

A CASE STUDY OF CO-TEACHING
BETWEEN A REGULAR EDUCATION TEACHER AND
A SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER IN AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation by

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The following faculty members have examined the full copy of this dissertation for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education with a major in Educational Leadership.

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DEDICATION

First, I dedicate this dissertation to my very supportive husband, Neil – my rock and my motivation. Without him by my side, this undertaking would not have been accomplished.

Second, I dedicate this accomplishment to our three sons, Rett, Dusty, and Chris, hoping to inspire them to follow their dreams and accomplish what others may deem unattainable.

Third, I would like to dedicate my educational journey to our grandson, Dmitri, and future grandchildren to become scholars in their own right.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Teacher isolation continues to be a product of a strong school culture belief system that creates a professional challenge for educators attempting inclusive educational practices, particularly co-teaching partnerships between special education teachers and regular education teachers (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Purpose: This case study specifically looked to understand how school culture influences co-teaching collaboration efforts between a special education teacher and an elementary education teacher (Schein, 2004) where inclusive practices are implemented that have a positive impact on student learning for all students, especially students with disabilities.

Setting: A 5th grade classroom in a small, rural elementary school.

Subjects: One elementary school principal and two teachers. The two teachers, one special education teacher and one 5th grade elementary teacher, co-teach in a 5th grade classroom.

Data Collection and Analysis: Research data for this qualitative case study were collected through person-to-person interviews, direct observations, and a review of relevant documents. Sorting the information into different themes, the techniques of cutting and sorting, word lists and key words in context (KWIC), word co-occurrence, and metacoding were used to process and analyze the information through the theoretical lens of organizational culture (Schein, 2004).

Findings: An elementary school principal willingly took on the challenge to eliminate the two-track system between special education and regular education in her school to make an inclusive and collaborative one track system of education for all students and teachers. She created opportunities for collaboration by selecting interventions that required collaboration between teachers, by encouraging co-teaching, and by supporting teachers who, within the context of the environment the principal created, were able to make the co-teaching work.

Conclusions: This study illustrates that it is possible to eliminate a traditional two track educational system between regular education and special education and to create an integrated culture where the two became fused as one. This elementary school was assigned a principal who believed a supportive school culture was best for students, teachers, and support staff and took this opportunity to create a more inclusive and collaborative environment. With the emphasis on inclusion, the principal fostered staff buy-in and established ownership with the staff by helping them focus on how to provide differentiated instruction to all students in regular education classes, including students with disabilities (Zigmond, 2001). In this collaborative school environment, a co-teaching partnership between a special education teacher and a 5th grade elementary teacher is considered to be a successful partnership. Having two highly qualified teachers willing to change how they teach in order to provide differentiated instruction and interventions helps meet the individual needs of the diverse student population in this 5th grade regular education classroom.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

During the late 1970's, U.S. public education was embarking on a time of transformation. In 1975, the United States Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Law to ensure handicapped students (students with disabilities) receive an appropriate education in public schools (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). This new law, better known as Public Law 94-142, forever changed public education in the United States.

The inception of P.L 94-142 prompted significant changes in how public schools provided an education for students with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). States, universities, and local education agencies had to create infrastructures for special education services (Kleinhammer-Tramill & Fiore, 2003). Special education classrooms were formed, staffed with certified special education teachers, and filled with students identified as having a handicap (Skrtic, 1991a). To use the language of the law, students with disabilities were to be provided with a “free and appropriate education” (FAPE) in the “least restrictive environment” (LRE). Additionally, the law mandated that an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) be developed for each student that outlined services to be provided, established learning goals, and measured progress toward achieving them.

As U.S. public schools attempted to comply with the law, one consequence was the creation of parallel education systems – one for general education students and one for special education students (Skrtic, 1991a). Students believed to have disabilities and academic deficiencies were identified, evaluated, and many times placed in separate special education programs where they received specialized academic instruction and services (Lipsky & Gartner,

1996). Lipsky and Gartner also articulated that this setting generally meant students with disabilities were removed from the regular education classroom for a portion or all of their school day to receive academic instruction in a separate classroom segregated from peers. The result was academic instruction for students with disabilities transferred from the regular education teacher to the special education teacher. Very little, if any, collaboration between the two teachers occurred and none was expected (Lortie, 1975).

The school's organizational structure and culture supported the creation of two separate systems and set the stage for public school teachers to teach two very different curriculums to two different sets of students – the regular education students and the special education students (Skrtic, 1991a). Consequently, regular education and special education evolved into two separate entities. Once students entered the realm of special education, it became difficult for them to return to a regular education environment, or to be “mainstreamed.” That is, students would be returned to the regular education environment when they demonstrated they could keep up with the mainstream (Moore, Gilbreath, & Maiuri, 1998). Nonetheless, the division of educational programs promoted and encouraged special education students and teachers to work in isolation from the regular education student and teacher population in public schools, a practice remaining intact in some schools today (Goodlad, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Moore et al., 1998).

The creation of separate educational systems resulted in special education students spending all or most of their school day isolated from their peers, tucked away in special education resource rooms or self-contained classrooms (Skrtic, 1991a). Early on, educators and advocates questioned whether the practice of isolating special education students from their peers without disabilities constituted the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities.

Thus, in schools across the nation, the definition of LRE and the lack of access to the regular education classroom by special education students became a controversial issue (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

Another controversy was the growing number of students identified as needing special education services. What began as a very small number of students being placed in special education in the late 1970's expanded to over 9% of the student population nationwide being identified as having a disability in 2003 (United States Department of Education, 2007). The state of Kansas followed a similar trend (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007a). As time has elapsed, an increasing number of students have been identified, evaluated, and placed in special education to receive special education services (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). As the number of students identified for services increased, how and where to provide special education services to students with disabilities became a topic of discussion for many educators. Lipsky and Gartner (1996) reported that special education service delivery models were varied and typically comprised a continuum of services from most restrictive to least restrictive: (a) placing students with disabilities in self-contained classrooms for the entire day to receive special education services, (b) pulling them out of the regular classroom for part of the day to receive special education services in a self-contained or resource classroom, or (c) remaining in the regular education classroom and receive special education support there, a practice also commonly referred to as inclusion.

From Mainstreaming to Inclusion

In the 30 years since the passage of P.L. 94-142, a gradual change of service delivery models from mainstreaming to inclusion of special education students in regular education

classrooms has occurred. Each reauthorization of P.L. 94-142 represented shifts in philosophy about how to best meet the educational needs of students identified with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). When special education services were first authorized, it was considered best practice to provide individual special education services to students in special education rooms, in isolation from other students (Zigmond, 2003). Over time, however, educators began wondering whether isolating students in special education rooms to receive special education services was the best practice (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). Educators began asking questions, analyzing data, and reviewing services. They questioned whether students benefited from instruction in isolation and whether special education services could be provided more meaningfully and productively through inclusion of students in the regular education classroom. These changing philosophical beliefs about the different special education service delivery models of pull-out services, mainstreaming, or inclusion for students with disabilities began to transform the way education in regular education classrooms would be provided in the future.

Educational plans to include students with disabilities in regular education classrooms evolved from the 1975 statute of P. L. 94 – 142 and its amendments through the 1980s and 1990s (United States Department of Education, 1997; Zigmond, 2001). Until the late 1980s, the educational practice of mainstreaming came to mean allowing students with disabilities to participate in some regular education classes, most generally the classes that required no or minimal modifications to the curriculum or instruction made by regular education teachers to accommodate students with disabilities (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Conditions were placed on the placement of students with disabilities to receive instruction in regular education classrooms. It was common practice that students with disabilities had to

demonstrate academic skills to “hold their own” in the regular education classroom. For the special education teacher, mainstreaming typically meant the special education teacher used a consultation model when working with regular education teachers to modify regular education instruction or curriculum for a students with disabilities (Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2004). The special education teacher’s specialized knowledge of differentiated instruction and modifications helped regular education teachers problem-solve educational needs of special education students who were mainstreamed in their classrooms (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2002).

The service delivery model of mainstreaming began to be replaced by inclusion with regular education and special education teachers exploring different service delivery models to provide appropriate special education services to students with disabilities (Dettmer et al., 2002; Friend & Cook, 2007). This was an educational philosophical shift for both sets of educators on how and where to educate students with disabilities. Voltz, et al. (2001) describe *inclusion* as a condition or state of being and sense of belonging rather than a physical space and has more to do with how educators respond to individual differences than where instruction is delivered. At first, educators focused on the goal of simply placing students with disabilities in regular education classes, often music or physical education classes, which required little or no modifications or accommodations for the student to be a participant in the class. Later on, teachers gave attention to what academic skills the regular education classrooms required for students to be successful and how the student with disabilities could be mainstreamed into these classes (Voltz et al., 2001). As inclusive practices continued to evolve, educators began to look at what modifications, accommodations, and differentiated instruction each student needed and looked to create learning environments that supported individual learning differences (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Voltz et al., 2001). The special education teacher continued to consult with the

regular education teacher but also began to collaborate with him/her to develop appropriate academic programs for special education students included in regular education classrooms. Collaboration between the two teachers is considered to be an effective way to implement inclusion of special education students in regular education classes (Friend & Pope, 2005).

The reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act in 1997 (IDEA) resulted in major changes in the special education service delivery system (Murawski & Swanson, 2001). These changes codified the shift from mainstreaming to inclusion and expanded the IEP team by adding mandatory members such as the principal and regular education teachers of the student (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). Before this law change, the responsibility for a student's IEP belonged to special education personnel who worked in concert with parents of the special needs student (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975). Another change included in the 1997 IDEA reauthorization was more specific language that described how students with disabilities were to gain access to the general curriculum, in particular what constituted the student's "least restrictive environment" (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

Least restrictive environment was redefined to mean that special education was no longer a place, but a set of services designed to meet students' educational needs (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997). Districts and schools were encouraged to provide special education services in regular education classrooms and not in special education classrooms (McNulty, Connolly, Wilson, & Brewer, 1996). Regular education teachers, special education teachers, and other IEP team members were expected to work together to determine how best to provide an appropriate education to meet the needs of students placed in special education

(Kleinhammer-Tramill & Fiore, 2003). Kleinhammer-Tramill and Fiore (2003) go on to describe that collaboration methods to help special education students access the general curriculum in the regular education classroom became the new focus of IEP teams across the nation.

Current laws have also influenced the inclusion of students in regular education classes. In 2004, Congress enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), which further strengthened the notion that special education students receive an appropriate education with their peers without disabilities. Another intent of the reauthorized IDEIA was to align special education law with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). NCLB states that special education students must receive instruction and meet state assessment benchmarks the same as their regular education peers (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Together, these two laws have been instrumental in shaping teachers' approaches to providing academic instruction for all students in public schools. Although the word *inclusion* does not appear in either law, it has become the term used most often to describe the practice of maintaining special education students with their peers in regular education classes to receive academic instruction.

Collectively, the federal laws of NCLB and IDEIA have encouraged inclusive practices where regular education and special education teachers work together to develop appropriate educational programs for all students, including students with disabilities. NCLB monitors academic achievement of all students (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) and IDEIA monitors school districts' implementation of inclusive practices (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Implementing Inclusion: Special Education and Regular Education Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration between special education and regular education teachers is considered a viable strategy for implementing inclusion in schools (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2005; Friend & Cook, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2005). In this context and for the purpose of this study, teacher collaboration means a special education teacher and a regular education teacher working together to develop appropriate academic programs for students with disabilities in regular education classrooms (Villa et al., 2004). This form of collaboration encourages special education teachers and regular education teachers to partner and cooperatively deliver academic instruction in regular education classrooms to meet the needs of all students (Friend & Pope, 2005). Co-teaching is the name educators and scholars have given to one form of teacher collaboration and it generally involves a special education teacher and a regular education teacher sharing instructional and classroom management responsibilities of a single regular education classroom (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Co-teaching, sometimes known as cooperative teaching, teaming, or team teaching (Friend & Cook, 2007), gives teachers and students a viable option for overcoming a culture of isolation in schools that has contributed to the two system approach in education (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). In the early 1990s the term cooperative teaching was shortened to co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 2007). Co-teachers collaborate and plan academic lessons together with both taking the role of educating all students in the classroom in which they share responsibilities (Dettmer et al., 2005).

The philosophical shift for educators and the gradual change of service delivery from mainstreaming to inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms has not

come easy to educators. As the shift to inclusion became more prevalent and the concept of inclusion was adopted, the efforts of a few educators to implement inclusive practices have not become widespread and regular education and special education teachers continue to struggle with implementing collaborative instructional service delivery models for special education students (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). For this qualitative case study, I plan to study the collaboration form of co-teaching between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher in a school where inclusive practices are implemented in classrooms.

Research Problem

Collaboration in the form of co-teaching between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher can be effective in inclusive classrooms and all students can meet high academic standards (Cramer & Nevin, 2006). Unfortunately in many public schools today, the co-teaching form of collaboration between special education and regular education is not considered by many educators to be a viable teaching strategy or a manageable choice during the school day (Skrtic, 1991a). This philosophy continues to reinforce a school culture supporting a two system approach of education for regular education and special education students, and hinders effective collaboration efforts between teachers (Senge, 2000). Thus, program and teacher isolation continue to be products of a strong school culture belief system that creates a professional challenge for educators attempting inclusive educational practices, particularly co-teaching partnerships (Friend & Cook, 2007).

The ongoing isolation of special education teachers and students from their regular education counterparts can promote a sense of inequity in schools where a lack of social justice for some students with disabilities becomes a prevailing issue (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). If all

students do not have the same opportunity to receive the benefits of a full education, a deficit view of students may become engrained in teacher beliefs of student abilities (Benard, 1997). Labeling students with disabilities and providing their education in separate settings also fosters a deficit view of them (Gaustad, 1999). In contrast, when students with disabilities receive an appropriate education in regular education classrooms with regular education and special education teachers working together to provide appropriate educational opportunities for all students, a view of student assets is fostered (Villa & Thousand, 2005). By creating a co-teaching team of a special education teacher and a regular education teacher, the potential exists for the co-teachers to develop a classroom learning community that contains a natural support system for all students to feel a sense of belonging (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). Such a supportive classroom setting can also create the conditions for all students to gain academic and social skills. Given the emphasis in federal and state law on inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, it is important to understand an effective co-teaching arrangement between a regular education and a special education teacher in a regular education classroom that supports learning and academic achievement for all students.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

Regular education and special education teachers are often viewed as catalysts for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms and these students' improvements in reading and math (Cramer & Nevin, 2006). The purpose of this study is to describe how and why an effective co-teaching arrangement between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher is successful in an inclusive elementary classroom where all students achieve high standards.

The objectives of this study were to identify and describe an effective co-teaching arrangement between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary setting where students with disabilities are included in regular education classrooms and all students are achieving high standards. A qualitative case study design was used to study the impact of this teacher collaboration method on improved reading and mathematics skills for all students. To that end, this study proposed to achieve the following outcomes:

1. Describe an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school where the educational practice of inclusion is considered successful.
2. Identify strategies a co-teaching team of a regular education teacher and a special education teacher practice to maintain a successful working relationship in a regular elementary school classroom where all students are achieving high standards.
3. Identify organizational conditions that contribute to an effective co-teaching arrangement between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school setting.

Research Questions

It is important to understand how an effective co-teaching team between a regular education and a special education teacher impacts all students and especially special education students' success in the inclusive regular education elementary classroom. Seeking to identify this effective relationship led me to develop these research questions:

1. How does a regular education teacher describe an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education and a special education teacher in an inclusive elementary school setting?
2. How does a special education teacher describe an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education and a special education teacher in an inclusive elementary school setting?
3. In an inclusive elementary school setting, what strategies are practiced to maintain an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education and a special education teacher?
4. In an inclusive elementary school setting, what organizational conditions are present to support an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education and a special education teacher?

Significance of the Study

Collaboration between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher is critical if students with disabilities are to be successfully included and receive benefits from academic instruction in regular education classrooms (Villa & Thousand, 2005). Both NCLB and IDEIA contain language that promotes practices of inclusion and for all students to achieve high academic standards (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004; No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Nonetheless, teachers continue to struggle to meet these mandates and collaboration efforts continue to be difficult for some public schools to implement (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Then again, examples of effective collaboration strategies, specifically co-teaching between regular education and special education teachers, do exist (Haynes, 2006; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002) and it is important to

understand what makes those co-teaching arrangements work in a school culture where teacher isolation is often the norm (Lortie, 1975).

This study describes what makes for an effective co-teaching relationship between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an inclusive elementary school setting. The results of this study can contribute to the theoretical knowledge of organizational culture and co-teaching by validating and confirming co-teaching teams of regular education and special education teachers as an effective collaboration method in educational inclusive settings where all students meet high academic standards.

Overview of Methodology

This qualitative study was grounded in a social constructionism epistemology (Merriam & Associates, 2002) and data analyzed through the theoretical framework of organizational culture (Schein, 2004). Grounded theory methodologies merged with ethnographic case study methods facilitated the identification and description of collaboration strategies demonstrated by two elementary teachers, one regular education and one special education, in a co-teaching arrangement where all students achieve high standards of learning (Crotty, 1998; Yin, 2003).

Data for this qualitative case study (Merriam, 1998) were gathered during the spring 2008 and fall 2008 semesters. Following qualitative research guidelines, rich, primary sources of data including observations, interviews, and reviewing germane documents were used to collect relevant information relating to this co-teaching case study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Data were transcribed and entered into a *Microsoft Office* file management program to allow data themes to be coded, grouped, and sorted for analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first chapter provided a background overview of the proposed study, established the problem statement, outlined the purpose of the study, and stated its significance. In addition, chapter 1 gave a general idea of the methodology, identified the key research questions, listed the proposed study objectives, and outlined the organization of the dissertation. Chapter 2 details the conceptual framework of the study, articulates the theoretical framework, search criteria, and provides the reader with a summary of empirical research on inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes, teacher collaboration, and co-teaching. Chapter 3 includes the elements of research design and methodology descriptions, details the site selection and identification of study participants, reviews the role of the researcher, and describes data collection and analysis methods. Chapter 4 includes a summary of the findings. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review includes a synthesis of empirical research and describes the theoretical framework used to view the topic being studied. The topic of teacher collaboration, specifically co-teaching, between regular education teachers and special education teachers has gained attention in education research partly due to the fact that inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms is a controversial subject (Kim, Woodruff, Klein, & Vaughn, 2006). Trying to understand the interpersonal and organizational dynamics of an effective, co-teaching team between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher will be the focus of my research. Background information and a review of the problem statement in the previous chapter led me to research and analyze relevant empirical literature. Written descriptions of my conceptual framework and the theoretical framework of organizational culture are shared as well as representation of how the study is formed by empirical research on the themes of inclusion, teacher collaboration, and co-teaching.

Conceptual Framework

There are multiple ways to look at this study and I chose to anchor and structure this research based on the knowledge and experience I have in education. My personal experiences as an educator are important for the reader to know and understand where my perspective on this study has its roots. I have 24 years experience as an educator in the Kansas public school system. My teaching experience in small, rural school districts includes 13 years as a teacher with 10 of those as a special education teacher, five years as a special education school-community transition facilitator, and six years as an assistant director of special education. Drawing on my skills as an educator with roots in both regular education and special education, I learned how the

dynamics of organization culture influences how professionals work in the educational arena. This rich, diverse teaching experience helped shape the conceptual framework for this study.

I have two fundamental beliefs regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities that helped me conceptualize this study. First, I believe students with disabilities can be successfully educated in regular education classrooms. With appropriate accommodations and/or curricular modifications, the right supports will help students with disabilities meet academic success in a regular education classroom. Second, I believe co-teaching can be an effective practice to meet specific needs of students with disabilities. Pairing two professional teachers, a special education teacher and a regular education teacher, who possess different educational expertise sets the stage for an educational classroom that meets the specific needs of students with disabilities. The regular education teacher has expertise in curricular content concepts and the special education teacher has specific training analyzing student needs and locating materials to support accommodations, modifications, and different instructional strategies. This co-teaching arrangement in a regular education classroom setting creates an environment for students with disabilities to meet success.

These beliefs align with those of a social constructionist epistemology. A social constructionist believes that our worlds are socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). The structure of the public school system as a work environment for teachers is socially constructed. Each school has its own cultural norms and values influenced by the community it serves (Gergen, 1999). When looking through a social constructionist lens, educators are human beings who engage with their world and try to make sense of it (Crotty, 1998). Every educator constructs meaning from information shared in an educational setting and is affected by the organizational culture of

that environment (Schein, 2004). His/her responses to stimuli are based on values and assumptions learned from being a part of an organization's culture (Crotty, 1998).

Theoretical Framework: Organizational Culture

Utilizing a social constructionist epistemology, I further develop the theoretical framework used for this qualitative study and will discuss it in the following sections. The phenomenon of co-teaching will be viewed through the theoretical perspective lens of organizational culture theory.

