. Educators interviewed were more likely to misinterpret policies when dimensions of a policy were unclear or ambiguous as written. Many educators articulated inaccurate understandings of policy such as interpreting NCLB as a mandate for full inclusion.

Additionally, educators in the study were challenged to craft a coherent response from conflicting instructional theories of action represented in NCLB and IDEA. Many teachers expressed the concern that they had to make a choice. Specifically, it was NCLB with its clear consequences for schools, including AYP ratings that are tied to

sanctions, which took precedence. Teachers felt compelled to pressure students to meet age-based content standards that were not aligned with their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and greatly exceeded the students' present level of performance (PLOP). This practice went against professional judgment in the view of many teachers interviewed. Teachers reported worrying about possible negative results for the students reported feeling overwhelmed when alignment became largely their responsibility. In efforts to create coherent pedagogical practices in their classrooms, teachers noted the challenges associated with implementing conflicting mandates and experienced frustration and fears that students suffered (Russell & Bray, 2013).

Misinterpretation of policy has strained the capacity of local educators to coordinate and implement programs (Lee & Loeb, 2000; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Districts and schools governed by these policies may form their own policies and guiding documents that collectively cooperate to solve common problems and to help align federal mandates. As written, NCLB and the IDEA mandates can easily be seen as aligned, misinterpretation may lead to conflicting policy production and implementation of initiatives that have limited basis at the state levels. Also, while it is true that a deep understanding of the intricate details of policy can prepare administrators and teachers to leverage these policies to their benefit; it is also true that misinterpretation of policies can lead to informal policies that result in misguided rules and expectations of the school culture. Misinterpretation may lead to informal policies that further confuse the landscape in education when they are based on misinterpretation of what some consider vague federal policies (Russell & Bray, 2013).

### **Implications of Informal Policy in the Co-taught Classroom**

Informal policies address the cultural dynamics and needs of the school and are the group norms that emerge upon implementation of an initiative. For example, administrators and teachers may work together to determine which general educators are the best fit to co-teach and in which courses they are needed. Other informal policies may relate to how students are scheduled to create heterogeneous classrooms that support best practices and maximize the available faculty. Informal policies may also include respecting the co-teaching relationship so that co-teachers are not used as convenient substitutes when other courses are in need or may relate to how teachers are approached regarding the assignment of being a co-teacher. Much of the literature regarding such informal policy decisions is limited. Teacher evaluation and support provided by the administrator and district seem to be the most discussed challenges in literature that encompasses a broad range of educators.

Research based in the co-teaching context would add to the body of research that has examined meanings teachers make of policies in general terms (i.e., Russell & Bray, 2013). Additionally, the study of formal and informal policy specific to the co-teaching context allows insight into organizational structures that exist that hinder or support this effort.

### **Historical Perspective of Co-teaching as an Inclusive Practice**

Co-teaching is a service delivery option that can be used to facilitate inclusive practices with students with disabilities in general education settings (Cook & Friend, 1995). Even during the early years of co-teaching implementation, educational leaders

noted that co-teaching required co-activity and coordination to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in integrated settings (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1995). Co-teaching continues to require a collaborative style of interaction, and confusion sometimes occurs regarding terminology. In fact, the term *co-teaching* is sometimes confused with inclusion, teaming, consulting, or collaborating (Villa et al., 2005). The integrity of co-teaching as an inclusive practice is threatened when such confusion exists.

Several studies have highlighted various components necessary for maintaining successful co-teaching aligned with inclusive practice such as effective planning (Bryant Davis et al., 2012; Friend, 2013; Howard & Potts, 2009) and building a strong relationship and rapport between co-teachers (Mastropieri et al., 2005). The importance of administrative support (Dieker, 2001; Vaughn et al., 1997) and understanding of the key players and teacher roles are essential as well (Pugach & Wesson, 1995; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002; Zigmond et al., 2003).

In 2015, a report by the U.S. Department of Education revealed that 61% of students with disabilities aged 6 through 21 are educated more than 80% of the school day in general education settings (NCES, 2015). While co-teaching can foster inclusive practice, most important is re-conceptualizing it as a way of constructing an environment that supports effective academic, pre-academic, and social skill development for students with disabilities as they are increasingly educated in general education (Friend, 2013).

The definition of co-teaching described by Friend and Cook has provided a strong foundation for the practice over time. As mentioned in Chapter I, co-teaching is defined

by Friend and Cook (2013) as “a service delivery option for providing special education or related services to students with disabilities or other special needs in their general education classes” (p. 14). Keefe, Moore, and Duff (2006) add that co-teaching can be seen as a marriage that takes place between two teachers and is a blending of teaching philosophies, classroom management styles, grading systems, and personalities. This conception of co-teaching is consistent with the understanding that has evolved over the past thirty years, namely, that inclusive practice in special education is much more than a physical location to serve students. Similarly, the models of co-teaching described by Friend have endured as concrete methods of implementation in inclusive schools.

Specifically, six models of co-teaching are briefly explained in the following paragraphs. Models that are appropriate to use with a high level of frequency include parallel teaching and station teaching. These models allow for increased engagement of students through use of small and varied group formations and often minimize behavior problems while ensuring instructional intensity.

Station teaching allows for different objectives to be the focus of each station and students rotate through each station so that, in most cases, each teacher interacts with every student in the class by the end of the lesson (Friend, 2013). Other times, the stations may be developed in such a way that each student receives direct explicit instruction that supports either remedial or enhancement activities and may only rotate from an independent station to one of the co-teachers. However, each student would have their needs met by all of the activities required during the instructional time allotted.

In parallel teaching students do not rotate and instruction is based on the same objectives for the lesson but may be presented in different ways. Each teacher would take a group of the students and present the material in various ways. For example, a language arts lesson on parts of a narrative/story may be delivered simultaneously. One teacher may represent the content by first reading a story and stop to indicate the parts, such as rising action, climax, falling action as the story is read while another teacher may have present the definition of each part of the story and have students help write the specific part explained. This model allows students to be more actively engaged in a smaller group and helps the teacher address the needs of the students more easily and provide intensive instruction.

Two other models described by Friend are teaming and alternative and are recommended for occasional use for very different reasons. Teaming occurs when two teachers jointly deliver instruction to the whole instructional group. Alternative involves one of the co-teachers working with a small group of students while the rest of the group takes part in large group instruction. Teaming should be used occasionally because it requires maturity in the co-teaching relationship that can only be present when teachers are comfortable and fully trust each other. Teaming also limits the amount of interaction of the students because it is whole group instruction instead of small group; further, pacing can be problematic if teachers do not gauge their individual contributions to the content delivery. Alternative teaching should only be used occasionally because of the risk of stigmatization of students who are consistently part of a smaller group within the general classroom environment.

Finally, a model that is recommended for seldom use is one teaching, one assisting (Friend, 2013). This model has the greatest potential for overuse as one teacher teaches the lesson and one teacher assist individual students, and teachers often fall into this common pattern of working together. Obviously, the flaw in this model is that the special educator becomes a passive partner and that students do not have the benefit of two teachers who each share their unique expertise and create an inclusive environment. Friend cautions against too much dependence on this model and recommends being purposeful and using it as a means of collecting data on individual students or groups of students for relatively brief periods of time to support increased instructional intensity. In this way, the observations are a way of responding to the immediate academic or behavior needs of the students in the classroom. Scruggs et al. (2007) similarly describe the dangers of overuse of this model because it does not utilize the expertise of both teachers; one teacher is focused on content delivery (usually the general educator) while the other (usually the special educator) is relegated to the role of helping rather than teaching. One specific negative outcome may be that a student can easily become less independent and feel enabled by the assisting teacher (Friend, 2013).

Over time, the defining characteristics of co-teaching have been clarified in order to ensure fidelity of implementation. Additionally, several researchers have identified important components necessary for successful co-teaching at the high school level, including a focus on co-planning and co-assessing (Murawski, 2015). In all settings, co-teaching requires three essential components: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing (Conderman & Hedin, 2014; Friend & Cook, 2013; Murawski & Lochner,

2011). Overall, results for co-teaching have been mixed, as suggested by a review of studies related to student outcomes in secondary school implementation.

### **Student Outcomes in Co-taught Classes**

In the current co-teaching research base, benefits to students are noted primarily in non-academic domains. For example, Zigmond et al. (2003) found co-teaching resulted in increased individual attention for students. Dieker (2001) found co-teaching was linked with reduced negative behaviors. Walther-Thomas (1997) found that when students were placed in a co-taught environment they exhibited improved self-esteem and social skills and suggested this was due in part by increased time with teachers and emphasis on learning and social skills within the general education classroom.

As co-teaching became more widely implemented in the 1990s, several studies focused on student academic achievement outcomes. For example, increases in access to the general education curriculum for students resulted in increased student engagement in studies by Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend (1995); Cook and Friend (1995); and Boudah, Deshler, Schumaker, Lenz, and Cook (1997). Murawski and Swanson (2001) found that co-teaching had a small to moderate positive effect on reading and math scores of students with disabilities in co-taught classrooms.

More recently, McDuffie et al. (2009) found that middle school students in co-taught classrooms out-performed students with and without disabilities in non-co-taught classes in science when given a choice of an answer rather than open-ended question. The results of the study reaffirm the aforementioned mixed results in co-teaching research on student academic progress.

Researchers have sought to explain their results based on the complex nature of co-teaching. For example, Murawski (2006) compared students' achievement when receiving instruction in co-taught and solo-taught classes. Results were mixed and showed no significant difference for student outcomes; however, the researcher explained that the mixed results were due to the factors related to the quality of the co-teaching rather than whether they were merely in a co-taught class. Indeed, special education teachers in the study were not aware of the content to be covered in an upcoming lesson. Teachers reported that this was due to the limited available planning time. While the special education teachers were comfortable with the subjects they taught, often the details of the day's lesson were the content teacher's responsibility. The researchers argued that problems with structural supports created a great disadvantage for capitalizing on the strengths of the special education co-teacher to design instruction and use their expertise to make a meaningful contribution in the classroom.

In a similar study by Fontana and Frey (2005), academic performance for students with a learning disability (LD) in a co-taught class was examined. Students in the co-taught class were compared to students in a non-co-taught control group, and significant academic differences were found in favor of the co-taught students. However, the study focused primarily on students with learning disabilities, and so the impact on students without disabilities, an important consideration, was unknown.

A study by Hang and Rabren (2009) is an example of the positive impact of co-teaching on academic growth of students when it is implemented with fidelity. The study included 45 co-teachers consisting of 31 general educators and fourteen special educators

whose students included 58 students with an array of disabilities in grades 1-10. Data were gathered using surveys, observations in the co-taught classes, and a review of student records. Students with disabilities in the co-taught classes improved significantly academically to nearly matching the achievement of non-disabled peers.

To understand the social and academic impact of co-teaching, another study by Conderman and Hedin (2012) was conducted that examined co-teachers' perspectives and student perspectives in one middle school classroom. Mixed results were obtained regarding student and teacher perspectives with students reporting that they felt they had more opportunities to ask for help because there were two teachers but also expressing that two teachers can lead to confusion concerning instructional content and roles. In an effort to explain the mixed results, Conderman and Hedin suggested that the co-teachers had not fully recognized the potential of the practice and encouraged teachers to develop strategies to enhance their distinct roles in the classroom. The researchers suggested infusing strategies based in the professional knowledge of special educators, for example, developing individualized strategies based on the needs of students using specially designed instruction.

Few studies focus on academic outcomes of students because it is difficult to separate the outcomes of students from the nature of the teachers' co-teaching relationship (Friend, 2013). In general, though, it is accepted that co-teaching with specialized instruction in a supportive environment leads to improved inclusive academic outcomes (Newman et al., 2011; Ploessl, Rock, Schoenfeld, & Blanks, 2010).

Many studies have identified challenges to co-teaching implementation at the secondary level that are unique to that setting. Further, much of the research has been qualitative and has focused on the perspective of teachers and students regarding various aspects of co-teaching (Cole & McLeskey, 1997; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). Concerns with the rigor of studies and inaccurate representations of co-teaching continue to constrain the impact of this research, particularly at the secondary level (Murawski, 2015).

Additionally, data on the generalization of student academic outcomes is nearly impossible to gather because co-teaching is often implemented without a clear understanding of the aspects and administrative supports needed to adequately support the effort. However, studies do show benefits of co-teaching including increased educational opportunities for students, as well as a reduction of stigmatization and a decrease in fragmentation of special education and general education instruction (Dove & Honigsfeld, 2010; Wilson & Michaels, 2006).

### **Co-teaching in High Schools**

Despite the shortcomings in the co-teaching knowledge base noted thus far, some research offers valid insights into the effective implementation of co-teaching at the high school level. Fourteen relevant studies used a definition of co-teaching similar to the current study and provided insight on future research in the area of co-teaching specifically in high schools. Perhaps the most important analysis across studies of co-teaching in high school, however, is Dieker and Murawski's (2003) identification of three specific domains that can be used to analyze current and future research. The domains

include content knowledge and delivery, the structure of the co-taught setting, and how diversity is perceived among professionals and students. Many studies have address one or more of these three domains identified by Dieker and Murawski as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

## Domains of Studies Related to Co-teaching in Secondary Schools

| Domain    | Source   |
|-----------|--|
| Content   | <p>Dieker, L. A. &amp; Murawski, W. W. (2003). Co-teaching at the secondary level; unique issues, current trends, and suggestions for success. <i>High School Journal</i>, 86(4), 1–13.</p> <p>Keefe, E. B., &amp; Moore, V. (2004). The challenge of co-teaching in inclusive classrooms at the high school level: What the teachers told us. <i>American Secondary Education</i>, 32, 77–88.</p> <p>Mastropieri, M. A., Scruggs, T. E. Graetz, J., Norland, J., Gardizi, W., &amp; McDuffie, K. (2005). Case studies in co-teaching in the content areas: Successes, failures and challenges. <i>Intervention in School and Clinic</i>, 40, 260–270.</p>   |
| Structure | <p>Dieker, L. A., Stephan, M., &amp; Smith, J. (2012). Secondary Mathematics Inclusion: Merging with Special Education. <i>Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School</i>, 18(5), 292–299.</p> <p>Brinkmann, J., &amp; Twiford, T. (2012). Voices from the Field: Skill Sets Needed for Effective Collaboration and Co-Teaching. <i>International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation</i>, 7(3).</p> <p>Dieker, L. A. (2001). What are the characteristics of effective middle and high school co-taught teams for students with disabilities? <i>Preventing School Failure</i>, 46, 14–23.</p> <p>Leafstedt, J. M., Richards, C., &amp; LaMonte, M. (2007). Perspectives on co-teaching: Views from high school students with learning disabilities. <i>Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal</i>, 14, 177–184.</p> <p>O’Rourke, J., &amp; Houghton, S. (2008). The perceptions of secondary teachers and students about the implementation of an inclusive classroom model for students with mild disabilities. <i>Australian Journal of Teacher Education</i>, 34, 23–41.</p> <p>Vannest, K. J., &amp; Hagan-Burke, S. (2010). Teacher time use in special education. <i>Remedial and Special Education</i>, 31, 126–142.</p> <p>Weiss, M., &amp; Lloyd, J. Q. (2003). Conditions for co-teaching: Lessons from a case study. <i>Teacher Education and Special Education</i>, 26(1), 27–41.</p> |

Table 3

(Cont.)

| Domain    | Source   |
|-----------|--|
| Diversity | <p>Dieker, L. A., &amp; Ousley, D. M. (2006). Speaking the Same Language: Bringing Together Highly-Qualified Secondary English and Special Education Teachers. <i>TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus</i>, 2(4).</p> <p>King-Sears, M. E., Brawand, A. E., Jenkins, M. C., &amp; Preston-Smith, S. (2014). Co-teaching perspectives from secondary science co-teachers and their students with disabilities. <i>Journal of Science Teachers Education</i>, 25, 651–680.</p> <p>Magiera, K., Simmons, R.J., Marotta, A., &amp; Battaglia, B. (2005). A co-teaching model: A response to students with disabilities and their performance on NYS assessments. <i>School Administrators Association of New York State Journal</i>, 34(2), 1–5.</p> |

### Content Knowledge

Content knowledge is an important component for teaching in high schools and must be adequately taken into account when implementing co-teaching. Co-teachers may be responsible for teaching in multiple classes across various departments such as English I and chemistry, and they are given the task of integrating their specialized pedagogical skills in the classroom with often limited or non-existent content expertise (Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

Teacher preparation and licensure for special education professionals often do not focus on content in specific areas; rather they focus on ways to design instruction based on students IEPs and scaffold instruction through multiple ways of representing and assessing students' progress regarding the content. Specially designed instruction (SDI) is a key component co-teaching that is developed by the special education teacher and may be delivered or implemented by both special educator and general educator. SDI

includes strategies, methods of representing, engaging, and assessing content so that students with disabilities can have full access (Friend, 2013).

Special education teachers should be careful to not be a passive participant in classes, especially in secondary education. This often occurs because of an imbalance of power due to perception by one, or both, of the co-teachers or an inability to develop SDI. In some cases, special education co-teachers compromise their professional knowledge in secondary education. For example, Fontana and Frey (2005) found that teachers relied on the content teachers' perspectives for instructional decisions and found parity difficult as they taught in a wide range of content areas.

Another study by Keefe and Moore (2004) found that teachers felt content knowledge was essential to facilitate collaboration and compatibility between co-teachers. In these cases, parity was seen as difficult without content knowledge. In addition, an inability to deviate from a teaching style was found to be a particular problem in secondary education where content is more complex. Without parity, the *a priori* structure present in secondary schooling gains momentum and leads to teachers who do not collaborate or form their own specialist teams (Friend & Cook, 2013; Dieker & Murawski, 2003).

### **School Organizational Structure**

The structure of schooling is very different at the high school level than at the elementary or middle school levels and requires careful consideration when studying co-teaching. The high school schedule and the ability of students to enroll in an array of course offerings combined with the requirements for graduation for each student means

that co-teachers must be innovative in supporting students in inclusive classrooms. Co-teachers' assignments in high school may vary across content areas. Often, co-teachers focus on courses that have a standardized test as the final assessment, but they may be required to teach across science, math, social studies, and English within a given semester. Thus, special education teachers may work with multiple general education teachers and have no option of having a shared planning time. Finally, the transition needs and goals of students become very important, as high school is often students' last formal education, and so special educators may take on a multifaceted approach to ensure their students are prepared for adulthood.

The complex nature of co-teaching for high school special educators suggest that success is dependent on many factors including planning. Shared planning time or use of alternative methods (i.e., electronic planning formats) and professional development are supports that help teachers form co-teaching roles and collaborate with others. For example, in a study by Vannest and Hagan-Burke (2010) co-teachers reported that they spent more than half their time allotted for instruction in a supportive role. Time was spent often engaging in remediation activities with students, rather than delivering the primary academic instruction. Another study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that special education teachers did not use their professional knowledge, including pedagogical skills, to engage students in co-taught classrooms.

Lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities when co-teaching also can create barriers to implementation. Role confusion can be problematic because it interferes with true teaming and collaboration. In a study by Brinkmann and Twiford

(2012), 19 teachers from three suburban school districts were interviewed to help determine the skills needed for effective co-teaching related to roles. For example, general educators ranked communication (23%); knowledge of data collection and diagnostic testing (15%); differentiation (15%); and interpersonal skills (13%) as key competencies needed for to co-teach effectively. Similarly, special educators ranked communication (26%) and differentiation (13%) as key competencies needed but also included advocacy (19%) as an area of importance for special educators to effectively co-teach. It is important to understand the similarities as well as the difference in competencies needed to co-teach. The authors recommended that institutions of higher education expand co-teaching and collaborative coursework to better prepare teachers to assume their co-teaching roles.

Studies by O'Rourke & Houghton (2008) and Bessette (2008) also offer insight into the environment of a co-taught high school class. These researchers found that students perceived special educators as helpers instead of leaders. In each study, the students reported they did not feel the instruction was changed very much. The studies are somewhat confusing because they combined elementary and secondary students' perceptions. Results disaggregated by school level would have provided more precise information on the students' understandings.

One study was found that focused on detrimental effects of co-teaching on high school students when it is not carefully implemented Leafstedt, Richards, and LaMonte (2007) found that students with learning disabilities (LD) did not feel help was readily available in co-taught classes when they needed it. Students also perceived their IEP

goals were not being met. One area that seemed to be challenging was parity among the teachers. This may have been caused by a lack of appreciation of differences among teachers and is discussed in the next section regarding diversity.

### **Diversity in the Context of Co-teaching**

Diversity is most often used to support the idea of celebrating differences among students in a given class or school setting (King-Sears et al., 2014). Diversity issues can be mediated if teachers explore culturally responsive teaching by including students' prior experiences and cultural backgrounds in lesson planning and co-teaching groupings. For the purpose of this review, diversity is used in a slightly different way. Diversity in the context of a high school co-teaching environment can be used to describe the benefit of building a climate that celebrates diversity among staff as well as respecting student differences (Friend, 2013).

Teachers can benefit professionally from co-teaching through inclusive practices. Professionals share teaching strategies for new content, embed teaching methods, individualize instruction, scaffold learning experiences, and monitor students' understanding more effectively (Adams & Cessna, 1993; Giangreco, Baumgart, & Doyle, 1995). Teachers together reflect and find they often learn new content and strategies from one another (Friend & Cook, 2013; Hohenbrink, Johnston, & Westhoven, 1997; Hughes & Murawski, 2001; Salend et al., 1997). Shared accountability and responsibility in a strong co-teaching partnership creates a supportive environment (Bauwens et al., 1989; Gately & Gately, 2001; Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Given the positive outcomes of co-teaching practice and its widespread use in the field of special education, most secondary special educators have professional knowledge to implement it in schools. Conversely, most general educators in secondary education teacher preparation programs have little to no knowledge of co-teaching. Few teacher preparation programs are preparing educators to co-teach (Nevin, Thousand, & Villa, 2009). In rare incidences, despite lack of preparation, teachers who are open to innovation and value diversity may seek out information on co-teaching practice. They may ask to attend a workshop or conference or purchase books on the topic. Often the model of co-teaching used and the frequency of its use relates to the professional knowledge attained and an appreciation of diversity. The openness of the teacher relates to the balance of power that occurs and parity among co-teachers (Leafstedt et al., 2007; King-Sears et al., 2014).

What constitutes parity requires a complex view. Some studies make connections of how students perceive teachers to how teachers perceive each other. For example, Moin, Magiera, and Zigmond (2009) observed 10 co-teaching pairs teaching over 50 high school science lessons. They found that teachers relied on whole group instruction and that the special educator took a subservient role in the classroom. Thus, a limited view of what leadership is in the classroom stifled co-teaching practice. The teachers in the study and the researchers examined who took the lead of a particular lesson due to the primary use of whole group instruction.

Another recent study of high school students by King-Sears et al. (2014) provides an expanded viewpoint regarding appreciation of differences and what constitutes

leadership roles during co-teaching. Both the teachers and students perspectives were considered in the investigation in a high school setting.

The students in the co-taught class in the study perceived both teachers as having the same job and felt they were equal leaders in the classroom. This was surprising as the teachers' opinions differed from those of the students. The teachers perceived the content teacher as taking the lead in instruction delivery. The difference in the perceptions of the participants seemed to be related to the varied methods of teaching used and the appreciation of different strategies used by the teachers.

The authors connect the various models used as a logical reason that the perception of students differed. Based on the data collected, the instruction was delivered in ways that were independent of who was in the lead role at a given time and required facilitation of both professionals. In this case, the teachers varied the models of co-teaching used and were able to effectively use the teaming model during at least one of the lessons observed. Although the study is limited by only describing a single co-teaching team, it is important in that it considers a more complex view of roles of co-teachers by making an important point that teachers and students can perceive leadership and power in different ways within the context of the classroom system. That said, the over-dependence on one co-teaching model was noted in this study as being detrimental to the co-teaching relationship and may explain the perceptions of the teachers.

Over-dependence on one co-teaching model sometimes is caused by a lack of familiarity with other models and a lack of appreciation of different strategies. For example, Dieker (2001) found that the ability to collaborate supports use of varied co-

teaching models, which results in the sharing of expertise and appreciation of different perspectives of how to design the lesson. Nine co-teaching teams were observed and interviews were conducted with teachers and students. Four teams used a collaborative style of planning and shared equally in teaching responsibilities, including design and delivery of instruction. Three teams primarily used a one-teach-one support (i.e., one teach, one assist) model of co-teaching with the content teacher taking the lead and the special educator in a supportive role. The model that allowed the special educator to act in a supportive role was more feasible for the teams as they had difficulty planning together and did not have the time or ability to appreciate diverse perspectives regarding teaching strategies or the aims of the lesson. Teaching diversity was not recognized among the teachers in the study, nor was it observed. Although the co-teachers followed a model, it was overused and did not maximize the expertise of the special educator in these instances.

### **School Change**

Implementation of inclusive practices requires consideration of the content, structure, and diversity within high schools but also requires knowledge about school change. Although a thorough literature review regarding school change is not warranted for the current study, it is important that key research and literature in this area are briefly reviewed to better understand the paradigm shift required as co-teaching is implemented. Co-teaching is a mechanism of change and is a practice that requires careful planning and ongoing monitoring and improvement by leaders and stakeholders (Friend, 2013). The concepts related to the needed shift in the culture of schools are of most importance. The

primary elements of school change include organizational dynamics, development of a shared moral focus, capacity building, and sustainability (Fullan, 2007).

### **Organizational Dynamics**

Professional development (PD) is a common theme across studies. The most frequently means of support for co-teaching by administrators was to provide opportunities for professional development such as workshops and out-of-district training. Building an inclusive culture requires actions of the principal to support implementation of co-teaching (Cherian & Daniel, 2008; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010) but takes more than a charismatic leader.