Organizational culture has its roots in social psychology, was later included in organizational psychology, and is a relatively new concept that has been a focus of many studies during the last few decades (Schein, 1990). Schein defines the culture of a group as

[A] pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal 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. 17)

To understand the forces that drive an organization is to understand the culture of that organization and the inter-group conflict of a group (Schein, 2004). Schein was influenced by Lewin (1947), who posited that as individuals increase their involvement in groups, their perceptions, actions, and feelings are directly reflective of the group in which they are a member. Schein (2004) adds to this discussion by clarifying four characteristics of culture to help us understand culture in organizations: Structure Stability, Depth, Breadth, and Patterning or Integration. *Structure Stability* defines the shared mentality of the group. It is the glue that holds the group together, is predictable and meaningful, and creates a stable atmosphere in which the

group functions. *Depth* refers to the unconscious, less tangible, less visible, embedded beliefs of the group. *Breadth* describes the functioning of the group. Once beliefs become embedded and a culture is developed, these beliefs control every aspect of group roles and tasks. *Patterning or Integration* further develops the concept of stability by explaining the behaviors, values, climate, and rituals of the group. It ties group members together to form a “whole” by helping the members make sense of their world. These group attitudes vary greatly from group to group, even if their organizational structures are similar. Therefore, a culture of an organization where attitudes, norms, and values are specific to that group can be described as a system that has a “mind of its own” (Senge, 1990). In addition, organizations can have an operational makeup of one or more cultures, with no one culture being dominant, or in the case of regular education and special education, one can be a dominant culture and the other a subculture operating within the dominant culture, or two parallel cultures operating simultaneously (Cook & Yanow, 1996).

Senge, et al (2000) describes schools as a type of formal organization with a hierarchical structure, core constituents, and a board of directors (p. 14). The United States’ public school system is constructed of many local school districts (organizations) with each school organization having different paradigms with different core assumptions (Senge, 2000). The members of a school district work in the context of its unique organizational culture. In the context of this study, teachers are members of a school district and function under its cultural influences and can influence the culture in which they work.

Senge et al (2000) further explain that the culture of a school “is a continual process in which attitudes, values, and skills of its members continually reinforce each other” (p. 326). For example, if teachers in a school are involved in professional development for an intense period of

time, shared learning of attitudes, norms, and values will become the underlying basic assumptions of that group, as long as reinforcement is present. Reinforcement can come in the form of more professional development opportunities, teachers working together in teams in the organization where reinforcement of each other is prevalent (Schein, 2004) or using a teacher mentoring program to reinforce basic assumptions (Schein, 1995).

For this study on co-teaching, I plan to conduct research that describes the organizational culture of an elementary school for the purpose of painting a picture of a successful co-teaching relationship between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher. According to Schein (2004), an organization's culture operates at three levels: artifacts, espoused beliefs and values, and basic underlying assumptions. I plan to study these three operational levels of organizational culture at an elementary school, analyze data for relevancy, and report the findings to add to the field of knowledge on co-teaching and the elements of organizational culture that support it.

Schein describes the first level, observable artifacts, as "all the phenomena that one sees, hears, and feels" in a culture (p. 25). He further explains that artifact phenomena include all the visible organizational structures and processes, what you observe and feel when you enter an organization. When analyzing the artifacts of school organizations with parallel educational systems, special education and regular education, one often sees two very different cultures (Skrtec, 1991a). Because cultural artifacts of organizational charts, handbooks, and teacher lesson plans are specifically connected to one particular organization, they make perfect sense to members of that culture, but often do not make sense to outsiders (Schein, 2004). The observable artifacts of a school that houses both special education and regular education can have artifacts

that are very similar, yet also very different. When examining concrete artifacts of an organization, they can be obvious and easily identifiable, yet hard to interpret correctly unless you understand the culture of that organization (Schein, 1990).

The second level of organizational culture, espoused beliefs and values, are those supported and socially validated at the conscious level by a cultural group (Schein, 2004). These espoused beliefs and values also include the norms, ideologies, and philosophies established and practiced by group members (Schein, 1990). Examples of these beliefs and values in a school setting include strategies, goals, and philosophies at the district level, the building level and the classroom level (Schein, 2004). The focus of this study will concentrate on teacher attitudes and what they value about school leadership, collaboration, co-teaching, and student learning in the cultural setting of an elementary school.

The third level of operation in an organizational culture is the basic underlying assumptions. Schein (2004) describes these as the unconscious perceptions and beliefs that are taken-for-granted by group members. These beliefs and values tend to be the hardest to change in a culture because they are embedded in “mental maps” of the group and a comfort level of connectivity is felt by group members where stability and meaning are sought (p. 31). These levels can be tangible or deeply embedded in the culture of the group. If they become deeply embedded, the levels can be taken for granted and sometimes fixed and as a result, change is hard to accomplish (Schein, 2004). It is also possible for an organizational culture to support conflicting or inconsistent values, especially when going through a change process (Schein, 1990). This study will seek to understand the culture of an elementary school and examine to what extent teacher collaboration is fostered by the culture’s underlying assumptions, or

determine if teacher collaboration is being practiced in contrast to the culture's basic underlying assumptions that continues to support traditional teacher isolation practices.

The basic underlying assumptions of a culture of an organization can stay intact or gradually change as new learning occurs, is successfully implemented, and becomes an accepted practice of group members (Schein, 2004). In order for change to occur, letting go of previously held values, beliefs, and actions is encouraged in order for the person(s) to learn and accept new beliefs and values leading to changes in behavior, then re-freezing new beliefs and values can occur (Schein, 2004). Groups, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in organizations, so unless the group learns, the organization does not learn (Senge, 2000). For school organizational culture to change and promote collaboration between teachers is a change from the traditional school culture of teacher isolation (Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee, 1996). This study will examine the teacher collaboration form of co-teaching through the lens of organizational culture to see if co-teaching is valued in the organization's culture or if this collaboration style between teachers is occurring in a school culture that continues to support teacher isolation.

This description of organizational culture establishes the theoretical framework for my study. It will be designed to examine what influences organizational culture may have on teacher collaboration, specifically a co-teaching arrangement between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher.

Synthesis of the Empirical Research

This section of the literature review is a synthesis of empirical research related to my study. First, a review of the literature on inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes is discussed. Second, findings from empirical research on teacher collaboration

in special education are presented. Finally, information specific to co-teaching is shared.

Research is available for public school stakeholders to use as the basis to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities and all students (Wang & Reynolds, 1996).

Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Regular Education

Scholars and educators have offered a number of definitions of inclusion with the intent of informing teachers' educational practices. For example, Friend and Cook (2007) broadly define *inclusion* as a belief system that creates a foundation for how students are educated. Another definition further details that *inclusion* is an educational philosophy and instructional practice premised on the belief that students with disabilities learn best when they are educated with their non-disabled peers in regular education classrooms (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996). Skrtic, Sailor, & Gee (1996) further maintain, "Inclusive education provides the place and the catalyst through which general and special educators...can come together to create quality, democratic schools... Inclusion signifies much more than the mainstreaming of persons with disabilities into general education classrooms" (p. 142, 157). Moore, Gilbreath, and Maiuri (1998) expand on these definitions to include "all students in a school's attendance area are full members of that school community and each student participates equitably in the opportunities and responsibilities of the general education environment" (p. 1). Once *inclusion* was defined and accepted by scholars and educators, emphasis switched to how to educate students with disabilities within inclusive settings and thus, became the issue faced by members of the educational community.

How to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms is a topic that scholars and educators continue to research, monitor, and debate. When P. L. 94 – 142 (EHA)

was passed in 1975, the law provided for the education of students with disabilities, and included, (a) “to the maximum extent possible, handicapped children are educated with children who are not handicapped”, and (b) “removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular education classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975; McNulty et al., 1996). As EHA was reauthorized by the U. S. Congress through the years and in 1990 became IDEA, increasing emphasis to include students with disabilities in regular education classrooms became a national trend and different service delivery models proliferated in schools with varying reports of success (Walther-Thomas, 1997). In their study, Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that even though special education teachers felt internal and external pressures to include students in regular education classes, they took a position to support inclusive practices and assume a co-teaching role with regular education teachers. This support for inclusion helped teachers create educational programs in regular education classrooms for students with disabilities and meet the intent of IDEA '97 guidelines of FAPE and LRE (Heiman, 2001; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997; Patterson, 2005; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; United States Department of Education, 2000). Patterson (2005) goes on to say, “IDEA '97 clearly defines educators’ roles and responsibilities with regard to children with disabilities, including teachers in both special education and inclusive general education settings” (p. 67).

When reviewing the literature on inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes, I identified three recurrent themes: (a) descriptions of inclusive models and practices, (b) support needed for inclusive programs, and (c) teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive practices.

Descriptions of inclusive models and practices. Many schools have re-examined policies and procedures on service delivery models for all students and researchers have found the traditional structure of “one teacher teaching one group of students” is changing (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). Different collaboration service delivery models are generally used to implement inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms: consultation, and co-teaching (Friend & Cook, 2007). The specific needs of each child determines which service delivery model teachers use to support student learning in inclusive classrooms (Dettmer et al., 2002). The two most common models of inclusion are consultation and co-teaching.

The first model, consultation, typically involves the special education teacher with specialized expertise consulting with the regular education teacher on an educational problem related to working with the students with disabilities in his or her class (Dettmer et al., 2005). As individual student problems arise, the regular education teacher discusses his/her concerns with the special education teacher on an as-needed, case-by-case basis (Walther-Thomas, 1997). The intervention plan developed by the two teachers is typically implemented by the regular education teacher for the student with disabilities in the regular education classroom with little or no assistance from the special educator (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

The second model, co-teaching, is used when a special educator and a regular educator discuss the educational needs students with disabilities have in inclusive regular education classrooms. Together they problem-solve, develop an intervention plan, and assume equal ownership of the problem and solutions (Friend, 2000). The interdisciplinary teachers co-teach the class and have mutual ownership, pooled resources, and joint accountability for the entire class (Friend & Cook, 2007). Walther-Thomas (1997) describes co-teaching experiences as

special educators working with classroom teachers to develop, deliver, and evaluate effective instructional programs (p. 396).

Support needed for inclusive programs. Like any new innovation or program, effective inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms does not happen immediately after the decision is made to move in that direction (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996). According to the literature, inclusion of special education students in regular classrooms works best when (a) effective leadership is provided from the district and building level that supports teachers' efforts, (b) when professional development is provided for teachers, and (c) when time is provided for special education and regular education teachers to collaboratively plan (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002).

Since the regulations in IDEA 1997 required a total reversal of established practices for students with disabilities in public schools from self-contained or pull out models to a more inclusive model (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996), inclusion service delivery models and their variants have been practiced in U.S. schools (Kim et al., 2006). Because the federal mandate was left to each state and local school district to interpret and plan its implementation, inclusive practices in schools were wide-ranging. For some schools, due to a lack of state, district, and building leadership, interpretation of how to implement this top-down mandate was left to individual teachers (Patterson & Marshall, 2001). However, for inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms to be successful, teachers need sufficient levels of support (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Leadership support by administrators was valued by teachers who practiced inclusion service delivery models in schools (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002).

District-level and building level planning were also identified as key factors for inclusive education programs to become successfully integrated in the school environment (McNulty et al., 1996; Walther-Thomas, Bryant, & Land, 1996). Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2002) spoke to the importance of planning when considering inclusive educational programs for students, “If we do not take time to plan, we cannot plan to have successful inclusion” (p. 247).

Researchers have further reported that professional development and training opportunities are important supports for successful inclusion of students with special needs in regular education classrooms (Friend, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; McNulty, 1996; Wang & Reynolds, 1996; Zigmond, 2001). Ideally districts would provide staff development opportunities for professionals who co-teach for ongoing skill development and support plus assure that adequate resources for teachers in inclusive classrooms are available (Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). McLeskey and Waldron (2002) indicated in their study that teachers who enter the realm of inclusive education need training on implementation strategies through professional development opportunities. In her writings, Friend (2007) also stresses the importance of teachers having professional development to learn strategies to include students with disabilities in regular education classrooms.

Professional development training opportunities were influential in helping educators modify their philosophy of special education to focus on a student “needs-based” approach rather than focus on the disability of the student (Wang & Reynolds, 1996). This change of philosophy supported by staff development opportunities was also instrumental in helping school districts in the state of Colorado promote the concept of inclusion (McNulty et al., 1996). Educators began to focus on how to include students with disabilities in regular education classrooms as well as

provide individualized instruction to students with disabilities (Zigmond, 2001). With this change, many different beliefs and attitudes of teachers towards inclusion have been noted.

Teachers' attitudes toward inclusive practices. Teachers have varied attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. Special education and regular education teachers' attitudes about inclusion range from being highly supportive of students with disabilities being educated along with their peers in regular education classrooms to believing that students with disabilities should be in segregated educational settings (Haynes, 2006). Some regular education teachers have made tremendous advancements toward including students with disabilities in their classrooms, yet others have not, and as a result, many students with disabilities remain in restrictive settings (McNulty et al., 1996). One recent study found that some regular education teachers still believe students with disabilities need to be academically and socially able to make it in the class before being included (Haynes, 2006), a vestige of the outmoded mainstreaming concept.

To make possible the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, the special education teacher often bears the burden of being the facilitator of inclusive practices and communicator with regular education teachers. In their study of a district that was implementing inclusive practices, Patterson and Marshall (2001) found that special education teachers felt the need to convince regular education teachers to allow students with disabilities to receive instruction in the regular education classroom. In another study, some regular education teachers embraced the concept of inclusion but questioned their ability to provide effective academic instruction to students with disabilities and still others preferred the traditional pull out program (Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). In both of these studies,

special education teachers were in the position of advocating for students with disabilities to receive academic instruction in regular education classrooms and negotiating with regular education teachers for regular education placement. This negotiation between educators was the precursor of teacher collaboration.

Special Education-Regular Education Teacher Collaboration

Historically, teaching has been described as a “lonely profession” with teachers working almost in total isolation (Lortie, 1975). Isolation is especially a problem for special education teachers, as they are often not even considered a part of the school (Goodlad, 1984). The most promising initiative in schools today to address the isolation of special education teachers is collaboration between special education and regular education teachers (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997). Friend and Cook (2007) stated, “Beginning with the premise that schools are a reflection of larger society, the current trend toward collaboration in the United States...makes it quickly apparent why collaboration is such a significant trend in schools” (p. 19). A study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) found that special education teachers believed that collaboration between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher is necessary for students with disabilities to be included in regular education classrooms. However, a culture of collaboration in a school can be difficult to create; it is evolutionary and one that takes time to foster, especially between teachers who have traditionally belonged to two different professional and organizational cultures – regular education and special education (Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Skrtic, 1991b).

Scholars have posited various definitions of special education and regular education teacher collaboration. For example, Friend and Cook (2007) define collaboration as “a style for direct interaction between at least two coequal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision

making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 7). Teachers of different disciplines working together collaboratively represent a systems change in schools today from traditional teaching methods of one teacher assigned to one classroom (Goodlad, 1984). Dettmer, Thurston, and Dyck (2002) offer this definition of the special education teacher’s role in collaboration, “A collaborative school consultant is a facilitator of effective communication, cooperation, and coordination who confers, consults, and collaborates with other school personnel...on a team that addresses special learning and behavioral needs of students” (p. 6).

Although scholars have argued for the value of collaboration, it is often difficult to put into practice. Some teachers desire to collaborate but the organizational structure of schools leaves little time during the school day for them to work together to develop appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies (Skrtic et al., 1996). The theoretical concept of shared planning time between regular education and special education teachers is difficult to actually accomplish. School administrators and teachers struggle to find collaborative planning time during the work day because teachers feel pressured to spend time examining effective research-based teaching strategies to increase student state assessment scores and to comply with state and federal guidelines (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002).

How to help teachers move from a traditional non-collaborative environment to one where collaboration is embraced and practiced remains a topic of interest for scholars and educators (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). Haynes (2006) found some regular education teachers were territorial, like the traditional one teacher – one class structure, and were reluctant to share their classroom with another teacher. It is important for any particular school to find an effective collaboration model and strategy, as not all models and strategies transfer effectively from one

school to another or more specifically, one classroom to another (Cramer & Stivers, 2007). The literature on collaboration between special education and regular education identified (a) characteristics of effective collaboration between special education and regular education, and (b) benefits of collaboration between special education and regular education teachers for teachers and students.

Characteristics of effective collaboration. Effective collaboration between teachers is characterized by personality traits of teachers and other qualities considered essential. An overarching characteristic of successful collaboration found in the literature is collegiality between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher (Dettmer et al., 2002). To support a collegial atmosphere between teachers, support, respect, communication, and cooperation are characteristics each teacher must possess (Dettmer et al., 2002, 2005; Minke et al., 1996). Additionally, scholars Friend and Cook (2007) further describe elements of effective collaboration between teachers, saying, “participation is voluntary, parity among participants is required, mutual goals are developed, a shared responsibility for participation and decision making is insured, teachers share resources, and teachers share accountability for student outcomes” (pp. 8 – 12).

In a collaborative teaching arrangement, both teachers combine their expertise to determine effective methods to deliver the curricular content by modifying instructional methods, materials, and curriculum (Haynes, 2006; Stanovich, 1996). The special educator usually has expertise in designing an alternate instructional delivery model; whereas, the regular education teacher is competent in the area of curriculum (Friend, 2007; Villa & Thousand, 2005). A study by Janney, et al (1995) found that regular education teachers appreciated the

practical, student specific information shared by the special education teacher: “The [special education] teachers...let me know, okay, these students can achieve at this level...[and] these are little things that [Mickey] can possibly do, [so] then I can watch for them.” (p. 99). The study by Weiss and Lloyd (2002) also supported a feeling of satisfaction by special education teachers participating in collaborative relationships with regular education teachers. A reciprocal relationship can develop in a collaborative partnership between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher (Haynes, 2006).

Despite much of the literature describing how collaboration can be successful, challenges in collaborative relationships can arise. Pugach and Johnson (2002) identified two challenges teachers face when collaborating: Philosophical differences and different levels of expertise. Teachers with *philosophical differences* have opposing beliefs about teaching and classroom management preferences. Before teachers make the move to collaborate, it is important for them to discuss their educational philosophies. If it is not recognized that teachers’ educational philosophies are not compatible, the partnership can lead to one of dysfunction. Also, teachers in a school have *different levels of expertise*. Being able to share their skills and being open to learning from each other can be a challenge for teachers who prefer to work alone. Taking the time to reflect and examine their assumptions and practices can help educators address the difficulties that come with collaboration (Cramer & Stivers, 2007).

Benefits of collaboration for teachers. Reported benefits of teacher collaboration for teachers include sharing of classroom roles and responsibilities, sharing ideas and skills with another professional on a daily basis, and reduction in the amount of time teachers were isolated in the school environment. Inclusive classrooms staffed with a regular education teacher and a

special education teacher whose philosophy of education and teaching style were similar and where there was agreement on teaching roles and responsibilities were reported to be the most successful collaborative relationships (Amerman & Fleres, 2003). Collaboration efforts such as co-planning and co-teaching opportunities for teachers provided the structure teachers needed to address the diverse needs of all the students included in regular education classrooms (Duchardt, Marlow, Inman, Christensen, & Reeves, 1999). Teachers who supported collaboration as a part of their daily work helped foster student learning by teaming with other professionals to design appropriate education programs for students was another benefit (Pugach & Johnson, 2002).

Special Education and Regular Education Co-teaching

Co-teaching is a specific form of collaboration that involves the partnership of two or more teaching professionals sharing instructional and classroom management of a single regular education classroom (Dettmer et al., 2005; Friend & Cook, 2007; Villa et al., 2004). Many times the terms “team teaching” and “co-teaching” are used interchangeably to describe a shared, supportive arrangement between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher (Friend & Cook, 2007). Literature reviewed supported both terms and for this study the terms “team teaching” and “co-teaching” are used interchangeably. When reviewing the literature, these themes were found (a) co-teaching models, (b) characteristics of co-teachers and co-teaching, and (c) benefits of co-teaching.

Co-teaching models. Co-teaching can look differently from school to school and classroom to classroom. Scholars and educators even disagree on co-teaching definitions and models. Villa, Thousand, and Nevin (2002) described four primary models: Supportive teaching, parallel teaching, complementary teaching, and team teaching. These co-teaching models are

progressive; that is, as teachers become more experienced, they move to a higher level of co-teaching. *Supportive teaching* is the beginning level and involves one teacher delivering the instruction while the other teacher provides classroom management support. This approach is most commonly used when teachers first begin co-teaching. *Parallel teaching* involves the two teachers dividing the class into groups with each teacher delivering the lesson to his/her group of students. The students may rotate between groups. This is another approach commonly used by teachers new to the co-teaching concept. *Complementary teaching* occurs when co-teachers share the teaching role by supporting the other while one is teaching. For example, one teacher may model note-taking skills on the board while the other teacher is delivering the instruction. *Team teaching* requires that both teachers actually share in all aspects of classroom instruction, management, and student responsibilities. Co-teachers who team-teach divide the lessons in ways that allow the students to experience each teacher's strengths and expertise. In this model, both teachers are comfortable alternately taking the lead and being the supporter. As co-teacher teams gain confidence, *complementary teaching and team teaching* become the preferred collaborative teaming models.

Friend and Cook (2007) described six approaches to a co-teaching arrangement: One teaching, one observing; station teaching; parallel teaching; alternate teaching; teaming; and one teaching, one assisting. Unlike Villa, Thousand, and Nevin's progressive model of co-teaching, Friend and Cook provide a menu of options. *One Teaching, One Observing* occurs when one professional teaches while the other observes. The first teacher delivers the instruction to the group while the second teacher monitors students and collects individual or group data. *Station Teaching* is an approach where co-teachers create and deliver instruction at different stations for students to rotate through during class time. In *Parallel Teaching*, teachers jointly plan the

lesson, but divide the class in half. Each teacher delivers the lesson to his or her half of the class. The students do not rotate as in station teaching. *Alternate Teaching* involves one teacher working with a small group of students while the other instructs the large group in some content or activity that the small group can afford to miss. *Teaming* requires both teachers to be responsible for planning the lesson. Both teachers share the instruction, monitor students, and facilitate group projects. *One Teaching, One Assisting* describes the practice of one teacher delivering the classroom instruction while the other provides management by monitoring student behavior. The co-teaching model educators choose to practice is dependent on student need and how best teachers can support individual student learning needs in the regular education classroom.

Characteristics of co-teachers and co-teaching. Essential characteristics of co-teachers found in the literature include flexibility, compatible teaching philosophies and styles, shared responsibility and accountability, receptive in learning different curricular presentation styles and modification strategies, and equitable acceptance of all students. Active participation by both participants is necessary for the co-teaching partnership to be an effective service delivery model in the regular education classroom (Friend, 2007).

Flexibility is an important trait required by teachers to use when working with individual student learning styles and each other (Bouck, 2007). Having a diverse classroom of students with multiple learning styles present, co-teachers have to master flexibility to meet individual student needs. Teachers also practice flexibility with each other as they demonstrate a willingness to compromise and negotiate when planning instruction, learning activities, and classroom management responsibilities (Friend, 2007). Sharing this responsibility by co-teaching

with another teacher helps decrease this expectation each teacher could have faced if teaching the class solo.

A study of co-teaching by Bouck (2007) reports effective co-teachers discuss individual educational teaching philosophies and styles before entering a co-teaching partnership. Effective communication skills practiced by both teachers support this sharing of beliefs and promote collaboration skills by both educators (Pugach & Johnson, 2002). A sense of parity among participants can also be established when teachers discuss their differences in teaching philosophies and styles as they collaborate to design appropriate educational programs and create the structure for classroom management (Friend & Cook, 2007).

In a co-teaching relationship, both teachers are expected to share the responsibility of teaching all students (Villa et al., 2004). This includes developing and sharing a common belief of accountability for all students to be academically successful (Kruse & Louis, 1997). Also, taking the time to clarify teacher roles is important to help establish primary, secondary, and equal responsibilities the co-teachers will share as they provide effective instruction in the regular education classroom (Villa et al., 2004).

Co-teachers are also expected to learn to modify instructional materials and delivery of instruction to meet the individual needs of the students in their classroom (Amerman & Fleres, 2003; Pugach & Johnson, 2002; Villa et al., 2004). When both teachers share this responsibility, it creates a classroom that facilitates the inclusion of students with disabilities (Villa et al., 2004). When teachers enter into a co-teaching partnership, they have the support, time, and resources to develop curricula and teaching strategies that reflect research-based, best practices in teaching and learning (Pugach & Johnson, 2002).

As co-teaching arrangements are described, often the details of a co-teaching partnership have characteristics similar to those used to describe a successful marriage; it takes a conscious effort from both teachers to make the co-teaching relationship a successful venture for both of them (Minke et al., 1996). In the ideal inclusive, co-teaching environment, teachers develop a shared sense of ownership for all students and work together to create a nurturing environment for students (Dettmer et al., 2005). In her study, Bouck (2007) writes that in successful co-teaching arrangements both teachers share a view of students as *ours*, not *mine*, *yours*, *his*, or *hers* (p. 47). Teachers who work together to provide support and guidance to help all students meet their maximum potential also see themselves being accountable for student achievement (Kim et al., 2006). Additionally, a more equitable view of students with disabilities emerged when co-teaching arrangements between regular education and special education teachers were practiced; students with disabilities “lost” their labels when the special education delivery model changed to a co-teaching collaborative model instead of the traditional pull-out model (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Although research lists supportive aspects of co-teaching, there is also research describing difficulties teachers have when working in a co-teaching arrangement. Struggles co-teachers encounter include time limitations for co-planning, lack of inservice opportunities to learn teaching strategies, and inadequate resources to support the inclusive classroom. A study by Magiera & Zigmond (2005) revealed that teachers who co-teach do so under constraints of limited or no training or co-planning time. In order for a co-teaching assignment to work, researchers recommend scheduled planning time during the school day for co-teachers to collaborate and plan instructional activities. Doing so allows the teachers to create curricular modifications and individual accommodations that are critical for students to be successful in the

regular education classroom (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996; Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). Because they believe that all students can benefit from a co-teaching arrangement, teachers continue to enter into this collaborative style of teaching (Friend & Cook, 2007).

Benefits of co-teaching for teachers. In addition to the benefit of working together as a collaborative, co-teaching team to educate all students, the profits teachers gain from experiencing co-teaching include personal and professional growth opportunities and sharing of classroom management duties.

Personal and professional growth by teachers in co-teaching arrangements is exemplified when they learn different strategies and techniques from each other. Partnering with another teacher provides opportunities to gain different perspectives of teaching strategies by opening doors to share ideas and gain insights to formulate a collective focus on student learning (O'Shea, Williams, & Sattler, 1999; Senge, 2000). Besides providing teachers with a sense of collegiality, co-teaching can provide teachers with a synergy that invigorates them as professionals to try new, innovative strategies and activities to meet the needs of all students in of the diverse student population in a regular education classroom (Friend & Cook, 2007; Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001).

A co-teaching arrangement allows teachers to share classroom management duties. Co-teachers are able to assume fewer roles in general because their partners can take on a portion of the roles typically done by one teacher (Bouck, 2007). Consequently, more time can be devoted to meeting the individual needs of diverse learners (Duchardt et al., 1999). Additionally, when co-teaching is successful for the teachers, it sets the stage for all students to benefit from being

educated in an inclusive regular education classroom; an outcome proponents of co-teaching have theorized through the years (Walther-Thomas, 1997).

Benefits of co-teaching for students. The co-teaching service delivery model offers potential benefits for students with disabilities and other low-achieving students (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997; Kohler-Evans, 2006; Walther-Thomas et al., 1996). A three year study by Walther-Thomas (1997) states that students in an inclusive classroom taught by co-teachers improved their self-worth as a learner, improved their academic learning, improved their social skills, and improved their collaboration skills. This study went on to describe that students with disabilities developed better attitudes about themselves and their ability to function in the regular education classroom.

Results from another study indicated that with two teachers in the classroom, the co-teaching service delivery model lowers the teacher-student ratio. Therefore, more one-to-one interaction is achievable than in solo-taught classrooms and students academically benefit from having two teachers in the same classroom (Magiera & Zigmond, 2005). A study by Janney et al (1995) found that students with disabilities made academic gains in reading and math when they received their academic instruction for these two subjects in a co-taught classroom. Villa and Thousand (2005) confirmed students academically benefit when their individual needs are accommodated through the cooperative efforts of special and regular educators who differentiate instruction in an inclusive classroom.

One additional benefit to students is teachers choosing to participate in a co-taught class have the opportunity to model collaborative behaviors for the students in their classrooms. Teacher collaboration reinforces partnership skills and collaboration has been identified as a skill

that students will need in the 21st century as they live and work in a global, interdependent society (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Malgeri, 1996).

Summary

Chapter 2 began with a description of my conceptual framework and was followed by an overview of organizational culture, which is the theoretical perspective of the study. The synthesis of the literature is based on the premise that co-teaching is an effective form of collaboration and that organizational culture has an influence on how teachers support the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms. It includes a literature synopsis on the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education, a discussion of the literature on special education and regular education collaboration, and concludes with a review of the literature describing special education and regular education co-teaching issues.

Much of the literature reviewed defined the concepts of inclusion, collaboration, and co-teaching with explanations of how co-teaching arrangements have progressed through the years in classrooms where traditional teacher isolation had been the norm. Teachers describing their attitudes toward inclusion, collaboration, and co-teaching were the basis for a large amount of the research. Research also described co-teaching as a form of teacher collaboration brought forth in part by special education laws mandating that students with special needs receive instruction in regular education classrooms. Literature connecting the academic performance of students with the concept of co-teaching was minimal. Research that was reported described varied results on academic achievement for student in co-taught classrooms. It is apparent that more research in this area is needed. A lack of empirical research linking organizational culture

to co-teaching arrangements between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher further indicates this dissertation has solid reasoning for conducting a research study.

A review of the literature did not generate research linking organizational culture with inclusion, teacher collaboration, or co-teaching, but descriptors of organizational culture were included in reported co-teaching arrangements. The concept of schools evolving through the years from a traditional community of teacher isolation to become a collaborative community was reflected in the literature. More schools are attempting to move from a traditional bureaucracy toward becoming more democratic, inclusive, and collaborative organizations.

A central, recurring theme identified during the synthesis of the research revealed inclusion for students with disabilities can be effective if positive, supportive collaboration between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher is established. In order for all students to have a positive, supportive learning environment, teachers must develop and work together as an effective team. A co-teaching partnership between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher can make a difference when including students with disabilities in regular education classrooms with their peers. A co-teaching partnership is considered to be a beneficial service delivery model and a necessity in schools to be effective during the 21st century for all students, especially students with disabilities, to academically achieve high standards.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 of my dissertation includes a description of the study methodology, describes the research perspective, context of the study, describes researcher's position, and explains data collection and analysis methods and procedures.

A single-focus case study of a co-teaching arrangement between a regular education and special education teacher in an inclusive elementary setting was conducted using a qualitative research design. Ethnography (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003) and grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) methodologies were incorporated to facilitate the research process. A qualitative case study format (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) was used to describe a co-teaching team of one regular education teacher and one special education teacher in an elementary school where inclusive practices support the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms.

Research Perspective

Operating within a qualitative paradigm emphasizing a social constructionism epistemology with grounded theory and ethnographic methodologies, I approached this study looking through an organizational culture inspired theoretical lens to examine the co-teaching phenomena in an elementary school. Following the philosophy of constructionism, I located an inclusive classroom where an effective co-teaching relationship between teachers existed. In this dissertation I describe an effective co-teaching arrangement between a regular education and a special education teacher in a classroom where all students to achieve high academic standards and the school environment that supports this arrangement. I believe that teachers can be the

catalyst for student success. Therefore, working through an organizational culture perspective, I identified beneficial characteristics of an effective, working relationship between co-teachers and have described what supports this co-teaching relationship.

Context

Frage Education Cooperative (FEC) is a special education service delivery system that provides special education services to six school districts in Kansas (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007c). The structure of FEC is that of a special education interlocal with its own governing body, funding sources, and policies (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007c).

Frage Education Cooperative's main function is to support the needs of special education students in its participating districts. FEC allocates special education staff (related services, teachers, and para-educators), instructional resources, technical support, and training to the six districts that make up FEC (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007c).

The six districts are comprised of ten elementary schools, ten middle schools, and seven high schools (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007c). The race/ethnicity of the student population in these elementary schools is primarily Caucasian (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007c). The student population of the ten schools ranges from a low of 98 students to a high of 496 students (Kansas Department of Education, 2007). Eight of the ten elementary school student populations average more students with disabilities than the reported average for their school district (Kansas Department of Education, 2007). All elementary schools reported a larger number of students with disabilities than the state average, which is 13.97% (Kansas Department of Education, 2007). One elementary school was selected as the focus of this study

determined through analysis of relevant statistical information accessed from the KSDE School Building Report Card for 2006 – 2007.

Frage Education Cooperative is required by IDEIA to monitor special education practices in the state of Kansas (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). One special education practice monitored is least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities attending public school districts. This is accomplished by collecting data on the amount of time special education students are in the regular education classroom (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). A guideline for school districts to follow recommends that special education students not be removed from the regular education classroom for more than 20% of the school day (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007b). According to the KSDE report for the six school districts FEC serves, each district's LRE data for inclusion illustrate that students with disabilities totals are included in regular education classrooms over 80% of the school day where the current state average is 55.58% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2007b). These data indicate that students with disabilities receiving special education services through FEC are included in regular education classrooms for most of their academic instruction.

Researcher's Position

As noted in the previous chapter, my personal experiences as an educator have shaped my perspective on this study. My 24 years experience as an educator in the Kansas public school system have provided a rich, diverse teaching background to this study.

During my 24 years as an educator in the Kansas public school system, I gained valuable insight and understanding into how educators feel regarding the education of all children. Over

the years, I personally experienced both the exclusion and inclusion of students with disabilities – first as a regular education teacher, then as a special education para-educator and special education teacher, and presently as a special education administrator. Through these experiences, I became familiar with the many educational interventions and strategies regular education and special education teachers employ in schools. From the beginning of my career in education, I have maintained a belief that a public school can provide an appropriate education for all students, all students can learn, and all students can achieve high standards. Thus, this shift in IDEIA to educate students with disabilities in regular classrooms resonated with my personal and professional philosophy on how best to educate all students, especially students with disabilities.

My interest and experience as a para-educator and teacher in inclusive elementary classroom settings and now as an administrator supporting inclusive practices led to a desire to study the teachers of students with disabilities who are making dramatic academic improvements while receiving special education services in regular education classrooms. Recognizing the importance of effective teacher collaboration, specifically co-teaching, and improved student achievement, I conducted a study designed around this theme, completed an in-depth analysis, and have reported findings that I believe will strengthen the knowledge base of best educational practices of inclusive elementary classrooms.

The structure of qualitative research aligns with my personal beliefs which supports the identification and emergence of various themes throughout the course of the study (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research was also ideal for understanding how participants perceived their roles in an organization (Merriam, 1995). As teachers are an integral component of the public school system, I wanted to research co-teaching arrangements in an inclusive school between a

regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an inclusive regular education elementary classroom where all students are successful, academically and behaviorally.

A qualitative researcher looks to describe and understand the phenomena (Crotty, 1998). I became interested in telling the story of co-teachers – how they developed a working relationship with each other and what efforts it takes to sustain it. During this study, as I worked in a social constructionist’s paradigm seeking to explore personal truths, I strove to establish and believe I accomplished good rapport with the participants, which is imperative when conducting qualitative research (Merriam & Associates, 2002).

As a researcher with an educational background, I realize that I brought my own educational experience and history to this study. Creswell (2003) maintains that the researcher must be conscious of how his or her own history may influence the study. My own personal educational experiences as a regular education teacher, special education teacher, special education transition facilitator, and special education administrator could be viewed as researcher bias. However, these experiences could also be viewed as the researcher having insight into the research problem. In the nature of qualitative research, I took care to make apparent possible biases while I collected, interpreted and summarized data for this study (Crotty, 1998; Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994; Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000; Patton, 2002).

Taking comprehensive measures to establish trust with the participants also helped to work against personal biases brought to this study (Merriam, 1995). Creswell (2003) contends that taking time to relate the purpose and procedures of the study to the participants so they have an understanding of the nature of the research and what to anticipate during the study will also

help establish trust (p. 64). I am the Assistant Director of the Frage Education Cooperative and because this study took place in schools and classrooms where I arrange/am responsible for special education services and with special education teachers under my supervision, extra steps were taken to ensure the teachers were comfortable with me, the researcher, interviewing and observing them in practice (Coghlan & Casey, 2001; Peshkin, 1988; Zeni, 1998). Care was taken to reassure the teachers in the study that I wanted to tell their story and I followed member checking procedures with them throughout the course of this study (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Continuous monitoring of the research data assures involvement by research participants to establish that the results of this study are believable. Member checking and other precautionary steps to assure the study's credibility were built into the timeline and followed.

Study Participants

The participants in this study were one regular education teacher and one special education teacher who co-teach in a regular education classroom and one school administrator. Participation by the teachers and the administrator in this study was voluntary. The administration of one of the six elementary schools identified a co-teaching partnership of a regular education teacher and a special education in an inclusive classroom where all students are achieving to high standards in reading and mathematics. Pseudonyms have been used in place of real names when using data from interviews and observations to illustrate findings.

Data Collection Methods

A qualitative case study design was used to report the oral and observable data grounded in the setting selected for this qualitative study (Yin, 2003). The case study design was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of a co-teaching situation and to generate ideas that may

influence practice in the educational field (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Yin, 2003). Data collection methods of participant interviews, participant observations, and review of relevant documents were used to analyze when answering the guiding questions of the study (Creswell, 2003).

I conducted multiple semi-structured individual and group interviews with the participants during a six-week period of study in an elementary school the spring semester of school 2008 and the fall semester of school 2008. As planned, two observations with written field notes were conducted per week (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Multiple interviews and observations became necessary as emerging themes are identified (Merriam, 1998). Also during this time period, relevant documents were reviewed to gain information important to emerging themes. The participants and researcher kept personal journals of their experiences during this study to add to the database of information. According to Patton (2002) using different data sources, the fieldworker (researcher) were able to validate and crosscheck findings (p. 306). The plan for these data collection methods is outlined in the sections below.

Interviews

In this qualitative research, I collected data for this study through semi-structured, person-to-person interviews and group interviews (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In order for me, the researcher, to grasp the collaboration efforts teachers believe to be effective in their co-teaching partnership and to understand the culture of the co-teaching arrangement within the larger school culture, it took several interviews for me to fully understand this phenomena. Therefore, each teacher and the school principal participated in 4 individual interviews and 2 group interviews. The individual interviews lasted about 30 minutes each and the group

interviews took about 45 minutes. I recorded the interviews using note-taking methods and a digital audio recording device (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Data collected from interviews were transcribed verbatim. An unstructured/informal style of interview replicating a conversation was used to generate empirical data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997; LeCompte & Preissle, 2003; Merriam & Associates, 2002).

The data collection method of interviewing I selected for this study was appropriate as engaging, positive, open-ended questions are designed to collect useful, data that uncovers identifiable components of a successful co-teaching arrangement in an effective school (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Without designing realistic strategies for questioning about collaborative experiences, my questions could have been simplistic and the responses uninformative (Klein, 1999). Care was taken to design the questions to be consistent with the goals and designs of the proposed study (LeCompte & Preissle, 2003). The interview guide is contained in Appendix B. As I conducted this emergent case study, listening and learning were key components of effective research strategies I kept in mind as I interviewed the co-teachers and the principal.

Observations

The qualitative research tool of observation was used to study the elementary school principal and the co-teaching teacher team as they worked together in the elementary school setting. Observations of the teachers took place in the natural settings where the co-teaching team of teachers typically interacts – in the regular education classroom, during planning time, and outside the classroom. Observation of the principal took place in the school setting – in her office, in the hallways, in classrooms, and monitoring school lunch. Observations in the classroom and school environment took place as planned for 2 days a week for 6 weeks, with

each observation lasting approximately one hour. Observing the two teachers as they engaged in co-teaching planning sessions took place as planned for 3 sessions during the 6-week study, with each observation lasting approximately 45 minutes. Recording field notes of observation data as the two teachers co-teach and plan helped me fully understand the nature a co-teaching partnership between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher. Care was taken to conduct my direct observations in a casual manner (Yin, 2003). Additionally, as a researcher, I took precautions to collect, present, and analyze observation data fairly because it is vital to case study research (Yin, 2003).

Documents

Documents are visible aspects of organizations which provide some evidence of cultural artifacts (Schein, 2004). A review of documents of the research study provided me, the researcher, with relevant information that helped me understand the phenomena of an effective co-teaching teacher team in an inclusive school and regular education classroom where students with disabilities receive special education services. Reviewing qualitative documents to discover themes or sub-themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003) of the school organization included, but not limited to KSDE website with links to individual district and school data, district website with links to classroom and teacher web pages, school building handbooks, classroom handbooks and other information guides, teacher lesson plans, and other relevant data in the school or classroom.

Journals

One way to learn more about the feelings, beliefs, and perceptions of participants in a qualitative research study is to have them write personal documents throughout the course of the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). The teachers were asked to contribute a minimum of two entries

each week for 6 weeks. As a part of my study's action plan, having the participants keep journals during the study allowed them to reflect on their experiences on many issues that may arise during the timeframe of this study. Thoughts on co-teaching the participants had and felt uncomfortable sharing with me during interviews may be more readily expressed in writing. It was important for me to help my study participants feel comfortable as they shared their thoughts and keeping a journal provided them with a means to elaborate on their actions, experiences, and beliefs. Data shared in journals concerning the participant's personal thoughts on the study objectives informed the study such as the interviews and observations did (Merriam, 1998). These personal accounts are often described as descriptive, self-revealing, first-person narratives by qualitative researchers and are considered to be a reliable source of information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

Each study participant received a blank journal to record their thoughts at the time of the initial individual with an explanation of its use and ended with the last semi-structured interview. I asked the participants to enter a minimum of two entries per week, but they could enter as many journal entries as they wished over the course of the study. Time during semi-structured interviews with the participants was used to review the information they shared using the journaling format. This allowed us to explore emergent study data, conduct periodic member checks for confirmation, and help ensure my information accurately reflected the experiences they shared (Stake, 1995). The data obtained from the journals supported the information gathered through personal and group interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis strategies I used in my qualitative case study of co-teaching are described in this section. Plus, an overview of qualitative research analysis procedures is described for the reader to understand the position I took to carefully analyze the data I collected during the study.