In a case study of one principal's effective implementation of inclusion, Hoppey and McLeskey (2014) found that school leaders who focus their attention on developing solid relationships with their staff find more success in implementation of inclusion. The principal studied provided a variety of avenues to develop teachers' knowledge for effective implementation such as training activities on and off campus and team building activities. The study concluded that both "bottom up" and "top down" actions are required for change to occur but that the principal is able to create an environment that supports such actions. This aligns with a previous study regarding the role and characteristics of leaders, A. Collins (2011) warns against a narrow focus on the importance of principals and the assumption that powerful, charismatic leaders are all that is required for change. As the studies shows, all stakeholders in a school have to work together to create lasting change. In fact, some researchers have criticized reformists who have focused on how to restructure for inclusion rather than altering the

attitudes and beliefs needed for a permanent change (Fullan, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2000). The implementation of an inclusive program should not be based on one person's identity or beliefs but requires a paradigm shift amongst all shareholders.

When given opportunity and support, ordinary men and women can accomplish extraordinary achievements in organizations (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Challenging opportunities within organizations often bring forth skills and abilities that people did not know they possessed. The value of shared (sometimes referred to as distributed) leadership is essential to counter disruptions in the change process as it relates to implementing inclusive practice (Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Fullan (2007) argues that current strategies for reform have caused dysfunctional outcomes and fragmentation of inclusive school change. It is well understood that changing the culture of a school is a complex task that requires innovation and development of professional knowledge

### **Shared Moral Focus**

A shared moral focus leads to re-culturing of schools. Engaging in people's moral purpose is a key "driver" of school change described by Barber and Fullan (2005). Re-culturing relates to changing the denominating assumptions, values, and beliefs of stakeholders that impact operating procedures (Beyer, 2012) and is closely aligned with a shared moral focus. A shared moral focus is rooted in beliefs about specific program changes and deep-rooted value of school reform as a means to improve education (i.e., Morrier & Hess, 2010; Payne, 2008; Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Ravitch, 2010).

## **Capacity Building**

Capacity building is a whole group enterprise. It involves policies, strategies, resources, and actions designed to increase the group's collective power and requires more than initial training before implementing a change (Fullan, 2007). Capacity affects instructional quality and student achievement and is essential for transforming practice. Desimone (2009) conducted a review of the literature on systemic change and the professional development required to accomplish it. He identified several components that were important to school change, including content knowledge focus, active learning with new content, coherence of new strategies with school/district initiatives, support sustained over time, and collective participation of many or all teachers from the same school. All of these components speak to building capacity.

Five elements of building capacity are specific to the change process, including developing new knowledge and skills, establishing professional learning communities (PLCs), building program coherence, accessing new resources, and developing school leadership. Teachers need continuous support such as training and consultation to provide a foundation for the change they are undertaking (Fullan, 2007). Additionally, the group must understand the change process itself and help in developing cultures of evaluation to self-assess the change process.

## **Sustainability**

School change is interconnected with system transformation. Thus, the idea of what constitutes a system is a valid consideration. A system is more than formal rules and procedures but forms as well through cultural responses and initiatives (Bakken &

Hernes, 2006; Hernes, 2007). The challenge to schools in the 21st century is not acting on school initiatives but sustaining improvements in an era of rapid changes and globalization (Dinham & Crowther, 2011; King & Bouchard, 2011; Walker, 2015). A longitudinal study by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) focused on the complexity of a system and how change occurs in secondary schools. The study consisted of eight secondary schools in two countries during three decades. Secondary schools showed a great deal of resistance to change due to their size, bureaucratic complexity, subject traditions, identifications, and closeness to university section. These researchers identified five major internal and external levers responsible for shifts that affect structure, culture, and identity. Hargreaves and Goodson make the point that external factors influence implementation and sustainability factors and should be considered.

### **Conclusion**

Co-teaching offers students the opportunity to have increased access to the core curriculum and specialized instruction in a supportive environment, which can lead to improved academic outcomes (Newman et al., 2011). As leaders in the field of special education began to question why students with disabilities were not being served adequately in general education despite mainstreaming efforts, co-teaching was presented as a means to aid implementation of inclusion.

Specific changes related to inclusive practice can be found in the literature, including placement of more students with disabilities in general education courses and moving special education teachers out of self-contained classrooms (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004). As with any school change effort, both top down

and bottom up factors matter and educators who try to transform school climate from the bottom up face a tremendous amount of frustration without support (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2014).

### **Paucity of Co-teaching Research and Policy Guidance**

With vague and sometimes conflicting policy messages regarding inclusion, teachers and educational leaders rely on their professional knowledge about the best way to provide instruction to students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Unfortunately, this is often complicated by a lack of preparation about how to co-teach (Nichols, Dowdy, & Nichols, 2010). Further, Russell and Bray (2013) found that educators were more likely to misinterpret policies when dimensions of a policy were unclear as written.

### **Depth and Scope of Conceptual Model Used in Current Studies**

Three broad concerns have evolved as co-teaching classes have increased in secondary schools, including (a) alignment of goals of special education teachers and general education teachers as evidenced in the planning process (i.e., Bryant Davis et al., 2012; Howard & Potts, 2009), (b) formal and informal policy coherence (i.e., Russell & Bray, 2013; Mastropieri et al., 2005), and (c) structures of secondary curriculum and content (i.e., Dieker, 2001; Vaughn et al., 1997). Unfortunately, current studies have limited generalizability and lack the depth of insight needed to reveal specific issues in co-taught classrooms.

### **Formal and Informal Policy and the Knowledge Base on School Change**

Restructuring usually occurs during school change but does not always lead to a new school culture. It is important to note that change of location of service delivery in

the building does not always bring about effective inclusive practices and can sometimes result in continued exclusion within the confines of the general education classroom (Fullan, 2007). In the current study, Bolman and Deal's conceptual framework allows examination of such a system and supports further exploration of the formal and informal elements needed to identify oppressive and supportive co-teaching cultures.

Taken together, current literature demonstrates that there is an impact of content and collaboration on co-teaching practice. However, much is not known about how teachers make meaning of policy and how their professional knowledge and beliefs and philosophies influence their work in co-taught classrooms. Thus, it is clear that research is needed that considers the interplay of policy and practice with beliefs and roles in order to move the field forward with a deeper understanding of what structures are needed to support, and not hinder, co-teaching practice.

### **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

Two issues in prior qualitative studies related to co-teaching are (a) the failure to identify co-taught classrooms validated as having high quality and (b) an absence of a framework or lens incorporated for analysis purposes. Qualitative investigations generally have described specific instances and perspectives of teachers in co-taught classrooms with a broad scope that mentions the influence of policy and cultural factors in an ambiguous fashion with limited depth. Use of qualitative tools with a strong conceptual framework creates a more comprehensive approach to the study of the interplay among policy directives, cultural elements, and professional knowledge in co-taught classrooms. Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames provide a way to generate important understandings and discernments through the use of various lenses, perspectives, and stances as the following research questions were explored:

1. What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching?
2. What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?
3. How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching?

Although prior studies have aided the identification of unique aspects specific to co-teaching in secondary schools, the complexity of each characteristic has not been studied deeply, and the interplay of the influence of policy or lack thereof has not been explored.

In this chapter, the theoretical perspectives and resulting epistemological decisions that guided the study are discussed in detail, as is the research design. The method, including participant selection and tools used for data collection, is explained, along with a rationale for use of qualitative data collection and narrative analysis procedures. Last, the rigor of the study related to trustworthiness is addressed throughout the procedures and explicitly discussed at the end of the chapter.

### **Research Design**

The goal of the researcher specific to this study was to understand how participants make meaning of their work in co-taught classes. The type of data necessary to address the research questions could only be gained by individually asking teachers questions related to their practice and interviewing co-teachers partners to determine individual and shared views. Asking co-teachers about their thoughts, feelings, aspirations, fears, and opinions supported the effort of trying to understand meanings teachers make of policy and in what way these meanings influence the work of co-teaching, and so interviewing was selected for data collection. With the purpose of the study in mind, decisions were made during its conceptualization relating to epistemology and theoretical perspectives.

In considering the epistemological foundation of the study, multiple epistemological views including subjectivism, objectivism, and interpretivism were considered. The subjectivist view contends that meaning is created from anything but the object itself. The objectivist holds that there is a meaningful reality that exists and is waiting to be discovered, whereas the interpretivist views reality as being the interplay between the subject and the object. In the interpretivist's view, truth or meaning exist in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. The teachers' views and how they relate to their environment and external forces are examined in this study. This study places an emphasis on the interplay of practice, formal and informal policies, beliefs, and knowledge of teachers. Of the three epistemological stances presented, the only view that represents the interplay of all these elements is interpretivism (Crotty, 1998).

Further, because meaning is interpreted it is logical to consider (a) what it means to know and (b) how one looks at the world to make sense of it. Constructivism was identified as the theoretical perspective. In constructivism, subject and object emerge as partners in the generations of meaning (Crotty, 1998). There is no objective truth, and meaning only comes into existence through engagement with realities in our world.

The emphasis on context and how it may support or hinder the actions of teachers requires one to acknowledge that the teachers construct meanings based on the interplay of various factors. Therefore, the only way to discover reality is to analyze the relationship of multiple elements within the unique setting and analyze teacher's voiced opinions and beliefs. In this study, constructivism is appropriate because the researcher

seeks to describe the perspectives of co-teachers within the natural context. In distinguishing the methodological and theoretical design choices, the study satisfies guidelines provided by Caelli, Ray, and Mill (2008).

The following section describes the researcher's stance in relation to the philosophical position in describing the social justice and political theory elements that serve as a basis for inclusive practice, including belief in the positive outcomes of inclusive practices.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Although different concepts, I have seen how co-teaching and inclusion relate. Co-teaching is a service delivery option that supports inclusive practice. I have been a student of inclusive practice and co-teaching for the past decade. Primarily, my desire to research co-teaching is deeply rooted in my personal experience of working in co-taught classes and my belief that it is necessary for schools to create socially just environments. Protecting students from discrimination by eliminating a marginalizing system that often over-identifies students (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011) and places them inappropriately in restrictive environments is one of the driving forces of my work.

Through my graduate studies, I gained understanding of how supports could be given in various ways, and so my philosophy regarding who should be included, meaning students who should participate and be full-members of general education classes, changed. My view of inclusion became more complex as I considered the appropriateness of inclusion for all students. This growth in professional knowledge

regarding inclusive practices solidified my belief of its importance and allowed me to expand the concept as a viable option for many students.

I believe co-teaching is one of the few structures available that can make inclusion of students with disabilities a true reality while ensuring all needs are met. I greatly value co-teaching because, as a co-teacher myself, I saw firsthand the benefits for teachers and students. I shared joy with students who finally passed their first end-of-course (EOC) in their academic career in a ninth-grade English course. I heard the relief of parents and witnessed the rejuvenated motivated of student as they explained that they think they will continue their academic career beyond high school as they “try community college now” because a small victory in the co-taught classroom leads to greater confidence that they can be successful in school. I have witnessed how students made great gains in a co-taught biology class while, unfortunately, they continued to struggle in other courses without a co-teacher. I have been a cheerleader and advocate for these students and have facilitated tutoring to ensure that they will earn the privilege of walking across the stage on graduation day. In my professional experience, I have not seen another practice that is able to support complete access for students with disabilities like co-teaching can when implemented well.

Conversely, I have deep concerns about how inclusive practices are implemented and sustained. I have seen schools require students with disabilities to join the general education classroom as a physical placement only with little or no academic benefit to the students involved. Defining inclusion as a physical location in a building does a disservice to the students in the classroom and to the movement as a whole. In such

situations, students are excluded because of lack of engagement in the group even if they are physically in the room as their peers without disabilities. Students are left either baffled by the instruction or are pulled away to do mini-lessons in the back corners of the room. I have seen students with a shadow of a paraprofessional who is constantly at their side despite the fact that the student does not require any form of a one-on-one. Any of these forms of support tends to lead to stigmatization and all the problems that result. I am not alone as many educators recognize the danger of segregating students. What educators often forget is how subtle segregation can be.

I see a much greater risk of providing a deceptive environment with inconsistent or isolating teaching strategies used with students with disabilities in the general education setting. Many schools operate under a veil of being inclusive as they merely invite students with disabilities to share physical space with their peers. Social justice issues can become hidden within such organization when students are merely physically included rather than full members of the class and school. What is worse is that the negative effects of being academically and socially segregated are often left unaddressed.

Understanding the potential relationship among teacher knowledge, internal influencing factors, and external influencing factors on the implementation and development of co-teaching seems a logical area to study to advance the field. In this way, additional organizational steps that should be taken to support successful fully inclusive environments may be identified and a deeper understanding of how teachers navigate the complexities of co-teaching can be shared. These findings would help to eliminate the threat of pseudo-inclusive environments that are socially unjust.

Thus, throughout my current research strand, the dynamic interplay between policies and educators in specific contexts is examined as organizational behavior and structure is considered. Study of policy coherence that investigates how educators' experiences and the dimensions of organizational context shape sense making alongside the interplay of policies as written would extend and elaborate propositions made in prior research (e.g., Russell & Bray, 2013). Interpretations of policy may vary by the specific roles professionals hold. Their role may affect how educators make meaning using prior practices, experiences, and worldviews. The study of policy coherence specific to the role of the co-teacher allows insight into organizational structures that exist in the unique characteristics of the co-taught classrooms already described in great detail by Friend (2013).

### **Research Method**

This qualitative study sought to (a) understand the regulations and laws supporting or hindering teachers in the implementation of co-teaching; (b) determine the informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach; and (c) explore ways co-teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching.

The data sources included a written policy analysis of current regulations and laws through a document review, which included examining policy and procedure guidelines notebooks that participants shared and comparing information with policies and letters of guidance document collection that were analyzed in the literature review

phase of the study. Also, in-depth interviews with individual co-teachers and co-teaching pairs provided data on understanding the perspectives of teachers, what guides teachers to co-teach, and how teachers reconcile beliefs and understandings of policy messages with professional roles. Lastly, administrators provided background information through a brief questionnaire to aid in analysis and conclusions. Development of data sources and instrumentation, recruitment procedures and participants, and data collection and analysis will be discussed in explicit detail in the following sections.

### **Participants**

The aim of this study was to delve deeper into understanding the interplay of policy and practice in the co-taught classroom based on the perspectives of co-teachers. Therefore, participants of the study were carefully selected with the aim of finding teachers who were competent and exemplary in the art of co-teaching. In the following sections the sampling and selection criteria will be presented as well as a description of the participants and contextual information gathered.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

All members of the study were required to have a minimal level of teaching and co-teaching experience to ensure that teachers had experienced implementation of co-teaching and had gained a general understanding of the high school environment in which they worked. The following selection criteria were required:

- Teachers taught at the same level of instruction (i.e., all high school).
- Teachers had at least three years of teaching experience in a K-12 setting.
- Teachers had a minimum of one year of co-teaching experience.

- The co-teaching pair must have co-taught for at least one full semester.
- Both partners of the co-teaching pair consented to participate in the study.

### **Sampling and Selection Procedures**

This study followed the standard protocol of sampling found in interview studies. That is, it is not possible to employ random sampling or even a stratified random-sampling approach because randomness is a statistical concept that depends on a very large number of participants. Further, interview participants were required to consent to be interviewed, and so an element of self-selection existed in this study. Self-selection and randomness are not compatible. Therefore, participants for this study were selected from a purposive sample in order to ensure a homogenous group regarding characteristics that have been identified as critical to co-teaching. Suri (2011) explains that purposive sampling is often best suited to qualitative fieldwork because it focuses on recruitment of a particular group that is more likely to meet the participation criteria.

The EC directors were given the inclusion criteria guidelines, and an explanation of the importance of quality co-teaching practice. The definition of co-teaching referred to in chapter one was shared with the directors, as was a summary of the study (Appendix A). These discussions occurred in various ways. A face-to-face meeting was conducted with one EC director, a telephone conversation was had with another EC director after an email request was sent with a summary of the study, and another EC director called to ask questions after receiving IRB approval documents from the superintendent of the district. In all situations, the directors were given the same information concerning the

study and definition of co-teaching used. All were asked to refer special education teachers who they felt would be a good match for the study.

Once identified, the recommended special education teachers were either presented information face-to-face or emailed information with a request to complete a demographic survey as potential participants. Each teacher who met the criteria for participation was either handed information about the study as part of a face-to-face meeting or emailed a recruitment packet that included a summary of the study, a demographic form, and a consent form. The potential participants were asked to submit the demographic form and consent form either face-to-face or through mail using a provided self-addressed, stamped envelope. The demographic survey (Appendix B) addressed needed information, including the years of experience in teaching, areas and subjects taught at the time of the study, the level of education, and length of experience co-teaching in the high school setting. Information regarding how teachers gained professional knowledge regarding inclusion and co-teaching also was requested. This document was aligned closely with the criteria for participation to avoid potential confusion of inclusion as solely a belief system that it also allowed quick determination of teachers who fit into the study.

### **Demographics of Participants**

The co-teachers participating in this study work in the piedmont region of North Carolina, which consisted of rural, urban, and suburban areas. The school systems accessed were of variable size but comparable in percentage of students with disabilities served in each school. Approximately the same percentage of the total population was

students with disabilities in high school across the three counties (12%, 13%, 15%). The number of special educators who co-taught varied across each county respective to the overall population and the number of schools who implemented co-teaching. There was an average of seven co-taught courses in each of the schools with a range of 6 to 9. Co-taught courses were fairly consistent in subject matter; that is, in almost all schools, only the courses that included testing using end-of-course (EOC) standardized assessments were co-taught (i.e., English I, Algebra I, Biology). One high school made an exception and included students who were on an occupational course of study (OCS) in a U.S. History co-taught course.

Initially, 26 teachers were identified by the special education directors and/or administrators of the three counties. Two of the 26 did not meet the criteria because they did not have enough co-teaching experience so their teaching partner was also eliminated. One partner of one pair participated in the individual interview but, because of scheduling issues, did not participate in the joint interview. Unexpectedly, the general education teacher was required to teach during her planning block because another general education teacher had a medical emergency and went on medical leave. Attempts were made to interview the pair via phone or Skype but the general education teacher explained that she did not have time to commit to the study given the circumstances. Therefore, a total of 21 individuals participated in individual interviews while only twenty individuals participated in the joint interviews. Joint interviews consisted of ten co-teaching pairs. Teachers were from six high schools across urban ( $n = 2$ ), suburban ( $n$

= 2), and rural areas ( $n = 2$ ). Demographic and contextual factors of pairs are described in Table 4.

### **Instrumentation**

The primary data were gathered using audiotaped, semi-structured interviews of general and special education co-teaching pairs. Background information was collected to inform the study by surveying administrators using an open-ended instrument and an interview protocol was developed for individual and joint interviews of co-teachers. The type of data collected was guided by the framework and by the feasibility and usefulness of the data (Maxwell, 2013) and the researcher was the primary tool for data collection.

Qualitative interviews examined how general education and special education teachers interpret the value of formal and informal policy with social justice as an overarching lens. The questions were generated based on the aims of the study and the conceptual framework used to guide the research. As can be seen in Table 5, Bolman and Deal's (2013) conceptual framework and the research questions were used to generate the interview questions and probes for the interview questions.

Table 4

## Demographics

| <b>School name/Type</b> | <b>Designated Sped administrator</b> | <b>Co-teaching Pair</b> | <b>Type of educator:</b> | <b>Yrs. exp. co-Teaching</b> | <b>Yrs. exp. teaching</b> | <b>Subject/Grades teaching at time of study</b>     |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| WHS/Urban               | Yes                                  | Pair 1                  | GET (J.)                 | 4                            | 15                        | math  |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET (M)                  | 17                           | 17                        | math, biology, study skills                         |
| PHS/suburban            | Yes                                  | Pair 2                  | GET (R)                  | 5                            | 5                         | English I, II                                       |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET (H)                  | 11                           | 20                        | English I-IV  |
| SVHS/suburban           | Yes                                  | Pair 3                  | GET (D)                  | 3                            | 15                        | English I,II, IV                                    |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET (T)                  | 18                           | 28                        | English I-IV  |
| SHS/urban               | No                                   | Pair 4                  | GET (B)                  | 1.5                          | 5                         | English I, II                                       |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET (D)                  | 10                           | 17                        | English I-IV  |
| ES/rural                | No                                   | Pair 5                  | GET (C)                  | 15                           | 24                        | English I, II                                       |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 6                            | 10                        | English I, study skills                             |
| CS/rural                | No                                   | Pair 6                  | GET                      | 1.5                          | 2                         | English I   |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 3                            | 9                         | English I, Math                                     |
| ES/rural                | No                                   | Pair 7                  | GET                      | 11                           | 11                        | English I-IV  |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 8                            | 11                        | English IV; Integrated Math II;<br>physical science |
| CS/rural                | No                                   | Pair 8                  | GET                      | 3                            | 11                        | biology, Earth and<br>Environmental Science         |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 3                            | 18                        | biology   |
| CS/rural                | No                                   | Pair 9                  | GET                      | 3                            | 4                         | math  |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 4                            | 6                         | math  |
| CS/rural                | No                                   | Pair 10                 | GET                      | 2                            | 2                         | US History  |
|                         |                                      |                         | SET                      | 4                            | 10                        | English I, biology, US History                      |

Table 5

## Individual Interview Protocol Rationale

| <b>Interview Question</b>   | <b>Probe (as needed)</b>  | <b>Conceptual Model Topic</b>   | <b>Related Research Question</b>   |
|---|---|---|--|
| What beliefs or philosophies support your co-teaching?  | Do you have specific beliefs about inclusive practices?<br>Do you have specific beliefs about who belongs in the general education classroom?   | Symbolic Frame: includes the culture, meaning, rituals, ceremonies, and beliefs found within organizations.                         | #3. How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching? |
| What are some of the policies and expectations that you know of support your work in your school? | Do you know of any state policies or initiatives?<br>Do you know of any federal policies or mandates level?<br>Who has provided the most support for your co-teaching efforts?<br>Your co-teaching partner? Peers?<br>School administrators?<br>Others? | Structural Frame: Includes roles, expectations, and meaning people in organizations make of policies.                               | #1. What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching?   |
| What supports are needed for you to effectively co-teach?   | How do you feel about your effectiveness in co-teaching?<br>Why?  | Human Resource and Political Frames: include needed supports, skill development, power, conflict, and competition in relationships. | #2 What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?                                      |

The open-ended questions for the teachers were piloted with a team of co-teachers who did not participate in the study itself to confirm that the questions would elicit the desired insights. The questions were revised twice during the pilot process. Probes were added to each question to gain deeper insight into the topic. The questions focused on the current challenges of the co-teaching setting and how professionals worked to resolve conflicts with their partners, colleagues, and administrators, specifically conflicts related to external pressures due to policy directives and expectations. Semi-structured interviews allow for in-depth exploration of a topic, which allowed the researcher to maintain a certain amount of control over the conversational topics covered and the line of inquiry. However, the direction of questioning was influenced and steered by the participant.

Structured interviews would have required the researcher to repeat the same set of questions and present the same personal demeanor with every interviewee. The use of the semi-structured protocol for interviews was the best fit for the study because it allowed the researchers to understand the participant's world so the line of questioning could shift depending on the responses of the participant (Maxwell, 2013). This became especially relevant in the second interview of the co-teaching pair.

### **Protocol for Individual and Joint Interview of Co-teaching Pairs**

After the development of the data collection measures and recruitment phase of the study, the process of conducting in-depth interviews was completed. The questions for the second phase of the study were based on a protocol similar to that for the first phase. Additionally, questions for the co-teaching pair as a unit were devised from

analysis of the data collected in the individual interviews. Specifically, each individual interview was reviewed for common themes, and questions were devised that delved deeper into the topics within each them and were specific to the co-teaching pair. The first interview was individually with each teacher separate from their co-teaching partner. The second interview was conducted with each co-teaching pair consisting of a general education teacher and a special education teacher as unit. Steps were taken to build a trusting relationship with participants, including communication and transparency of the goals and aims of the study as well as minimizing research talk, being nondirective, staying neutral, and maintaining rapport (Yin, 2011).

Teachers were asked to participate in two consecutive interviews. The questions for the second phase of data collection of the study were based on a protocol similar to that for the first phase. Specifically, each individual interview was reviewed for common themes, and questions were devised that delved deeper into the topics with each teacher separate from their co-teaching partner. The second interview was conducted with each co-teaching pair consisting of a general education teacher and special education teacher as unit. Steps were taken to build a trusting relationship with participants, including communication and transparency of the goals and aims of the study as well as minimizing research talk, being nondirective, staying neutral, and maintaining rapport (Lichtman, 2012).

The interviews piloted with two co-teaching pairs at a high school not included in the study. Two questions were simplified after a lack of understanding the intent of the question was reported by two of the four people interviewed. The questionnaire was also

piloted and shortened after the principal reported that it took a long time to answer the questions and he thought it would be cumbersome for others to complete. Additionally, the idea of tailoring the questions based on individual interview responses emerged as it was apparent that one of the co-teaching pair tended to dominate the conversation.

### **Questionnaire for Administrators**

The administrators were given a questionnaire after all interviews were completed. The data derived from this survey were important to understand the context of co-teaching as experienced by the participants, as well as to make note of details of the informal and cultural aspects of the setting. The questionnaire was also piloted and shortened after the principal reported that it took a long time to answer the questions and he thought it would be cumbersome for others to complete.

### **Procedure**

After completing and obtaining IRB approval and gaining support in three counties for the study, the researcher contacted the exceptional children (EC) directors in the school districts and asked for recommendations of schools in which to recruit. Information including a summary of the research, interview protocol, observational protocol, and consent form was sent via email and delivered to each administrator and EC personnel of the schools the EC director recommended. EC directors were asked to recommend co-teaching staff based on their knowledge of the teachers' work experience and quality. It is important to note that the original recruitment design for this study included an observational protocol to document the quality of co-teaching. Unfortunately, that procedure was determined by administrators to be too intrusive to the

classroom. Many of the administrators commented that they felt they could not ask their teachers to have visitors in their class during the critical time of the year just prior to the testing window but that the teachers could participate in interviews during their planning time. The decision was made by the researcher upon recommendation from district administrators to develop another way to recruit skilled participants. Asking EC directors and administrators for referrals of co-teachers and requiring teachers to complete a demographic form satisfied this need.