Research data for this qualitative case study were collected through person-to-person interviews, direct observations, and a review of relevant documents (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Interview and observation data were gathered using a digital video photography device and a digital audio recording device. The interviews were transcribed verbatim using a personal computer and the *Microsoft Office Word 2007* computer program (Microsoft Corporation, 2008b) and exported to the *Microsoft Office Excel 2007* (Microsoft Corporation, 2008a) computer database to facilitate analysis of data. Documents relevant to this co-teaching research was reviewed and recorded for analysis throughout the course of the study.

Using the qualitative study research questions and theoretical framework as guides, the research data were examined for common patterns and themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ryan and Bernard (2003) recognize that identifying themes in qualitative research is a step in analyzing culture (p. 86), while Strauss and Corbin (1990) link the themes of qualitative data with “conceptual labels placed in discrete happenings, events, and other instances of phenomena” (p. 61). Identifying themes in the qualitative data can be difficult because they are abstract and can be connected with broad and specific kinds of expressions and constructs (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Ryan and Bernard go on to describe types of themes to look for in a qualitative study that include: Repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and

analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data, and theory-related material. *Repetitions* occur when topics occur repeatedly over and over in the data. Only the researcher determines if the theme is relevant to the study by comparing it to the structure set forth by the research questions and theoretical framework. *Indigenous typologies or categories* describe long terms that are differently or used in unusual ways that the researcher is familiar with. *Metaphors and analogies* are often used by people to signify their thoughts, actions, and experiences they have when describing the subject matter. *Transitions* are considered to be naturally occurring markers people use when changing themes. Pauses in speech, changes in voice tone, and particular usage of wordage are examples of speech transitions. An example in written text of transitions includes changing paragraphs. *Similarities and differences* involved the researcher conducting systematic, constant comparisons when analyzing data. It helped the researcher to stay focused. *Linguistic connectors* is an approach to examine data by searching for commonly used words used to identify casual relationships and others that signify restrictive relations. *Missing data* is important to consider when analyzing data. Asking “What is missing?” helped me keep focused on the study guidelines and not report on only what I looked for. *Theory-related material* was used to help me understand how data related to qualitative research. Care was taken to be sensitive to the information collected from the phenomenon as it connected to theories; when data were examined, I reported findings accurately and not only what I looked for.

Sorting the information into different themes requires several process techniques for the researcher to use when analyzing data. When I processed the information obtained in the qualitative case study, I used the techniques of cutting and sorting, word lists and key words in context (KWIC), word co-occurrence, and metacoding (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). *Cutting and*

sorting involved the researcher to compile thematic folders of detailed information obtained from study data using process techniques of highlighting, cutting, pasting, and saving important text relevant to the theme. *Word lists and key words in context (KWIC)* required me to take a look at the words the study participants used to understand what they were talking about. Word counts allowed me to list commonly used words or phrases, while KWIC kept the word counts in context when the information in was recorded in thematic units. *Word co-occurrence* required me to examine the text and use a matrix to look for word patterns of usage.

A careful analysis of the text gathered in this qualitative case study was taken and a summary of extracted findings was written based on the common themes. As this section provided the reader with a sense of understanding of data analysis techniques used, the next section provides an overview of the care I took to guarantee the quality of the research.

Research Quality

In this section, I describe the precautions taken to ensure the research quality of my study. The processes used to collect data for this study were consistent with those of a Social Constructionist as described by Patton (2002): Authenticity, trustworthiness, and credibility. A description of transferability of the study and ethics in research was included for the reader.

When conducting a qualitative research study, the researcher goes into the field to capture firsthand what happened in the real world (Patton, 2002). I took care to immerse myself in naturally occurring phenomena and listen conscientiously, as if I had entered the other person's world. This allowed me to capture both observable external behaviors and internal states (beliefs and values) of the study participants (Patton, 2002). Also, I acknowledged that I had a certain level of subjectivity on the study topic which is inevitable, but was addressed throughout the

course of the study (Peshkin, 1988). Peshkin (1998) further clarified that I as the researcher had to be vigilant of how my subjectivity influenced the study and swayed its results in the forefront while the research was conducted.

An emphasis on authenticity and trustworthiness was my focus, I took care to be balanced, fair, and conscientious throughout the study (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) described these research qualities to include “taking into account multiple perspectives, multiple interests, and multiple realities” (p. 575) as the researcher conducted the study. I kept a personal journal throughout the six weeks of this study. This journal writing activity helped me maintain my focus when answering the guiding questions of the study. I wrote a minimum of three entries per week describing my feelings and thoughts. This personal journal helped ensure the trustworthiness of the study.

Credibility of the study depended on the neutrality of the researcher and rigorous data collection methods used (Patton, 2002). It was insured by the description of the phenomena from participants’ eyes and enhanced by thorough triangulation of case study data continuously through the course of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To ensure the credibility of the findings, member checking strategies were used during the data collection phase of interviewing by the re-statement and clarification of questions, as needed.

The transferability of the findings in this study to similar circumstances is left up to the reader. I collected thick, rich descriptions of relevant data describing a co-teaching partnership between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher, the elementary school principal, and the organizational culture in the school. Contextual analysis of the study findings

allows readers to make informed decisions as to the relevancy of data to his/her individual needs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability of this study was established by the utilization of an audit trail, the employment of triangulation methods, and reflective journals (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Keeping organized records of this study included raw data, recorded data, written notes, related materials, and other relevant information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In addition, after collecting data, the rich case study data were given to the study participants to review and to confirm or disconfirm common themes and provide a comprehensive perspective on the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2002). A peer review team was used to boost the confirmability of this study by providing feedback to me.

Ethics when collecting data were issues focused on during the course of this study. To ensure the protection of human subjects, the Institutional Review Board of Wichita State University approved the study before any data were collected. All participants signed a consent form that asked them to be a participant volunteer. Wording on the form also explained the purpose of the study. Assurance of confidentiality and an option to withdraw from the study at any time was stated on the consent form as well. To comply with IRB requirements for confidentiality, pseudonyms were used to protect the identification of the individual participants, the school, and the town in the study.

Summary

Chapter 3 began with a review of the research design and method, research perspective, purpose of the study, research questions, context for the study, study participants, and the researcher's position. The chapter concluded with descriptive details outlining data collection

methods, data analysis methods, research quality and a chapter summary outlining a comprehensive timeline for the proposed study.

This research study was completed during the 2008 fall semester of school. This qualitative case study was conducted in an elementary school and focused on a current, co-teaching partnership between two teachers; a regular education teacher and a special education teacher who co-teach in an inclusive classroom and the school administrator who facilitates this inclusive school environment. Data for this study were collected during the 2008 spring semester and 2008 fall semester of school. Semi-structured, individual interviews were audiotaped with each participant, one special education teacher and one regular education teacher, who co-teach in a regular education classroom and the elementary school principal. Semi-structured, group interviews of the teacher team were audiotaped. Each interview lasted approximately one-half hour in length. Classroom observations of the teacher team as they co-teach in the regular education classroom and observation of the elementary school principal took place during the course of the study. Ethnographic field notes were written as I conducted observations in the classroom and as I studied the school culture. I also observed and wrote field notes describing the co-teaching team as they planned lessons together during the week. A letter from the school principal granted the researcher permission to conduct this co-teaching case study in her school. After the IRB was approved, the case study participants were selected, participant consent obtained, and planning interviews and observations dates completed. Also, dates were selected to organize data and complete transcriptions for member checking were arranged by the researcher.

Analysis of the data and findings were studied and organized during the fall 2008 semester and presented following compilation of data. The compilation of data included findings

and conclusions drawn from the study, recommendations for future research, specification of theoretical implications, and details of contributions to the profession and practice.

CHAPTER 4

Findings of the Study

Chapter 4 provides the findings from data collected and analyzed during the course of this case study. Insight into this co-teaching partnership between a regular education teacher and a special education was gained through interviews, observations, and document reviews.

I begin chapter 4 by describing background information on Swan River Unified School District 1120, Swan River Elementary School, and student achievement state assessment data. Then I discuss, several themes identifiable as recurrent to the perceptions of the participants about co-teaching and student learning. The tone for student learning and achievement at Swan River Elementary School is structured by the setting, customs, and actions of the school district administrators and staff towards inclusive education.

Swan River USD 1120

Swan River USD 1120 is a small, rural school district in north central Kansas, serves students from three small communities, and encompasses 133 square miles. The small three rural communities that comprise the district first consolidated their separate districts into one unified district in the 1960s with the closing of one K-12 school from that western-most community and transporting those students to one of the two remaining K-12 school buildings. In 1978 declining student enrollment forced USD 1120 to look at consolidation again. This time the two K-12 schools were reorganized to make one Pre-K-8 grade building in one community and one K-5 and 9-12 building in the other community. This school building arrangement remained adequate for almost 24 years, but in 2002 continued declining student enrollment forced additional consolidation efforts by the school district. The eastern-most school became a middle school building serving grades 4-8. The preschool was also kept at this location. The school in the

middle community housed grades K-3 and 9-12. This configuration was determined at the time as the best structure to best suit the declining enrollment issue. This arrangement met the needs of the district for 3 years, but it soon became necessary to re-organize again. In 2005, the school building in the middle community that served grades K-3 and 9-12 now is the school building serving grades 6-12. The middle school in the eastern community became a Pre-K-5 school, Swan River Elementary School, which is the specific site of this study. When Swan River Elementary School was created in 2005, a new principal was assigned, but most of the staff from the former K-3 school and the grades 4-5 teachers from the former 4-8 school were reassigned to SRES, including the two co-teachers who were the focus of this study.

As with most consolidated school districts, transporting students to and from school is an issue of concern for the district. Every school day, students arrive at the school closest to their home by walking, using personal transportation, or riding district bright yellow school busses bearing the Swan River USD 1120 logo. Then students who attend the other school are transported by bus to reach their classrooms. At the end of the day of school, the transportation routes reverse order to return the students back to the school in their home community so they can return to their rural homes. In addition to transporting students to and from school and occasional field trips, in the evenings the school district provides transportation after extracurricular sporting practices, competitions, and school activities to return the middle school and high school students to their home communities. Most of the students ride a school bus for a portion of their day and for many the bus ride takes over one hour to reach their destination.

According to 2007-2008 school data, Swan River USD 1120 has 305 Pre-K-12 students enrolled in its two school buildings (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). District-wide, 55.74% of the student body is considered to be economically disadvantaged and a high

percentage, 94.43%, is racially identified as being White. The student body gender division for the district is 46.56% male and 53.44% female. Despite the high percentage of students from low-income families (55.74%), the Swan River School District has experienced minimal in and out of district movement with its student body throughout the school year. Another unusual fact about this school district is that in the 2007-2008 fiscal school year, 26.89% of the Swan River K-12 students received special education services. This percent is two times higher than the 2007-2008 state average of 13.20% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). Also, in the face of high level poverty and special education numbers in this school district, USD 1120 has not only continued to meet its adequate yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks for all students in reading and math, but also received standard of excellence recognition awards as determined by the state of Kansas for both academic areas.

Given these identifiable factors and characteristics, the Swan River School District is known in the surrounding communities, county, and state to be a first-rate, financially sound, inclusive school district where all students receive a high-quality education. The following sections describe Swan River Elementary School, student population information, school staff, curriculum and interventions.

Swan River Elementary School: Description

The Swan River Elementary School was built in 1960. It is a single level, red brick building reminiscent of schools built in the 1960s as the architectural lines on the school building's front are an abstract form of architecture. The main entrance to the elementary school is easily identifiable as the building opens to the south and is landscaped with a flagpole, small trees, shrubs, and benches between the building wall and sidewalk leading to the school entrance. The original school name made of metal lettering still exists and is attached on the right brick

wall of the entrance. Tall oak trees line the south and east streets with parking for visitors marked on the street south of the school entrance. North of the school, the former high school football field has been converted into a large, grass field for student use and is connected to the playground and baseball field. It is a well-kept building and lot that is attractive and welcoming to visitors. The school's northern location in the small town isolates it somewhat from the rest of the community. Traffic by the school is low since neighborhood homes encompass three sides of the school. School traffic is basically the only traffic that flows on the streets.

As you enter the single story elementary school, two glass double doors identify the entrance to the school. Two signs are visibly displayed on the entrance for visitors to read – “no guns allowed,” and “all visitors must report to the office.” As you first enter the school, the first thing you see on the left wall of the entrance is a white milk cooler making a soft humming noise as it keeps the half-pint cartons of milk cool. Bright red milk crates are stacked next to the cooler. The entrance opens up to a commons/lunch area. Lunch tables are set up as they are used throughout the school day for breakfast, lunch, and small group student instruction. The brick and concrete block walls are painted the colors of red and white and are adorned with bulletin boards displaying school information. A handmade wooden placard reading “Swan River Elementary School” hangs on the wall beside the bulletin boards. A remodeled trophy case displays pictures of students participating in different activities held throughout the school year. Numbered, royal blue student lockers line the east wall with flyers taped to several. Some students have fall decorations embellishing their lockers. A double doorway opening into the gym and stage area is painted a bright, royal blue color. Another door to the east of the commons area is painted bright red and opens into the fifth grade classroom. To the northern end of the commons area on the left, a hallway leads to three classrooms, a custodial room, and the

preschool classroom. As you walk down the long corridor that stretches the length of the building to the north playground, you pass the school kitchen, restrooms, office, and two classrooms. On the east side of the locker lined hallway are five classrooms and the school library. The same red color painted on the walls of the commons/lunchroom area is also the paint color for all classroom doors in the school building.

The school building is clean and well lit. The ceiling consists of white ceiling tiles and florescent lighting fixtures. The school has a fresh, pleasant smell, as if the custodian had recently finished cleaning. The terrazzo floor is spotless and recently polished. Although small, the school's restrooms are clean with no graffiti written or painted over.

Each classroom is basically the same size and design, roughly 20' by 20.' Large windows in the classrooms allow natural sunlight to penetrate and are available to students throughout the majority of the school day. Curtains handmade by school patrons cover the large windows that occupy a large portion of the outside wall. The classroom doorway and a row of smaller windows located close to the ceiling that run the length of the room are located on the hallway wall.

The elementary office is located down the main hall upon entering the building. A placard hanging from the ceiling identifies the room as the office. This elementary office area appears to be very similar to one you would find in any elementary school. You enter a large room sectioned into three smaller rooms housing the office assistant, principal, and a very small teacher workroom. A bulletin board displaying school information hangs on one wall and an intercom system hangs on another. A glass window is situated in the wall beside the office assistant's desk so she can monitor hallway traffic. Much of the remaining wall space is adorned with additional school information.

Student Information

Swan River Elementary School (SRES) provides educational programs and services to Pre-Kindergarten through grade five students. Student demographic information accessed from the KSDE website indicates that the race/ethnicity of the student population in this small, rural elementary school is primarily Caucasian (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). The student population for the 2007-2008 school year in grades Kindergarten through fifth was 109 students and with 37.14% students with disabilities, SRES averages three times more than the state average of 13.20% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). Also according to the KSDE 2006-2007 building report card for SRES, Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data illustrates that students with disabilities are included in regular education classrooms over 80% of their school day where as the current state average is 57.20% (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). These data indicates students with disabilities receiving special education services at SRES are included in regular education classrooms for most of their academic instruction during the school day. The SRES building report card state assessment data for the school year of 2007-2008 indicate the students in grades three through five at SRES met the state of Kansas proficiency guidelines for students in reading and math (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b).

Class Size, School Staff, and Daily Schedule

Class size. Swan River Elementary School tries to keep each regular education classroom under 20 students per class to accommodate a smaller teacher/student ratio. Each classroom at SRES does average less than 20 students, as classes are purposely divided to create two classrooms per grade when class numbers reach around 25 students. Because of this guideline,

SRES has two Kindergarten classrooms, two 1st grade classrooms, and one classroom each for the 2nd – 5th grades.

School staff. The teaching staff at Swan River Elementary School is a core of highly qualified teachers (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). SRES has on staff one school administrator, eight elementary teachers, one Title I Reading teacher, one Title I Math teacher, one reading recovery/at-risk teacher, and itinerate teachers for music and physical education. Frage Education Cooperative provides special education services to the students at SRES by placing staff there. Special education staff members consist of three interrelated special education teachers, nine para-educators, and four itinerate special education support personnel consisting of an occupational therapist, a physical therapist, a speech/language pathologist, and a school psychologist. In addition to the administrative and teaching staff at SRES, five classified workers make up the custodial, cafeteria, and secretarial staff.

Staff turnover at SRES is minimal, as a majority of the teaching staff has worked for the Swan River School District over 10 years. Even special education staff remains consistent from school year to school year with little or no change of teachers, support staff, or para-educators. Sonya, the regular education 5th grade teacher who has been a teacher in USD 1120 for 28 years had this comment about working at SRES, “I like it [at SRES] because all the teachers get along and we all work together.” Susan, the special education teacher who has worked in USD 1120 for 12 years expressed, “I like the fact that we’re a team – that we have very strong administration that definitely guides us... that definitely assists us in all ends of the teaching spectrum.” To add constancy and steadiness to the educational team at SRES, Liz, the elementary school administrator, has been at USD 1120 for 21 years, first as a teacher for 13 years, then as an administrator for 8. Her tenure with the district has given her valuable insight to

its character as she passionately described the Swan River School District, school staff, and the community,

[Swan River School District] is a very, very supportive community, I think, that is very involved with the school and school activities and that is always great to see of course – the home and school connection. I've enjoyed the people I work with too. And like I said, I have been in three different settings as far as being [a principal], a teacher, and a coach for a number of years – just very happy. And I have seen a lot of positive changes at Swan River School District and felt like with our superintendent we are heading in the right direction and planning for the future.

A core of school staff members who work together as a team is a key feature of the educational environment at SRES to provide an inclusive school for all their students. The school staff at SRES works closely together as professionals and they also respect one another as valued members of the elementary school team.

Daily schedule. Swan River Elementary School has a daily schedule much like the majority of elementary schools in the United States. Classes begin with the sound of a bell at 8:10 a.m. each weekday morning and end the school day with another bell sounding at 3:15 p.m. Once the students have reported to their assigned classrooms, attendance, lunch count, and other beginning of the day duties are completed; then academic programming begins. Throughout the school day, students participate in reading/language arts/spelling, mathematics, science, and social studies lessons with the average lesson being 50 minutes. Students regularly exit their classrooms throughout the day for scheduled music, physical education, recess, lunch, and restroom times. All students also attend scheduled computer, art, and library classes during the week, but not on a daily basis.

All school staff and students except the preschool students eat their lunch at the school. Students enrolled in preschool classes attend one-half day sessions rather than attend a full day of school. K-5 students have a staggered lunch schedule beginning at 11:00 a.m. with the K-2 students eating their lunch, and then at 11:25, the students in grades 3-5 are dismissed from class for lunch. The school principal monitors both lunch periods with assistance from school staff. A family style lunch period was established three years ago to encourage school staff to eat with their assigned students. By doing so, each staff member can receive their lunch at no cost. This program was designed to provide non-academic time for relationship-building opportunities between staff and students.

Curriculum and Interventions

Curriculum and Instruction. Past curriculum committees selected the textbooks for core subjects that are currently used today in classrooms at Swan River Elementary School. The core subjects taught at SRES include reading, language arts, spelling, mathematics, science, and social studies. SRES previously used a four year rotation plan to review and purchase new textbooks. At this time, SRES does not have a written plan to purchase textbooks, but when new textbooks are needed, a curriculum committee will be established to review textbooks that are evidence-based and aligned with Kansas state standards. In addition to using textbooks, teachers use up-to-date materials located from other resources to supplement the standards-based curriculum. This practice is used relatively often because the Kansas state standards guide the curriculum for the core subjects and supplemental materials are used to fill in textbook curricular gaps. The instruction and curriculum resources for these subjects can differ from classroom to classroom, but the Kansas state standards are the constant factor used to drive the curriculum and create vertical alignment between the grades.

With the emphasis on all students achieving high academic standards as determined by guidelines set by NCLB, teachers make curricular decisions based on test data and student mastery of academic concepts. The academic concepts taught are generated from these curricular decisions based on student data. Because of increased awareness of individual student mastery, teachers are more conscientious in selecting materials and obtaining evidence-based instructional strategies to teach with fidelity in their classrooms. The 5th grade teacher, Sonya, explains the use of supplemental materials,

Now, not everything taught from the textbook covers NCLB – the state standards, so I have to supplement with resources...the information students need to know for state assessments is just not covered in our textbooks, so I make sure I cover that [concept].