Once teachers were identified as potential participants, information was shared in various ways. One district allowed presentation of the research summary and review of consent form in a regularly scheduled district meeting of EC faculty. Teachers who represented high school staff were asked to meet with the researcher following the meeting. Teachers were given hard copies of all materials presented and the lead teachers agreed to share information with other EC teachers at their schools.

The other two districts wanted to communicate solely by email and information was given to specific administrators who sent it to potential participants. Consent forms were collected either through the mail in a self-addressed stamped envelope or were placed in the provided envelope, sealed, and given to the administrative assistant at the front office of each school within a week of receiving the information. Once the consent forms were collected, direct contact was made with the EC personnel to arrange a meeting or phone conversation.

Each special education co-teacher was given the option of choosing the general educator that they felt they had the strongest co-teaching relationship. Requests were

made of these teachers to participate in the study. The projected timeline for the study was January 5, 2015 to August 1, 2015. Recruitment was scheduled for the month of January, 2015 and collection of data was projected to be completed from February 1, 2015 through June 30, 2015. Individual interviews were completed over a five week period from the last week of March through the month of April, 2015. The majority of the joint interviews were completed in two counties over a three-week period in May, 2015. The third county requested that the joint interviews be conducted after the completion of the school year. These interviews were held within two weeks following the end of the school year in June.

After data were collected, all interviews were to be either transcribed by the researcher or by a paid transcriptionist who signed a confidentiality form (Appendix C). Once interviews were transcribed, data were analyzed using the methods described in the following section.

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell's (2012) common steps of data analysis were followed, including preparing data for analysis, analyzing the data, and validating the analysis and interpretations. This process was not linear, and the steps followed were sometimes simultaneous. For example, the interviews from the first phase were analyzed to create the protocol for the interviews for the co-teaching pair. Also, stories that emerged from each pair were analyzed independently and then compared across the sample in various ways. First the information was compared based on teacher title (SET or GET) and then information was compared by type of school (urban, suburban, and rural). In this way, it

was possible to see relationships between various pieces of data individually as well as across settings. Explicit connections between research questions and typology of research design were addressed as findings emerged. The digital recording from each interview was transcribed and added to the corresponding matrix as appropriate for initial coding and themes emerged (Maxwell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). During this open coding stage, words and phrases were written down while reading transcriptions to label main points in participants' responses. Once all data was initially coded, all open codes in each matrix were reviewed collectively. Related codes were grouped into categories based on Bolman and Deal's (2013) four frames. Finally, all data collected was entered into NVivo, a qualitative software package. Preliminary codes were already established but NVivo provided a way to quickly check within and cross pair analysis as well as look for any differences in sequential analysis of the data given the prolonged recruitment and different phases of data collection between the individual and joint interviews.

Narrative analysis provided a critical way of understanding not only the key actors and events but also cultural conventions and context (Lichtman, 2012). Also, narrative analysis allowed the researcher to explore the data specifically looking for stories presented during answering the questions. Riessman's (2008) thematic analysis was used to categorize accounts or elements of the accounts shared by the teachers. The process of examining the stories or accounts within the stories considered (a) the setting and characters, (b) a summary of events key to the story, (c) complicating action

including evaluative comments on the events or themes by the researcher, and (d) the outcome of the story (Lichtman, 2012).

Once the elements of each set of interviews were compared, commonalities and differences emerged. Common themes and how they relate to the four frames of the conceptual model were coded by hand and using NVivo. NVivo allowed queries to be made based on word count as well as word search that strengthened the rigor of the analysis. Conclusions were drawn concerning how the findings of the study fulfill the gap in the current literature and findings were categorized by the original research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

Validity within qualitative research refers to the clarity and quality of the process used to achieve the results of the study and is identified as trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013). Several standards for qualitative research trustworthiness found in the literature (Seidman, 2013) were employed in this study. First, the main knowledge producer was the participant, although the interpretation of the researcher mattered. The role of the researcher included some detachment because the aim was to describe the practice and perspectives of co-teachers. Additional elements as described in detail by Seidman, include the creation of a theoretically rigorous design, debriefing with peers and faculty, and the completion of member checks before, during, and after the study. Specific examples of how trustworthiness was maintained throughout the study include:

- The study was designed in a theoretically consistent manner given the intent and was based on a comprehensive review of the literature.

- The interview questions were created using the conceptual framework and knowledge of current literature.
- The questions and survey were piloted in order to refine the process.
- During narrative analysis of the data, interviews were transcribed verbatim.
- Internal consistency between the series of two interviews with participants was established through member checking after both the individual and joint interviews.
- The data was coded by hand using the code book (Appendix D) and the data were coded again using qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, which validated findings from hand coding (Appendix E).
- An audit trail was kept throughout the study and reviewed as appropriate to ensure trustworthiness.

NVivo was able to confirm the findings of the hand-coding using the node matrices feature as well as add additional insight based on the frequency of word use and term search capabilities as various queries resulted in reports of specific phrase or word use and reaffirmed the findings found through hand coding. For example, a query, which produced a report of the ten most commonly used words throughout all interviews found the some of the terminology identified by hand coding to develop themes. For example, "expectations" was a word identified by NVivo as being used frequently and it also served as a code for the one of the emerging themes (Appendix F).

As the study concluded, a high-level of communication was established with faculty/committee members familiar with the organizational frameworks and co-teaching

practice upon each point of analysis of the findings. Perceptions were discussed with these members of the faculty and shared with the entire committee at various points within the study timeline.

### **Conclusion**

Participants, instrumentation, and analysis were areas to consider while designing a study that would reflect a clear purpose. Participants had to meet specific criteria to be able to understand perspectives gained in context of the co-taught classroom across similar context. Instrumentation was developed to specifically consider the interplay of policy and practice in the co-taught classrooms and how co-teachers' beliefs and professional knowledge are integrated in their work of co-teaching. Each step of data analysis was designed to probe deeper than past studies to understand the meanings teachers make of various informal and formal policy messages. Also, expectations teachers receive and how they interpret these messages while considering their beliefs and professional knowledge. In the following chapter, the findings of the study will be explored.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

Professional knowledge, belief systems, political elements, and professional and personal philosophies intersect in co-taught classrooms. Conceptualization of this study emerged from social justice theory and organizational behavior framework. First, social justice theory was used to (a) acknowledge the current struggles of students with disabilities in the inclusive classroom when exclusionary practices result in stigmatization and poor academic outcomes for them, and (b) address the call for a deeper understanding of inclusive practices as an inclusive philosophy becomes more evident in legislative efforts. Bolman and Deal's (2013) meta-framework of organizations revealed how co-teachers make meaning of policies and align them with their roles and beliefs, as well as support aspects of their work environment.

Findings demonstrated how teachers understand policies as well as aspects of structure, procedure, and practices that support or hinder co-teaching practice. Using multi-frame thinking provided by Bolman and Deal, a deep understanding of the structures including policies and goals that may be aligned or in conflict with teachers' philosophical views, professional knowledge, and perception of the purpose of co-teaching was analyzed. The frames helped determine underlying power conflicts and competitions and provided insight on cultural factors that support or hinder co-teaching practice and explored how teachers feel about their work.

This chapter begins with background information and the research context. Three sections corresponding to the original research questions follow. Each section includes research findings that emerged from individual interviews of co-teachers as well as from those of co-teaching pairs.

### **Research Context**

Using the research questions and organizational behavior model as a framework, themes emerged from the transcribed data for general education teachers (GETs) and special education teachers (SETs). The resulting categories captured similarities and differences in ideas and showed patterns or themes within each frame, recognized as necessary by Miles et al (2013). Policies identified consisted of some of the laws, policy guidelines, directives, and administrative guidance discussed in Chapter II. Analysis of these written documents established the political landscape in which co-teachers operate and, combined with the conceptual model, aided in extracting the meanings teachers make of formal policy. Also, inaccuracies between what is written and interpretations made were identified.

As mentioned in Chapter III, a questionnaire was included in the recruitment materials given to administrators at the beginning of the study. The questionnaire was also sent via email to the administrators after the joint interviews were completed because no administrators had responded to the initial request. Response ultimately remained low for the questionnaire. Only 2 of the 6 school administrators completed the questionnaire. However, the responses received provided valuable insight into the context of those school settings.

The administrators were asked questions that inform the study concerning supports they feel are given to support quality co-teaching and what policies they feel guide co-teachers' work. Administrators indicated that, when selecting co-teaching teams, they look for someone who works well with others and who is adaptable, flexible, has a good attitude and strong subject area expertise. The administrators reported that professional development specific to content and strategies and ways to collaborate were important aspects that increased co-teachers' professional knowledge.

When asked about cultural elements of their school that impact co-teaching, one administrator shared that 15% of the population consisted of students with a disability and that collaboration among EC department and other departments was absolutely necessary. Administrators noted that ensuring all students are appropriately placed based on their individual education plans (IEPs) and gaining "buy in" from general education teachers were key components to building a successful co-teaching partnership. Additionally, ensuring that students viewed both teachers as leaders in the classroom was reported as a challenge seen in one school.

The insight from the administrators highlighted the benefit of supports and directives given to some of the teachers. Further, the administrative perspective combined with findings from individual interviews contributed to a more comprehensive view of the schools' context. The context is important to consider given the aim of this study to understand the interplay of policy and practice within the specific environment of the co-taught class. The following sections will clearly indicate the findings found related to each of the three research questions.

### **Research Question 1**

*What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementing co-teaching?*

During interviews, teachers referred to some of the written mandates or laws by formal names such as IDEA or NCLB. More often, teachers did not indicate the actual law but rather discussed the requirements in more general terms such as “the state requires” ( $n = 14$ ) or “federal mandates” ( $n = 5$ ) or “the district requires” ( $n = 9$ ).

Teachers also spoke of a part of a law, such as FAPE, that they felt affected their work, or they spoke in general terms concerning the mandate based on their own understandings. Additionally, there were differences apparent between SETs and GETS concerning policies that supported or hindered their work.

The following section documents incidences in which co-teachers named a particular formal policy as well as when teachers made informal references regarding particular laws and mandates. The section begins by separating the policies SETs referred to into federal, state, and local, followed in a similar manner with a description of the GET perspective of policies that hinder or support co-teaching. Finally, policies discussed by both the SETs and GETs are summarized.

#### **SET Perspectives**

All SETs ( $n = 11$ ) relied heavily on policies directly related to special education which included federal laws and policies such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004), which they perceived supported the idea of co-teaching. Other directives and expectations were also articulated by SETs that differed from GETs with

respect to expectations they thought guided their work. These included student placement procedures, highly qualified status of SETs, and discussion of the placement of students in OCS in co-taught classes. Additionally, class size and student ratio requirements, curriculum differences between adapted and standard curriculum, and the importance of the graduation rate for school accountability were also discussed.

### **Federal Policies and Laws**

SETs felt strongly that federal regulations mattered and supported their work in the co-taught classroom. They specifically discussed particular elements of IDEA including free appropriate public education (FAPE) as justification of their work in co-teaching. The importance of an individualized education plan (IEP) as a supportive, binding document that guides all educators when serving students with disabilities was addressed by many SETs ( $n = 9$ ), although some ( $n = 4$ ) thought developing the IEP with current state curriculum standards was difficult to do. Two distinct parts of IDEA were referenced by SETs. FAPE and IEPs were discussed in detail. FAPE was considered a completely supportive element while supportive aspects as well as difficulties were discussed related to IEPs.

**IDEA and FAPE provide justification of co-teaching.** SETs tended to reference IDEA and FAPE as elements of federal policy that supported co-teaching. As one SET explained, “All students should be given access to the general education curriculum as much as possible based on IDEA principles.” Another SET summed up the perceived value of federal regulation by explaining the connection she made between what free appropriate public education means in relation to inclusion and co-teaching

practice in this way: “FAPE makes it possible for students to be part of the general education classroom; we have co-teaching because of the ideas about inclusion in FAPE.” Additional references to federal policy were related to the individualization of students with disabilities.

### **IEPs are Required Legal Documents**

IEPs were viewed as the legal document that “governed what students do” at school and how instruction is delivered to them. The IEP was repeatedly described as the guiding document that helps teachers communicate what the students’ needs are in the co-taught setting and what was vital to the process. One SET explained, “You have to do what you have to do for the kids, but IEP is King.

Other SETs indicated that the IEP is a document that may require negotiation due to expectations in co-taught classes. Teachers shared that sometimes a compromise must occur in consideration of the co-taught setting in order for the IEP to be supportive of the co-teaching process. Teachers with this view discussed how IEP teams have to consider the curriculum focus of co-taught classrooms in the high school setting and the standards of the curriculum when developing a plan. Teachers believed strongly that there must be a compromise or at least consideration of the goals and objectives that are standard for the general education class when developing the IEP. One SET explained,

Some stuff on the IEP is just not realistic to follow in a regular classroom and we’re sitting in meetings with parents who are going ‘but my kid has a disability’ and we see your point, but these are our state standards. This is what they [the state] are saying we have to do in high school.

Teachers felt they were responsible for educating parents of the high expectations that they felt the state sets for students while at the same time working with parents to devise an IEP document that is workable and meaningful in the co-taught classroom.

Similarly, another SET discussed an IEP meeting in which she had a discussion about demands of the class with the parent: “The parent asked if all the English II teachers were as rigorous as her [the general education teacher who is the co-teaching partner] and I was like, yes—because those are the standards of the state and if they are not that rigorous, then the scores reflect it.” Another SET summed up the pressure felt during IEP meetings when she shared,

I feel like I am getting caught between a rock and a hard spot because you have the standards that the state is setting for high school and then you have kids who have anxiety and they have severe executive functioning issues and while they may be smart enough, they sure are not showing us when they do not do work so that makes IEP meetings difficult.

### **Perspectives of State Policy**

Additional perspectives of state policy emerged as GETs and SETs discussed the meanings teachers made of state directives concerning who should be included in the co-taught classroom. Although no state policy was identified, it was clear that teachers in one particular county believed that there were mandates that determined which students with disabilities should be included in co-taught classes. This was inconsistent among districts. Teachers in one county in particular had the understanding that it was state mandated for students on the Occupational Course of Study (OCS) to be included in co-taught classrooms while other SETs ( $n = 5$ ) mentioned that this was a school decision.

The SETs that thought that inclusion of students in OCS in co-teaching classes was required saw it as a hindrance; whereas, teachers who perceived the inclusion of students in OCS as a choice tried to find ways to include these students in the co-taught class.

GETs and SETs also referenced other topics concerning their perception of state policies. The importance of highly qualified status of SETs and how districts have made changes in expectations due to the change in status for many teachers was addressed. Also, class size and ratio standards set by the state and the importance of supporting an increase in graduation rate was discussed by several SETs and GETs.

**Students in OCS are required to be in co-taught classes.** Some state standards mentioned by the GETs ( $n = 3$ ) and SETS ( $n = 8$ ) included the requirements of inclusion of students in OCS. One district of the three seemed to require that students in OCS be included in particular co-taught classes; however, teachers in this county stated firmly that this was a state requirement. As one SET mentioned, “Students in OCS are required to be included by the state. They are already included in the CTE classes and we’re starting to include them in biology next year because they have to be included.” Another GET felt strongly that OCS students were required to be included by the state: “OCS kids have to take biology in an inclusive environment as required by the state. They have an EOC in biology—it is not counted for the score so why put those kids through it? Those kids can’t read—1st or 2nd grade level—but that is the policy, they have to take it.”

Another teacher shared similar insight but added how the requirement to include a population of students with very high needs creates difficulties in serving students who have mild to moderate needs. The SET said, “It is policy that when they [students in

OCS] are in a core taught class, we [SETs] have to be there. When you have students in OCS, then you pull your LD in with those, and then you have OCS, LD and your typical students all in the same class; it is stressful to meet all those needs. I feel like we do okay, but it sure is difficult.”

**Students in OCS may be in co-taught classes.** Some districts seemed to allow teachers to determine if students in OCS were assigned to a co-taught class or if they visited the class when the adaptive curriculum and standard curriculum aligned in the co-taught classroom as they deemed appropriate. A SET illustrates how he felt it was more of a choice by the IEP team to include or not to include the students in OCS when he explained, “Students in OCS can be included because the curriculum aligns in certain areas, especially in English. It is easy to include them in English so we do that; it is much harder to align the two curriculums in math.” Another teacher in the same district felt positive about the inclusion of OCS in a core English class and said she was always looking for “ways the adapted curriculum and standard aligned so she could include them more in co-taught classes.”

**Highly qualified status for SETs is important.** Some SETs ( $n = 4$ ) and GETs ( $n = 1$ ) also discussed the changes in teacher certification based on a shift in requirements for the state test and highly qualified status given to special education teachers. SETs reported that the expectation of the district to have content area license was strong and pressure to co-teach with an emphasis on content knowledge was seen as a hindrance. In describing expectations of the district, one SET said:

Five years ago all of our highly qualified criteria changed and I know that impacted a lot of us and since then, it has been strongly encouraged at the EC district level for us to go and get certified in specific subject areas. I was already English certified so it did not affect me as much.

**Class size and ratios are difficult to adhere to.** Finally, class size and ratios of students with disabilities and students without disabilities enrolled in the class seemed to be an area of concern for most SETs ( $n = 9$ ) and some GETs ( $n = 2$ ). The discussion often related to a need for additional staff to adhere to the ratios required by the state. The written policy analysis showed that the state guidance concerning the ratio of students with disabilities compared to the students without disabilities is that no more than 80% of the total population of the class should be students with a disability (NCDPI, 2014).

All co-teachers interviewed had classes in the parameters set forth by the state but many SETs reported that they go over the required amount determined by the state as they see it. It is important to note that best practice in co-taught literature suggests no more than a third of the class should be students with a disability. However, all four teachers of one of the school districts fully perceived it as a state requirement and had a desire to adhere to the perceived policy. One SET explained, “I am not supposed to have over that 50% of students with disabilities [in a co-taught classroom] but sometimes we do.” Another SET expressed a similar concern and connected it to need for more faculty:

The computer schedules them and then we go back in as SETS and hand schedule. There may be 10 students with LD, but I may have 5 more over in this class and they’re juniors too so I have to pull them in there. That is why the class ended up having 31 because I pulled them in and I do kick out a few regular ed in that process, but not too many because I try to stay in the state required ratios.

When this SET was asked what the required ratio was, she replied, “50% is the allotted percentage.”

It is unclear if this requirement was interpreted to be less at the district level as they found a percentage that was somewhere between best practice and the state ratio. It is just as possible that this was merely a misunderstanding of the teachers in one district or a mythical policy that teachers believed to be true. It is also possible that one person in the county is responsible for this expectation. No conclusions could be made based on the data collected. What is clear is that teachers consider ratios and class size and find this an area of concern.

**Graduation rate is a constant pressure.** Teachers think about state monitoring of the graduation rate when they consider how to serve students in high school. In discussing the need for more faculty to serve students, one SET shared, “I cannot cover English II if I stay within the ratio of the state and you need that support for the research paper for graduation, cannot cover them twice a year, just do not have that manpower, even though we have more [faculty] than the other high schools in the county based on the ratio of students.” Teachers felt students meeting graduation requirements was of key importance and that they needed to support each student with an IEP by having time with them to work on these requirements. In order to do so, co-teachers felt taxed and that more resources were needed.

### **Perspectives of District and School Policy**

SETs did not mention policies at the district or school level that governed their co-teaching work. When asked directly about any policies at these levels, they were

more likely to discuss procedures and implementation of state policy than precise policy at the district and school levels. These procedures will be addressed in the next section with discussion of the second research question.

### **GET Perspectives of Policy**

As the GETs discussed the policies that influence their work in the co-teaching environment, they addressed concerns about the technology emphasis and the changes in curriculum standards at the state level. All GETs ( $n = 10$ ) noted problems differentiating instruction based on these standards and tended to worry about getting all students prepared. The policies that they felt hindered the co-teaching classroom also seemed to be perceived as a hindrance across all of their classes.

Many GETs joined in the conversation with SETs regarding federal policies, district policies, and school policies. The details of those discussions will be presented later in the chapter. However, only two policies linked to the state were discussed by GETs. They included technology and curriculum demands related to the college and career ready initiative.

### **Technology Emphasis Hinders Co-teaching Practice**

GETs loosely referenced initiatives regarding technology. The teachers that discussed technology perceived requirements of integration of technology into their classroom as a state requirement that was a positive experience. Most identified unique ways they differentiate with students in the co-taught class by using iPads, computers, and the Smartboard. However, some teachers noted that with students in the co-taught classes, it seemed to be more difficult to use technology.

One GET explained,

I think that is a constant expectation that we integrate technology and not that technology is a bad thing. It is a great thing and those are important skills to those students, but sometimes we need to do groundwork before we can get to the technology piece, so we have to build up to that.

It seems that the teacher felt there were prerequisite skills needed before students could use technology in the classroom. The curricular demands were tied closely with the technology demands, according to the GETs.

### **College and Career Ready Initiative is a Focus in Co-taught Classes**

GETs spoke a great deal about the demands of curriculum at the high school level and shared how curricular expectations make their jobs more difficult in various classes.

Speaking to how math co-teachers are particularly at a disadvantage, one GET said,

Our goal is to follow state policy and have everyone college and career ready, and I'm not seeing that happen in all core classes. I think it happens in CTE classes. I don't think it's happening in core classes because of what is on the test and they are having to spend so much time teaching to the test that you have kids coming in here, 9th and 10th grade that cannot add 5+1 without using a calculator because they have been so programmed of what they have to do to pass the test that they have no idea of how to think anymore and we don't have the time to teach them how to think or give them time to try to work out anything because you are having to fulfill too much that is in the curriculum. There is just too much required in the math curriculum.

Another GET extended the idea that the issues with curriculum may be more universal instead of specific to co-taught classes or felt only by students with disabilities by saying, "It is not just with students with disabilities . . . I have an honor student and I am seeing that with him. He is getting a bite of this and a bite of this and a bite of this

and when he has a test he has to remember all of those bites and it's just not happening because he's not having enough time to work with it and understand it." The GET continued to make the point that education should be responsive to the world we lives in and felt there was too much memorization required of students. She said,

It's such a fast-paced society and everything is instant, and if I can use the internet to look something up why not, and as a teacher, if I'm struggling with something, I can use the internet, then why can't kids? Why does everything have to be memorized? Why does everything have to be measured by a test? If they had the ability to solve a problem however they solve the problem, why is that not good enough?

### **GET and SET Perspectives of Policy**

Most GETs and SETs felt that particular laws and mandates existed at the federal and state levels that influence their work in the co-teaching class. NCLB was the primary policy discussed by both the SETs and GETs. It was apparently the mandate that the GETs and SETs equally discussed in great detail in terms of the parts of NCLB that they felt had a detrimental effect on co-teaching practice. Although some acknowledged the necessity of the law, SETs and GETS discussed the problems associated with the teacher evaluation system in their co-taught classroom. GETs tended to discuss test scores and the unfairness of action plans based on lack of student growth. GETs and SETs linked many of the challenging aspects of their work to NCLB and standardized state assessments.

### **Perspectives of Federal Policy**

Teachers only briefly mentioned federal guidelines and policies when discussing their work in co-taught classrooms. However, when they discussed the policies, they

were very clear about their perspectives of how they hinder the co-teaching process and schools in general.

**NCLB has unrealistic goals for some students.** Some SETs ( $n = 3$ ) and GETS ( $n = 4$ ) specifically discussed parts of NCLB as a policy that hinders their work with students in the co-taught classroom. One SET explained, “NCLB assumes they could all meet this mark at a certain age but that is assuming that they’ve all had the same life experiences, well they haven’t and school does not equal that.” The GET co-teaching partner of this pair echoed, “School doesn’t give everybody those experiences and that background knowledge and those experiences make so much of a difference in their ability to learn in the co-taught classroom.”

These teachers felt that life experiences were not considered when the federal mandate was implemented and that their perceived requirement of educating everyone at the same pace is unrealistic. Another GET mentioned the unfairness of expecting all students to achieve academic goals in a specified timeframe. She shared,

You know, I have two children, perfectly great children, same parents, one is walking at 10 months old and one is walking at 13 months old. Does that mean the 13 month old is not any better than the other that walked at 10 months old? No—it’s not fair. He was sick from birth and had lots of health issues . . .

The problem with lack of consideration of other factors such as home life, social environment, and lack of prior experiences described by the teachers seemed to be related to the underlying assumption that students with disabilities are more likely to present with these other factors.

A SET extended the conversation when she explained her view that it is not simply unfair but detrimental to the education of particular students to place those with moderate or severe disabilities, who need to work on mastery of basic skills, in a co-taught setting.

If I look at it from the standpoint of NCLB, so you know, I am still supposed to expose my OCS kids, who have some issues and who work slower—they're still supposed to be exposed to grade level material when they have not mastered fifth-grade material . . . it is not fair.

The idea of fairness continued to be a theme as the teachers discussed testing to measure student progress and teacher effectiveness.

### **Perspectives of State Policy**

Questions about state policies resulted in one of the co-teachers (GET) beginning a discussion related to testing, evaluation, and graduation rate by simply stating, "I don't think you can get past test scores with any discussion of administration and policy" and the co-teaching partner (SET) added ". . . and graduation rate." Teachers believed the state testing requirements led to district policies that were often misaligned.

**Students are discouraged by testing requirements.** The teachers showed a great deal of compassion for the students and acknowledged the problems the assessments create for motivating students at the high school level. One SET clarified this point when she shared,

We work on getting them through the end. Cheerleading them through the end, making them see, don't lose hope! Don't give up, I know it seems overwhelming and hard. The GET echoed the response, "We say, 'Don't give up!'" That for me

is the most pressure and sometimes the parents feel like we expect too much and in reality, it is the state.

**Most students will pass if the content is taught effectively.** Not all SETs and GETs felt state assessments were a hindrance to their co-teaching work. As one teacher made the point,

I don't feel like we're stifled or we're teaching to the test. I mean it's just that I feel like we just teach what they require us to teach and then if we do that well, they will show it on the test unless they are just bad test takers. IF they are not good test takers and they don't do well on the EOC, we give input. We say "they worked hard, their grades are pretty good in the classroom, I think they should pass and [administration] usually say okay!"

In this teachers view, teaching what is required was the focus of their work.

### **Perspectives of District Policy**

The SETs and GETs all agree that there were difficulties with the implementation of policies at the district level that were designed to support the state testing standards. For example, both GETs and SETs discussed concerns that the changes in student requirements on assessments have resulted in district benchmarks that do not align with state EOC requirements and take too long to administer to students. The following dialogue occurred upon discussing changes in the English I EOC:

GET: The questions now ask, for example, it won't identify a theme. It will say, how does the author's tone affect the theme? So how is a kid supposed to, first of all they've got to identify the correct tone, then they have to identify just one theme, the most important theme, and then figure out how to make the connection, how the tone affects theme.

SET: So the test itself takes forever because there's so much they have to do for one question. We've started making up strategies, there must be strategies all

over the place . . . for the informational test, we made up something called MAPS—just to give them something to focus on while they’re working on it. It’s a beast of a test.

The loss of instructional time in the co-taught classroom was a concern for many SETs and GETs as the students have to use extended time to take the “beast of a test.”

Another GET explained how the district’s response of making a benchmark is seen as an unnecessary hindrance in the co-taught classroom. She explained,

The county will make a benchmark . . . , my poor students. It took them three class periods to take a 40 question reflection of this test and they have four hours to do 80 questions and 4 constructive responses. So they have to rush a bit faster and then you get the other EOCs that only take them an hour, two hours.

**Curriculum standards are difficult to align.** Additionally, curriculum standards emerged as a concern when SETs spoke of joining of the OCS standards with core standards. As one SET stated,

There’s too much in the curriculum for them to have to work on and when you’re combining two curriculums (OCS and Core) into one class and you have, I know you always want to have a variety of levels and differentiation is wonderful, but it’s not practical, in that classroom when you have that many needs. I mean you’re talking about teachers would be working non-stop to get this particular lesson ready for this one and for this one, and for this one.

**Teacher evaluations are not comprehensive.** SETs consistently reported that their teacher evaluation was based on the expectations of the district special education department and that they did not have the pressure of negative consequences based on their particular students’ progress. One SET explained, “This year, I will get the average score of the school’s EOC (state standard 6—I think is what that is called) and the state

level for me is made up of the school as a whole EOC scores.” These teachers make the point that growth could be measured in different ways to determine the good work co-teachers do every day in the classroom and that scores on standardized assessments do not necessarily reflect everything accomplished. One teacher gave an alternative assessment that she felt would be more comprehensive when considering teacher evaluations. This SET said in relation to students in OCS, “We have this graduation portfolio that I guess that is a state thing. I think that’s a much better measure of what they know and what they’ve demonstrated than a standardized test. That could be used for evaluating co-teachers at least.”

SETs also seemed to be concerned about faculty accountability regarding testing. SETs described limited faculty available to help prepare students for the assessments and thought that the assessments were categorically unfair. For example, one SET said,

You’re accountable for all the LD kids and their general education peers. You know, we are still accountable for the 10th graders who take the state test and they are expected to be on the same spectrum which is a whole other issue when we do not serve them in 10th-grade English.

Another teacher displayed fear of losing her job if teachers do not do well on standardized assessments when she said, “I think we are both thinking okay we want them to be prepared [for the assessment] and if we lose our job, we lose our job and God’s got something else for us. Because we are doing what is best for them.”

Throughout this section, the perspectives of identification of formal policy has been clearly seen by considering the policies and regulations mentioned by co-teachers through each level of the system including federal, state, district, and school. In addition,

the data collected shows the differences between the regulations and laws that SETs believe guide co-teaching and those noted by GETs. SETs seem to articulate federal policies and laws more fluidly than GETs. SETs mentioned IDEA, FAPE, the importance of IEP while GETs discussed the impact on technology initiatives and college and career ready expectations as problematic. Both GETs and SETs were able to discuss the ways some state policies hinder their co-teaching. Both co-teachers mentioned NCLB, teacher evaluations, curriculum standards, and accountability measures related to testing. In the next section, Research Question 2 will explore the informal elements of policy and how co-teachers believe these procedures practices and understanding guide their co-teaching.

### **Research Question 2**

*What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?*

All teachers felt they were primarily responsible for developing the co-teaching relationship. As one GET put it, "It was really something that developed based on our expectations of each other and what we thought was right for the kids." However, both GETs and SETs recognized the value of gaining professional knowledge of specialized education services and subject or content area expertise. Co-teachers discussed aspects of the working environment that support their efforts and identified opportunities for growth related to procedures and practices. The following sections depict perspectives of GETs and SETs concerning how they build professional knowledge, such as professional development opportunities and collaboration in professional learning communities

(PLCs), procedures that support co-teaching practice, including consistency of co-teaching partnerships and content areas taught, as well as supportive administrative characteristics and leadership skills that help co-teaching to be successful.

### **Perspectives Regarding Professional Knowledge**

Co-teachers discussed professional knowledge in multiple ways. Special education knowledge and content area knowledge were both seen as valuable assets to the co-teaching relationship. Some GETs ( $n = 6$ ) shared how they determined their own expectations of co-teaching by relying on the knowledge of co-teaching shared by their co-teaching partner. SETs tended to share information about changes in teacher licensure in their field of study and addressed why these changes impacted the co-teaching relationship. Details of perspectives of SETs and GETs concerning professional knowledge unique to each co-teachers' responsibilities are explained in the following sections.

#### **Special Education Co-teaching Knowledge is Key to the Partnership**

It was evident that the pairs relied heavily on the SET to share information concerning how to implement co-teaching in their classrooms. This was logical considering the demographic data showed that the total years of co-teaching experience for SETs was on average 8.4 years with a range from 3 to 18 years' experience, whereas GETs average co-teaching experience was 4.9 years with a range from 1.5 to 15 years. Thus, it is not surprising that SETs seemed to have a firm understanding of best practices of co-teaching and a strong influence about the ways the pair would construct their co-

teaching partnership due to the amount of experience and professional knowledge they have acquired though the number of years they have co-taught.

### **Licensure for Special Educators is a Concern of Co-teachers**

Conversely, although SETs felt they knew more about how to implement co-teaching, they were concerned about their knowledge base in content areas as well as highly qualified status changes in criteria as part of the state licensure process. The SETs referred to the federal teacher licensure audit conducted by the federal government in 2009 which indicated that the Praxis 0511 (Fundamental Subjects: Content Knowledge) did not satisfy HQ requirements for the content area instruction and that an alternative method of meeting the HQ status known as high objective uniform state standard of evaluation (EC HOUSSE) was deemed not rigorous enough. Therefore, disqualification of highly qualified status was widespread among special education teachers.

Of the SETs who were referred for this study, most ( $n = 8$ ) were considered highly qualified in both special education and in the content area in which they co-teach. SETs identified HQ status as a concern for their colleagues and for co-teaching practice in general. Primarily, problems arose with the inability of teachers to be “teacher of record” and teachers reported that this affected parity in those co-teaching relationships. It is important to note that the co-teachers interviewed did not have this issue as they were all dually certified in content area and in special education. Therefore, they were describing it as a concern for their colleagues. SETs shared that they believed expectations at the district level were created to counter the issues with lack of HQ status. Districts interpreted this various ways and many variations of roles and responsibilities

were created for co-teachers as a result. For example, some districts specifically determined that students with disabilities would be assigned in the general education block for half of the time and then would be pulled out by the co-teacher for a remaining half of the time while other districts relied on virtual public high school to deliver instruction to students with disabilities. Yet other districts were not as prescriptive and relied on the relationship between the co-teaching pairs to address any issues as they co-taught for the entire block.

In all of three of the counties, specific expectations were placed on SETs regarding certification. One teacher commented, “Certification in subject area is strongly encouraged at the district level” and another shared the expectation, “We have to, well, we don’t have to, but I am English certified and the other EC teacher is math certified so she goes into the math classes.” Yet another SET mentioned, “We go into the areas where our specialties are.”

### **Content Area Knowledge is Important When Co-teaching**

Most co-teachers ( $n = 13$ ) shared how valuable it is to understand the content of the subject areas at the high school level and believed this should be considered when determining what to teach. Co-teachers relied heavily on their professional knowledge with one teacher sharing,

Because I’m a certified English, I think that helps. I’ve been in English classes for 17 years, I have that background too. But if I go into, I haven’t this year, but in years past, if I went from an English to a history class, it was helpful to be able to go into the history classes and say, “Hey, this project is writing but you’re writing in English so we’ve got to carry these skills”; if I went into a math class, it would be a disaster. I would be learning, not teaching . . . learning. So I stay away from math classes for that reason.

### **Consistency of Co-teaching Subject Area Supports Strong Relationships**

Some co-teachers ( $n = 7$ ) did not think content expertise was needed but that consistency weighed more heavily. Consistency regarding the co-teaching partner and the subject taught was considered a supportive practice for various reasons. Teachers felt consistency helped to clarify roles and responsibilities and helped them develop stronger relationships with their co-teaching partners and the students they serve.

One teacher explained that it was a matter of convenience and streamlining of responsibilities that made him more effective. He explained,

I think you can benefit some students but I don't think anywhere to the degree of what you can do if you are just assigned to one [content area]. I know every day what I am doing and before when I had multiple preps, you weren't sure what you were doing and it was kind of hard to switch from math to English to science so, for me, I think I like that they (administrators) keep us in one subject area.

### **Consistency of Co-teaching Subject Area is a Matter of Convenience**

Another idea emerged concerning the impact consistency of teaching a particular subject matter or course has on defining roles and supporting relationships with students.

One SET described her experience co-teaching across content areas:

When I started here 11 years ago, we did math and English, we kind of mixed them all together. I was fine with either one, so we just kind of mixed and matched between the two subjects. When Mr. C came on board he was very, hey can I do math? I'm not an English person. I have an English degree and it made sense for me to do the English and I was like fine, let's just go ahead and define the two roles totally separate. And it's a little easier now. The kids identify him as the math co-teacher, I'm the English co-teacher, so my kids and his kids, we have them for four years, so it's kind of nice, in the same subject.

Another SET held a slightly different view regarding the benefit of content specific assignment. He thought the consistency of teaching one content area was convenient and helped him more efficiently prepare for what he was doing each day and said his belief is that “you are going to be more effective in the classroom if you’re just a math co-teacher, that is what I am doing now and it is working” but he went on to say that he felt content area specialization was not absolutely necessary, noting “I think I could do a decent job in all of those subjects because I have done science, English, and now math. If I had one of each during the day, I could do the basics enough to be effective.” The co-teaching partner extended the point made when she said,

They look at him (SET) as another math teacher instead of a EC teacher so I think that if he was more spread out in different subjects areas, he may not develop that relationship with the students that he has and they may not feel as comfortable coming to him and asking for assistance in specific subjects.

This teacher suggested that relationships with students may be more fully developed if a teacher stays in one content area.

Students benefit if teachers are consistently placed in co-taught classrooms. One SET explained, “I think the nice thing about staying in a subject area too is there are kids that I see, they were in English I and they pop up in English 4 and they’re like Hey Ms. B and they get it and then they become regular ed models for others in the class.”

### **Professional Development**

Both GETs and SETs suggested professional development (PD) should be used to increase professional knowledge of co-teaching. PD was seen as a necessary component of building co-teaching practice and many desired to learn more about how to be

effective. The majority of those interviewed had experienced PD in their current district or a previous district in which they worked. However, teachers had specific thoughts regarding when PD should occur and how it should be conducted. They seemed to look for structure through PD instead of seeing it as a place to learn about options or strategies that may be used during co-teaching practice.

### **Co-teachers Feel They Lack Professional Development**

Unfortunately, many teachers ( $n = 12$ ) felt they were given little or no support when they first began co-teaching. They relied on their assumptions of what they thought was the best way to implement co-teaching. A GET explained, “I feel like we’ve done great. If they want certain methods to be used, then they should maybe give us some expectations on exactly what this should look like.” Co-teachers took it upon themselves to determine if what they were doing was effective.

Another GET described how she was introduced to the world of co-teaching without PD of any kind, “It was the 1st day of school [for teachers] and I saw I had an extra section in my roster and I didn’t know what that was and then the special education teacher came in and told me I was co-teaching.” Another GET explained a similar perspective, “I just feel like for the most part they just throw you together and they say, ‘Go!’”

Another GET explained how they developed their co-teaching practice despite the lack of PD: “We had no training but she [the SET] had co-taught before so we just created it based on what we thought it should look like and how it was going to help kids.” The SET of the co-teaching pair added, “I also read some information about co-

teaching on my own. Looked up some stuff.” Some co-teachers shared thoughts about why PD was not given. Many believed it just was not seen as important at the district or school level. A SET described other priorities that she felt the district focused on instead of co-teaching training: “We don’t really discuss much as far as how we participate in the inclusion/co-taught class at the district level, it’s more like, here’s the paperwork, a lot of reviewing paperwork.”

### **Perceived Quality of Professional Development Matters**

Some of the SETs ( $n = 4$ ) and GETs ( $n = 1$ ) who attended trainings described them as incomplete or not relatable to the specific environment. A SET shared that it matters that the person training them has knowledge outside of what the county people have and that ideally, they would have co-teaching experience and felt “It would be helpful if we could get somebody out of the county to train us, when you get somebody from our county office that has gone off somewhere else and they want to put their two cents worth and they have never co-taught, it makes it hard to apply or believe.”

Some SETs ( $n = 2$ ) described trainings that lacked quality according to the co-teachers. As one SET explained,

I think there were 3 or 4 models, and they said you know this is the way you can do, but the thing is at our district level, it was a variety of different ways to co-teach and they pushed all of them on us and coming from 4 years of trying to co-teach, I knew those things may not work, one of them was even fly by the seat of your pants or something like that.

It was apparent that this SET did not see how the models learned in the professional development that was a one day event could be implemented in his co-teaching practice.

Another SET described what she saw as a disconnect between knowledge and implementation because of her unique experience:

We were made to go to a co-teaching meeting at the beginning of the year, the reg ed and the sped teachers, and we were given a list of examples of ways to co-teach, some of those were to split the room into two halves and one teacher discuss one thing and another teacher discuss another thing, and that is good when your co-teacher is fluent in that subject but this being my first year in history, I am learning as the students go and so separating them into two groups is probably not the best thing to do because I do not know the information that well.

Teachers have a difficult time implementing methods that they feel are recommended by their district without consideration of context.

Based on perspectives shared, it is evident that mixed messages are sent from the district level relating to the best model to use for co-teaching practice. As one SET explained,

The district expectation is that we are both standing in front of the room talking to the class together, 'cause we've taken training on co-teaching, you know, all the different models of it and that was what the district told us- that is the expectation. It is not done that way in every class. I do not do it that way in every class.

The co-teacher shared belief that a “one way fits all approach” was not successful in co-teaching practice.

### **Co-teachers' Recommendations for Professional Development**

Despite the inconsistencies in quality and perceived relevance of PD, every teacher ( $n = 20$ ) in the study felt that PD was a supportive tool that could be useful to co-teachers, especially if teachers are allowed to collaborate with other co-teachers across schools and across districts. Teachers expressed a desire to learn ways to improve their

practice. One teacher summed it up by saying, “I think PD would help if it is someone who understands the context and maybe someone who has been in schools like yours where it works, right? As a teacher, you would say that that person knows what they are talking about!” Teachers agreed that they could benefit from seeing strategies and models used in classrooms “like their co-teaching classroom” and it would be nice to know if what they were doing was following what other successful co-teaching teams are doing.

### **Professional Learning Communities**

Another way that co-teachers believed they could increase the professional knowledge of co-teaching is through participation in PLCs. GETs reported that they benefited from content specific PLCs and when the co-teaching pair was part of the same PLC, it was seen as a greatly supportive practice. One GET explained,

I think the most important thing is to join PLCs and plan together because I think it is so important for them to know what is going on in the classroom. I have come down here numerous times saying this is how I plan to teach this, what is your perspective from the EC side of things. That makes us successful.

### **Planning Time is Important to Co-teachers**

Co-teachers reported a desire for more planning time. They believed that PLCs were an optimal time for this to occur. As one GET described: “The PLCs give us the chance to, it’s almost like forced planning time and unfortunately, I don’t get to go to their PLCs like I would like to and she doesn’t get to come to mine. We don’t get a lot of that collaborative time because EC has theirs and English has ours.” Another teacher

explained why PLCs are not part of the co-teacher planning when she noted, “They focus on the courses that have the EOCs and the NC finals.”

### **PLCs are Difficult to Consistently Attend**

Even when co-teachers are scheduled to attend PLCs, they often find it difficult to do so. One teacher indicated that PLCs are structured for the co-teaching pair but are difficult to fit into the schedule when other priorities arise. She said, “We need to find better ways. We are supposed to meet once a week for PLC’s but I get pulled usually on Fridays to, you know, do tests or whatever; but PLCs would be nice on a weekly basis.” Another teacher had a similar dilemma as she explained,

Ours are on Friday but maybe if we changed it to a different day, it would work because it seems like on Fridays, I am doing testing with students. Our principal said she was trying to put together a roster of a Monday that these teachers are supposed to do read aloud and accommodations for assessments. We are working on it.

### **Planning Can Take Many Forms**

Some co-teaching pairs shared the firm belief that planning can take many forms. As one GET explained, “I’d say we probably talk at least a couple times a week while we’re teaching a class together and make sure that we’re kind of on the same page and moving towards the same things and what needs to be adapted.” The brief planning completed by the co-teaching pair seemed to be enough to aid the success of the co-teaching effort. However, another pair indicated that the brief planning works, but more lengthy and involved planning is preferred. The SET explained,

Planning time helps us do this well. Last semester, we had planning time at the same time which was nice because we could come into each other's room, sit down and discuss things. This semester, we don't have planning time together, but being next door helps. If she was not next door, I don't know when we would do it. I just don't know how we could plan and be successful.

As described by many co-teachers, planning time was important but they seemed to make whatever little time they found work. They preferred more structured planning time but managed to accomplish a great deal in the short period of time when the schedule did not allow additional time.

### **Special Education-specific PLC**

Some SETs identified the benefit of being in a PLC comprising of only SETs who co-teach. She explained,

But I do find the PLC part on my end, it's nice to talk with Mr. C to talk a little bit about, you know, in class today I did this, even though it's math and English, it's interesting to hear what he's doing on his end and he and I can kind of meet the same expectation of participation as teachers in the class.

### **Administrative Expectations that Support Co-teaching Practice**

Co-teachers shared ways their administrator supported the practice of co-teaching in the school. Teachers reported examples that show principals trust teachers to be innovative, consider individual student growth in co-taught classes, and create an environment in which co-teaching is valued by other staff.

### **Co-teachers Feel Trusted by their Partner and Administration**

Co-teachers consistently discussed the concept of trust and how it plays a role in developing strong co-teaching practice. Comments by SETs illustrate their feeling of

being confident in the co-teaching pairs' ability and being trusted by their administrators in terms innovation. One SET explained, "I feel like, for the most part, administrators support anything that we try. In some classes, we've split the entire class and we will take turns teaching different parts of lessons. I feel like we have support in doing whichever way we feel is best for the students." Another SET shared, "We definitely have support from them and I feel like they trust us to do the right things for the students. Yet another SET explained specifically the ways the trust can be used to be innovative,

I think administration wants us to do whatever is going to be successful, whatever we need to do to help each kid in the classroom be successful. Whether it is to keep them all together, whether it be her teach a lesson then me teach a lesson, whether it be her teach content and I provide support on learning strategies, they don't care how we do it if it is leading to a successful outcome for the student.

Trust discussed by co-teachers was seen as a supportive element necessary to co-teach between themselves and their partners, as well as, between their administrator and the partnership.

### **Co-teachers Focus on Student Growth**

Many co-teachers discussed the ways their administrator helps them approach assessment with a positive attitude. One GET explained, "Administration let us know that state testing is a very important component, but they don't hang it over our heads." Another echoed this point and acknowledged that her principal was not deterred by the scores being reported to the district and being a reflection of the principals' work. The SET explained,

He emphasizes growth a lot. And that's kind of nice because all of the scores in the school, they're still going down as a lump down to the district level and so the individual growth of certain students is not going to be seen, but he still focuses on the importance of that and celebrates when a kid just passes the class.

Other co-teachers felt that realistic expectations were important when it comes to assessment of students. As one GET explained,

Our administrators look at the roster and what I can say about the previous principal and this one. They'll look at our roster and they'll be Hey he made a 2, hey that's better than I expected, or Wow, I can't believe he passed. They know the kids enough to know who the low flyers are gonna be and who to expect.

Another GET shared the idea that it is important for administrators to understand the unfairness of the assessments, saying, "They're not questioning our teaching methods and why they can't do what they can do, especially in English. I think it's different because you have so many kids who don't read well and it's just not a fair assessment."

Acknowledgement of student effort is essential according to some co-teachers. For example, one SET described the excitement her principal had when a student passed a class comfortably regardless of test scores when she said, "You know what, but he worked his tail off so we (co-teachers and administrators) meet in the committee and we decide and make decisions on passing and failing there."

Other co-teachers discussed holding high expectations but appreciating individual student growth. A GET explained, "I think the principal imparts the belief in co-teaching to the regular ed teachers. That tells them we have expectations for our kids to make progress. To improve their skills, high scores are nice but we also want to see growth." This GET continued, noting that her administrator definitely focuses on student success

as he stated the following earlier in the semester: “One day we’re going to get every student into an honors class.” For some teachers, the focus on student growth helps them remain confident in their ability to co-teach. As another GET explained, “I don’t feel like the administration at school is looking at us and going shame on you, you should have done more. I don’t think they’d ever say that to us. They know that we’re doing a good job.” One GET summed it up best when she explained,

I think it’s nice for them to remind us, it’s not about if they pass, it’s about if they display growth and we know that they display growth at the end of our semester, So I rest easily at night knowing that while I’m waiting for my scores from that inclusion class, I know they’re not going to be great, but I know that when administration sits down and really evaluates it, our kids are going to demonstrate growth.

### **A Supportive School Environment is Vital to Co-teaching**

Another idea that emerged from teacher comments was the principals’ ability to empower co-teachers to structure their environment with the help of other staff in the school. For example, one SET explained,

Our guidance counselors are awesome and the head guidance counselor . . . basically, we put [students] in the co-teach classes where we want them and where we want study skills and we build the whole school’s schedule around it. ‘Cause they’re the ones that have to have so many concessions and in some semesters, they may have a math and English and study skills and they cannot overlap.

Teachers also feel administrators have a great deal of influence on the culture of the school and how much their role as co-teacher is valued. One SET explained,

“Administrators are very supportive. Our principal in particular guides how the others

have to think really. He's focused on scores and I think there are some days when he gets hyper-focused on it, yes, but it's not every day." The GET then added: "But as far as really pulling us in from the co-teach classes and having unrealistic expectations, there's not, they're very much supportive." Another co-teacher shared her ability to have input on who she will work with because of her collaboration with guidance counselors. This SET explained,

We're kinda given, Mr. C and I, the leeway with our principal and our guidance counselor, to choose who we work with. Which is huge. Rather than the administrators saying these partnerships will work. I think if I were assigned to someone, you might get someone you're not real comfortable with or you might get into a class where you're not wanted and I've been there before.

### **Administrative Expectations that Hinder Co-teaching Practice**

It is not surprising that overall, co-teachers who were recommended as successful co-teachers by their administrators felt supported. However, a few of the teachers interviewed discussed expectations, or lack thereof, that hindered their co-teaching practice. The approach administration takes in assigning co-teachers, aiding in placement of students decisions and scheduling, and respect for co-teachers' instructional time in classrooms is important.

### **Random Assignment of Co-teachers**

GETs expressed a desire for principals to have a conversation with them concerning assignment of a co-teaching class. As one GET explained, "I never got a sit down conversation that you are going to be a co-teacher but I did not have a negative or positive connotation because I never did it before so I did not know what to do or how to

feel.” Another GET expressed the idea that the principal can set the tone for co-teaching when she described the apologetic way the principal spoke when telling her she would co-teach in the coming semester. The GET said, “The principal told me in passing that he was sorry but I had a co-teaching class. I ended up loving it but that made me cautious about what it was going to be like.” As these examples indicate, it matters how a principal presents the concept of co-teaching because often a principal’s viewpoint is the first exposure GETs have to the practice and can lead to them perceiving that co-teaching is either an exciting opportunity or a burden.

### **Scheduling and Placement Decisions**

In addition to the approach principals take when informing GETs of their co-teaching assignment, SETs were concerned about making schedules and student placement decisions for co-taught classes. One co-teaching pair described the desire to know the schedule of co-taught classes and have administrative support during decisions regarding placement of students in particular classes.

Another SET pointed at a lack of administrative support at the district level when they discussed their perception that they were on their own. The SET said of placement decisions, “Occasionally, we will discuss who will be in the co-taught class with our special needs administrator; otherwise, it is more of a departmental decision by the EC teachers at the school level.”

Another SET from a different school shared similar thoughts regarding the amount of independence the SETs have in their work when she said,

We are not micro-managed, well, we are not even macro-managed. I don't think because as an EC department, we choose who we are working with based on where the kids are scheduled. I would prefer that we have support from administration and they say this time of year, next year you are working with a co-teacher in . . . and then you are going to work with so and so. Now how that works in your schedule we may not know yet, but this is what we plan on doing instead of having us figure out who we are going to work with and sometimes it is somebody we worked with before and sometimes it's not.

In this situation, the co-teachers felt their work was completely dictated by the students' schedules as created by the guidance counselors with themselves having no input.

These examples show that from the co-teachers' view, it is frustrating for principals to simply inform them where they will be assigned in terms of co-teaching. The co-teachers would prefer that principals allow them input into their assignments so that their individual needs can be more optimally met. However, they do not want the sole responsibility and seek administrative involvement.

### **Value Instructional Time**

Finally, one teacher discussed what she saw as a problem associated with administration relying too heavily on her co-teacher to help them with what she considered to be administrative issues regarding students with disabilities. The GET explains,

I think they respect her [the SET] a little too much because they always pull her out of our co-teaching class to make every decision which is a good thing [because they value the SET] but it hurts our class. From this perspective, SETs should be valued but the importance of being consistently present in the general education classroom during instructional time with the students should be protected.