To supplement core curriculum materials to fill in curricular gaps, SRES teachers continuously examine and select different evidence-based educational resources that support the curriculum, are differentiated, and taught in whole group, small group, and individual instruction. This allows the teachers to better meet the diverse learning needs of their students by selecting the resources to help students learn and retain academic concepts being taught. In addition to purchasing ready-made materials, the teachers at SRES often use educational materials hand-made by teachers, borrowed from other teachers, and obtained from educational websites.

In 2006-2007, a curricular change was made at Swan River Elementary School in the 5th grade classroom. The subjects of reading, language arts, and spelling were integrated into one subject where teachers use their reading resources as the basis to create the resources for language arts and spelling. A sentence diagramming program called Rainbowing provides the structure for language arts instruction, as the teachers use the reading materials as its resource base. Weekly sentence structure practice, grammar exercises, and essay writing probes are taken from the

stories the students read. In addition, spelling exercises are supported with reading materials. Each week different spelling words are identified from the reading materials and throughout the week are practiced and ultimately tested. By integrating these three subjects, students become more familiar with the reading materials and are documented as achieving higher levels of competency in the areas of reading, spelling, and writing. The special education teacher, Susan, describes the Rainbowing language arts program used in the 5th grade classroom, “The way the language arts [program] works is all curriculum-based so we are not using a textbook at all. We take sentences and paragraphs from the reading program and we use them in our Rainbowing [lessons].”

I observed the language arts class taught to the 5th grade students and witnessed the integration of the reading, spelling, and language arts curriculum. The design of the Rainbowing sentence diagramming program allows teachers to use the reading curriculum as the materials to teach sentence diagramming concepts in combination with language arts concepts. Each student had a teacher-made Rainbowing notebook they worked from with instructions on sentence diagramming concepts included. During the classroom discussion, the students referred to the Rainbowing instructions regularly. The students would work with the teacher using colored markers and the reading selection. After working several problems together as a whole with guided self-talk from the teacher, the students were given an opportunity for whole group, small group, and/or individual practice with a short assignment to complete in class. The following example illustrates the use of individual, small group, and whole group practice during one language arts lesson.

After reviewing with the class helping and linking verbs and asking the students probing questions, Sonya, the 5th grade regular education teacher gives instructions to the class:

“You have 30 seconds to write down as many helping verbs you can think of.” After the time is up, the teacher shares with the class that she was looking for 22 helping verbs. The students share their lists of helping verbs in small groups for a few minutes before the teacher calls them back together to generate the entire list of 22 helping verbs with participation from the whole class. This preparatory set activity captured the students’ interest before the language arts lesson reviewing verbs, including linking verbs, was emphasized.

Many times the students and teachers work through academic tasks together or the students may be assigned to work in small collaborative groups to complete assignments.

Interventions. Since the 1970s, Frage Education Cooperative (FEC) has provided special education services to Swan River USD 1120 Preschool-K-12 students with identified specific needs, for the most part academic and/or behavioral, in both inclusive and individual settings. Also during this time, gifted education services were made available through FEC for identified students requiring academic enhancement. Since 2005, when Swan River Elementary School was created, FEC has continued to provide special education services to the students at SRES. In addition, the special education staff from FEC consults with teachers on intervention strategies for all students.

Swan River Elementary School currently offers four different intervention programs to K-5 students who need additional assistance to learn academic skills, especially in reading and mathematics. Ever since Liz, the principal, has been at Swan River, Title I and Title II intervention K-5 programs have been available for students struggling in reading and math. The Title I and Title II programs offer reading and math support to students who are identified by teachers as needing more skill practice in a small group setting. In 2006, an at-risk/reading

recovery program was created and is available for students in grades K-1 identified as needing extra support in reading and mathematics. This at-risk/reading recovery program is considered an early intervention strategies program.

Initiated when Liz was a middle school principal and something she continued when she became SRES's principal in 2005 is the Student Improvement Team (SIT). SIT is one intervention used by Swan River Elementary School as part of the special education placement identification process, but also is a support system available to assist students struggling in school. A group of designated teachers along with the elementary principal and school psychologist make up the Student Improvement Team (SIT), which meets on a weekly basis to discuss individual student needs. Swan River Elementary School has two Student Improvement Teams – a K-2 grade level team and a 3-5 grade level team. Classroom teachers submit students' documented academic and behavioral concerns to SIT. Parents with concerns about their child may also refer him/her to SIT for assistance and may be a member of SIT when reviewing their child's educational program. SIT members review each student's information to discuss academic and behavioral supports and interventions each individual student needs to improve and bolster his/her learning. Recommendations of possible supports and interventions are given to the referring teacher and in some cases, the parent, or for both to try for a specified amount of time. In Kansas, and nationally, this intervention process is called response to intervention (RTI). During the course of the recommended intervention timetable, teachers regularly submit student progress on the recommended strategies back to SIT. This information is reviewed and adjustments to the interventions are suggested for teachers to try. Because this procedure is also part of the special education placement process, the Student Improvement Team might

recommend referral for additional testing. The special education teacher, Susan, shared her thoughts on working within the response to intervention model in the SIT process,

Response to intervention has made a big difference because it's really forcing the general education teachers to be more involved with all the students, to have to understand what the strategies are, to understand what the deficits are, how a student is placed in special education. I've [worked with] teachers for years who never really understood the process. Now, it is becoming much more clear-cut – who [understands the process] and who doesn't and how are we going to help the ones that do not.

A school-wide approach to delivering high quality academic and behavioral supports to all students at Swan River Elementary School is Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a). MTSS is a term recognized in the state of Kansas that is used to describe how each school provides academic and behavioral support to meet the needs of all students in their building. It is designed on the premise that with appropriate supports, teachers will have the processes and tools in place to help made decisions for every student to be successful (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a). Two different laws converged to provide the impetus for schools to research different intervention strategies to help all students meet academic and behavioral success in schools NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) and IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004). The definition of MTSS from the Kansas MTSS webpage is,

MTSS is a coherent continuum of evidence based, system-wide practices to support a rapid response to academic and behavioral needs, with frequent data-based monitoring for instructional decision-making to empower each Kansas student to achieve high standards (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a).

Implementing MTSS at SRES enables all school staff to develop shared core beliefs to support the academic and behavior success of every student. Core beliefs of MTSS include: All students can and will learn, all students will achieve high standards, all school staff will continue to learn and grow, school staff will reflect, school leaders are responsible for the learning of each student, student learning will include academic and behavioral competencies, and change in a school system is planned, rational, and vigorous (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a).

Beginning with the 2005-2006 school year, the faculty at Swan River Elementary School examined the core reading curriculum used with whole group reading instruction to see how well it aligned with the Kansas state standards. They also considered if all teachers were consistently teaching the reading curriculum with rigor and fidelity. Then the teaching staff took a closer look at evidence-based instructional strategies to enhance the core reading curriculum and to establish a continuum of academic supports designed to meet the reading needs of all students. After they analyzed the reading curriculum at SRES and analyzed student reading scores on state assessments, the faculty made a commitment to change the reading instruction delivery model they were currently using and implement MTSS.

MTSS is structured to provide reading instruction using a core curriculum for all students, a supplemental reading curriculum for some students, and an intense reading curriculum for a few students. MTSS components include using a universal screening instrument to identify students needing additional support in reading or mathematics. Teachers implement a variety of scientifically based research strategies and approaches to differentiate lessons when teaching whole group, small group, and individual students. Ongoing criterion-based measurements and continuous progress monitoring are conducted to measure student progress. Plus, system level problem-solving decisions are based on grade level data when appropriate.

MTSS as it is implemented at SRES for reading instruction is meeting the diverse needs of its students in grades K-5. Since spring 2006, students in grades 3-5 have met AYP standards in reading on the Kansas state assessments (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). When asked how MTSS became the intervention model chosen to implement at SRES, Liz, the elementary principal, had this to say,

Probably by just attending conferences and workshops, doing research, and knowing that was where education was going. I have heard several people present on how well it has worked. Doing interventions – what a benefit it was for the students. And just looking at society today; how diverse our kids are and not everybody is on grade level anymore, obviously. Then looking at how much that would help those students.

Liz continued to talk about MTSS and made this comment about using this system of support at SRES,

My opinion...Number 1...staff buy-in is huge. My staff spent a lot of time this summer attending workshops, gaining more knowledge on [MTSS] and the professional time we worked [at SRES] as well. So I think that the biggest part is staff buy-in. And just realizing that all kids are not the same and they are not going to learn the same way. It took a couple of teachers a little longer to get there – to understand it is a different style of teaching to meet the needs of these kids.

Used as a reading intervention program at Swan River Elementary School, MTSS is designed to first deliver whole group reading instruction to each class (Tier I), and then group students into smaller reading groups (Tier II) for supplementary reading instruction. Additional intense reading instruction targeting specific reading skills is taught to a few students (Tier III).

SRES sometimes refer to this reading program as a “walk-to-read” program because it is differentiated to meet the needs of the students placed in each reading group, and students are continuously being regrouped. Walk-to-read is a reading program designed for students to walk from their regular education classroom and regroup with students from another classroom that have similar reading skills. Several different small reading groups are developed for students to receive reading instruction based on their skill level. The design of the tiers is that each reading group is differentiated from the other. The reading groups are “leveled” according to the reading skills of the students in the reading group. Students with similar skills are grouped together and receive instruction accordingly. Students can be fluid in the reading groups, as skills are learned or identified; students can move up or down in the reading groups to receive instruction that meets their reading needs. To determine the smaller, tiered student reading groups, a preponderance of evidence method is used. That is, teachers use multiple indicators of student work to make decisions. The multiple indicators are taken from different sources – reading test scores from three different tests (Kansas state reading assessment, Measures of Academic Performance (MAP), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills [DIBELS]) and teacher recommendations based on each student’s academic achievement scores gathered from daily reading assignments.

The principal, Liz, considers MTSS to be a successful reading intervention strategy to meet the needs of all the students at SRES and had this to say about implementing it, “We started out with just a class-within-a-class in, for example, the 5th grade, but this year at this point, we are now at K-1st grades together, 2nd-3rd grades together, and 4th-5th grades together.” As Liz stated above, at SRES the teachers combine two grade levels to create Tier II reading groups, typically with five or six students in each group. The teachers plan to keep these Tier II level

reading groups as small as possible and structure them with a low teacher/student ratio.

Resources supplementing the core reading curriculum are the materials used for Tier II reading instruction.

Within the design structure of MTSS, additional reading instruction is scheduled later during the school day for students identified as needing a more intense, more individualized approach – Tier III. At the Tier III level, students are provided reading instruction one-on-one or in groups of two or three. This extra reading time was designed for a few students to gain individualized specific skill review using differentiated reading materials and teaching strategies. The 5th grade regular education teacher, Sonya, acknowledged additional reading instruction is necessary for some students as she described this intervention time,

What we are doing this year with our reading groups – we set aside time for 4th and 5th grades in the afternoon, time for a specific intervention time [Tier III] of about 30 minutes. We specifically look at what the students missed on the state assessments and group them by that, re-teach, and really work on what they really need to know.

Hopefully, we will really see a big difference on their state assessment [scores].

Besides the tiered levels of reading instruction, an essential component of MTSS is the ongoing monitoring of student progress. The teachers document each student's reading progress as well as administer individual reading probes. Continuous monitoring of individual student reading progress allows teachers to make adjustments as needed to student reading groups, instructional strategies, and supplemental materials.

Swan River Elementary School is small, rural, traditional in some aspects, yet a leading-edge school in other ways, as they had to collaborate to change the way students receive reading instruction. The regular education and special education faculty work together to focus on the

academic needs of all students and implements evidence-based educational practices and interventions to address those needs. The next section describes the SRES school climate, the principal's role, teaching methods, collaboration time for teachers, and the evolution of co-teaching at SRES.

A School that Supports Learning for All Students

Swan River Elementary School is a caring, supportive environment that accommodates learning for all students. The principal, Liz, along with the support of the superintendent and board of education, has worked with her staff during the three years of her tenure as a principal to create this welcoming environment. The moment you step in the school, you experience a positive feeling of collaboration and solidarity. You get this feeling from the school staff and students as they welcome you to their school and offer their assistance. Throughout this section describing a school that supports learning for all students, I give observation and interview data supporting this analysis.

Teachers at Swan River Elementary School nourish and maintain an inclusive school environment where all students can succeed. The community, school administration, and school staff share the belief that all students can be successful. Liz, the elementary principal, shared a view offered by visitors to SRES,

I have had a lot of people that have either been a substitute teacher or are visiting the school and can see the positive interaction of our students and see the movement of our students [between teachers]. It is nice to hear from people observing from the outside.

The elementary school mission statement reinforces this inclusive conviction in its message to staff, parents, and community members,

The mission of Swan River Elementary School is to ensure that all students can learn essential skills. Our students will develop creativity, curiosity, responsibility, and respect. We will promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being in all students. As a staff, we will establish strong lines of communication between staff, parents, and community to achieve our mission.

Sonya, the fifth grade regular education teacher, shared her thoughts on the importance of student success at SRES,

[Student success] is very important. Everyone should feel like they are doing a good job. I have a couple of students that are very low students, but I want them to succeed. So I tell them to do their very best. It is OK if you don't get everything all right. It's very important for them all to succeed.

Many times the philosophy of the school mirrors that of its educational leader, the principal. The next section ties the inclusive philosophy of Swan River Elementary School with the principal who nurtures and promotes a sense of belonging for students and teamwork for staff.

The Role of Building Leadership in Creating an Inclusive School

Establishing a learning environment. The elementary school principal, Liz, believes building level leadership is an integral ingredient when creating an inclusive school where all students are welcome and where school staff embraces individual differences. When she was a teacher at Swan River Middle School, Liz came to believe students learn best in a supportive environment where teachers support each other. This has not always been the case at Swan River USD 1120. When Liz was a middle school principal, teachers in USD 1120 worked in isolation with minimal collaboration. In the 1990s, a special education reform movement known as inclusion became a topic of interest and discussions on how this might look in a school began to

occur in the Swan River School District. Through the years, Liz researched different inclusion models to implement at her school and ways to promote collaboration efforts with her faculty. When she became the Swan River Elementary School principal in 2005, she felt the time was right to create the nurturing, supportive learning environment for students and teachers she had envisioned.

Compassion, understanding, and developing personal relationships with the families and community are characteristics Liz brings to the building leadership position at Swan River Elementary School. As well as working with adults to set a positive tone for learning at SRES, Liz wants every student to feel welcome in her elementary school. She believes it is essential to create a learning environment that increases the likelihood that all kids can and will learn. She had this to say about fostering a positive environment at Swan River Elementary School,

I think the biggest change is just understanding what world our kids are coming from. I think that is the biggest difference. You don't have a group of kids that are going to come in, sit down, and do everything you ask them to do...and they are not going to always be on grade level. I think it is compassion that still needs to be there...the desire to reach every kid. I try to establish a very positive environment here. I just think kids learn better and people work better in a positive environment...that is very important to me.

Describing how the principal facilitated a staff change in attitude towards inclusion where all teachers are accountable and are expected to provide an education for all students; these words were shared by the Susan, the special education teacher,

It has kind of been a slow process. We have been at it for several years now. [The principal] took it in kind of baby steps. We first laid the groundwork and got student improvement teams in place then went through that process for a year or two. Then we

started with interventions, examining test scores more closely, understanding that not all kids were going to be placed in special education – that [the regular education teachers] were still responsible for [student] learning, and that really hadn't happened before. That directive and that guidance came from her... It forced all teachers, not just special education, to be more accountable for the students they work with.

Helping the staff at SRES understand the concept of creating an inclusive school environment where all students can learn together in regular education classes was the first step Liz took when guiding teachers to create a more supportive environment for students. Liz then looked to develop teamwork skills among the teachers at SRES, by working with them to become more collaborative.

Promoting teamwork. To establish a building-wide system of support for all students, a key component to fostering an inclusive school is creating teamwork among staff. One way Liz, the elementary principal, helps create a team concept is by being a team member herself. She has this to say about being a team member and attending professional development activities with her staff, "I attended all those workshops and all those days with them. I put myself as a member of that team as well. I think it is important for me to see it as well." Liz demonstrated she was a member of the SRES teaching team by modeling teaming skills she expected from her staff.

To illustrate, during the summer of 2008, Frage Education Cooperative, Swan River School District, and another local school district scheduled several workshops for teachers on evidence-based educational practices. The following is an example of Liz participating with the teachers from SRES at a *Make It and Take It* workshop they attended together. The purpose of the workshop was to give teachers an opportunity to research evidence-based materials, make the materials, and share their resources with other teachers.

Liz, 10 teachers, and one support staff member from SRES arrive around 8 a.m. at the school cafeteria where the workshop on *Make It and Take It* is scheduled. They all have on T-shirts with the SRES logo on them. Liz arranged transportation so the teachers could ride together to the neighboring town where the workshop was held. As they sign in and look to find a seat where they can sit together, you hear some of the teachers say “Hi” to other workshop participants from neighboring schools and asking, “Where are the refreshments?” “Where are the restrooms?” and “Where can we sit?” Liz and the SRES teachers move to tables in the back of the room and place their materials down as if to mark their spot. Until the workshop begins, the teachers and Liz make their way to the refreshment table, restrooms, and visit with staff members from other schools. After getting their refreshments, the SRES staff gradually walks back to their “assigned seat” to eat their donuts, drink coffee or water, visit, and wait for the workshop to begin. At 8:30 a.m. the workshop begins when the workshop facilitator says, “Welcome to the *Make-It and Take-It* workshop. We will work our way around the room with each participant standing where you are, state your name, what school you work in, what grade you teach, and then share the educational materials you made with the group.” The facilitator went on to caution, “With this many participants, we each have approximately five minutes to share your project.” It was somewhat quiet while each project was being presented, but then workshop participants asked questions on the materials, websites, books, and resources as each teacher presented their materials. “How that educational material could work with students,” “What a great idea,” “What website did you access to find that project?” “Can we have a closer look at the project?” “What resource did you find that project from?” When it became the SRES teachers’ turn to share, they each displayed

their project, gave a short description the project, where the resource was located, and answered questions from the other participants.

This is a popular workshop for teachers. For one day, the teachers work on their own time to research different resources and make materials for their classroom. Then the second day, the teachers come together and share their resources and material with their colleagues. Many good resources, often new websites, are shared between teachers at this workshop.

Besides creating a team and “we’re all in this together” atmosphere at Swan River Elementary School for all teachers, Liz also encouraged relationships to develop between special education and regular education staff. At SRES, she worked to eliminate the dual system in education – special education and regular education, by promoting teamwork between the two entities to create a more integrated system of support for all students. Due to her incessant support for an inclusive setting at SRES, Liz has noticed a change in teachers willing to become team members. She shared,

It all starts with the buy-in with your staff and you have to be part of the team as an administrator. You have to give them that ownership and to show the positive – what can come out of it. [SRES] has now gone through [creating an inclusive environment] for three years and showing the [results] of our test scores coming up and just the positive [change in] attitude of the kids and the teachers.

Susan, the special education teacher, agreed that the principal has worked hard to build teamwork among her staff when she said,

As a principal, she has an open door policy and makes it clear that she is always available for any problems - whatever we need. I truly think that her interest is with the kids and

wants to provide the best education for them. She believes in communication and teamwork and it [is working] to make us all come together as a big team.

I observed Liz, the elementary principal, in her building leadership role when I visited SRES. Many times her office door was open and she was easily accessible. Other times, I observed her monitoring student lunchtime, visiting classrooms, or delivering messages to teachers and students. Every time I visited the school, Liz was always pleasant and welcoming. She demonstrated a caring, nurturing demeanor toward students and was respectful to her staff members. One example is during lunchtime where Liz makes a point to talk with adults and students alike. Since lunchtime is family style, the custodian, teachers, and para-educators eat with the students. Liz monitors lunchtime so the teachers and para-educators can have a duty-free lunch. The following illustrates Liz talking to students and teachers and para-educators while monitoring during lunchtime.