As can be seen from the co-teachers perspectives of administrative roles in co-teaching programs, creating a supportive culture of the school is very important when supporting co-teachers. The next research question considers the ways teachers reconcile their personal beliefs and philosophy of education with policy messages and roles they take with considerations of the school culture.

### **Research Question 3**

*How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching?*

Teachers discussed what professional roles they took while co-teaching and the multiple ways in which they rely on their understandings of co-teaching practice and content and create a shared vision through collaboration with consideration of the school culture. Co-teachers use their knowledge and teaching philosophies to determine which policies they must strictly adhere to and which policies they can somewhat ignore while they fulfill their co-teaching responsibilities. In the following section, the roles are first described and then the relationship between roles and collaboration, school and student culture, vision, and adherence to policies are shared to uncover the ways co-teachers align their beliefs with expectations and responsibilities of their work.

### **Professional Roles**

Distinct roles that co-teachers assumed became apparent through discussions about relationships as well as direct questions concerning roles and responsibilities. As data were analyzed, three distinct relationships could be identified that related to the roles co-teachers take in the classroom and beyond. The roles are shared in the following

section within the context of relationships between (a) co-teaching partners and (b) co-teachers and the students they serve.

### **SET and GET Relationships**

Co-teachers described a few roles they take based on their area of expertise and teaching knowledge. However, discussion of roles often emerged in terms of responsibilities that are shared among co-teaching partners as they respond to the needs of the class at a particular moment in time. A few teachers also described ways they have learned new skills or changed teaching practice based on the shared knowledge of their co-teaching partner.

**Roles based on expertise.** Many co-teachers described their role in the classroom based upon unique but complementary areas of expertise. SETs often referred to the GETs' content expertise while GETs often referred to the SETs' ability to understand the students' needs and scaffold instruction. One SET explained, "I think the GET is the master of the content and when I see it is necessary, I will ask a clarifying question that I think the students have that they are not asking or I may just bounce in and give the clarification myself as part of delivery of instruction." The GET co-teaching partner expounded on the concept by noting,

I like it a lot because sometimes as the teacher/expert, you kind of forget that not everybody is going to soak it in like you have or really get it, so it helps to have someone else in there like she said . . . like sometimes, she may interject and ask a question that kids might have or explain something a little further, better than I have because she is not the content expert.

Another GET described the roles in a similar manner in terms of collaboration with her SET co-teacher when she explained, “I think some of our best times are I present the material then we can each work in a small group so that he can be right on some people who need that extra help and he knows them well and I can be available to small groups as well.” The co-teaching partner elaborated, “As the co-teacher and not the teacher of record, I feel like my role is to sometimes reteach in a different manner or with different words, modify for those students who need modification and to assist in the learning process for students.” The SET seemed to perceive his role as unique and complementary to the GET role. A GET added to the discussion concerning the different responsibilities,

One thing that Mrs. M does really well is she uses a lot of her knowledge as far as the way people learn, not just with the special needs students, but with students in general. Like if she sees we are losing a lot of people during a lesson, she will have them take their hands and put it over to their opposite arm and do those types of things to refocus and it works!

Another SET explained the importance of the willingness of special educators to become actively engaged in the instruction of the class by explaining her experience of moving from an elementary school to a high school setting when she said,

The only other co-teaching experience I had prior to this was in the elementary setting, which is very different. And so when I came here, it just kind of evolved over time from what it was when I got here, which was sit in the back and take notes, to this is stupid . . . we’re wasting me. Let’s do some groups. My whole thing was let me do the warm-ups, especially in math. That’s what Mr. Cook does usually. If we do the warm-ups, then I don’t have to be the expert and I’m showing my knowledge and we’re going back over it and it’s review and I’m the teacher.

Through these comments it is clear that teachers connect “teacher of record” or general education teacher with a certain level of responsibility. Most SETs feel that it is in their responsibility to complement and complement the instruction and practice of the teacher of record or general education teacher in a co-taught setting.

Another co-teaching pair illustrated their roles by telling a story about a particular unit on Othello and how they used their skills in specific roles:

SET: We shared, not only, we let the students read but we also, she and I read the bigger parts, since it is Othello and it was in Shakespearean language but she [GET] offered the more analytical part of it and I asked the broader questions. But then I always kind of chimed in with “look at around line 147” to kind of refocus them to a smaller area. Not giving them the answer but focusing them on a specific spot. Maybe adding modification a little bit could complement the larger broader concepts with expertise in how to break that down, scaffold it a little bit more for the students.

GET: But it’s nice so the kids can see and there are times when we both struggle with Shakespeare (who doesn’t struggle with Shakespeare?) So I think it was nice for the kids to see us struggling and helping each other so that it felt more like a team as opposed, because with those kinds of kids I think it needs to be a team as opposed as us to them.

SET: We also had the room set up in a circle and like she sat over here and I sat over there, we sat next to students who had problems [engaging], we were spread throughout. It was also bringing in some of the ones over here who may not have been engaged. While we were reading, I was also taking notes to help them, later annotating in my book a lot to help later as we broke out to do questions.

**Roles responsive to student needs.** One SET described her role in trying to meet individual student needs even if that meant making curricular modifications. The SET explained,

This is going to sound very negative, but it’s true. Part of the reason I can water down, well not water down, I can reduce part of what they are having to do for

her is because something they're having to do in that co-teaching classroom has nothing to do with their curriculum and we don't have a way of working in both curriculums. We are trying to get to the adaptive curriculum that they are responsible for instead of watering it down.

Another SET explained how this may not look like what co-teaching should look like but felt she was effective because it was responsive to the student needs in the class.

This SET shared,

We do a lot of partner work in our class so they get a lot of peer tutoring because they tend to respond to that better than working with us. So it's, you know, sometimes the special education role for me looks more like a TA [paraprofessional] role because I'm standing around waiting for a student to need me, sometimes we're actually co-teaching or we are facilitating groups.

The teachers elaborated the benefits gained as their responsibility for students in OCS who were served in the co-taught class increased. As one GET said,

Lots of times, when I give an assignment for the OCS students, if we feel like it is going to take like three days for them to do it, she'll modify—maybe only have them do 1 or two essential parts of the assignment. I will sometimes do modifications now that we have worked together. In the beginning, I could not have done that but we worked enough now that I can do it if needed.

Although the inclusion of students working on the OCS in the co-taught classroom was required in this particular district, the majority of the districts attempted to serve these students through co-teaching when the adaptive curriculum and standard curriculum aligned. Therefore, the sharing of strategies and knowledge of what works for the students can be applied to all co-teaching groups.

Another GET shared a slightly different experience. She did not focus her response on how she worked with students with disabilities but rather adjusted her approach when teaching all students. She shared that she has changed her entire teaching style through her experience with co-teaching. She shared, “The thing is, like in the past couple of years while I have been co-teaching, I’ve completely changed my whole teaching anyway. I mean I hardly ever lecture. If I ever do, it’s for a few minutes and it’s a lot of collaborative group work.”

Another SET went into great detail about how her roles in the co-taught classroom change among different classes she is assigned with different co-teaching partners. She said,

If there are different roles for me in the class that’s fine, in different classes. And I think that would be the only negative is there are times when I sit back in other classes and maybe they’ve chosen a particular book they’ve taught for two or three years and I’m sitting here going, it’s not going to connect with this group but I keep my mouth shut because I don’t want to breach that trust and that respect for each other. But with this co-teacher, she’ll say, “What do you think about that book,” and I’ll be honest and we usually make a decision together. Whereas, and it what’s interesting to me, is it does not matter about the experience of the teacher—I’ve had the same situation happen with a 2nd-year teacher and a 25th-year teacher. There’s really no reason, some people just see my role as more support.

As can be seen by the detailed response of the SETs and GETs above roles can be defined in the partnership, may lead to a shift in teaching style or may be fluid across various environments. Teachers tend to rely on what works in a specific environment and are responsive to the needs therein.

### **Co-teacher and Student Relationships**

At least one co-teacher of each pair mentioned the relationship factor between the SET and the students they serve. Although teachers recognized their expertise, they considered the students' needs when determining their roles. One SET explained,

It's not that I'm always working with the special education students in the classroom. I work with every student, she works with every student, if I feel like the special education student is not responding to me, or there is a question more related to content and I'm not comfortable explaining everything, you know, she will come over and she will work with that student and I will work with some of the general education students.

Another SET reinforced the importance of being responsive to all students when she described, "I think that I support mainly the EC students but am available to all students in a classroom. I mean if a child who is not EC comes to me for help, I am not going to turn them away." Another SET described her role as a responsibility that comes with the job of co-teaching: "The expectation is that I will help them all. They just see me as another teacher in there."

Both SETs and GETs described the ability of the teacher to build a strong relationship with the students across classes as an asset. SETs believed they could use the relationship to motivate students. One SET described in this way the responsibility of understanding what is going on with a student if he or she is not performing well: "I dig deep. A lot of times, I'll go way back and see what the kid—if the kid is not doing well on tests, I'll go back and research and see what's going on at home." The SETs seemed to advocate for the students if they were struggling, attempting to identify a factor that may be a barrier to the students' progress.

Another SET shared his ability to form strong bonds with the students and saw that as a role he would take on for multiple years. He described the ability to build rapport and a lasting relationship with students with and without disabilities as his primary role. He said,

I can develop a relationship with the worst kid. Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad [because] they'll worry me for four years (laughing). But as long as we're teaching stuff and if that kid is not doing it—we've got some that I don't know what to do with—but to get to that kid—whatever we have to do to get them to put forth the effort and try to learn and do decent in the class.

The SETs and GETs interviewed appeared motivated to share ownership of the students in their classroom. The teachers were not focused on whether a student was identified as having a disability when they spoke of their work in the co-taught classroom. One GET noted,

Sometimes she [the SET] can get through to a particular kid who may not have an IEP, well then that does not really matter. Whoever can get that student motivated, and sometimes I am the only one who can get through to a student who has a disability. It's a relationship thing, we do whatever works.

The roles described above hint at the importance of collaboration between SETs and GETs in high school co-teaching. The following section describes more in depth how co-teachers collaborate while considering content and behavior management in their shared classroom.

### **Collaboration in Co-teaching Settings**

Not all co-teachers are able to work with someone they know or have worked with before although one SET noted, “I would really prefer to co-teach with people that I

work well with.” The co-teachers described situations in which they would work collaboratively to address content and student behavior concerns. To work collaboratively, teachers indicated that parity was imperative as well as a shared goal.

Parity was expressed with precision by a GET who said, “Everything my co-teacher says is important. She wouldn’t say it if it wasn’t something that helps the students.” The co-teaching SET partner reiterated their approach to addressing content demands together saying,

And I think that’s another thing because we’ll go and dig through the book room. Because we were having trouble finding something, we didn’t want to read Frankenstein. We didn’t want to read Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We wanted to read something a little bit more contemporary that was supposedly British Lit and then we went back and looked at Common Core and found that we could read some American authors and so we read a John Grisham book and the kids loved it. Several of the kids said they went and bought a copy of the book just to have [it].

The SET in this pair shared in the goal of addressing content needs at the same time as she addressed student needs by finding an appropriate book that would interest the students.

Another GET suggested that behavior management is an area about which teachers collaborate. She explained,

For some reason, sometimes the College Prep (CP) classes are larger than the honors classes, so you might end up with let’s say 37 children in a CP class. And it’s nice to have another authority in the classroom. And the students know, I think, that’s something too that comes with certain co-teachers is just making sure that the other person in the classroom is the other teacher. And they are the other teacher in the classroom and they are just as much of an authority as the “lead teacher” or whoever’s classroom it is. And I say that with quotation marks

because it's an equal footing. And so I think it's really good when you have that many students in a classroom.

GETs and SETs described the ways they collaborate with academic and behavior goals in mind. A shared goal was important and something co-teachers thought about regarding the aims of the lessons they developed. They also considered the goals of the students on particular days based on their graduation requirements. However, as one teacher noted, "We're very good at being reactive, but it would probably be nice if we were proactive and had more of a long vision."

Another SET shared information from another co-teaching experience that is less than collaborative. She explained,

There are situations—she and I kind of make a lot of the decisions about what we read and what we do together. There are some classes I go in and kind of everything is set. I give suggestions but I kind of just, they may be are not quite as open to it. Not open to me in the classroom but they kind of have their thing and they just really want me there for support, which is fine.

### **School Culture and Student Culture**

Co-teachers felt that school culture as well as student culture had an impact on the success of the co-teaching collaborative effort. One SET considered the difference in two schools in which she had co-taught during her career and commented, "I don't know if it's just here- some of the students are more respectful. I feel like here, co-teaching is more valued. Does that make sense?"

A GET shared, "I think it might be the culture of the school and maybe also you know, [the SETs] are both really, really good at what they do . . . she doesn't just sit

down in the back of the classroom, she continues, she teaches.” The co-teaching partner added,

It was a pretty open, casual group. Every time I walked in the door, ‘cause I would come midway sometimes, beginning sometimes, depending on what the class was doing, always, “Hey Ms. Walton, how are you? Ms. Walton’s here.” It was always a welcome. Where in several classes, I would walk in and I would feel like I’ve interrupted. Sorry I’m late, it took too long with the test.”

Another SET described how the culture of school had changed since new administration had come to the school, saying,

I think in the past, more so than this year, there has been a negative connotation aspect to it. We were considered like teacher’s assistants a lot of time and we walked around and helped students but as far as getting to instruct any, I didn’t get to before co-teaching this year with her but in some aspects, it is a positive. I think of co-teachers as a whole, it is different from what I think right now of this experience. As much as she or myself may have dreaded it, it is working.

Another SET compared the current supportive culture to past schools at which he had co-taught when he said,

I’ve also seen it in different schools. ‘Cause this is my 3rd or 4th school. I’ve seen it ‘cause I like to teach them, but I’ve definitely seen in different schools sometimes with colleagues, like other staff members not wanting to teach those classes or saying bad things about the kids.

Staff members of the school are not the only ones who have had problems with the students with disabilities who are in the co-taught class. A SET described the negative connotation some kids hold in terms of co-taught classrooms. She explained,

There's a negative connotation with some kids. I've had quite a few situations where I walk in the room and they know who I am. Like, they know I teach study skills and they know which kids go in study skills and so I've had some quite rude little people look in the room and go, "You're in here? This is that class? Where's my schedule change form? I don't need to be in the low class." I've had that. And when they want to go, you're like please, I will go and talk to guidance for you. I'll fill out the form for you.

Another SET shared a similar story:

Interestingly enough, I had a young man last year in an English II class who said that in the beginning. Really had a snooty attitude about that. Turns out he and my son are the same age and he knows my son who goes here. And so it would be interesting after about two weeks, he couldn't get the change he wanted because the honors classes were filled up. So after the first grading period and his grade was like a low C, high D, I walked over and I'm like, "What's your excuse here, what's the deal here?" And it turned out the kid ended up making quite a big turnaround and changed his attitude because he realized that I wasn't there to single anybody out, I was there to help everybody. It was kind of a little different perception.

Finally, another SET discussed the problem with being blind to context when implementing co-teaching practice. The teacher expressed that he struggled with the fact that he was in a rural school and that a different approach to co-teaching was needed for his setting. This SET said,

It seems like my experience with the city schools, bigger schools like DC, even the schools down toward Charlotte or wherever. Those kids can read—I mean they focus more on reading so when they get up to the 10th grade, they can pretty much read. Our problem in this rural area—they are reading on a third and fourth grade level. Trying to read a biology text. It just makes it harder. I think the state has tunnel vision, to be honest with you. Because I've been in training and they just give you a book and it has some good ideas but it is not going to work in certain areas of certain environments. It might work good in a city school but it is not going to work for the rural county schools. They don't have the skills and they don't have the same interest. A lot of kids' parents are farmers or work in the mills. They have never been pushed to do good in school or get their high

school diploma. They'll go work on a farm—which is fine—they'll make a lot more money than I do. They've never really been pushed. They'll try hard—if they make a C or a D, they're good with it.

### **To Follow or Not Follow Policy to Meet Expectations**

Teachers discussed how policy is either integrated or ignored at specific junctures as they develop the roles they take while co-teaching. Often it was evident that co-teachers relied on their teaching philosophy and professional knowledge to determine if policy should guide choices made at a given time.

One SET described how she processes policy but focuses on other priorities in the classroom. In discussing the inclusion of student with disabilities in the OCS program in the co-taught setting, she said,

Federal and state policies are constantly in the back of my mind but I honestly don't think one time about a policy when I'm in a classroom. It doesn't enter my mind—the kids will lead the way in which they need to be taught and I go by that. And so if I see that a kid is struggling and they're constantly struggling on one thing, then I know that is something that maybe we need to modify differently.

Another co-teacher echoed the perspective when she explained that, as she understands it, all the EC students are to remain in the classroom the whole time during co-teaching.

We do that most of the time, but there are times that we have to take them out because of the pre-requisite stuff, especially for OCS students. And if doing that kind of goes against the policy, then I am okay with that because that student has just learned something regardless of whether I have abided by the rules.

Other teachers described a tendency to be happy when policies align with their practice but do not consider them a determining factor. One SET explained, “It is great if they pass and you have students that meet that expectation. So it’s not that you are lowering expectations so much as it is okay, I am aware of that but it cannot be the dictator of everything I do.” The co-teaching partner agreed with the SET’s point and shared an example:

We really went outside the box with our seniors. We have our co-teach class first period, that’s the one they have to go to. They also attended a day care class at a local community college and they left after about 30 minutes, with 30 minutes left of class. So we had to modify assignments, send them on to OCS class later in the day. Those kids still ended up with As, Bs, and Cs in my class and it turned out to be a really good lesson in organization for them. To be able to, “Okay, guys you’re gonna have to read Chapter 14 on your own and here’s the study guide and the questions. If you have questions, ask me or Ms. N later in the day, you can come down and get help.” So we really pushed it outside the box on that, but I mean, I don’t know that I’ve always had this attitude but I kind of have. Policies are there and I don’t break them, but I don’t always follow them.

Some teachers expressed the desire to follow policies but described their understanding of policy much differently. One co-teacher (SET) who felt he could work within the policy structure given to them shared his perspective:

My expectation is to follow. I’ve always been a rule follower so my expectation daily is to follow the policies and procedures and try to meet the expectations of what is required of me from administration, from county, from state. However, I understand that you know if people don’t understand that we have a lot of leeway, we do. I mean I get tired of hearing about how that we’ve got to teach to the test. I mean we’ve got a lot of leeway, or at least I feel like we do, to do whatever we need to do, and if it’s to bend a little bit of a policy to teach kids, then that is what we do.

Co-teachers showed a great deal of independence and leadership at the school level. They tended to look to their administrator for validation of ideas and practice. One teacher described what she felt was a student-focused philosophy:

We went to our local administration [after a district meeting], our administration here, and said what are we supposed to do? This is how they say do it and we were told at that point, you're the professional . . . you do what works, what helps the students learn the material, you do what works and so that is what we have done. We have done what works.

Another SET explained the partners' willingness to share their opinion about practice with the administrator:

I'm going to say to administration what is on my mind. I am always for the kid. Sometimes you get to a certain point where you've done all you can and you just say hey to the kids—you are on your own. But I am truly child-centered. That's why I left my good paying job to come here.

Another SET described the rationale for the ability to make the decisions regarding following or not following policy. The SET shared,

I feel like I am an ethical, professional employee and my co-teacher is too so I feel like that is imperative for us to have the freedom to do what we know is right by the kids. If you are not, then you probably should not have that freedom because if you are given freedom, you're going to do things you shouldn't do. But for us, I feel like we are given that freedom.

One SET described his leadership at the school level and the perception of the support the administration gives when he has an idea that may or may not be aligned with district expectations concerning co-teaching in this way:

If it goes against policy to do something that I think is going to be beneficial for the student, you know, as long as it is not illegal, immoral, do it! And you know, I feel like I'm empowered to use my own professional knowledge to do so. I am a professional and I've got experience and you know I've worked since I got out of college so I've got 20 some years of experience and I feel like the administration we have are saying, Listen, we trust you as a professional, you understand the policies and the procedures, you understand what is expected of you, now unless you do something just totally aberrant or you do something immoral or illegal, you know of course we're going to do something about that; but otherwise, you do what you need to do to teach those kids, that's how I feel about it.

One GET made an interesting point about technology as an example of a choice she makes to adhere to policies. The GET explained,

For example, [we bend the rules concerning district policy], the district says we have to incorporate 21st century technology skills in our lessons. So even though we want to focus on reading with some strategies that these students need, we have to also find a way to do that with technology. Freedom is the key.

The GET thought that the teachers work hard to meet all of the demands of the students' needs while incorporating technology into their lessons, but sometimes a choice must be made because it was not feasible to do both.

A similar perspective was noted when a co-teacher discussed testing: "When it comes to testing," one GET shared, "we don't really care about the scores as long as we get what we need because typically, that population is not going to be good testers anyway and when you're talking English, you're talking about kids who can't read."

Some teachers expressed the belief that positive outcomes accrue for students and teachers when co-teaching is implemented. One GET explained why it is worth it to try to co-teach, "50% of our students reading on a 5th-grade level or below so you know, whether it's inclusion or whatever you call it, having two people works because there are

discipline issues because students do not all come in here wanting to be here.” While another GET made the point that there is value professionally even if co-teaching is not necessarily conducted with best practices in mind, saying,

Even if in the classroom, we’re not doing it exactly right; outside of the classroom, having each other’s back is enough for me to do it. You just are not going to get that very much anymore. I trust that if I’m not here, she’s going to have the expectations that I left. I trust that if a parent tries to throw me under the bus, she is going to have my back and in this profession, you have to have each other’s back.

### **Summary**

The findings showed the complexities of co-teaching as seen through teachers’ perspectives of the meanings of policy and expectations and their roles with input from personal and professional philosophies and professional knowledge and skills. It is pertinent to the discussion that nuances existed between school districts. While firm conclusions cannot be made, review of the data as a whole showed that co-teachers from one county in particular articulated positive aspects and seemed more optimistic about their co-teaching work. The co-teachers in this county tended to make statements that were more positive in nature even when describing difficulties and obstacles to co-teaching, statements such as “all students can be included in some fashion even if we cannot include all of them all of the time” and “if we teach the curriculum well then we don’t have to worry about test scores” when discussing student progress regarding co-teaching.

Conversely, teachers from another county that had recently dealt with change in administration shared some positive aspects and a belief that co-teaching was currently

working. However, they tended to fall back on previous years of troubled experiences with co-teaching and were more skeptical concerning the practice. For example, explaining that “it is impossible to reach all the students in the general education classroom when students in OCS are included” and “co-teaching worked well this year but is has overall I still have concerns based on the years of co-teaching prior to the new administration changing things.” The frustration was seen in the tone and words they chose to use in their remarks such as “it’s difficult, even though we do it well” or “we see progress despite the difficulties” and “students exceeded our expectations because we were not sure this would work.” These slight but telling variations of perspective on their own may not indicate anything more than differences in personality of the participants. However, they may also be indicative of the climate, motivation, and satisfaction of the co-teachers in this particular school. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explained, an individual’s script at work may be different in different situations. How one appears and what roles you take are often determined by how a person approaches a task. The teachers with more of a skeptical tone are contending with a great deal of change in their particular environment; negative aspects of past experiences may have led to cynicism. However, the teachers seemed to be excited about the change in administration and were satisfied with the past year of successful co-teaching. Overall, the perspective of teachers from the three counties addressed each of the three research questions in the study and provided great insight for discussion and future implications that are presented in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study sought to provide information regarding the experiences of co-teachers and how they make meaning of their work and define roles and responsibilities, given the interplay of policy and practice in the co-taught classroom. The research questions addressed were these:

1. What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching?
2. What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?
3. How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching?

This chapter will discuss the context of the study and the findings through the lens of the Bolman and Deal (2013) four frames of organizations. The defining characteristics of each frame and the findings that emerged through analysis of the data using the frame will be identified. Opportunities for growth related to individual frame characteristics will be explicated along with clear connections to the research questions. Finally, the limitations of the study will be presented, followed by a discussion of implications for future research and practice.

### **Context of the Study**

A questionnaire was included in the recruitment materials given to administrators at the beginning of the study. The questionnaire was also sent via email to the administrators after the joint interviews were completed because no administrators had responded to the initial request. Response ultimately remained low for the questionnaire; only two of the six school administrators completed the questionnaire. However, the responses received provided valuable insight into the context of those school settings.

The administrators were asked questions that inform the study concerning supports they feel are given to support quality co-teaching and what policies they feel guide co-teachers work. Administrators indicated that, when selecting co-teaching teams, they look for someone who works well with others and who is adaptable, flexible, and has a good attitude and strong subject area expertise. The administrators reported that professional development specific to content and strategies and ways to collaborate were important aspects that increased co-teachers' professional knowledge. When asked about cultural elements of their school that influence co-teaching, one administrator shared that 15% of the population consisted of students with a disability and that collaboration among EC department and other departments was absolutely necessary. Administrators noted that ensuring all students are appropriately placed based on their individual education plans and gaining "buy in" from general education teachers were key components to building a successful co-teaching partnership. Additionally, ensuring that students viewed both teachers as leaders in the classroom was reported as a challenge in one school. The insight from the administrators highlighted the benefit of potential

supports and directives given to some of the teachers. Further, the administrative perspective combined with findings from individual interviews contributed to a more comprehensive view of the schools' context.

### **Interpreting Results through the Four Frames**

The meta-framework consists of a political frame, symbolic frame, human resource frame, and structural frame. Frames allow the researcher to sort through themes that emerge in the data and provide valuable insight of how these themes relate to specific areas of organizational behavior. When looking through the lens of the four frames, the complexity that existed related to the interplay of policy with co-teaching practice becomes apparent.

The first two frames discussed are political and symbolic, because many of the positive attributes of the co-teaching experience described by teachers can be linked to these frames. That is, their stories address the research question that relates to relationships, beliefs, and cultural understandings. The political and symbolic frame encompassed specific examples from the findings that satisfy the characteristics of these frames.

The human resource and structural frames are discussed in the latter half of this section because analysis of the study's results suggest ways these frames could be enhanced in the school setting to support co-teaching practice. The findings were based on the perspectives of co-teachers when addressing the research questions concerning formal and informal policies and procedures that support co-teaching. In the following

sections, the defining characteristics of each frame and the connection between the frame and the results of this study are explored.

### **Political Frame**

The political frame considers how people can gain power through various means within groups. The power discussed in this section goes beyond the traditional authoritative power that is given to a member of a group based on their title or job description in an organization. Bolman and Deal (2013) warn that political power is not necessarily negative and, in fact, is a constructive element of an organization that should be addressed so groups can be both just and efficient. Exercising power is a natural part of an ongoing bargaining system where members are able to negotiate based on self-interest.

### **Defining Characteristics**

The political frame contains five propositions that explain its defining characteristics. According to Bolman and Deal (2013, p. 188), the following can be seen through the political lens:

- Organizations are coalitions of different individuals and interest groups.
- Coalition members have enduring differences in values, beliefs, information, interests, and/or perceptions of reality.
- Key decisions involve allocating scarce resources and determining who gets what.
- Scarce resources and enduring differences put conflict at the center of day-to-day dynamics and make power the most important asset.

- Goals and decisions emerge from bargaining and negotiation as competing stakeholders jockey for their own interests.

To understand who has power related to a particular initiative, they recommend using Pichault's (1995) procedure that includes the following steps:

Step 1: Determine channels of informal communication

Step 2: Identify principal agents of political influence

Step 3: Analyze possibilities for mobilizing internal and external players

Step 4: Anticipate counterstrategies that others are likely to employ.

If these steps are followed, a co-teaching political map emerges. Results of the study clearly showed the channels of informal communication to be primarily originating from the SET. The SET is the only member who communicates with all other stakeholders including parents, students, GETs, guidance counselors, and administrators. The fact that the SET was given the freedom to implement co-teaching as he or she saw fit increased the power of the SET in the organization in the context of the co-taught classroom. Bolman and Deal (2013) explained that it is important to understand a political landscape because it can indicate a dominance of power or a balance of power in an organization. A political map using a two-dimensional diagram clearly defines the players, power, and interest of the members. As can be seen on the figure A, the power of mobilizing internal members lies primarily with the SETs. SETs and GETs felt they had the most leeway and freedom to implement co-teaching in the way they saw fit but the GET often deferred to the expertise of the SET regarding co-teaching practice. Thus, SETs held the most power and were, in most cases, the most positive about co-teaching.

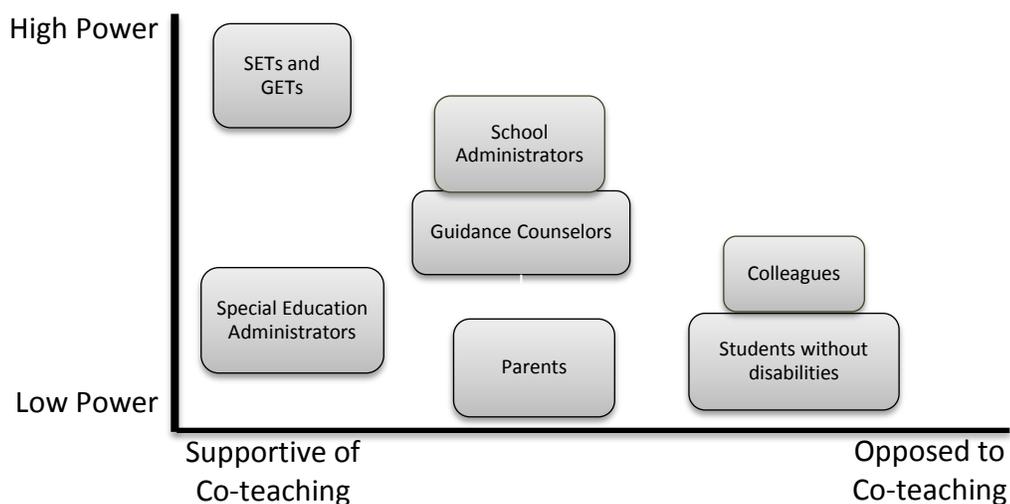


Figure 1. Political Map of Co-teaching Climate.

Students with disabilities were consistently mentioned when teachers justified daily decisions during co-teaching practice although they did not indicate that students have much say in how co-teaching is implemented. Co-teachers indicated that students were generally pleased with academic success and were sometimes surprised that they did so well on standardized assessments. However, it is unclear from the current data if students with disabilities in these schools are supportive or opposed to co-teaching. The current data does not substantiate appropriate placement on the political climate map. It would be speculative to insert them but should be noted that they are key stakeholders who are part of the climate and influence the placement of others on the map. Guidance counselors and principals have equal amounts of power based on the findings because both took on a supportive role. Co-teachers described many situations in which the administrator helped teachers feel good about their work by easing the pressure of standardized testing and shaping the way others in the school felt about all students. Co-

teachers felt the administrator established norms regarding accountability and respect in the school. Co-teachers believed these norms mattered and greatly affected the political landscape. Although only a few of the co-teachers reported such occurrences, it is apparent administrators shape the way colleagues of co-teachers view co-teaching and working with students with disabilities. Because some administrators intimated that co-teaching was a sacrifice or at least a negative experience by apologizing when assigning teachers, principals were placed toward the middle of the support continuum.

Co-teachers consistently reported how they depended on the relationship with the guidance counselor to schedule students so that needs could be met. Each SET interviewed worked with the guidance counselor in some capacity to construct a schedule that worked and enabled them to co-teach. Some teachers interviewed did not give a clear indication of great level of support of the idea of co-teaching practice from guidance counselors. However, counselors were able to help co-teachers coordinate their schedules to serve the students they needed to serve in the co-taught class and a few teachers described working closely with the guidance counselors to support co-teaching practice. One teacher explained that she felt that the guidance counselor understood the value of co-teaching and showed this by scheduling the “entire school around the students in the co-taught class” while another teacher shared how the counselor had allowed her to have insight on the which students without disabilities would work best in the co-taught classroom because they understood how important it was to have a cohesive class to support effective co-teaching. Therefore, guidance counselors are in the area closer to “supportive of co-teaching” on the political map.

Special education administrators, parents, colleagues, support staff, and students without disabilities had the same low level of power as counselors. Special education administrators were perceived to be supportive of co-teaching practice and SETs reported they ensured the SETs understood the paperwork responsibilities. At least two SETs explained clearly that the district did not care how they co-taught as long as their paperwork met expectations. This limits the power of the special education administrator regarding the co-teaching initiative. Colleagues were reported to be generally supportive of the idea of co-teaching but a few co-teachers mentioned that some teachers did not value the practice enough to participate when asked if they were willing to co-teach. Students without disabilities had the least amount of power. In rare situations these students lost all influence as they were moved out of the class if their opposition was so great that it would interfere. As noted on the chart, some were seen as opposed to the idea. These were only rare cases and co-teachers reported that students without disabilities typically respected students with disabilities and co-teachers.

Bolman and Deal postulate that all organizations incorporate the political dimension, creating arenas. In the arenas, the “rules of the game” are determined along with the parameters for players. New initiatives can be implemented either by a bottom-up or top-down approach and both are necessary. Top-down approach refers to initiatives that are announced with enthusiasm as exciting new projects that will improve the organization in some manner without input from frontline staff. Often, administrators fail to anticipate major political battles that emerge when the top-down approach is used. The major mistake appears to be an assumption that if those in positions of authority

perceive it to be a good idea then success is ensured. This neglects the power of the group(s) in lower-level positions, who can devise creative ways to resist, including creating diversions, undermining the initiative, and ignoring the plans given to them. The critical question that emerges is whose preferences and interest are to be served by the organization? Sometimes, when there are conflicting preferences, the groups have to agree on ways to distribute power and resources so that both groups can be successful and the organization can grow.

### **Political Frame and Co-teaching Practice**

The teachers in this study appeared to understand the value of bottom-up initiatives and the use of power to attain goals in the interest of the co-teaching pair. In fact, co-teachers felt they had a great deal of leeway and freedom to build their co-teaching partnerships and practice the way they saw fit. In some cases, SETs were given the power to choose with whom they wanted to work as a co-teaching partner and usually determined this on likability and friendship. Co-teachers appeared to leverage different types of power at various times.

For example, SETs often worked behind the scenes to devise an ideal working situation using interpersonal skills and established relationships and used their information power as a basis (Raven, 2008; Raven & French, 1958). The SETs felt they understood the aim and goals of the co-teaching relationship and approached teachers they thought would be open to co-teaching. They encouraged GETs whom they thought would be good partners before the semester began or sometimes before the GET was assigned as a co-teacher. If the GET seemed somewhat interested, the SET would

discuss the potential with the administrator who would often allow the SET to build the schedule so that they were able to co-teach with the GET who agreed based on the SETs expertise.

Other situations demonstrate the use of expert power within the organization; SETs worked to build rapport with teachers with whom they were assigned by gradually teaching parts of the lesson and gaining the respect and trust of GETs. Many of the co-teachers discussed the importance of collaboration and flexibility in roles and responsibilities in order to make co-teaching work. Many of the GETs in the study were new to the idea of co-teaching and shared how much they had asked of the SETs to determine if it was succeeding or if the students could do the work. The teachers (mostly GETs) who had the least amount of experience relied heavily on their co-teaching partner.

Additionally, SETs worked closely with guidance counselors to schedule students in the co-taught classroom. Guidance counselors trusted their expertise regarding the needs of students and followed the recommendations given by the SET. This action was key because it not only determined their co-teaching partner but also determined the make-up of the class. In this way, the SET had referent power as well as expert power. The guidance counselors did not question the logic of the recommendations but followed the directives of the SET without hesitation. The influence of helping schedule accomplished many goals for the SETs. It helped them limit the number of classes they would be required to teach and helped to serve the maximum number of students in a timeframe and helped the guidance counselor create a schedule that would not require

additional changes once the semester began. In this way, the balance of power can also be based on legitimate power of reciprocity in which each agent (the SET and the counselor) were benefiting from the arrangement.

The above three examples of use of power in schools shows the importance of professional knowledge as SETs are seen as experts in many cases and given referent power and the leeway to influence and make many decisions. Fortunately, most of the co-teachers in the study had received training at some point in their professional career and at least one of each pair, usually the SET, had a significant amount of experience in co-teaching. Therefore, the teachers were able to share their knowledge and build their own expectations as a co-teaching pair of what effective teaching would look like in the co-taught classroom.

### **Opportunities for Use**

The data suggest that the political frame was fully developed within the co-teaching context in these schools. Respect between administration and co-teachers was present. The teachers' perspectives indicated that parity and a shared goal existed among the SETs and GETs. However, co-teachers mentioned two areas that could be strengthened.

First, many co-teachers desired to form coalitions with other co-teachers in the school building, across the county, and outside the county as such coalitions could prove valuable to sustain quality co-teaching practice. Teachers perceived that they could explore ways that co-teaching is best implemented and could have a greater voice in providing understanding to new faculty if they were part of a larger coalition. These

coalitions could be added to the “high power” groups at the top of the political map. This is important if sustainability of co-teaching practice is considered. The professional knowledge could be harnessed in a network of people who make up the coalition rather than the GET and SET who currently hold the power so that if one of the partners leaves, the shared knowledge could be quickly replaced without interruption to the practice.

Although teachers perceived that administrators trusted them, let them know they were competent in their jobs, and helped them to establish respect from their colleagues, the co-teachers did not feel they had administrative support through communication about teachers’ roles and responsibilities. Some teachers reported that they were never told directly by their administrator that they had been assigned to co-teach. They learned of this responsibility when they saw it on their roster for the semester. The political power of the administrator to give value to the practice of co-teaching by speaking to teachers with excitement and using positive language about the practice can help create a motivated and united workforce in the co-partnership and in the school.

### **Symbolic Frame**

The symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013) captures the heart of an organization. This frame focuses on how humans make sense of the often chaotic and ambiguous world in which they live. The symbolic frame highlights the tribal aspects of contemporary organizations as it addresses the belief system of the members of the organization and how members interact to form an identity as an organization. Meaning is not given to us; we create it. Symbols are the basic materials of the meaning systems or cultures we inhabit. Our own cultural ways or “how we do things around here” are often invisible to

us because we see them simply as the way things are and ought to be. The symbolic frame is essentially the culture of the organization.

### **Defining Characteristics**

Myths, vision, and values are used in schools to explain, express, and legitimize, and to maintain solidarity and cohesion, and they are major elements of the symbolic frame. They communicate unconscious wishes and conflicts, mediate contradictions, and offer a narrative anchoring the present in the past (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Cohen, 1969). Symbolic forms and activities are the basic elements of culture, accumulated over time to shape an organization's unique identity and character (Schein, 1992). Culture is defined by Schein (1992; p.121996) as

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 229)

Bolman and Deal added to this definition of culture, depicting it as a product and a process. As a product, it embodies wisdom accumulated over a length of time from experience that resulted in the members gaining understanding and forming cultural norms. As a process, it is renewed and recreated as newcomers learn the old ways and eventually become teachers themselves. These new ways take on symbolic meaning, discussed in more detail in the following section.

### **Symbolic Frame and Co-teaching Practice**

A group within the culture can have its own identity and form beliefs that support the aim or mission of the group. Co-teaching is a somewhat counter culture to the way

teachers are often perceived and judged. The dominant model in schools is of the one teacher as the leader of a classroom. Many teachers who choose not to follow such a vision of teachers in their practice would consider this view of school culture a myth. Regardless, co-teachers find themselves seeking out others like them who are “open” and have a volunteering spirit to be innovative against the traditional view of one teacher/one class with similar students and anyone different relegated to special classes. Co-teachers work against the expectation that the teacher’s classroom is his or her solitary kingdom and that collaboration is needed to help students reach their potential. Co-teachers in this study felt they were identified as a small group within the larger group of the school who believed in inclusive practice and formed beliefs and an identity that supported their goal of effectively co-teaching. Co-teachers explained how they created the partnership and worked hard to find ways to reach each student in their co-taught classes.

**Student-centered philosophy.** Students were at the core of decisions co-teachers made in examples given. Although this may be a consideration by many in the field of education, student-centered philosophy used by co-teachers consisted of a distinct focus on individual student achievement as they described their work in IEP meetings and the way they approached teaching the students in the co-taught classroom. Growth of an individual student was emphasized as co-teachers discussed their student-centered philosophy. Often, co-teachers discounted standardized accountability of the group but used testing to defend the rigor of the classroom to parents. Co-teachers shared how they offered state testing as a justification for the rigor of the co-teaching class to address parents’ concern expressed during IEP meetings regarding high expectations.

Conversely, when meeting with an administrator, co-teachers were advocates for approval of a student to pass a class based on effort and course grade when the student did not score “proficient” on required standardized tests. Although contradictory in a sense, the teachers were not being dishonest. They were merely adhering to their shared student-centered philosophy.

In both of these situations, the belief of “do what is best for the student” guided the co-teachers’ work and also became a source of pride. The examples given that proved it worked pertained to students who had outperformed what was expected of them on standardized testing or students who were able to graduate because of the success of the co-taught class. Co-teachers explained how they had worked to support students with disabilities and how their ability to co-teach resulted in the students’ success as they reflected on co-teaching practice.

**Belief in co-teaching practice.** Although a few teachers had negative past co-teaching experiences building partnerships, most teachers interviewed believed strongly that co-teaching worked for students. The teachers who had poor prior experience did not report that it was co-teaching practice that made it difficult; rather it was resistance to the practice from the other teacher. A strong belief in the practice was apparent in the stories teachers told. Often co-teachers discussed in detail how all students benefited, whether they had an IEP or not. Even teachers who were skeptical because of past experiences agreed that, at least this year, they had seen positive results.

**Co-teachers become a unit with their own identity.** Many teachers specifically described the unique relationship with their co-teacher as a marriage or a partnership and

spoke about how others perceived them. It was important that others, including students, parents, colleagues, and administrators, see them as equal partners. They were satisfied that they had developed a partnership that was respected and accepted by others in the school. Additionally, shared lingo was a visible sign of membership in the group and aided in the development of a unique identity.

According to Bolman and Deal, specialized language reinforces unique values and beliefs. Although not directly addressed in this study, the idea of the language of special educators has traditionally been quite different than that of general educators (Nichols & Sheffield, 2014). However, when SETs and GETs spoke, hints of a shared language seemed to exist with the teachers in the study. Individually, repeatedly, co-teachers spoke about teacher individualization, student-centered goals, inclusion, and motivation. During the joint interviews, many of the words used by the co-teachers also reflected a student-centered philosophy while ideas of the importance of teacher knowledge and differentiation also emerged.

### **Opportunities for Use**

Bolman and Deal explain that discovering a team's soul is the key to understanding the symbolic frame and that successful practice emerges this process. The essence of high performance is spirit, which comes from a shared purpose, philosophy, and relationship building when forming teams. The teachers in this study clearly had developed the aspects of the symbolic frame in their efforts to co-teach. It was clear that they saw their partnership as a marriage and that others in the school saw them as a unit. Despite the development of organizational characteristics of this frame, opportunities

exist to further explore how the political frame could be used to enhance co-teaching practice. For example, symbolic leadership by principals could possibly empower teachers to align goals of the co-taught classroom with those of the school more easily and shape culture to be more accepting of co-teaching practice. What is clear is that positive, cohesive culture—the heart of the symbolic frame—results in success (J. C. Collins, 2001; J. C. Collins & Porras, 2005).

### **Structural Frame**

To understand the dynamics between leadership and culture, the findings should be examined through the structural frame. The structural frame has two principal intellectual roots. The first is the work of industrial analysts, such as Taylor (1911), who worked on designing organizations for maximum efficiency. The emphasis is on development of principles focused on specialization, span of control, authority, and delegation of responsibility. The second is the effort of economists and sociologists such as Weber (1978), who described a fixed division of labor, hierarchy of offices, rules governing performance, and use of technical qualification for selecting personnel. Over time, these ideas have been studied by many and have evolved into a greater understanding of how structure influences what happens in the workplace. Bolman and Deal (2013) note that structure need not be inflexible. Structures in stable environments are often hierarchical and rules-oriented. But recent years have witnessed remarkable inventiveness in designing structures emphasizing flexibility, participation, and quality.

### **Defining Characteristics**

Clear goals, focus on the mission, well-defined roles, and top-down coordination are elements in the structural frame. Division of work and coordinating of responsibilities are key aspects that are essential to performance and build an environment that supports the goals of the organization. Although arenas can vary based on the type of environment desired by members of an organization, six assumptions undergird the structural frame:

1. Organizations exist to achieve established goals and objectives.
2. Organizations increase efficiency and enhance performance through specialization and appropriate division of labor.
3. Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh.
4. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures.
5. Effective structures fit an organization's current circumstances (including its goals, technology, workforce, and environment).

Successful organizations employ two primary methods to coordinate individual and group efforts and to link local initiatives with system-wide goals: vertically, through the formal chain of command, and laterally, through meetings, committees, coordinating roles, or network structures. Rules, policies, standards, and standard operating procedures limit individual discretion and help ensure that behavior is predictable and consistent.

Lateral forms are typically less formal and more flexible than authority-bound systems and rules. Formal gatherings and informal exchanges are the cornerstone of lateral coordination. But informal contacts and exchanges are important in turbulent environments such as schools that are often shaped by outside pressure and political climate. When organizations become complex, the demand for lateral communication increases tremendously.

Lateral linkages supplement and sometimes supplant vertical coordination. Such an organization structure is multifaceted and initiatives emerge from many places, taking shape through a variety of partnerships and coalitions. Vertical coordination rests on top-down command and control. It is often efficient but not always effective, and it depends on employees' willingness to follow directives from above. More decentralized and interactive lateral forms of coordination are often needed to keep top-down control from stifling initiative and creativity.

### **Structural Frame and Co-teaching Practice**

People's behavior is often remarkably untouched by commands and rules alone, although vertical coordination is generally effective if an environment is stable and tasks are well understood and predictable. The results of this study suggest that lateral techniques are somewhat established based on perspectives of co-teachers, but difficulties exist due to interpretations of policies and guidelines regarding specific responsibilities of each co-teaching partner.

Co-teachers have an established partnership and work in ways that coordinate with others in the school to meet objectives. Very little structure existed formally but

across schools teachers often used political power to work with similar stakeholders to organize a system that supported co-teaching practice in their respective schools.

Teachers are operating in an arena that is more akin to a farm, where the co-teachers are responsible for a specific garden. The SET is the head gardener and the GET is owner of the plot of land and is responsible for the harvest. In the garden, SETs and GETs work together to determine the flowers they will plant. When and how they plant is entirely within the control of the co-teachers with little outside direction to guide their efforts.

Co-teachers' reflections suggested that lateral elements including formal and informal meetings, task forces, coordinating roles, matrix structures, and networks to support policy were somewhat underdeveloped. Throughout the study, they discussed the need for professional learning communities (PLCs) to include both general education and special education co-teachers and consistent policies that support their practice and considers the co-teaching context. For example, co-teachers were concerned about how they know if they are doing well because teacher evaluation procedures did little to inform them of their fidelity of co-teaching implementation and practice. They felt that they received little or no guidance regarding what co-teaching should look like and how it should be implemented locally and that the state and federal policies were either vague or hard to integrate into practice. Federal and state policies regarding academic qualification of special educators also seemed to be problematic for co-teachers to interpret in ways that would help them with the day-to-day operations of effective co-teaching.

Specifically, co-teachers discussed a perceived connection of teacher of record and highly qualified status. It is clear through policies and procedures at the state level (§ G.S. 115C-110.1) regarding teacher qualifications and the ways these expectations are articulated in the 2011 teacher evaluation guidelines provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and 2015 school personnel activity (SAR) report, that general education teachers are always identified as the teacher of record. Thus, it is not surprising that GETs reported that the responsibility to have all students pass the standardized test rested with them more so than a special education partner. GETs interviewed discussed the pressure that this responsibility placed on their work. When this discussion was had in joint interviews, several SETs as the co-teaching partner, voiced that giving this responsibility to the GET was unfair. SETs also did not believe the practice of attaching their effectiveness in co-teaching to the score of the entire school was logical.

Additionally, an issue with SET licensure arose during discussions of responsibilities. Despite the fact that the SET is not the teacher of record in a general education setting even if he or she is highly qualified, some special education teachers in this study felt the fact that they could not have the responsibility of teacher of record because of a problem with licensure that occurred several years ago. SETs related the designation of teacher of record to a federal audit that was conducted in 2006 that invalidated many special education teachers' qualification to teach general curriculum in (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2014). From the SETs' perspective, this audit greatly damaged the value of their work and perceived competence by

colleagues. All SETs shared that it was imperative that SETs attain dual licensure in special education and general education as a solution to the problem. Special education teachers indicated they would not be as well-respected by their co-teaching partner and others in the school if they did not have dual licensure.

Troubles arise and performance suffers from structural deficits, according to the perspectives of teachers in the study. If co-teachers are unclear about what they are supposed to do, they often tailor their roles to fit personal preferences or assign factors such as responsibilities of teacher of record and related qualifications. As one teacher explained, they are not micro-managed or macro-managed.

Returning to the farm metaphor that was described at the beginning of this section, co-teachers skills and professional knowledge enables them to effectively grow the crops. They may not be aware what the rest of the farm is doing and may not have knowledge that would help align their personal goals to the greater mission. Thus, the garden may be full of roses while the rest of the farm is growing corn. As the results and the farm metaphor illustrate, co-teachers are operating with limited directives and organize the structure that meets their particular needs in the co-taught classroom. It is unclear if connections are made between what is happening in co-taught classrooms and school-wide goals. This echoes concerns in educators in the field of special education in general who often do not feel they are included when education reforms are being explored and policies developed.

When teachers are developing expectations as a unit as they are implementing co-teaching practice, control relies heavily on professional training. That is, in the absence

of formal structures, co-teachers need professional development in order to create expectations of their work and understand roles and responsibilities of their co-teaching practice. Co-teaching and the creation of teacher expectations based on what they believe is good for students can yield the benefit of developing teachers highly specialized in their knowledge and ability.

Co-teachers explained several data-based goals that influenced their practice, including standardized tests, College and Career Ready initiatives, and graduation rate. Locke and Latham (2002) make the case that clear and challenging goals are a powerful incentive to high performance. Performance control is less successful when goals are ambiguous, hard to measure, or do not relate to the needs of the co-taught classroom. Some teachers offered that school goals were detached from what was happening in the co-taught classroom. Teachers tended to develop goals that revolved around “individual student growth” as an alternative to using proficiency levels of their class as a whole as they attempted to connect their effectiveness in the co-teaching classroom to standardized testing objectives.

### **Opportunities for Use**

The most basic and ubiquitous way to harmonize the efforts of individuals, units, or divisions is to designate a boss with formal authority. Bolman and Deal explain that authorities—executives, managers, and supervisors—are officially charged with keeping action aligned with goals and objectives. They accomplish this by making decisions, resolving conflicts, solving problems, evaluating performance and output, and distributing rewards and sanctions. A chain of command is a hierarchy of managerial and

supervisory strata, each with legitimate power to shape and direct the behavior of those at lower levels. It works best when authority is both endorsed by subordinates and authorized by superiors. Every group evolves a structure that may help or hinder effectiveness. Conscious attention to lines of authority, communication, responsibilities, and relationships can make a huge difference in a group member's performance.

Bolman and Deal explain that a tightly controlled, top-down form may work in simple, stable situations but falls short in more fluid and ambiguous ones. A study by Moeller and Charters (1966), for example, explored the effects of structure on teacher morale in two school systems. One was loosely structured and encouraged wide participation in decision-making. Centralized authority and a clear chain of command characterized the other district. Moeller found the opposite of what he expected: Faculty morale was higher in the district with a tighter structure. Teachers seemed to prefer clarity of expectations, roles and lines of authority. Hence, assumptions should not be made that members of all organizations prefer structures with more choices or leeway (Leavitt & March, 1962).

One critical structural challenge is how to hold an organization together without holding it back. If structure is too loose, members go astray, with little sense of what others are doing. Even in participative systems, managers still make key decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2013), but too-rigid structures stifle flexibility and creativity and encourage people to waste time trying to beat the system.