It is now lunchtime, and the elementary students in grades K-1 have lined up in front of the student lockers in the cafeteria/commons area waiting for Liz, the elementary school principal and lunch monitor, to tell them to walk to the milk cooler, to get the flavor of milk they want, and then to walk to their assigned table to eat. While they wait, Liz walks up and down the lines talking in a quiet voice with the students. Liz, a para-educator, and the school custodian have placed lunch trays on the tables to allow more time during the 20 minute lunch period for the young students to eat. As students move to their lunch tables, Liz pats several students on the back or shoulder and says, “Butch, that will be fine.” “Tom, please remember to sit quietly.” And to another student, “Do you need help opening your milk?” As Liz monitors the lunch she is visibly “working the crowd” by walking between the tables, and occasionally stopping, and leaning over to quietly talk to

individual students. Liz sits down by a student and talks with her for a few moments before getting up to continue monitoring. Liz keeps a close eye on the students as they eat their lunches. The noise level in the cafeteria/commons area is not extreme, but not quiet either. The students are encouraged to talk with each other, the teachers or para-educators, or Liz in a “quiet” voice. Once in awhile, the noise level escalates, and when that happens, Liz walks over to the offending student/students and quietly signals for them to be quieter by placing a finger over her mouth as if to signal, “Shhhhh.” During the lunch period, Liz walks around the tables helping students who couldn’t get their milk carton open, dropped a napkin, or dropped a fork or spoon. When she assists the students, Liz talks in a quiet voice and often asks them about their day at school. Once in awhile Liz is approached by a teacher, para-educator, or another student with a question. Liz acknowledges the person and then steers that individual to a spot by the student lockers where they can visit quietly. During this conversation, Liz positions herself so she can still keep “an eye” on the students as they eat. The two talk quietly about the issue for a moment and then the person with the question leaves and Liz returns to her job of monitoring student lunch. One-by-one as the students finish eating; they gather their tray, utensils, milk carton, and napkin and carry the items to the cafeteria window, empty the leftovers and trash in the trashcan and place the tray on the shelf. Liz chats with them as they pass by her on the way to deposit their tray, utensils, and trash.

Liz is very visible at SRES. She talks with students and staff many times during the school day. Besides being visible in her school building throughout the course of a school day, Liz also collaborates with her teachers on student issues during collaboration time, staffing meetings, and when she is approached by a teacher in the hallway or in her office.

Instructional leadership. As the building leader, it is also important for the principal to be an instructional leader. Keeping informed of current, best practices in educational as well as the many managerial issues associated with the position, the principal's job can be very challenging – especially in a small, rural elementary school. Knowing that the principal is very supportive and knowledgeable of curriculum and behavioral supports, Susan, the special education teacher had this to say about Liz,

Liz is very proactive – having positive reinforcement in place – not to make everything negative, not to have kids that are failing, to have behavior systems in each classroom and that [these systems] are positive – not to have things taken away from the kids. She strives really hard to make a positive environment where kids are going to be successful, academically and behaviorally. She sets up academic programs too – like our reading incentive [program] - for kids to succeed. So it's not only going to be set up for the kids that are most capable are the ones who are always going to get the rewards. She really tries to have plans in place for everybody.

I observed Liz, the elementary principal, work with her teachers during collaboration time at school. This example illustrates how Liz is a team player and works with her staff during collaboration time to gain information, offer assistance, and discuss relevant issues,

Liz begins the collaboration meeting by saying, “I have a few things to say before you begin planning. Please give me suggestions that we may need to do to improve this process. This is our base year and improvements can be made.” She goes on to say, “We are so ahead of the game, [implementing the MTSS intervention model for all students] more so than other schools in our area. It is exciting for the 1st grade students and how they may be successful in the 3rd grade because of early intervening.” Liz continues, “I

know it is hard work for you and I appreciate it very much. It is working! I expect our student scores to reflect it again this year.” She concludes by asking, “Are you having difficulties in your small reading groups knowing which students are absent?” One teacher responds, “No.” Another says, “I’m not.” A different teacher replies, “I’m OK.” And one more responded, “I’m not having any trouble.” The teacher discussion turns to schedules, changes, clocks, and lesson plans. One teacher reminds the others, “Make sure you are on time to switch [between classes]. Everyone has a new clock. This is a reminder to follow the schedule.” One of the teachers responds, “Can we review the times to change classes?” A colleague answers the question by saying, “9:15 – 9:35 is spelling and 9:35 – 10:15 is reading.” The 4th grade teacher says, “The PE teacher comes at 10:15” The principal asks, “Is that what you need?”, “Are your lesson plans good?” and “Do you have everything you need?” All teachers reply that they have the lesson plans and materials they need for the small reading groups. The 4th grade teacher then comments, “I really need to have my kids out of intervention time at 2:45 so I can have time for language arts.” Another teacher responds, “Should we stop at 2:40, so the kids in the Title I room have time to get back to their classroom?” A different teacher replies, “That is OK with me.” And yet another teacher says, “I think so, OK.”

This vignette demonstrates the supportive, collaborative time when teachers have open communication between each other to discuss MTSS, resources, materials, instructional strategies, and scheduling issues. Collaboration time was scheduled bi-weekly by the building principal and helps set the tone for student learning at SRES by creating scheduled, uninterrupted time for teachers to work and plan together. During collaboration time, teachers receive assistance from Liz to create academic and positive behavior support programs plus the support

needed to adapt instructional strategies to meet the needs of every student attending SRES. In turn, the principal is aware of the concerns that teachers might have and is able to address them immediately.

Changing the Way Teachers Teach to Meet Student Needs

With the NCLB emphasis on all students in a school expected to achieve high academic standards in reading and math, teachers at Swan River Elementary School are changing their instructional methods to reach-and-teach every student in their classroom. Teachers are becoming more aware and knowledgeable about individual student achievement by analyzing student data from state assessments and other individual and group assessments given to students throughout the school year. They also use student data to guide their choice of evidence-based instructional strategies to use with students at SRES to meet identified academic needs. The 5th grade teacher, Sonya, added her view on how NCLB guidelines emphasizing student achievement on reading and math indicators has impacted her teaching,

[NCLB] has made me become more aware of what we really need to be teaching at the elementary school. Back years ago, we really didn't have any guidelines of what we were supposed to teach, so we taught what was in the textbooks. But now, we see specifically what every child needs. Every class in the state has to teach pretty much the same [standards].

A review of Swan River Elementary School state assessment data revealed that since the 2005-2006 school year, the students in grades 3 - 5 made adequate yearly progress (AYP) in reading and mathematics as determined by NCLB guidelines (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008b). The principal and faculty at SRES are pleased with their student test scores and consider these data to be important as well as student progress on DIBELS and MAP

assessments. Teachers also gather individual and group information from progress monitoring and daily assignments. They compile this assessment information and use it to make decisions when adopting research-validated curricular and instructional practices to use throughout school year with students in reading and mathematics classes. Two strategies that have facilitated instructional change at SRES are the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) and inclusive practices. The following sections elaborate on how they have contributed to instructional change at SRES.

Interventions and Instruction: MTSS. In a previous section on curriculum and intervention, I provided an overview of MTSS and explained in detail how MTSS is implemented at Swan River Elementary School. MTSS is the structure of reading instruction teachers use at SRES in grades K-5. To differentiate reading instruction for students at Swan River Elementary School, the principal and teachers took a holistic approach to meet the needs of all students.

With the structure of MTSS increasing reading instruction time, another important component of this intervention strategy is increased student engagement time with different teachers. With smaller reading groups, the teacher/student ratio is smaller and more one-on-one instruction can occur. The school principal, Liz, added her support of MTSS and small group instruction strategies by saying,

I would say that the biggest [change] is having our kids up and moving – they are not just stuck in a classroom all day. That has been a big change and a positive change. The kids like it - they are working with different teachers and different resources. In one room, they may have had this resource to use and in another room, they are using something else, and so I think it is just keeping it all new and exciting. [The students] are probably

learning the same skill, but obviously just another way of presenting it. There are more hand-on activities and less worksheets – obviously [the students] are going to have their little reading books, but you are not going to see worksheets anymore.

I observed small group reading instruction taught at the 4th and 5th grade level. After the spelling lesson, the students regrouped with their 4th grade peers to form smaller reading groups with their assigned teachers in several different locations throughout the school. The two classrooms were used as well as the cafeteria tables, the school library, and the Title I classroom. The students were observed to be actively engaged with the reading lessons as teachers gave reading instructions, offered encouraging words, and made supportive gestures.

The following example illustrates how students were engaged in their learning during one Tier II reading lesson with a small reading group receiving reading instruction led by Susan, the special education teacher, who is also the reading intervention teacher for a group of 11 students. This reading class is the highest reading group of the four reading groups made up of 4th and 5th grade readers with the majority being regular education students. However, there are three students with disabilities included in this Tier II reading group. This pre-teaching game-like activity was designed to reinforce existing skills as a review of the details from a story the class read earlier in the week. The day before, the students finished reading a collection of four short stories combined in a book titled *Animals have Emotions*. This collection of short stories was a representative sampling of an author's purpose on persuasion, and the teacher planned to review with the students the author's purpose as demonstrated in this group of short stories.

At the beginning of the class, the students ask Susan if they can play the story recall activity with her “squishy” objects. Susan says “Sure,” to the students and sends one student to her classroom to retrieve the “squishy” objects. When he returns, Susan leads

the group in a recall activity on persuasion and author's purpose using the "squishy" objects, which are small, soft, nerf-like items representing "W" words of who, what, when, where, and why. Susan arranges the students in a circle and reviews the directions for the game. She explains, "All eyes on me as I explain the rules of the game. I will randomly toss one object at a time to a student. When you catch the object, tell me what "squishy" object you have, what does it represent, and I will ask you a "W" question from the story and you reply." The students are fidgety during the game, but are also paying attention. Susan tosses a squishy object, a student catches it, and then responds to a question Susan poses about the "W" word written on the object. Tommy catches the object shaped like a hammer, and Susan asks him a "why" question, "Why did you think the mother waited until his feet got better?" Tommy pauses and thinks for a moment. His classmates are also thinking back to the story and try to recall the answer. With guidance from Susan, Tommy softly responds with an answer I cannot make out. Susan says, "Right." Susan proceeds with the game by tossing a squishy object in the shape of a wheel and asking a "when" question to the student that catches it. Susan and the class play this toss and answer the "W" questions so every student has an opportunity to participate.

The example above illustrates a Tier II reading group activity where students are grouped together according to reading ability and receive reading instruction supported by supplemental reading materials and strategies. Two levels (Tier I and Tier II) of reading instruction meet the reading needs of the majority of students, but for a few students more reading instruction is still needed. Students identified as needing more intensive reading support receive additional time for targeted reading instruction later in the school day – Tier III.

A Tier III class is designed to provide reading support to students who are struggling in reading and need additional reading instruction beyond Tier I and Tier II. Many times Tier III is considered “pull out” time for reading for students with identified reading disabilities to receive individualized reading instruction in the resource room setting. Also, students identified to receive Title I reading services are supported during this additional time. This intensive reading instruction is taught in a more one-on-one setting to target specific skills. The following illustrates the structure and design of a small Tier III reading group.

Every afternoon for 30 minutes, the Title I and special education teacher each work with individual students struggling in reading in small groups – one-on-one, or one-on-two or three. No Tier III reading group is any larger than this and the students are “pulled” from their regular education classrooms during this time. Teachers use manipulatives and computer generated software programs to customize the reading lesson to meet individual student needs to reinforce reading skills the students have not mastered from previous years of reading instruction. This time is described by Susan, the special education teacher, as time to help “fill in the gaps” of the reading skills students are lacking. The teachers look at individual student data from various sources (DIBELS scores, MAP scores, state assessment data, daily work, and phonemic awareness probes) to guide the selection of reading materials and instructional methods to use. The teachers target the five specific skills reading skills - phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension as well as document student progress on each student’s progress and retention of these skills (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a).

In addition to small group reading instruction, during the 2008-2009 school year teachers in the 2nd and 3rd grades also implemented MTSS strategies in mathematics. Liz, the school principal supported this change of instructional strategies in math as well as reading,

In grades 2 and 3 [the teachers] are actually doing some ability grouping in math...small steps in math, but we are doing it this year. With one more year into this, we will be doing it in reading and math, K-5.

To meet the academic needs of all students, teachers at SRES changed the way they taught reading by implementing a system-wide reading intervention program at all grade levels. In addition, other intervention programs are available for students for more intensive skill practice during the school day.

Inclusive practices. Swan River Elementary School is a highly inclusive school as more special education students are receiving their entire educational program in the regular education classroom instead of in a separate special education classroom. Consequently, special education teachers as well as regular education teachers are changing their teaching methods. The special education teacher, Susan, gave insight regarding this change and its affect on how and where students with disabilities are receiving special education services,

I think we have definitely taken more time and effort to really look at the skills that are missing, to get [students receiving special education services] into part of the regular education curriculum. You know, that has been a huge thing. We have never really worried as much about the regular education curriculum to some degree, depending on the student. I am going to say that 95% of our students are in the regular education curriculum most of the time, which is a huge thing. There is just that very tiny few that have bigger problems that cannot be addressed that way. I think that learning to work within the system has been a process for all of us, but I do fundamentally believe that is why special education kids are doing better too. There is not that easy temptation and

sometimes pressure from the general education teachers to pull them out. I really think that in the past that happened a lot. That just isn't an option anymore.

I observed students with disabilities included with their peers in classroom lessons for spelling, language arts, and small group reading. As I was observing the lessons, I could not tell which students were receiving special education services. All students were participating in the lesson, engaged in the activities, and equally asked the teachers questions or for assistance. Taken during one observation of a language arts class the following excerpt gives the reader an example of inclusive practices at SRES. Susan, the special education teacher, is leading the lesson and Sonya, the regular education teacher monitors the students and provides support to Susan as needed.

During the language arts lesson in the 5th grade classroom, all students, including students with disabilities, have their own Rainbowing notebook, the day's assignment, and colored pencils to use as they diagram sentences with Susan leading the lesson. The day's assignment uses sentences taken from the week's reading assignment. The students are to diagram the sentences and discuss word usage with the teachers and each other. Susan uses the overhead projector to project the 1st sentence on the white board. She begins the lesson by asking the students to look at the 1st sentence of the assignment. Susan starts the diagramming discussion with the students and Sonya, her co-teacher. Sonya walks around the classroom between student desks and gently directs students to pages in the Rainbowing notebook, pats them on the back or shoulder to help them stay on task, and interjects supportive statements while Susan leads the lesson and discussion with the students. Susan poses the question, "What color do we begin with?" The students respond in unison, "Yellow." Susan asks another question, "What concept does the color yellow

represent?” Students again respond in unison, “A bridge.” Susan probes, “Do you see any bridges in this sentence?” Students respond this time with less certainty, “Yes.” “No.” “Maybe.” Susan queries, “Is a comma a bridge?” and “Where would we find this information?” She goes on to instruct the students, “On the yellow page in your Rainbowing notebook. Everyone look at the yellow page. What does it say?” This type of questioning and guiding student discussion over diagramming sentences continued for several sentences and was all-inclusive, as both teachers and all students joined in the discussion. After the group activity, the students each wrote a sentence and diagrammed it on their own. At this point in the lesson, both teachers, Susan and Sonya, monitor the students and when students raise their hands for assistance, one of the teachers would talk them through the diagramming sentence process.

After observing this lesson, the discussion was as much about sentence structure and word usage as it was about the parts of speech. I could not identify which students were students with disabilities, or who typically received extra help, or that the instruction was differentiated when the regular education co-teacher or both teachers were monitoring the class. All students participated in the lesson.

Another example taken from field notes during one observation illustrates how teaching occurs for students with disabilities included with their peers in Tier II small group reading instruction. The structure of MTSS for reading combines students with disabilities and regular education students in small reading groups according to their skill level in reading so the lessons are differentiated to meet the needs of the small reading group.

During this lesson on reading comprehension, Susan, the special education teacher, has regular education students and students with disabilities work together in a tier II reading

group. Today, the group works on a written summary of the story by first completing a graphic organizer to use as they write their summary. Ten of the 11 students sit in two groups of five, with one girl sitting at a desk by herself in the 5th grade classroom. There are normally 12 students in the class, but one student is absent today. This tier II small reading class has a student make-up of three students being identified students with disabilities and the other nine are regular education students. After handing each student their blue reading folder, Susan asks, “Did you complete yesterday’s activity of writing the summary for the story that was read earlier in the week?” Many of the students answer, “No,” and ask to work on it today. “First,” says Susan, “we need to review the ‘W’ words.” Susan is making a point to use terminology the students will see as they answer test questions. She writes the words who, what, when, where, and why on the white board at the front of the room. After writing the word “where,” she asks, “What is another word for where?” The students answer in unison, “Setting.” “Right,” affirms the teacher, “and remember to use these words when summarizing the story.” As they first work on their graphic organizers, Susan guides the entire class through some examples of what possible answers can/will be. After a few examples, the students work on their individual summaries and Susan monitors by walking between the groups and helping individual students with wording and asking them clarification questions when they appear to be struggling with answers.

This tier II reading group of 12 students, regular education students and those with disabilities were engaged in the lesson and regularly asked Susan questions. Each week the reading lessons are structured for the students to read a story and work through different reading, vocabulary, and writing activities based on the story.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in whole group and small group instruction with their peers enables SRES teachers to take on a new perspective on how students learn best. Teachers have learned to adjust their instructional styles and methods to differentiate lessons to meet individual student needs by teaching reading tier I, II, and III reading groups. With changes in instructional strategies also comes a need for teachers to change the structure of their planning time during the school day with less individual planning time and more emphasis on working together in planning teams.

Collaboration

When Swan River Elementary School was established in 2005, Liz, the building principal, believed the timing was right to make the move from a school environment where teachers worked in isolation to a more supportive environment that promoted collaboration between teachers. She made it her priority to help create an inclusive and supportive setting for teachers as well as students. One way was to create collaboration opportunities for teachers. Besides the typical faculty meeting structure, the SRES principal searched to find other ways to increase sharing of knowledge between teachers. She had already created the Student Improvement Team (SIT), which involved a few teachers sharing ideas on a regular basis, but did not involve everyone. Liz considered SIT a start, but wanted more collaboration time built into the schedule since the teachers had adopted MTSS as a reading intervention program for all students at SRES.

MTSS requires much planning by the teachers for successful implementation. Because the structural design of MTSS at SRES combines two grade levels for small group instruction, it was essential for teacher planning time to be collaborative rather than individualized. At the beginning of the 2008 school year, Liz finally created time during the school day for

collaboration between teachers. Kindergarten and 1st grade teachers meet for one hour every other Friday for their collaboration time. Then teachers in grades 2 and 3 have collaboration time for one hour and finally teachers in grades 4 and 5 have their collaboration time. So every other Friday for three hours, collaboration time for teachers at SRES was scheduled. To lend their expertise and support to the regular education teachers, Title I and special education teachers attend all collaboration meetings to share their knowledge on instructional strategies and to give insight to the regular education teachers on methods to differentiate lessons.

Throughout the school year to support MTSS in reading in the elementary school, the teachers use their bi-weekly collaboration time to plan reading instruction and lessons, review student test scores and progress, and gather resources. The special education teacher, Susan, shared her thoughts about the importance of collaboration time due to the efforts required to implement MTSS as a school-wide student intervention program,

At collaboration time, the teachers meet and discuss test scores – any recent testing that may have been done – discussing progress monitoring for reading groups, our intervention times that are also started, and looking at what skills we need to touch on for intervention. And we do that by looking back at, for example, state assessments from last year and our weaknesses.

Seeing the benefit of collaboration time for all teachers, Liz, the building principal expressed her support for this planning opportunity for all teachers,

Teachers need training and they need time to make all this happen – that is a big piece of it. This is our first year to do the collaboration time in school and I am anxious to see how it plays out. How much more can we get done by having time to plan?

With the increased emphasis in education by NCLB for all students to have academic success, to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes, and to implement MTSS, teachers need more planning time to develop reading lessons for their students.

Collaboration time is seen as beneficial for teachers to plan differentiated lessons, and Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, explains what it means to her,

Collaboration time is when you have set aside time besides your regular planning time and you get to work with other teachers – the ones that [also] work with your kids. [We] plan [lessons] for the next week or so and really look at what skills the students really need to work on. [We] plan where we are going to get our ideas and work together so everybody does the same topic or theme but create different lessons.

Susan, the special education teacher, also believes the scheduled collaboration time is worthwhile. She described what they accomplish during this time,

We are in the collaboration process so we know going in what concepts we are going to be working on and what materials we have to work with. We are professionals and know enough about the subjects to be able to introduce them to the kids. I am doing more remediation and helping teachers in general education because I have had so much more experience with it. I am providing a lot more input into what the kids who are not placed in special education are doing in the curriculum.

I observed a collaboration team consisting of the 5th grade teacher, special education teacher, Title I reading teacher, 4th grade teacher, and elementary school principal sharing ideas during collaboration time. The following example illustrates how staff uses the collaboration time.