Formal structure enhances morale if it helps individuals get their work completed. It has a negative impact if it interferes with the implementation of best practice or buries

teachers in paperwork or makes it too easy for management to control teachers. Every organization must find a design that works for its circumstances. In fact, there is no such thing as an ideal structure. Every organization needs to respond to a universal set of internal and external pressures.

### **Human Resource Frame**

For co-teachers, this means that control relies heavily on professional training, which is part of the next frame according to Bolman and Deal. The human resource frame requires a sensitive understanding of people and their symbiotic relationship with organizations. The human resource frame evolved from the early work of pioneers such as Mary Parker Follett (1918) and Elton Mayo (1949), who questioned a deeply held managerial assumption that workers had no rights beyond a paycheck, that their duty was to work hard and follow orders. Pioneers of the human resource frame criticized this view on two grounds: (a) it was unfair and (b) it was bad psychology. They argued that people's skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment are vital resources that can make or break an enterprise.

#### **Defining Characteristics**

The human resource frame is built on core assumptions that highlight the linkage between people's skills and satisfaction of work. Research has shown that organizations exist to serve human needs rather than the converse. People and organizations need each other. Bolman and Deal (2013) explain that "a good fit" occurs when people and organization needs are met. Individuals find meaningful and satisfying work, and organizations get the talent and energy they need to succeed. Organizations ask, "How

do we find and retain people with the skills and attitudes to do the work?” Workers want to know, “How well will this place work for me?” Bolman and Deal referred to Cable and DeRue’s (2002) idea that these two questions are closely related, because “fit” is a function of at least three components:

1. how well an organization responds to individual desires for useful work;
2. how well jobs let employees utilize their skills and express their sense of self;  
and
3. how well work fulfills individual financial and lifestyle needs.

When the fit between people and organizations is poor, one or both suffer.

Individuals may feel neglected or oppressed, and organizations fail to reach their goals because individuals withdraw their efforts or even work against organizational purposes.

A fit includes satisfaction of the worker. Bolman and Deal reference Herzberg (1968), who determined satisfiers as an organization paying well, offering job security, promoting from within, training the workforce, and sharing the fruits of organizational success. Additional ways to support fit between people and organizations include empowering workers through significance of participation, job enrichment, teaming, egalitarianism, and diversity. When individuals find satisfaction and meaning in work, schools, like many organizations, profit from the effective use of their talent and energy. But when satisfaction and meaning are lacking, individuals withdraw, resist, or rebel.

### **Human Resource Frame and Co-teaching Practice**

When the field of education is considered, at least one of the three components in the human resource frame is inherently missing. Teachers typically do not work for high

pay or ideas related to job promotion, and so teaching does not usually fulfill financial and lifestyle needs well enough to be considered a motivator to continue a career. Instead, as already discussed when exploring teachers' student-centered philosophy, the driving force behind teachers' work relates to student success. Teachers indicate that they must align all other elements including culture, policy, structure, and relationships to support their efforts. Innovation often must be present for teachers to meet the changing needs of students they serve, and they accomplish this by redesigning their jobs. Often this redesign is implemented through the structure or policy. However, the findings of this study indicated that teachers have more to do with the redesigning process than typically found in non-school organizations.

It is easy to perceive co-teaching as a redesigned job because, as explained earlier in this chapter, it is a counter culture to the traditional thought of what teaching looks like and how students with disabilities can be served. Bolman and Deal contend that most workers prefer redesigned jobs, though some still favor old ways. Hackman and Oldham (1976) explain that this relates to experience on the job and at what point the employee is on the professional growth curve. In education, this would mean that new teachers with high growth needs would likely be more open to redesigned jobs such as co-teaching while others with low growth needs would not. Also, Morgeson and Humphrey (2008) hints that organizational context may make a difference and inspire redesigning of work. In the context of schools, this may mean that schools struggling with performance may be willing to implement co-teaching. Teachers may be eager to volunteer because of their

child-centered beliefs, mentioned in the symbolic frame, and desire to improve student outcomes if the climate is open to innovation.

Co-teachers in this study took responsibility for redesigning their jobs by developing co-teaching roles and responsibilities and making it work for their students. In many ways, the freedom and authority given to co-teachers to construct the co-teaching team and define their roles as they see fit implies that administrators either abdicate their responsibilities to understand and guide co-teaching practice or possibly believe in egalitarianism, which is a democratic workplace where employees participate in making decision (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Egalitarianism usually is viewed as a matter of style and climate rather than a sharing of authority. It is important to note that teachers not only created their style of co-teaching but also determined when and how it was working. The responsibility of implementation and evaluation without input from the leader of the organization exist in these schools. This shift in total responsibility does not align with an egalitarian view of leadership described by Bolman and Deal. As seen by the limited structures in place, co-teachers had few directives and the feedback via formal observations and standardized test scores were irrelevant to their work.

Given these findings, co-teachers believed they were left to rely on their professional knowledge. Most co-teachers reported that they had received some professional development on the topic of co-teaching from the district level or from a work in a previous system. Two of the three districts had provided a professional development session or at least a district co-teaching meeting at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. Many co-teachers (mostly GETs) began their work with no

training. However, even teachers who had training had concerns about the way professional development was provided.

First, teachers often dismissed much of what they had been taught in the training because they did not feel it came from an authentic source. Teachers desired professional development that came from direct experience and knowledge instead of an interpretation of best practice by a district employee who may or may not have experience in the classroom. Co-teachers expressed the need for training that is provided by experts in the field who understand their classrooms. Co-teachers are eager to see examples of good co-teaching practice and desire to collaborate with co-teachers outside of their school and district to see these examples in action. They also value an ongoing professional learning model. This is consistent with the professional literature that suggests coaching and multiple training sessions are far more successful for increasing professional knowledge (Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013).

Teachers also believed that professional development should be tailored to the school context and culture. For example, one teacher believed that the training he received for co-teaching could be more easily implemented in urban areas because students in those areas had higher emphasis on reading instruction versus his rural school where students' ability to read and comprehend complex text at the high school level was not as important because of the number of students who worked in farming, an occupation perceived as not requiring the same type of reading as what is emphasized in the literature in high school.

### **Opportunities for Use**

More training is imperative for co-teachers as they work to determine the roles and responsibilities of their job as well as strategies they should use while co-teaching. Unfortunately, schools, like many organizations, are reluctant to invest in developing human capital because the organization fails to see the cost-benefit of it. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explained, the costs are immediate and easy to measure but the benefits are elusive and require a longer time to observe. PLCs were present in these schools but were not used to support co-teaching in particular. Shifting the focus of these groups to include co-teaching goals would be a cost-effective way of creating supports by colleagues and would allow time for problem solving and planning for co-taught environments.

When the data are analyzed using the human resource frame, it becomes apparent that schools have successfully increased participation and authority of teachers by involving them in the process of designing co-teaching practice. Many teachers felt satisfied with their freedom to do what is right for students, and co-teaching was seen as a positive service delivery option that improved student outcomes. However, co-teaching pairs usually relied on the knowledge base of the SET, which may include information learned in a different district or from experience with less than stellar co-teaching practice. Schools, districts, and states have the responsibility of developing co-teachers' talent and knowledge and equipping teachers with the resources as well as knowledge and skills to co-teach with fidelity so that the egalitarian climate can also support successful co-teaching practice.

### **Summary of Findings**

The conceptualization of this study was based on interest in the complexity of co-teaching and the interplay of policy and practice in the co-taught classroom. Thus, it is not surprising that no one frame can address multiple dimensions present in the research questions. Each frame tells a different story, but no single story is comprehensive enough to understand an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In practice, some frames may need to be prioritized over others at strategic times when educators find themselves at a juncture during implementation of co-teaching. For example, consider the scenario discussed by co-teachers in the study concerning the inability of the special education teacher to serve students in two English classrooms at the same time because of a scheduling issue. Although teachers felt they should support both the freshmen and junior students, they had to be innovative to find a solution that met both needs. The co-teachers discussed potential changes in student schedules and considered graduation requirements to build a schedule that allowed the special educator to split her time between the two student groups with support of the GET co-teaching partners. In this situation, a rational process that focused on gathering and analyzing information was exactly what was needed. At other times, developing commitment or building a power base may be more critical. This could result in the development of increased understanding of the intricate details of co-teaching that would aid in sustainability efforts. To better understand how the frames connect with the findings, it is necessary to go back to the research questions and the purpose of the study.

### **Findings Related to Research Questions**

When considering results across all four frames, it becomes evident that teachers reconcile their beliefs with policy messages and cultural understandings in their efforts to co-teach. When they determine how they will create their co-teaching roles, they seek to align their goals with the goals of the organization. In the following sections, specific themes are explained and the research questions are revisited.

#### **Research Question 1**

*What regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching?*

Expectations were a reoccurring theme as co-teachers discussed the meanings they made of policies as well as how they determined their roles in the co-taught classroom. Co-teachers used some policies to support the expectations they had of themselves and their co-teaching partner in unique ways. Sometimes co-teachers used policies as a rationale for co-teaching while other times the policies influenced expectations. In the following sections all variations of how teachers in the study defined and adjusted expectations they adhered to or created for the co-taught classroom are discussed.

**Expectations are supported by formal policies and laws.** Co-teachers used formal policies and laws to justify co-teaching practice and to inform their philosophy rather than dictate their specific roles they should take or how they should implement co-teaching practice. Teachers often spoke about the intent of federal laws and policies rather than specific details of such. Co-teachers spoke at length concerning how federal

laws and concepts such as IDEA and FAPE informed and supported co-teaching. They believed co-teaching to be a strategy and means of supporting inclusive practice. Co-teachers relied heavily on their beliefs and philosophies to undergird their work. They shared in the belief that many students should be served using inclusive practices. They explained that federal policy mentioned was seen in a generally positive light and fulfilled a need to connect co-teachers' beliefs about inclusion to their purpose they served in the co-taught classroom as justification of their work, that is,; serving students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment using inclusive practices.

When determining what regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching, it became apparent that there was a limited relationship between the laws and formal policies as written and how teachers use them in practice. Co-teachers did not perceive they were given clear expectations regarding their co-teaching practice. Co-teachers did not report that school administrators had given them any guidance regarding expectations of their co-teaching roles, even though the administrators lauded all teachers in the study as successful in their work. Instead, co-teachers determined what expectations they should have in the co-taught class based on how they perceived regulations and laws.

The bottom-up approach required teachers to find value of co-teaching and use resources to determine their responsibilities. The child-centered philosophy was seen as a higher priority than formal policies with one exception: The IEP was considered a legally binding document, and although teachers negotiated details in IEP meetings, they felt they adhered to the requirements as written.

**Expectations are sometimes based on misinterpretations of formal policies.**

Confusion and misinterpretation of policies and laws became apparent when comparing what teachers reported were expectations with written laws and policy. Within the study variations were found related to co-teachers' understandings across each topic mentioned regarding policy, including how highly qualified status affects teacher of record, how students in the OCS program should be included, and what exactly the ratio of students with and without disabilities should be in the co-taught class. For example, teachers quoted 50% as the maximum allowed percentage of students with disabilities in the co-taught class when in actuality it is 80%, according to written guidelines by the state department of public instruction.

The findings are similar to what Russell and Bray (2013) found when they interviewed general education teachers regarding their understanding of IDEA and NCLB and compared that understanding to what was written. In their study, Russell and Bray concluded that confusion and misinterpretation led to either misuse of policies and laws or teachers ignoring them and that clear cohesive, explicit policies are necessary. This study supports the finding that policy is often misinterpreted and unclear. It adds to these findings because it shows that co-teachers, in particular, use policy to support or inspire their work despite apparent confusion.

**Expectations are based on professional knowledge, philosophy, and beliefs.**

Teachers used their belief in individualization supported by IDEA and the IEP and their teaching philosophy to discount ESEA expectations for students. Co-teachers also sometimes tried to stretch the expectations to meet the needs of the students by focusing

on individual progress and discounting the proficiency scores of standardized assessments.

The philosophy most discussed was one that focused on student needs. There was a slight variation in how co-teachers discussed their philosophies. SETs were primarily concerned with individual student growth and let the students' needs guide their practice. GETs also seemed to focus primarily on individual student progress, but this required a paradigm shift. Student progress was measured from the present level of performance at the beginning of the semester, and GETs focused on increasing their level of performance. The new way of reflecting on student growth and teaching performance required a closer look at individual students instead of worrying about the performance of the class on standardized test and striving to have every student in their class reach a level of proficiency pre-determined by state testing. Co-teachers, especially GETs, asserted that the link between standardized test and teacher evaluation was unfair and detrimental to the practice because, based on their professional knowledge, it discouraged some teachers from co-teaching out of concern that low scores would result in a poor teacher evaluation and they would have to contend with punishment or negative consequences.

### **Research Question 2**

*What informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings, are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach?*

Co-teachers had a slightly different response regarding informal policies and procedures, especially those at the state and local levels. Some guidelines from the state led to responsibilities that co-teachers assumed as they tried to meet expectations. Co-

teachers considered informal policies and tried to adhere to the guidelines. The meanings teachers make of informal policy varied among participants and it was evident that they were misinformed concerning state requirements. What is clear is that the meanings teachers made from informal policy messages was closely related to the level of professional knowledge and the co-teachers' belief system concerning how students with and without disabilities should be served in the inclusive classroom. Procedures that support professional knowledge emerged as a strong theme when teachers discussed practices and understandings that guide their work. Teachers spoke in length about the value of PLCs and professional development as supports for increasing professional knowledge.

**Expectations are informed by meanings teachers make of informal policy.**

Co-teachers worked diligently to prepare students for assessments required by the state accountability program even though they sometimes felt standardized testing were unfair. Co-teachers also attempted to meet requirements they felt came from the state regarding college and career ready curriculum with the adapted curriculum in order to serve students with disabilities who were in the OCS program. They also attempted to meet requirements such as class size and ratio of students with disabilities. They worked closely with the guidance counselor to determine how many students in the co-taught classroom had a disability so they could arrange schedules to meet ratio expectations from the state. Ironically, many of the policies and directives co-teachers tried to meet were misinformed when compared to how the policies were written at the state level.

**Expectations from the district mainly concerned compliance issues.** Very few co-teachers discussed expectations from the district level beyond paperwork requirements. There were a few co-teachers that mentioned a district provided training. Primarily, co-teachers spoke of the district-wide meetings regarding paperwork. Co-teachers attended these meetings to ensure IEPs and other administrative paperwork met the standards needed for compliance purposes. Co-teachers agreed that support regarding paperwork was of great value but felt it was too much of a priority that limited the support that they wanted regarding how to actually co-teach in the classroom. Co-teachers felt the message was clear; teach how you want but make sure the paperwork meets specific requirements. Some co-teachers explicitly voiced the idea that the district was not concerned with how they taught in co-taught classes as long as the paperwork was completely correctly.

Mostly, co-teachers spoke of expectations that impacted their day-to-day relationships with colleagues and students. For example, co-teachers sought to ensure that students thought of them as equals, they worked to create a behavior management system that worked for both teachers, and they expected that both partners would be actively engaged at all times. Some teachers specifically expressed that they did not believe that one teacher sitting in the back of the room while the other teacher taught was acceptable, but sometimes this was the case with other co-teaching partners. Expectations for co-teaching were mainly devised using some policy and were based a great deal on philosophy and belief according to the perspective of co-teachers

interviewed. The administrator's influence was noticeably absent from discussions of how co-teachers understood their expectations.

These findings are not surprising given that prior studies that focused on administrators and the roles they take when implementing co-teaching in their schools have found that they have limited involvement. Studies have found that administrators often do not have an understanding of the practice of co-teaching and cannot provide vision, support, or understanding of the practice (Magiera et al., 2005; Nierengarten, 2013). The co-teachers' perspectives and ownership of creating expectations may be a direct result of the limits of the administrator's understanding of co-teaching practice. These findings also support the idea that, consistent with a study by Crockett (2002) special education leaders have an opportunity to increase the knowledge of principals regarding co-teaching practice.

**Professional knowledge helps co-teachers make meaning of informal policies.**

Procedures and informal policies influenced co-teachers' work but seemed susceptible to shifts in use based on professional knowledge of the teachers and the perceived needs of students or the co-teaching partner. Co-teachers sometimes disregarded policies that they did not think supported their co-teaching efforts or aligned with their professional knowledge. For example, one co-teaching pair discussed district-wide directives concerning the model that should be used in the co-taught classroom. One county determined that both teachers should be in the front of the class teaching at all times. Co-teachers in this county all agreed that this was not feasible or effective based on the day and context of the lesson. Therefore, co-teachers proceeded to ignore the directive.

**Professional knowledge is learned from co-teaching partner.** Co-teachers consistently described situations in which they learned from their co-teaching partner. Some GETs explained that they knew nothing of co-teaching practice when they were first assigned to co-teach and relied entirely on the experience of the SET. Some GETs described how they would repeatedly ask the SET if the students were capable of completing the assignments they had planned, or how they learned from the SET how to modify and make adjustments based on the students' needs. Other times, GETs mentioned they had looked to the SET to see if they were co-teaching effectively based on the SETs knowledge of the co-teaching models.

SETs spoke of how they had relied on the GET for content knowledge. They noted that they had learned a great deal about the subject of the class and increased knowledge of the content. This included understanding the pacing guides and demands of the curriculum and state testing, which they felt helped them be more effective co-teachers because they could assist in planning more easily. For example, one co-teaching pair described how they went about choosing a particular book for their students based on the GET's knowledge of content and the SETs knowledge of what would engage the students in their co-taught class.

**Professional knowledge is supported by consistency of subject taught.** Co-teachers felt strongly that consistency supported increased professional knowledge that they could use effectively while co-teaching. They discussed how teaching the same courses from semester to semester helped them gain a deeper understanding of the content and of each other. For example, SETs who co-taught in English classes only felt

they could gain a deeper understanding of the content and understand the expectations for their students from grade level to grade level. The benefits to their students of understanding the demands of the next level of instruction were great. They could plan more effectively how they would prepare the students for their current class as well as for their future classes, because they knew the expectations of all of the teachers in the English department as they co-taught with them.

Co-teachers also felt consistency was important regarding the teachers with whom they were assigned to collaborate. They saw the co-teaching partnership was like a marriage and that it needed time to grow and become stronger. Co-teachers perceived it was difficult to start over with a new teacher and that if the partnership is working it should be allowed to continue as is. This finding is supported by various works including Conderman, Johnston-Rodrigues, and Hartman (2009); Dieker et al. (2012); Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, and Shamberger (2010); and Little and Dieker (2009), all of which emphasized the importance of developing the co-teaching relationship over time with the understanding that conflict, difficult interactions, and trainings increase professional knowledge along the way.

**Professional knowledge is increased by professional development.**

Professional development emerged as a needed support and a direct strategy, according to teachers, to increase professional knowledge. Co-teachers spoke of their lack of professional development. Often they had only attended a single training with little follow-up conducted by the district. Co-teachers proposed they should be given more opportunities to visit places where effective co-teaching was established. Co-teachers

complained that sometimes training was conducted by a district person who had never been in the classroom and who had “put their own spin” on information learned elsewhere. Co-teachers wanted quality training that came from people who absolutely knew what co-teaching should look like and who had experience in the field.

Ultimately, co-teachers indicated that their particular school context should be considered when developing professional development and that it should come from an authentic source, someone who had direct knowledge of co-teaching rather than someone who had attended a training and brought it back to share. This is similar with literature on best practice of conducting professional development in that a coaching model is typically effective (J. F. Carlisle & Berebitsky, 2011; Casale, 2011; and Cohan & Honigsfeld, 2011). A recent study by Kraft and Papay (2014) that looked at teacher improvement rates of 9000 teachers found that supporting growth in professional knowledge in the school environment on a consistent basis through learning opportunities was more effective than a one-shot training that focused on skills or strategies with no follow-up.

**Professional knowledge is supported by PLCs.** Co-teachers felt they could increase professional knowledge by using the PLC structure already in use in their school. Generally, co-teachers interviewed did not attend PLCs together. PLCs were usually formed with the SETs going to a special education PLC while the GET went to a content specific PLC. Sporadically, the SET would try to sit-in on the content specific PLC. Co-teachers saw value of PLCs and spoke of ways that they were used to support knowledge across subject areas. For example, a GET discussed the benefits of a PLC

developed for all math teachers. He thought the math team was able to plan together and understand pacing and content in more effective ways because of the work in PLCs. Co-teachers described district-wide use of PLCs in which a lead teacher from a subject-area would attend a district meeting with other lead teachers from the same subject area. Co-teachers thought this should also be created for co-teaching partners. From co-teachers' perspectives this would be a way to see how other co-teachers in similar places were dealing with problems that arose while co-teaching. The value of PLCs has been studied extensively (i.e. Richardson, 2011; Cherrington & Thornton, 2015; DuFour, 2007), and the benefits mentioned by the teachers echo original idea of the purpose and positive outcomes that result from collaboration among teachers (Dufour & Fullan, 2013)

### **Research Question 3**

*How do teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional roles they take while co-teaching?*

Teachers relied on their beliefs and teaching philosophies as well as cultural understandings to determine their roles and responsibilities when co-teaching. Teachers used their belief in individualization supported by IDEA and the IEP and their teaching philosophy to discount ESEA expectations for students. Co-teachers also sometimes tried to stretch the expectations to meet the needs of the students by focusing on individual progress and discounting the proficiency scores of standardized assessments. Co-teachers explained how they built the practice the way they saw fit and conceptualized what co-teaching should encompass on their expertise and the expertise of their co-teaching partner.

Additionally, culture emerged as a theme that co-teachers felt supported how they determined their roles and responsibilities. As teachers spoke of elements of their school setting, cultural dimensions emerged that supported or hindered their co-teaching practice. As teachers spoke of their daily decisions made while co-teaching, relationships with their partners, as well as with other stakeholders of the co-taught class and school, were discussed. Co-teachers also explained the ways their principal helped facilitate culture to support co-teaching.

**Roles are formed based on philosophy and beliefs.** The philosophy most discussed was one that focused on student needs. There was a slight variation in how co-teachers discussed their philosophies. SETs were primarily concerned with individual student growth and let the students' needs guide their practice. GETs also seemed to focus primarily on individual student progress, but this required a paradigm shift. Student progress was measured from the present level of performance at the beginning of the semester, and GETs focused on increasing their level of performance. The new way of reflecting on student growth and teaching performance required a closer look at individual students instead of worrying about the performance of the class on standardized test and striving to have every student in their class reach a level of proficiency pre-determined by state testing. Co-teachers, especially GETs, asserted that the link between standardized test and teacher evaluation was unfair and detrimental to the practice because, based on their professional knowledge, it discouraged some teachers from co-teaching out of concern that they would be judged poorly on their evaluation if the students scored below the proficiency level.

**Positive school culture includes strong relationships that support co-teaching.**

Co-teachers expressed that a strong relationship was necessary with the administrator in order to support the needs of the co-taught classrooms. Most co-teachers in this study were confident that the school's staff members had a positive perception of co-teaching and discussed the respect they had from their colleagues, students, and parents. Co-teachers repeatedly mentioned the importance of being flexible with each other, with expectations, and with students.

Co-teachers discussed how strong trusting relationships helped them feel supported in various situations. They knew they could trust their partners to support them in IEP meetings and discussions with other faculty and parents. Co-teachers in this study also repeatedly expressed how much trust was an integral part of the relationship with their principal. Co-teachers found that most students without disabilities in their school were receptive to the co-taught class and that, as one teacher explained, would be immediately changed to another class if they had a negative attitude and requested a schedule change. Teachers even discussed the adaptation and appreciation some initially reluctant typical class members found over the course of the semester. They could trust the guidance counselor and principal to work with them to create a cohesive group in the co-taught classroom.

Trust was also a theme in a study by Hoppey and McLeskey (2014). Although co-teaching was not the focus of Hoppey and McLeskey's study, the study showed similar importance of trust and discussed the reciprocal nature of trust and how it can support collaborative efforts to work through dilemmas and solve problems when

inclusive practices are implemented. Such mutual trust was evident in the discussions with co-teachers in the current study as they were comfortable sharing concerns regarding trainings and student outcomes with the principals and with each other.

**Positive school culture is facilitated by administrators.** Co-teachers spoke in detail about how the administrators facilitated a positive culture by setting the tone for the school. Co-teachers reported that the administrator was key in determining the way others saw the co-taught class. Co-teachers mentioned mostly positive examples of administrators encouraging their work and approaching student outcomes with deep understanding of where the students started the year academically, and they appreciated the academic progress achieved despite sometimes disappointing test scores. Some GETs described conversations with administrators and colleagues who assured them that students were making good progress and that they should examine individual student progress instead of whole class progress based on state norms. These results are also similar to findings by Hoppey and McLeskey in the aforementioned study that analyzed one principal. Hoppey and McLeskey found that the principal were able to create a “buffer” between outside pressure. Some co-teachers in the current study described how their principal created such a buffer by shifting the focus to individual performance and growth beyond what was achieved on state test. Other co-teachers described ways the principal projected a positive attitude and high expectations of students with disabilities by believing that all students could achieve the standards set by outside forces.

## **Conclusion**

Expectations, professional knowledge, and culture are themes found as teachers discussed their shared beliefs, cultural understandings, professional roles and policy messages regarding co-teaching. Teachers prioritized these elements to create structure and operate effectively within the co-teaching classroom. A child-centered philosophy was seen as important to co-teachers because of the individual nature they felt guided the practice. From the co-teachers' perspective, a supportive culture and strong relationships were the key to their success. More often than not, teachers relied on their professional understandings and beliefs about how students learn best to guide their co-teaching work.

## **Limitations**

While this study yielded meaningful insight, several limitations are important to note. Some of these limitations are common in qualitative research, and others emerged based on unexpected developments encountered during participant recruitment efforts.

First, this study described the experience of co-teaching teams in a specific geographical area. Despite the effort made to interview co-teachers from urban, suburban, and rural areas in one state, the data have limited generalizability beyond the participating teams of co-teachers. This limitation is unavoidable and is common in any study with a small sample size in one geographical area.