At 2:15 p.m. on a Friday afternoon in the teacher workroom, five staff members, the 5th grade teacher, the 4th grade teacher, the Title I teacher, the special education teacher, and the elementary school principal, sit around two oblong tables pushed together to make a larger, square table. Snacks and memos are scattered in the middle of the table. After some casual conversation between them as they settle in, the teachers begin working together on small reading group instruction methods, materials, and student progress. Each teacher has brought information from the students they taught in their MTSS small reading group. The information was obtained using continuous running records from the previous two-week reading instruction period. The special education teacher has brought a folder containing 4th and 5th grade student information from the last state reading assessment, MAP test, and DIBELS scores. As they work together, teachers first discuss a specific student, Robert, then all students, and when to implement different concepts, practice and programs. The teachers are engaged in relevant, meaningful discussion on specific information pertaining to the reading groups. The teachers discussed students' writing responses on reading comprehension probes and problems specific students are having. One teacher shared, "I'm still seeing students, for example, Robert, do reversals when writing," In another class on a written assignment, the teacher of that class replied, "Robert was using strategies we taught him to try to remember how to write b's and d's." The 4th grade teacher added, "Other 4th graders are too." The 5th grade teacher then commented about another student's difficulty when responding to written questions, "Cindy cannot transfer information from the question in the answer." And another teacher agreed, "I have noticed many of the students are having difficulty answering questions by writing sentences. They want to write short answers in a word or two." One

teacher, who appeared to be processing this information, spoke up and suggested, “In RTI time, perhaps we need to spend one day per week on writing activities.” A teacher agreed and said, “We all need to have the students work on writing answers to questions.” Then the 4th grade teacher shared her thoughts, “Now that we have the laptops and a wireless connection, I want to use them during reading intervention time using Study Island¹.”

The conversation shifted at this point to questions on how to access Study Island with one teacher asking, “Do you remember your password for Study Island?” Her colleagues responded with a “Yes,” and told her how the passwords were set up. The special education teacher then asked, “When are we going to begin practicing for the state assessments?” The 4th grade teacher replied, “We can use the laptops for this also.” The Title I teacher added, “We need to schedule to use the laptops at our end of the building.” Then the special education teacher added, “We can also do Kidspiration activities using the laptops.” This style of dialogue between the teachers continued for the remainder of the collaboration time as they discussed student information, different reading materials, and strategies they used when the school bell rang to indicate the school day was over.

Teachers value collaboration time at SRES. The inclusive environment at Swan River Elementary School promotes cooperation between teachers with scheduled collaboration time for all teachers that fosters teamwork between them. Besides scheduling collaboration opportunities between teachers to support MTSS intervention strategies, SRES embraces the teacher collaboration strategy of co-teaching to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes. Currently, the regular education fifth grade teacher, Sonya, and the special education teacher, Susan, have paired up to co-teach reading and language arts concepts

¹ Study Island is a web-based resource purchased by SRES for reading and mathematics review.

to all students in the fifth grade classroom where students with disabilities are included. This co-teaching model has been implemented as a student support and intervention program to help all students meet success in the reading and language arts curriculum for three years, beginning with the 2005-2006 school year.

Evolution of Co-teaching at Swan River Elementary School

For many years in the Swan River School District during the 1970s and 1980s, special education practices primarily consisted of pullout remedial programs for students receiving services. During this time, very little correspondence between special education and regular education teachers existed. Then in the 1990s influenced by the special education reform movement called inclusion, students receiving special education services began spending more instructional time in regular education classrooms and less time in pullout classes taught in a separate resource room. With increased emphasis on inclusion at SRES, the regular education teacher and the special education teacher began corresponding with each other to discuss instructional strategies and academic modifications needed to support special education student academic and behavioral needs in the regular education classroom. Susan, the special education teacher, described that initially this correspondence generally took place in passing between classes in the hallways with no formal planning time scheduled between the two teachers.

The collaborative partnership between the regular education 5th grade teacher and the special education teacher was beginning to take shape, but still had a hurdle to overcome. Two different educational entities employed these teachers who were expected to and wanted to work together. Susan, the special education teacher, was employed by Frage Education Cooperative and placed to teach special education in the Swan River School District where Sonya, the regular education teacher, was employed by USD 1120 to teach elementary school. This difference of

employment entities could be considered a barrier and a difficult arrangement to manage, but due to the efforts of the Frage Education Cooperative, the Swan River School District, and the elementary school principal to support inclusion and collaborative efforts between the two teachers, a working relationship between Susan and Sonya slowly developed.

In the 2000s after several years of implementing inclusive practices, Susan, the special education teacher and Sonya, the 5th grade teacher at Swan River Elementary School, began exploring options for how they might take inclusion to another level for 5th grade students. After experiencing a year of class-within-a-class support with one special education student, the two teachers toyed with the idea of co-teaching. Susan, the special education teacher at Swan River Elementary School explains how co-teaching with Sonya evolved,

About three years ago [during the 2004-2005 school year], I was in her classroom a lot because I had a student that was in a functional curriculum – a modified curriculum. Because of that, I spent a lot of time in that classroom. I didn't want to pull him out [to receive special education services]. I wanted him to be able to stay in [the classroom] so I placed myself in there. I felt like I could facilitate better and easier than a para could. And it really evolved from that – that we were together and we spent time together. It was a natural progression I think.

The building principal added her comment about how the co-teaching partnership evolved,

It started out...probably with Susan...she has had a lot more training with collaboration, RTI, and [interventions]. She has had much more training. Sonya was very accepting of the concept and the idea. So they truly started together more so because Sonya was accepting of that and said, "Hey, let's try it."

Beginning with the 2005 school year at Swan River Elementary School, in an inclusive school environment for teachers and students, these two teachers have developed a co-teaching partnership that is supportive and successful.

Co-teaching in the Fifth Grade Classroom

I observed Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, and Susan, the special education teacher, co-teaching spelling and language arts lessons in the 5th grade classroom to all students – regular education and students with disabilities. The 5th grade class for the 2008-2009 school year has 15 students, with three being identified as students with disabilities. The classroom was arranged so student desks were positioned in groups of four or five.

During a review over spelling words in the 5th grade classroom, at the front of the classroom, Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, is instructing the spelling lesson using the overhead projector, while Susan, the special education teacher, walks quietly around the classroom monitoring student on-task behavior, redirecting students as needed, and offering supportive comments to help clarify a spelling question. The teachers trade roles at the beginning of the language arts lesson and Susan, the special education teacher, teaches the lesson while Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, monitors the classroom and provides support to the students and to her co-teacher. After the spelling lesson is completed, the students engage in independent seatwork or work together in small groups and both teachers monitor the classroom. The students seem to be receptive to both teachers, as they ask both teachers questions, and do not appear to favor one teacher over the other.

If you did not know the 5th grade teacher or the special education teacher, you would be unable to tell from the behavior displayed by the students and the teachers. Their roles appeared to be

more fluid than fixed as they shared teaching and classroom management duties and shifted back and forth between leading and supporting the lesson.

Sonya and Susan developed their co-teaching partnership to provide in-class support for all students. They both saw student need and willingly entered into a co-teaching partnership to create a regular education classroom setting where special education students were included and would receive the majority of their special education services. Both teachers shared their desire for every child to be successful in this regular education classroom where it is essential to teach differentiated lessons to meet the academic needs of students. The following sections will review the co-teaching pair's view on their relationship, teacher growth and collaboration, impact on student learning, and the importance of professional development.

Co-teaching Relationship

The two teachers view their co-teaching partnership as an effective educational strategy to provide academic instruction to meet the needs of all students in the classroom. Susan and Sonya are very comfortable in this setting, in part because they have taught together in the same school building for 12 years; first, in their own rooms as they followed the traditional pattern of separate special education and regular education, then as partners in education as co-teachers when the regular 5th grade classroom became more inclusive when it was reconstituted as a K-5 building in 2005. Since 2006, they have been co-teaching together and have developed fluid and seamless transitions as they move in and out of roles as the instructor and monitor during the lesson. At other times, the two are instructing the class together by lending support and providing clarification to concepts being taught. Then when it comes to small group work or independent seatwork, they both provide assistance to students as they monitor the classroom. Susan, the special education teacher, describes their relationship as being “melded all together.”

Through the years, the two teachers gained respect for each other, nurtured a working relationship, and now see co-teaching together as an expected development in their relationship. This bond was initially fostered as they collaborated on instructional activities and strategies for special education students included Sonya's regular education classroom. Then their collaborative relationship moved to the co-teaching level because they were open to each other's ideas and trusted each other. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, sees co-teaching with the special education teacher as part of a natural progression because inclusion of special education students into regular education classrooms has been an educational practice at Swan River for many years by saying,

I think this is our 12th year that we have been together in the same building. She has been in my classroom off and on for many years, but actually for co-teaching this is probably the 3rd year of actually doing the teaching together. We've worked together [long] enough it is just easy for us to do [co-teaching]. We have gone to the same workshops together so we know what needs to be covered. We have been to [Rainbowing] two or three times together. This summer we went to the workshops together. We just get together and collaborate.

The special education teacher, Susan, supported her co-teaching colleague by describing her perception of their relationship, "I would describe it in a very positive way. [Co-teaching] is something I enjoy and to my knowledge Sonya enjoys it too. I think we work well together." Besides being viewed as a natural progression in their relationship, the teachers believe the inclusive school environment at SRES fostered the development of their co-teaching relationship.

Teamwork between teachers is promoted in the inclusive, supportive educational setting at Swan River Elementary School where Liz, the principal, is viewed by Susan, the special education teacher, as providing the support and training needed to facilitate a co-teaching partnership in the 5th grade classroom. She shared this observation, “Really as far as direct support, she encourages [co-teaching]. I think she appreciates that we do have a [co-teaching] relationship and supports us in many ways, especially in the [Rainbowing] training aspect.”

Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, added,

[The principal] provides all the support I need. She is very open to letting us [co-teach] and have [collaborative] planning time. When we set our schedules, we set them so Susan can be in my classroom. She could have been someplace else, but she is in my classroom.

Collaborating with another adult can be trying for some, but these two teachers have found a way to make it work. Because they are so familiar with each other, a feeling of trust has been nurtured through the years and working together as a team seemed to be a natural fit for them as they provide reading, spelling, and language arts instruction to all students in the 5th grade classroom. Susan, the special education teacher, describes how Sonya is accepting of her being in the 5th grade classroom,

You have to be able to let go of any territorial things. I never feel like [I don't belong] when I am in her classroom – that she doesn't want me there – that she resents my presence. I always feel like she appreciates what I bring to the relationship and also to the kids. There cannot be any power issues or anything like that going on. You have to go into it knowing what we are doing is best for the kids. That has to be the most important mindset until you get to the point that you are able to let go and share – you just have to be able to play nice and share.

A high level of comfort between the two teachers was evident as I observed the co-teachers at ease as they taught spelling and language arts curriculum to the 5th grade students. One example taken from one spelling/language arts lesson illustrates their co-teaching relationship in the example below.

During a language arts lesson, the co-teachers support each other during the lesson by leading guiding questions and asking each other for their input. At one point, Susan asked for input from Sonya, “Sonya, what do you think?” “Do you have an example to share?” At a later time during the same lesson, Sonya would support her co-worker by asking, “What part of speech do you think this word is as it is used in this sentence?” and “Susan, can you help us with this objective?”

The two teachers developed a working relationship through their years of teaching together as a regular education teacher and a special education teacher. They both expressed respect and gratitude towards each other and enjoy this opportunity at SRES to co-teach together.

Co-teaching Influences Teacher Growth and Collaboration

When two highly educated and trained teachers co-teach together in the regular education classroom, there is an opportunity for teachers to learn from each other. The regular education teacher has curriculum scope and sequence knowledge and the special education teacher has expertise in individual student learning needs and specific instructional and behavioral intervention strategies. With the inclusion of special education students in the 5th grade classroom, this co-teaching arrangement set the stage for these two teachers to learn from each other as they collaborate to plan reading and language arts lessons for all 5th grade students. The building principal commented on the opportunity for teacher growth in a co-teaching partnership by saying,

Oh definitely, both of them [have grown professionally]. I would assume each of them would make that same comment if asked. I think both of them have – the opportunity to learn more about the different levels of kids. I think Sonya has picked up a lot more about special education and how to deal with those lower level kids where Susan enjoys the flip side of that too when just sharing knowledge with the other kids. It has been very good for both of the teachers.

The special education teacher, Susan, believes this co-teaching partnership is a very positive arrangement for both teachers to have professional growth opportunities. Her comment supported that of the building principal as she shared the following commentary about her experience as a co-teacher, “This has definitely been a very positive experience. It gives you a different perspective. As we start getting into the general education classroom more – I think it has helped me grow as a professional to have this experience.” Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, acknowledges individual professional growth was a product of this co-teaching partnership and their collaboration time together. But also through the years a sense of trust was built between them as they learned from each other, which was evident when Sonya shared,

You know, I think we have worked so long together that we know each other and we know what we need to cover. I think it is our personalities and how we can be open and just talk with each other. I don’t know that I could co-teach with every teacher in the school because I haven’t worked with them that much. I think that Susan and I have worked together for so long that we just know each other, shoot ideas off each other – that’ll work and go with it.

Besides having time during the school day to collaborate, through the years the two teachers had opportunities to nurture their relationship by attending workshops together. Sonya,

the 5th grade teacher, gave an explanation that the two of them first considering co-teaching together at a Rainbowing workshop they both attended in 2006 and then again in 2007. They both recognized the structure of the Rainbowing program supported team teaching. This realization prompted them to enter into a co-teaching partnership in the 5th grade classroom setting where special education students are included.

This past summer, for the first time, collaboration time for teachers was scheduled. This allowed the co-teachers time to work together and analyze student test data from state assessments, MAP, and DIBELS for the 5th grade students they will be teaching during the 2008-09 school year. They then used these data to pinpoint specific skills [indicators] that needed to be addressed during reading and mathematics instruction. The co-teachers worked together as a team as they analyzed group and individual student data. Susan and Sonya were then able to use their analysis to analyze their current curriculum and gather additional supplemental resources that targeted the identified skills. Because student academic needs in the 5th grade classroom are diverse, collaboration between the co-teachers is necessary so they can be as prepared as they possibly can. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, mentioned this summer collaboration time with her colleagues as being well planned and very worthwhile as she stated, “We all work together during the summer. We worked for 3 or 4 days together. We went through [state standards] we needed to cover. We really looked to make sure that everything that needed to be taught was taught.” The two teachers consider their co-teaching partnership to be successful because students in the 5th grade continue to achieve high standards in reading and mathematics and meet AYP guidelines as set by NCLB. Through analysis of individual student test scores, classroom curriculum, and specific academic skills, and through observing increased student engagement, the teachers believe their co-teaching partnership has positively affected student learning.

Co-teaching Affects Student Learning, Engagement, and Collaboration

When two highly qualified teachers with complementary sets of skills and areas of expertise co-teach in the same classroom, instruction moves to a higher level. The regular education teacher has the content knowledge while the special education teacher specializes in intervention strategies, modifications, and accommodations. Because of these combined teacher skills, the ability to reach and teach more students is possible in the regular education classroom setting. Susan, the special education teacher, supports her belief with this comment about increased teacher assistance for students, “I think having two teachers, two professionals, two people that are highly trained really makes a big difference on the success of the students.”

Sonya and Susan believe the students in the 5th grade classroom are comfortable with two teachers in the classroom and appear to like both teachers guiding instruction and monitoring them as they complete assignments. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, expressed her perceptions the 5th grade students have about them,

I think they like it. I don't think they even realize what we are doing. I think that she has been in my classroom so often that it doesn't really matter [to the students] who is up in front of the class giving instruction. And it's just not the special education students asking Susan questions. It is everybody.

Besides being comfortable with two teachers in the classroom, the students have academic needs the teachers need to address as well.

Differentiating a lesson can be challenging and time consuming for one teacher to do alone. When a regular education teacher and a special education teacher collaborate, they utilize the strengths of both teachers to create differentiated lessons to meet the academic needs of all students. Susan, the special education teacher reinforced the benefit of having two teachers

differentiate lessons by saying, “It is a benefit from our experience and our education. Instead of just bringing one little piece of information in, we are bringing in two pieces of information and putting them together to, hopefully make one big piece.” The school principal shares her thoughts on the importance of differentiating lessons,

I guess the biggest piece they had to look at to do differently is to differentiate the lesson – that was the biggest piece of it. I don’t know much about how they changed their instruction, but I think having so many different [academic] levels [in the classroom] as we do now, it is so important that the teachers make those changes; whether they are working with another teacher or whether they are working with the special education teacher or within their reading groups.

The effects of co-teaching on student learning are measured at Swan River Elementary School through a process of continuous progress monitoring and testing probes. Continuous progress monitoring using DIBELS and running records to document individual student reading data are done on a weekly basis and is given to students in grades K-5. MAP testing is given to students in grades 3 – 5 and is completed three times a year – beginning, middle, and end. State assessments in reading and mathematics are given to students in grades 3 – 5 during the months of February and March each school year. Teachers analyze both individual and whole class data and then use these data to design lessons and different strategies to meet individual student needs. Because SRES tests student achievement on a regular schedule during the course of the year, the co-teachers in the 5th grade classroom are able to use assessment data to continuously monitor student achievement and make adjustments as needed. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, noted testing data drives the instruction at SRES and explained how teachers “use the testing data – DIBELS, MAP, state assessments, running records, fluency tests, and others. We take

[student] information and go from there to see what [the students] need to work on.” Because they pay close attention to student data and know how to interpret it in order to inform, classroom, small group, and individual student instruction, the co-teachers are better able to meet individual student needs.

Swan River Elementary School 5th grade students have made a great deal of progress in raising their level of reading and mathematics achievement as measured on yearly state assessments. This progress can be attributed, in part, to the inclusion of special education students in the regular education classroom, but also because of the co-teaching partnership in the 5th grade classroom. Having two highly qualified teachers willing to change how they taught in order to provide differentiated instruction and interventions helped meet the individual needs of the diverse student population. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, shared, “The reading and language arts lessons are much different than what I did five years ago. It was tough the first couple of years to do that, but it worked. The results show that it worked.”

Another outcome of having two teachers co-teaching in the 5th grade classroom is increased student engagement in learning. While one teacher is guiding instruction, the other teacher helps students stay on task by walking around the classroom encouraging student participation. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, made this comment about having a co-teacher in the classroom,

It is much easier now with Susan and me both teaching. If we have a student off task, then we can just walk and stand by that student. It is just easier since we have another adult to walk around the room, monitor, and give feedback to me or to the students.

Susan, the special education teacher, reinforced what Sonya said by sharing, “And yes, we do have that opportunity – when one is giving group instruction, the other can be focusing on the students and really give more time to those that are struggling and just not doing as well.”

The co-teachers believe that special education students at Swan River Elementary School are having academic success because they are included with their peers in the 5th grade classroom. Susan expressed her pleasure that the special education students are “holding their own” with the regular education students and are “working independently.” Sonya also conveyed her thoughts on the inclusion of special education students in her classroom by adding; “I want [special education students] to stay in the classroom for an extended period of time.” To help keep all students on task during lessons, both teachers expressed that having two teachers in the 5th grade classroom is very helpful since several students have difficulties focusing on the task at hand. Having a second teacher in the classroom assisting with individual student on-task behaviors makes it easier for both teachers. Another example of the co-teachers working together is explained in the following narrative taken from an observation of a language arts lesson.

Susan, the special education teacher leads the class in diagramming sentences from this week’s reading materials using the overhead projector, while her co-teacher, Sonya, monitors the classroom. Susan, instructing the class uses sentences typed on a piece of transparency film and overhead colored markers guides the lesson on diagramming sentences. Even though the classroom is equipped with a computer attached to an LCD projector mounted on the ceiling, the teachers prefer using an overhead projector because it allows them to use colored markers. Each student is passed a printed copy of the sentences and a set of markers. The students are instructed to follow along with the teacher and mark the sentences with her as they work through the diagramming process

used during guided group discussion led by Susan. She asks probing questions, and asks for students to volunteer input when diagramming the sentences word by word. After a word is identified, Susan checks the rest of the class for understanding by asking a guiding question. She also asks for clarification on why a particular word was selected for an identified part of speech. This portion of the 5th grade language arts class is structured with one co-teacher, Susan, modeling and leading the discussion and the second co-teacher, Sonya, monitoring the classroom and giving input as needed to support the group discussion. After guiding a whole class discussion on diagramming four sentences, the students are instructed to diagram four sentences by themselves and to raise their hand if they want a teacher to come provide assistance. As the students began diagramming, both co-teachers proceed to walk around the student desks and monitor the classroom during this individual practice and answer student questions. Both teachers enter into discussions with students and guide the conversation with them as they diagram the sentences. After several minutes, the class comes back together and they diagram the four sentences as a group with Susan guiding the discussion on diagramming rules as they work through each sentence on the overhead projector and Sonya returning to the monitor and support co-teacher role.

The co-teachers have developed an effective partnership that works in the 5th grade classroom as they co-teach the language arts lessons. The collaboration skills the co-teachers demonstrate model appropriate social skills for students.

Students in the 5th grade at Swan River Elementary School also learn about collaboration skills because they are in a school where adults model collaboration and they are in a classroom where they see two teachers collaborate on a daily basis. Having two teachers model cooperative

behaviors is a natural way to present the concepts and a benefit for students. Susan, the special education teacher, sees the students picking up on collaboration skills and had this to say,

For one thing, I think the students kind of understand the way the two of us work together. The activities we are doing, specifically the Rainbowing and the grammar lend themselves to discussion – it is not a finite thing – there is not a definite answer [sometimes]. Some things are hard and they are hard for us as well as the kids. We are able to show this is how you give and take and work on something. I think it has helped them to be able to problem-solve a little better because they see us problem-solve together. The students are able to participate in our discussion even though it may start off with just the two adults, they are able to offer insight and share too. This is a good thing.