Second, the results of this study relied heavily on administrators' identification of effective co-teaching professionals. This study sought to elicit views from teachers who, despite challenges, were successful in the co-taught environment. All co-teachers were referred by an administrator who was informed of the definition of co-teaching used by

the researcher. However, the researcher cannot be certain that the co-teaching practice met the level of quality desired because the referrals were subjective and relied on the understanding of special education administrators and school administrators without the researcher observing the co-teaching pair. The administrators participated in a discussion with the researcher concerning the specific criteria in an effort to ensure they had adequate experience and understanding of co-teaching. The definition of co-teaching practice was shared along with concepts of collaboration and the importance of inclusion as more than a physical place. Also, the lack of student achievement data, while not a focus of this study, does not offer support of the fidelity of co-teaching practices studied

Third, recruitment of teachers took much longer than expected due to the time required to communicate with various levels of administrators and lead teachers in the districts. The timeframe for the study was during the middle of the semester of the high school calendar. Thus, the time of year was problematic. Administrators reported that the timeframe for data collection and interviewing fell within the key timeframe allotted for student and teacher preparation for testing. Therefore, adjustments in scheduling were necessary.

In an effort to accommodate the testing window and teachers' preferences, the interviews took several weeks to complete. In the first phase of the study, individual interviews were conducted and analyzed over a period of five weeks in March and April of 2015. Based on these data, Questions were formulated for the joint interviews and were approved by the committee chairs in May, 2015. The timeframe could be seen as a limitation because of the compounding stress that occurs over the course of a school year.

Teachers may be particularly stressed during this busy time of the year. It is not known, but is possible that if teachers were asked to participate at the beginning of the school year they may have felt more optimistic and less focused on outcomes of testing.

In almost all cases, the general education teachers (GET) recommended by the special education teacher (SET) agreed to participate in the study after they were given the recruitment packet. In only one incidence, the GET chose not to participate because she reported that she did not have “time to give to the task,” and so another GET was chosen by the SET. The SET explained that he also had a strong relationship and co-teaching partnership with the second choice. In the end, all SETs were able to recommend a co-teacher with whom they felt they had a good co-teaching relationship with and who agreed to participate in the study. It is not known how the joint interview would have been different had the SET’s first choice and the teacher he thought he had the best relationship with would have agreed to be in the study.

Fourth, the extent to which the participants trusted the researcher was important to the outcome of the interviews. The researcher was able to build a relationship with the participants in the individual interviews that positively affected the comfort level in the joint interview sessions, and the researcher perceived this was successful in fostering open and honest communication. However, the interview questions required teachers to reflect upon their organization, and it is important to acknowledge the possibility of hesitation in their answers because of job security concerns. Measures were taken to ease this concern by providing a private meeting space and few interruptions. Most interviews were conducted in the general educator’s classroom with the door closed. Others were in

the special education office, and other faculty members were asked to leave during the interview session. Ultimately, no evidence was found that co-teachers were concerned about job security but it possible that discussions about their organization would naturally cause concern.

Also, research bias was a concern and threat to trustworthiness of this study due to my own experience of co-teaching at the high school level and my personal philosophy and belief in the practice. It is important to maintain a clearly identified perspective of the background of the conceptualization of the study. Thus, clear articulation of my positionality gives transparent insight to my perspective of co-teaching practice and the reader can consider the findings with knowledge of my beliefs and philosophy. Also, use of Bolman and Deal's framework provided data analysis that was see through a lens that was separate from my personal view of the data. Also the use of member checks greatly reduced problems with trustworthiness.

Additionally, factors unique to the teachers in the study could have influenced results. For example, teachers' had an incomplete understanding of policy, which may have impacted the perceptions of how policy was supportive or a hindrance to their work. Teachers in this study also had caseloads that ranged from 16 students to 33 students which could have greatly influenced their perspective. In addition, at least one SET described that her school had underwent a drastic change in the past few years. The number of students with disabilities had increased to the point that her caseload had almost doubled. The teachers with the higher caseload could have felt less supported

than the teachers with the lower caseload just because of the level of stress that comes with the responsibility of maintaining compliance of paperwork for each student.

Also, most teachers in the study co-taught in the same subject area or in related areas such as math and science. However, there were two teachers who co-taught across very different subject areas including English, math, and social studies. These co-teachers may have been more skeptical due to the difficulty in preparing for each of the courses.

Finally, inter-rater agreement was a process that involved member checking of transcribed interview data. The researcher sent emails individually to the teachers with interview transcripts attached. No response or edits meant that teachers agreed with the transcription and validated it was indeed what was said. Although the emails were flagged to report when they were opened, there is no way of guaranteeing that participants read the attached transcription.

In spite of the limitations of the study discussed above, efforts were made to reduce the impact of these limitations in such a way that the results are meaningful. This study has provided results that add to the research literature that could support future research and can be used to inform administrators, educators, and policy-makers.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this study have implications for co-teachers, policy-makers, principals, and special education administrators. In order for the organization to effectively support co-teaching practice as a sustainable service delivery option, the following recommendations should be considered.

**Co-teachers**

Organizations may misdirect energy and resources if they do not carefully consider the needs of the members. Schools may, for example, waste time and money on programs that are unrelated to all attendees. For example, one district in the study required all teachers to adhere to specific requirements of a specific and time-consuming data analysis approach when determining student growth, which in essence only used the standardized testing measures to track student progress. No matter how many times a team from the district reviewed the graph on the wall of the classroom, the students with disabilities were usually starting at a proficiency level well below their peers and were not listed on the graph. Teachers found such a tracking system irrelevant and stigmatizing to students who never achieved getting their names on the graph. This type of program was misaligned with the classroom culture teachers were working to create, one based on support rather than competition.

Other training programs are misdirected in a vain effort to solve problems that have much more to do with social architecture than with people's knowledge of a specific strategy or process. For example, some have spent time and money on training that provides strategies for co-teaching to SETs but have failed to see that GETs also need this knowledge and that collaboration is inherent to the practice.

If schools need to build a social architecture that includes collaboration, knowledge of specific models alone will not support co-teaching practice. The needs of the organization and trainings must be aligned. Teachers must also consider exactly what their needs are for professional development and seek opportunities to meet those needs.

This may mean jointly attending conferences with sessions on co-teaching strategies, or it may mean collaboration across schools and districts to find what is working for others who share the same goal.

Co-teachers in this study showed strength in their ability to be political in a positive way through their work with guidance counselors, parents, and co-teaching partners. They also were innovative when difficulties arose when trying to serve multiple students with limited resources. Teachers should continue to be innovative while at the same time recognizing that much can be learned from professional development and others who are effectively co-teaching.

Co-teachers should continue to build partnerships and give symbolic meaning to the practice of co-teaching. Co-teachers in this study reported that they may have had negative experience but believed that the current partnership worked and was a positive example that shows the potential of co-teaching. Some teachers spoke of the change they perceived in the school regarding co-teaching—from negative to positive—once people saw that it could work. Co-teachers who are able to inspire others to volunteer to co-teach or who are able to show a positive example of co-teaching practice can help build understanding of the value of co-teaching among colleagues, parents, administrators, and students.

### **Policy-makers**

Policy-makers at the federal and state level can benefit from these findings as they go about their duty to provide policies for constituents that are meaningful and robust. A professional bureaucracy responds slowly to external change, and so it is not terribly

surprising that not all well-intentioned policies and laws immediately make it to the classroom level. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explained, a paradox exists in many professions, such as education, when individual professionals may work to be at the forefront of their specialty or field, whereas the organization changes at a glacial pace.

The following are recommendations of actions policy-makers could take to support implementation and increase the effectiveness of co-teaching:

- Review written policies to determine if more explicit policy messages could be sent from federal and state governments regarding co-teaching practice.
- Identify measures of co-teacher effectiveness beyond the standardized teacher evaluation process and standardized scores are needed for teachers to provide more meaningful and accurate feedback.
- Hold schools accountable for creating specific roles and responsibilities of co-teachers and communicating the job description explicitly to co-teachers.
- Use the four frames to find ways to implement co-teaching or support professional knowledge of teachers.

Co-teachers repeatedly expressed a desire to have more defined expectations and understanding of co-teaching practice. Although co-teachers strongly believed that flexibility and freedom to determine best practices and strategies based on their specific context, they also noted the complete lack of structure to co-teaching practice. The co-teachers studied seemed to desire a deeper understanding of their roles and responsibilities and were eager to have performance evaluations that reflect their practice of co-teaching and their professional growth. These recommendations are similar to

those made by McCullough, English, Angus, & Gill (2015) in a governmental report on teacher evaluation that concluded that a more comprehensive approach was needed.

### **Principals**

When a relatively new redesigned educational role is created, it requires principals to provide both a microscopic assessment of typical problems and an overall, topographical sense of structural options (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Principals have the responsibility to provide vision and feedback to co-teachers (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). In secondary schools in particular, they should design a structure that allows for collaboration and strong communication (Friend & Cook, 2013). They should build a forum to elicit input while communicating expectations. If they abdicate their responsibilities, performance suffers (Ingram, 1997; Simmons & Magiera, 2007). However, adhering too strictly to procedures that are created at the district based on interpretation of vague policies by administrators can be equally harmful and alienate co-teachers while it perpetuates images of bureaucratic rigidity (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Principals must clarify vague policies and develop expectations for their teachers. They should examine professional literature on the practice of co-teaching and consider peer coaching as a way to support co-teachers.

Principals should consider using the four frames model to reflect on the structural design of the school and of their own managerial style to determine in what ways are they effective and could make improvements to the structure of the school to support co-teaching practice. The workability of a structure depends on its fit with the organization's environment. Principals should rely on the insight of the current co-

teaching workforce, parents, students, and other teachers in the school when determining the cultural elements in place that affect the political and symbolic elements of culture. As Bolman and Deal explain, the major players need to negotiate a structure that meets needs of each component and still enables the organization to survive, if not thrive.

When determining the best structure, principals must understand that a process or event can be framed in various ways. For example, the concept of co-planning for instruction in the co-taught classroom may accomplish specific objectives such as the development of specially designed instruction, but it could also create an arena for addressing conflict. It could also be used as a sacred occasion to renegotiate symbolic meanings as teachers' view their roles in the classroom in ways that are counter to the traditional culture of teaching. In a given situation, multiple frames can be used to determine actions that will result in positive outcomes for co-teaching practice. Therefore, key stakeholders must be able to analyze and have input regarding the needs of the organization. Therefore, principals must work closely with co-teachers to develop and enhance co-teaching practice if it is to be effective and sustainable.

### **Special Education Administrators**

It is important for a school system to see a return on their investment of providing professional development. Progressive organizations give power to employees as well as invest in their development. Empowerment includes keeping employees informed, but it does not stop there. It also involves encouraging autonomy and participation, redesigning work, fostering teams, promoting egalitarianism, and infusing work with meaning. When supporting co-teaching practice, special education administrators often find themselves

trying to create a paradigm shift in the organization. It is important to note that any type of change eventually requires some form of structural adaptation. In the short term, structural change invariably produces confusion and resistance; things get worse before they get better. In the end, success depends on how well the new model aligns with environment and the task at hand. It also hinges on the route taken in putting the new structure in place. Thus, the recommendation is for special education administrators to focus on increasing professional knowledge of SETs through communicating and collaborating with school administration to ensure that co-teachers are provided adequate feedback regarding evaluation of co-teaching practice in a supportive way. Special education administrators can also work with school administrators to help provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with other co-teachers across schools in the district to share ideas and ensure co-teaching is implemented with fidelity across schools within the district.

Special education administrators can also help educate principals regarding the need for structure as they implement co-teaching practice. Co-teachers discussed how helpful routines would have been when they were first introduced to the concept of co-teaching. These were stressful times for teachers who felt they knew little of how to implement co-teaching.

Initial and regular meetings with their administrators or with knowledgeable coaches may have helped ease their concern. As Bolman and Deal (2013) explained, “in times of great stress decision processes may be a form of ritual that brings comfort and support” (p. 310). Any initiative, such as co-teaching, requires an understanding of how

to best frame the problem so that the best solution can be found that will help the practice become more effective.

### **Future Directions of Research**

Many ideas for future research emerged from the findings of this study.

Additional research is needed related to administrator perspectives using the Bolman and Deal framework. Co-teachers were given a great deal of power and freedom to develop co-teaching as they see fit with only moderate understanding and sometimes misunderstanding of the policy and laws governing special and general education.

Perhaps this was because principals believed that exercising greater control over the teachers and how they co-teach would result in resistance. Several potential research questions related to the special education administrator include:

- What are the structures principals perceive they use to support co-teaching practice while upholding expectations from district, state, and federal authorities?
- What guidance do principals give co-teachers and what do they feel comes from other leaders such as special education administrators regarding co-teaching practice?
- What skills and professional knowledge do principals feel they possess to guide implementation of co-teaching?
- What are the benefits of relying on symbolic leadership vs. relying on the structural elements discussed by Bolman and Deal?

Similarly, district level administrators' perspectives and a review of training programs offered at the state, district, and school levels should be considered for future research. Do special education administrators need to provide critical structure for this endeavor? If so, in what ways can they provide structure in the day-to-day events of co-teaching rather than merely focusing on paperwork? This study also leads to questions about types of professional development that special education administrators provide to support co-teaching practice. What does professional development comprise when co-teachers feel completely supported and knowledgeable? This study revealed that co-teachers were definitely part of the decision-making process within the organization and innovative practice was encouraged. Further, it became clear through the results of this study that co-teachers believed in the practice and wanted it to be successful. Questions related to sustainability of the practice in lives these:

- What happens when one of the co-teaching pair no longer co-teaches? Can knowledge transfer easily from the remaining partner to a new co-teaching partner?
- What happens when different levels of structure from the federal and state government are used? Would this affect sustainability?
- Does more structure stifle creativity and innovation of co-teachers?

Comparison of the findings of this study in a state with limited guidance at the state level versus another state with more structure on co-teaching would provide insight on the effect of more explicit policy messages and how teachers meaning may change in relation to co-teaching practice. Additional research considering co-teaching pairs from

rural schools or urban schools separately to see if specific cultural differences influence co-teaching is another area of interest. Finally, the question of whether disparity exists when co-teaching professional development is delivered in various ways would also be an area of future research. As can be seen by the varied questions above, many questions emerged through this study of co-teachers perspectives regarding the interplay of policy and practice while considering culture and professional knowledge of the co-taught classroom.

### **Conclusion**

This study used all four frames of Bolman and Deal to better understand the interplay of explicit policy messages, implied cultural understandings, beliefs, and professional roles interpreted by effective co-teachers. Understanding the findings as seen through the lens of the four frames allows for each element to be addressed by multi-dimensional thinking in a way that incorporates a piece of each frame in the specific content of the organization. Table 6 poses questions to facilitate understanding the themes that emerged from teachers' perspectives and how they fit in the organizational framework. It suggests conditions under which each way of thinking is most likely to be effective.

Professional knowledge is addressed within the human resource frame. The human resource frame also overlaps with the both the symbolic and structural frames. This is logical given that providing training, job enrichment, and data typically results in improving belief in an initiative. Policies and expectations are addressed within the structural frame. The structural frame can be used to clarify roles and responsibilities and

design ways to ensure accountability. The structural frame also affects all other frames in that if co-teachers are unsure of their roles and responsibilities, they may become resistant to the practice, affecting the symbolic, human resource, and political frames. As can be seen on table, these frames highlight the complexities of co-teaching concerning uncertainty and ambiguity that may occur as faculty who are new to the concept of co-teaching attempt to understand the practice and become successful. As Bolman and Deal explain, what is certain is that when individuals find satisfaction and meaning in work, schools (like many organizations) profit from the effective use of their talent and energy.

Table 6

## Frame Connection to Theme

| Question  | If Yes:                                  | Using the frame(s) will:  |
|---|--|---|
| Inspiration: Are co-teachers' commitment and motivation essential to success?                                     | Human resource frame<br>Symbolic frame   | strengthen support of co-teaching by improving buy-in of faculty  |
| Professional Knowledge: Is the technical quality, including strategies and models of co-teaching used, important? | Structural frame<br>Human resource frame | strengthen integration of goals, roles, and responsibilities; provide data, logic, and necessary training to ensure co-teaching with fidelity |
| Policies and Expectations: Are there high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty relating to expectations?           | Political frame<br>Symbolic frame        | help find order, meaning, and define responsibilities of co-teachers  |
| School Culture: Are conflict and scarce resources significant issues?   | Political frame<br>Symbolic frame        | address conflict, power, and self-interest to unite the co-teachers   |

Table 6

(Cont.)

| Question   | If Yes:  | Using the frame(s) will:                                      |
|--|--|---|
| School Culture: Is co-teaching being implemented from the bottom-up?           | Political frame  | inspire collaboration among co-teachers with shared vision    |
| Policies and Expectations: Is co-teaching being implemented from the top-down? | Structural frame<br>Human resource frame<br>Symbolic frame | provide training, job enrichment, and increased participation |

As evident in the results of this study, some areas within the organization of schools are well developed while some areas are limited in their use according to teachers who work in co-taught classrooms. Co-teachers need, at a minimum, structures that support professional knowledge acquisition and give meaning to policies that are misunderstood. Such improvements in the structural frame are imperative given the current responsibilities and roles of the SETs interviewed. SETs held many types of power as they lead the implementation of co-teaching. Administrators may examine their own structures using the questions on Table 6 to determine their focus of organizational improvement. Administrators may realize that more procedures and directives are needed so that co-teaching practice can be supported and sustained.

Co-teaching practice can be supported by distributing power among all stakeholders in various ways as professional knowledge is enhanced. The right structure depends on prevailing circumstances of the organizations. School leaders must examine the context of their co-teaching practice, the organization's goals, strategies used, and

cultural elements when supporting a complementary interplay of policy with practice. Only then will co-teachers feel supported and valued as part of the organization and sustainability efforts be realized.

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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT MATERIALS SUMMARY OF STUDY

**Project Title: How High School Co-teachers Reconcile Professional Knowledge and Beliefs with Competing Policy Directives and Expectations**

#### **Brief Description**

This qualitative study seeks to (1) understand what regulations and laws support or hinder teachers in implementation of co-teaching, (2) determine what informal policy elements, including procedures, practices, and understandings are guiding teachers' efforts to co-teach, and (3) explore ways co-teachers reconcile their beliefs with explicit federal and state policy messages and implied cultural understandings with the professional knowledge and roles they take while co-teaching. The data source includes primarily in-depth interviews with individual co-teachers and co-teaching pairs who meet a level of quality co-teaching. Administrators will be asked to provide brief background information regarding their perspective of co-teaching to aid in conclusions of the findings. Recommendation of quality co-teachers is requested based on co-teaching as defined as *a service delivery option that supports inclusive practice in which teaching occurs primarily in a single shared classroom. General education teachers and special education teachers share instructional and related responsibilities for all or a small part of the school day. All students are full members of their co-taught class. Co-teaching is, first and foremost, the mechanism through which students with disabilities get their required specially designed instruction, and it facilitates the blending of teachers' complementary expertise to benefit all students in the classroom. Further, it provides*

*opportunities to vary content presentation, scaffold learning of new concepts, and closely monitor students' understanding (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). Co-teachers' participation may vary as there is no set amount of time or workload required of each teacher. Co-teaching requires three components: co-planning, co-instructing, and co-assessing. If any one of the components are missing, teachers are unlikely to truly co-teach (Murawski & Lochner, 2011).*

### **How the Researcher Will Conduct the Study**

Interviews (See questions in Appendix C) will be scheduled in the time most convenient and appropriate for the teachers. The teacher interview will not exceed 30 minutes per session. The participants will first be interviewed individually and then asked to participate in a joint interview with their co-teacher. The total time commitment for each participant will not exceed 1 hour. The administrators of the schools participating in the study will be emailed a five questions survey regarding co-teaching practice. This should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

### **How the Study Will Affect the Union School System**

The Union School System has solid reputation for having effective, well-trained co-teachers and interviews with these professionals will help answer key questions in the field related to policy, accountability, and implementation of co-teaching practice. There will be minimal impact on teachers in respect to the value of their time. Interviews will be scheduled at a time most feasible for teachers' schedule. Every effort has been considered to conduct this study at an appropriate time of the year for teachers. The researcher has considered the requirements of special educators to have paperwork

completed by April 1st of each calendar year. No interviews will be conducted prior to this deadline. The researcher would like to coordinate with the teachers prior to April 1st but schedule interviews after this important date.

### **Plan for Correspondence**

After obtaining IRB approval, the researcher will contact a professional in the Exceptional Children's Department of the Union School System. The professional will be asked to identify co-teachers as potential participants in high schools. Informational packets (Appendix A) will be shared with potential participants through email and hard copies will be left at each school office. Each educator who meets the inclusion criteria will be presented information through phone or face-to-face conversation (see script Appendix B) about the study and given a consent form through email. They will be asked to submit the consent form to a designated professional in the school within seven days of receiving the information.

**APPENDIX B**  
**DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY**

**Participant Information**

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your school: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years you have been teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years you have taught in a classroom with learners with high or low incidence exceptionalities (must be a minimum of 3 to participate in this study): \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years you have worked as a co-teacher (must be a minimum of 3 to participate in this study) \_\_\_\_\_

Grade(s) you are currently teaching: \_\_\_\_\_

Grade(s) you have co-taught: \_\_\_\_\_

What subject(s) do you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide the preferred e-mail address and/or phone number where we can contact you:

E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Is there a best time to call? \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C**  
**CONFIDENTIALITY FORM**

**CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT**  
**Transcription Services**

Teachers' Perspectives of How High School Co-teachers Reconcile Professional  
Knowledge and Beliefs with Competing Policy Directives and Expectations

I, \_\_\_\_\_, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Tammy Barron related to her doctoral study on teachers' perspectives of how high school co-teachers reconcile professional knowledge and beliefs with competing policy directives and expectations co-teaching. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Tammy Barron;
3. To store all study-related digital recordings and materials in locked file cabinet and / or a password protected computer;
4. To return all digital recordings and study-related documents to Tammy Barron in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) \_\_\_\_\_

Transcriber's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### CODE BOOK

| <b>Joint Interview Codes</b> |   |  |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Theme</b>                 | <b>Codes: Definition/Terms</b>  | <b>Related Frame/Justification</b>   |
| Policies and Expectations    | Actual formal policies mentioned explicitly and/or cultural meanings co-teachers make of policies; informal policies and administrative expectations  | Structural Frame: Rules, policies, standards, and standard operating procedures; dividing work and coordinating it thereafter; structural design depends on an organization's circumstances, controlled, top-down forms may work in simple, stable situations but fall short in more fluid and ambiguous ones  |
| Professional Knowledge       | Skills co-teachers feel they possess; skills they would like to have; trainings to increase which they have experienced (pros and cons); opportunities for future PD; type of   | Human Resource Frame: emphasizes dealing with issues by changing people (through training, rotation, promotion, or dismissal); Suitable forms of coordination and control ensure that diverse efforts of individuals and units mesh. Organizations work best when rationality prevails over personal agendas and extraneous pressures. Effective structures fit an organization's current circumstances; |
| School Culture               | Relationships; rapport; empowerment; conflict; power; collaboration; relations with colleagues; with administration (pros and cons); with students; type of power (informational, coercive, legitimate, reward, expert) | Political Frame: Power, conflict, social architecture; Climate;;Empowerment includes keeping employees informed; It also involves encouraging autonomy and participation, redesigning work, fostering teams, promoting egalitarianism, and infusing work with meaning.   |
| Inspiration                  | Beliefs; teaching philosophy; beliefs about policy adherence (why or why not follow); motivation; satisfaction; vision; values  | Symbolic Frame: Belief system, philosophy, shared thoughts that unite a workforce; symbols and mission,  |

## APPENDIX E

### NVIVO CODES (NODES)

#### Policies and Expectations

Includes: formal policies mentioned explicitly and/or cultural meanings co-teachers make of policies; informal policies and administrative expectations

#### Professional Knowledge

Includes: skills co-teachers feel they possess; roles they take, skills they would like to have; trainings to increase which they have experienced (pros and cons); opportunities for future PD; type of PD;

#### School Culture

Includes: relationships; rapport; empowerment; conflict; power; collaboration; relations with colleagues; with administration (pros and cons); with students; type of power (informational, coercive, legitimate, reward, expert)

#### Inspiration

Beliefs; teaching philosophy; beliefs about policy adherence (why or why not follow); motivation; satisfaction; vision; values

Coding sample using NVivo:

"As the co-teacher and not the teacher of record, I feel like my role is to sometimes reteach in a different manner or with different words, modify for those students who need modification and to assist in the learning process for students."

I think it might be the culture of the school and maybe also you know, [the SETs] are both really, really good at what they do . . . she doesn't just sit down in the back of the classroom, she continues, she teaches. The co-teaching partner added, It was a pretty open, casual group. Every time I walked in the door, 'cause I would come midway sometimes, beginning sometimes, depending on what the class was doing, always, "Hey Ms. Walton, how are you? Ms. Walton's here." It was always a welcome. Where in several classes, I would walk in and I would feel like I've interrupted. Sorry I'm late, it took too long with the test."

"I think in the past, more so than this year, there has been a negative connotation aspect to it. We were considered like teacher's assistants a lot of time and we walked around and helped students but as far as getting to instruct any, I didn't get to before co-teaching this year with her but in some aspects, it is a positive. I think of co-teachers as a whole, it is different from what I think right now of this experience. As much as she or myself may have dreaded it, it is working."

## APPENDIX F

### NVIVO QUERY SAMPLE

**Queries for three counties showing top ten words with four letters or more used across all interviews for each of the three counties:**

| County A       | County B                 | County C       |
|----------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| administration | student                  | Teacher        |
| accountability | administration           | collaborate    |
| accommodations | Inclusion                | student        |
| collaborate    | know                     | think          |
| modification   | think                    | believe        |
| consideration  | student                  | learn          |
| teacher        | like                     | administrator  |
| know           | accommodate              | class          |
| think          | professional development | accountability |
| student        | learn                    | Inclusion      |
| work           | kids                     | instruct       |