A co-teaching team has many opportunities during a school day to model appropriate collaboration skills as well as help structure on-task behavior for students. In addition, establishing a working relationship where both teachers feel supported by each other also promotes a structure for teacher growth and collaboration opportunities, which are described in the next section.

Collaborative Professional Development Activities

Professional development for these co-teachers has given them insight into knowledge of evidence-based practices in education that focus on improving academic outcomes in reading and mathematics for all students attending Swan River Elementary School. Attending professional development activities together provides them a common knowledge base of educational practices and instructional strategies to work from. They talk the same language as they prepare lessons together. Otherwise, the two teachers may operate from two different points

of view. Attending professional development activities together gives the two teachers time to collaborate while at the workshops or in-services. Collaborating with each other to construct a common knowledge base creates a foundation on which to build their co-teaching partnership.

SRES schedules in-service activities that are supported by research and selected because of their relevance to yearly school goals the school staff set. These goals are based on student data gathered throughout the school year and identified as in-service topics to address. For the past three years, educators from SRES have attended several in-service days planned by school administration. In addition to these scheduled in-service days, teachers strategically attend in-service activities related to their teaching assignment or instructional area he/she designated as a personal professional development goal to study more in depth.

The co-teachers have already discussed attending Rainbowing workshops together and how this led to a co-teaching partnership in the first place. Attending several workshops together set the stage for them to network and develop strategies and materials plus gather resources to use in their classrooms. Sonya, the 5th grade teacher, expressed the importance of attending workshops together as being, “very beneficial.” Susan, the special education teacher, agreed and added,

We have been to a lot of trainings together throughout the years. We have almost made it a point [to attend together]. For three summers now; we have gone to the same trainings and workshops and that is encouraged by Liz.

Other workshops the co-teachers attended together covered the topics of small group reading instruction, mathematics strategies, and data analysis. Both teachers expressed attendance at these workshops together helped them be more comfortable in stepping into the co-teaching partnership because they learned curriculum initiatives as a teaching team. This experience also

provided the knowledge base they use when planning lessons and identifying strategies to use in the reading/language arts class they co-taught. “Easier,” “being on the same page,” and “talking the same language,” were descriptors the co-teachers used to describe what they learned from shared professional development activities. To create this inclusive classroom environment where the co-teachers were so at ease, both teachers expressed appreciation and credited the building principal with having the vision to make relevant professional development activities happen.

A unique finding of this study was the fact that the building principal, Liz, attended many of the same in-services and workshops as her teachers, which has solidified a bond between her and the co-teachers. She learned the same strategies as Sonya and Susan so she could walk-the-talk with them, participate in collaboration time to share ideas, provide support, and relate to parents in discussions on curriculum. Liz, expressed the importance of attending professional development activities with her staff,

Yes, I think [attending in-services] was a big help...and I, myself, as an administrator think it is great. I attended all these workshops and all those [summer planning] days with them. I put myself as a member of that team as well. I think that it is important for me to see it as well. It was just one of my top priorities to become very involved in the curriculum and know more about it. And I know that at the elementary level, parents ask more about it as opposed to junior high parents, so just being able to have that knowledge to talk to parents I think is important.

Professional development activities are a key ingredient in helping school staff learn effective teaching strategies and educational programs they may want to incorporate in programs already existing in their school. Having an elementary school principal attend with staff is an important

element in transformational change and at SRES it helped to establish a team mentality between the principal and the staff.

Chapter 4 provided a review of the case study findings gathered from interviews, observations, and a review of relevant documents. The chapter began with a review of the Swan River School District including demographic data of the small, rural school district. Then demographic data specific to Swan River Elementary School, the focus of this study, were provided. Also information pertaining to school curriculum, instruction, and intervention programs was detailed. Data gathered on building leadership, inclusion, teacher collaboration, and co-teaching were illustrated.

A co-teaching partnership between a 5th grade regular education teacher and a special education teacher can enhance learning opportunities for all students, including students with disabilities, in a regular education classroom. A content teacher combined with a teacher trained in differentiated learning strategies combines the best of both worlds. These two teachers have molded a co-teaching partnership that is successfully meeting the educational needs of all students in the 5th grade classroom.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study that describes Swan River Elementary School as being an inclusive school where all students achieve high standards, supports collaboration among staff members, and has effective school leadership. SRES is a Pre-K-5 elementary school that in many ways is traditional in nature. However, the fact that inclusion for students with disabilities in regular education classrooms and teacher collaboration as a co-teaching team co-exist in this traditional setting is unique.

The following sections in chapter 5 reveal my conclusions extracted from examining findings obtained from this case study on co-teaching in an elementary school. These conclusions are viewed through the lens of organizational culture (Schein, 1990) and specifically look to understand how Swan River Elementary School culture influences collaboration between teachers (Schein, 2004) where inclusive practices are implemented that have a positive impact on student learning for all students, especially students with disabilities. Also, in my conclusions barriers to co-teaching the teachers overcame that exist in most schools will be conveyed. I use Edgar Schein's (2004) three levels of organizational culture, artifacts, shared espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions to structure the following sections describing my conclusions. Viewing this study through the lens of organization culture, the values of a school staff towards inclusive education for all students was examined as well as the organizational structure present to support a co-teaching system of support for student learning. After my conclusions, implications for current policy and practice are presented.

Creating an Inclusive School Culture at Swan River Elementary School

To understand the forces that drive an organization is to understand the culture of that organization and the inter-group conflict of a group (Schein, 1990). The literature on organizational culture indicates that a school's culture will manifest itself as observable artifacts and espoused values although its spirit is its underlying assumptions (Schein, 1990).

Groups, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in organizations, so unless the group learns, the organization does not learn (Senge, 2000). Swan River Elementary School is a good example of Senge's theory of organization change. SRES made the transition from a traditional school culture where isolation for students and teachers was the norm to one that supports inclusion for students and collaboration between teachers. This evolution happened

under the guidance of an effective school leader, its principal. Her leadership is a key factor to the success SRES has had with inclusion, teacher collaboration, and a co-teaching partnership between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher.

The elementary school principal fostered a sense of ownership in her school staff for the inclusion of all students, including students with disabilities, in regular education classes and together they successfully support school-wide inclusive practices. Students with disabilities as well as regular education students are successful in regular education classrooms because inclusion principles moved from teacher values to basic underlying assumptions of the group as established and implemented inclusion practices by all members of the organization (Schein, 2004).

The elementary school principal at Swan River Elementary School also values establishing a collaborative school culture where teachers openly share ideas, resources, and strategies. Through listening, having an open door policy, and being a team member, she models teaming skills with her school staff. The elementary school principal works with all teachers in teaming opportunities including professional development activities to foster a sense of cooperation between them. Research supports that collaboration between all teachers, including special education and regular education, is imperative to support successful inclusive practices (Friend & Cook, 2007; Pugach & Johnson, 2002). Believing this, SRES has been able to move from valuing collaboration between teachers to successfully solidifying collaboration efforts between all teachers through the effective use of scheduled collaboration time (Schein, 2004).

In addition to all teachers working together to plan and implement inclusive practices, at SRES another example of teacher collaboration is the co-teaching team of a special education teacher and a 5th grade regular education teacher who work together to support inclusive

practices in a 5th grade regular education class where students with disabilities are included.

These two teachers value co-teaching and have moved it to the fundamental assumption level by demonstrating their acceptance of this shared partnership as something that is expected between them each school year (Schein, 2004) .

My conclusions obtained from the findings reported in chapter 4 describe how Swan River Elementary School has established an inclusive, collaborative elementary school culture to meet the needs of all students and teachers. In the following sections, I present an analysis of how Swan River Elementary School became an inclusive school culture as it relates to building leadership, teacher collaboration, co-teaching, and student learning. I then discuss implications of this study for policy and practice.

Effective Instructional Leadership that is Inclusive and Collaborative

A strong school leader provides guiding ideas related to teaching and learning to staff and gives them a sense of direction and purpose. An effective leader also helps teachers become committed to creating a school environment that supports learning for all students, including those with disabilities (Senge, 2000). Effective leadership can foster an organizational school culture where its members (teachers and students) prosper and grow (Schein, 2004).

Furthermore, supportive leadership by principals who are committed to inclusion practices for students and collaboration opportunities for teachers is valued by teachers (Friend & Cook, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). Findings from this case study supports the research on effective leadership by illustrating that the elementary school principal at Swan River Elementary School is an effective school leader who has established an inclusive and collaborative school environment for students and teachers.

In 2005 after district reorganization and a Pre-K-5 elementary school was established, the opportunity was available for the elementary principal to work with incoming staff to “unfreeze” traditional assumptions about education on teaching and learning the school staff had from previous experiences, introduce new, inclusive and collaborative values, and work with them to “refreeze” these new values to become assumptions of the entire school community (Schein, 2004). She led the charge for change at SRES by advocating evidence-based educational practices that supported inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classes, intervention programs that supported learning for all students, collaboration opportunities for teachers, and shared accountability for student learning by all staff members at SRES.

Although the elementary school principal at SRES had a philosophical belief that an inclusive and collaborative school set the a positive tone for learning for all students and supported teacher collaboration, the impetus of meeting student achievement and inclusion guidelines set by NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002) and IDEIA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004) made it clear the school-wide change she was advocating for “helped lead SRES in the right direction.” She leveraged federal and state educational policy to implement her inclusive philosophy. Rather than narrowing the curriculum, segregating students with disabilities, and focusing on merely “teaching to the test,” the principal demonstrated that high student achievement was possible within a culture of inclusion and collaboration. According to Schein (2004) effective school leaders can initiate change in school culture by modeling and coaching staff (p. 291). Because the school was reconstituted in 2005 as essentially a new school, the elementary school principal had the opportunity to establish a school climate where every student is welcome in an inclusive environment that supports learning for every student.

Data from this study indicate the principal at SRES fits a description of an effective leader as she promotes an open door philosophy and is approachable and accessible. She builds personal relationships with students, parents, and teachers and fosters these relationships to create a school atmosphere where everyone feels like they belong. To further support a sense of belonging in the SRES school atmosphere, the elementary school principal is visible in the school halls greeting students and staff, asking about their day, and offering assistance. She also monitors student lunch where during this time she is engaged in conversations with students and staff and visits classrooms on a daily basis. These seemingly small gestures have gone a long way toward fostering an inclusive school culture. The elementary school principal at SRES has been effective in helping her staff create a welcoming learning environment for students and teachers where they have a sense of belonging by modeling hospitable characteristics herself.

An effective school leader is not just a manager, but is an instructional leader who provides the impetus for setting the tone for learning (Senge, 2000). The elementary school principal demonstrates her instructional leadership skills by promoting team building and collaboration in a number of ways. She supports her staff's team building skills by attending professional development activities with them to learn evidence-based strategies and educational programs as a team. This practice gives her credibility with her staff and she is able to walk-the-talk with staff during curricular and differentiated instructional planning discussions. Teachers believe they have a voice at Swan River Elementary School because the elementary school principal listens and supports shared decisions on curriculum, instruction, and scheduling during teacher collaboration time. The elementary school principal is proactive and student-focused as she works with collaboration teams at SRES to implement differentiated educational programs

for all students, including students with disabilities, by becoming a steward of the learning process.

The Swan River Elementary School principal was instrumental in guiding the staff to eliminate the traditional two track educational program for regular education and special education students (Creasey & Walther-Thomas, 1996; Skrtic, 1991b). She is “student-focused” as she works with school staff to create one inclusive educational track at SRES for all students (Hourcade & Bauwens, 2001). The elementary school principal is seen as the catalyst for the inclusive school environment that is present today. Because of her leadership, all regular education classrooms at SRES support all students’ learning through differentiating instructional strategies and academic programs for students to be successful, even students who have academic and behavioral needs requiring more individualized instruction.

In summary, the elementary school principal has been able to guide the staff from a school environment where teacher isolation was the norm to one that is collaborative and supportive for all teachers. She has been influential in establishing a collaborative school environment where special education and regular education teachers are treated as professionals and as equals. Without her continued support for the inclusion of all students into regular education classes and her emphasis on team building between staff members, collaborative relationships between teachers might not have developed. The importance of creating opportunities for genuine collaboration between teachers to fostering an inclusive school culture will be considered in the next section.

Create Conditions for Teacher Collaboration

Schools can make the transition from a traditional school culture that maintains teacher isolation (Lortie, 1975) to one that supports collaboration between teachers and the inclusion of

students with disabilities in regular education classrooms (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002) under the guidance of a visionary and facilitating school leader. When all school members value the importance of every student and school faculty member, it can make the journey to an inclusive and collaborative school where everyone feels like they belong (Schein, 2004). Findings from this study illustrate that Swan River Elementary School has made the transition to a school that supports collaboration between staff members. A school leader who models collaboration skills and respects teachers as professionals has guided the transition. Effective leadership has helped SRES move from a non-collaborative environment to one where collaboration is embraced and practiced (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996). The literature supports planning time during the school day for teacher teams to prepare differentiated lessons to meet the needs of the diverse student population in their classrooms (Friend & Pope, 2005). It is difficult to accomplish, however, when the structure of schools leaves little time for genuine collaboration (Skrtic et al., 1996).

Regular education and special education teachers at SRES value scheduled collaboration time where they and support staff are able to gainfully discuss and make instructional decisions to improve learning opportunities for all students. Teacher collaboration fosters a sense of professionalism in the staff as they practice shared decision-making skills when planning differentiated lessons for inclusive classrooms. Also, when a desire to create an inclusive school is combined with the increased emphasis in education set by NCLB guidelines for all students to have academic success (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002), including students with disabilities, and the emphasis of IDEIA for the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular education classrooms (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004), establishing collaboration efforts between teachers becomes imperative. By creating collaboration

opportunities for teachers to openly share ideas establishes a safe environment for “unfreezing” of past practices and “refreezing” of new learned practices for teachers (Schein, 2004).

Adopt Interventions that Support Inclusion, Engagement, and Learning for All Students

Creating an inclusive school culture requires doing away with the two track educational system for special education students and regular education students and replacing it with one inclusive educational track for all students (Skrtic, 1991b). Valuing inclusion can lead to effective practices that then become fundamental assumptions in that school (Schein, 2004). As was demonstrated in this study, students with disabilities can be successfully included in regular education classrooms with their peers during the school day when school-wide inclusion and intervention programs are adopted and implemented.

Swan River Elementary School has made the transition to an inclusive school where all students are supported. Inclusion in this school transcends the special education-regular education binary, which is significant given that over one-third of the students are identified as having a disability that interferes with learning. Through the implementation of school-wide intervention programs that address the academic and behavioral needs of all students, faculty and staff have come to believe that all students can and will learn. Additionally, these school-wide interventions created the conditions that allowed for students with disabilities to be successfully educated in regular education classrooms. Meeting AYP benchmarks and Kansas Standards of Excellence in math and reading provide the principal and teachers with evidence that these practices are working.

Swan River Elementary School implemented different intervention programs to meet student academic and behavioral needs. One intervention program provides direct instruction and support to students while other interventions involve teacher collaboration. Instruction at SRES

might appear very traditional and teacher-centered, yet the learning activities were not remedial or boring, as students were actively engaged in the lessons. Because SRES adopted the MTSS school-wide intervention program for reading instruction, the implementation of this program required teachers to learn differentiated instruction methods and gathering the materials to use when teaching differentiated reading lessons and skills to all students. Additionally, the MTSS program structure was differentiation for all students; therefore it was easier to include students with disabilities with their regular education peers for reading instruction. State assessment test results for reading show the effectiveness of the intervention efforts by SRES faculty and staff, especially its teachers, to implement a school-wide intervention program for reading, that met the needs of all students, leading them to believe it was worthwhile.

Collaboration time was scheduled for teachers to work together in grade-level groups to differentiate the lessons. Without this collaboration time being scheduled into the school week, teachers do not find the time to plan. In previous years teachers did not have time during the school day to collaborate and plan the differentiated reading lessons that were necessary to implement the reading intervention program. The implementation of a school-wide intervention program and scheduled teacher collaboration time supported the inclusion of students in regular education classes and made co-teaching between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher possible. How to promote and support co-teaching practices between regular education and special education teachers is presented in the next section.

Promote and Support Co-teaching between Regular Education and Special Education

Faculty and staff in an inclusive school value, promote, and support co-teaching between regular education and special education teachers. Once the dual system of education is eliminated, the way is paved for co-teaching and other inclusive educational practices to become

the norm. In this school, the culture did not just support co-teaching, but allowed the co-teachers to take their partnership to another level. Given the umbrella of interventions provided for all students it is not surprising that the two teachers do not feel their co-teaching partnership is extraordinary – it is a way of life for them, and a way of life for the school.

With the inclusion efforts to include all students with disabilities in regular education classrooms, teachers collaborated to design the right supports, interventions, and accommodations students with disabilities required to be successful in a regular education setting and differentiate lessons to meet the academic needs of all students in the regular education classroom. As they collaborated, the knowledge and strengths each teacher brought to the table was valued. Faculty and staff recognized regular education teachers brought content knowledge and special education teachers brought knowledge of differentiated instruction. As knowledge was shared, a culture change also happened; teacher isolation evolved to collaboration where teachers were supporting and promoting each other. Seeing positive academic and behavioral progress of all students, regular education and special education, teacher collaboration continued to develop and expand. As these collaboration efforts grew, two teachers, a regular education teacher and a special education teacher became more familiar and comfortable with each other and entered into a co-teaching partnership. SRES values teacher collaboration and co-teaching where they are promoted and are products of the continued support of faculty and staff where inclusion of students with disabilities is successful.

The co-teaching partnership at SRES was successful because of several contributing factors that fostered an overall inclusive and collaborative school environment. The first contributing factor was a visionary elementary school principal that provided ongoing, team oriented, “we are in this together” support for a nurturing school culture that promoted learning

for all students, including students with disabilities, and collaboration between teachers. Another factor was the scheduled collaboration time for teachers to share ideas, resources, strategies, and plan implementation of the adopted school-wide reading intervention program for all students. An additional factor was the special education teacher and the regular education teacher both possessed the necessary collaboration skills to nourish and reinforce their co-teaching partnership as they teach together on a daily basis. Although the focus of this study was co-teaching in one 5th grade classroom, the overall organizational context in which co-teaching took place was significant to the success of the co-teaching arrangement. Implications from this study are considered for policy and practice in the next section.

Implications for Policy and Practice

This section discusses implications of the findings and conclusions for educational policy and practice extracted from this research. This emergent case study on co-teaching suggests implications for inclusive and collaborative organizational culture in an elementary school setting: building leadership as well as creating and supporting an inclusive school that supports learning for all students.

Building Leadership

Researchers on school culture (Schein, 2004; Senge, 2000) find that an instructional school leader plays an important role in establishing an inclusive and collaborative school culture. This study demonstrates without a doubt that an effective school leader is instrumental in establishing an inclusive and collaborative school culture.

To establish an inclusive school culture for all students necessitates the principal to collaborate with school staff to adopt school-wide programs that emphasize learning for all students, including students with disabilities. It is important for school administrators to

understand that their support is necessary and valued by teachers who practice inclusion service delivery models as in this case study on co-teaching. Also exemplified in this study, the ongoing support of the elementary school principal for inclusion was greatly appreciated by the co-teachers.

A collaborative school culture for teachers also requires support from the school leader. In this study, the co-teachers felt valued and professional when the elementary school principal involved them in shared decision-making opportunities on curricular, scheduling, and professional development choices. Although shared vision promotes merging new behaviors with old behaviors and is considered risk-taking and experimental, it is necessary when working with staff to “unfreeze” old practices and “refreeze” new practices (Senge, 2000). This collaboration among staff encouraged by the school principal promotes ownership and reassures a “we are in this together” outlook. These are important characteristics and beliefs for future administrators to consider as they attempt to make schools more collaborative for teachers.

Creating and Supporting an Inclusive School

For a school to be a safe environment and inviting to all students, faculty, and staff members, different school-wide initiatives are established to support an inclusive environment. Significant programs and plans that contribute to the creation and support of an inclusive school are: professional development activities, teacher collaboration opportunities, differentiated instruction programs for students, and co-teaching partnerships for teachers.

Professional development. Instructional leaders create professional development opportunities for teachers to establish a shared learning of attitudes, norms, and values and reinforce this shared learning to become the underlying basic assumptions of that group (Schein, 2004). Information gathered from this study reinforces the importance of the elementary school

principal and the school staff attending professional development activities together as a team. Professional development opportunities were influential in helping all educators modify their philosophy to focus on a student “needs-based” approach rather than focus on the disability of the student and help school staff promote inclusive practices (Wang & Reynolds, 1996). The information on learning and resources they acquire together helps set the tone for collaboration between teachers and the elementary school principal as they have a shared knowledge base to work from as they differentiate lessons to support learning for all students.

Attending professional development activities together provides teachers a common knowledge base of educational practices and instructional strategies from which to work. They talk the same language as they prepare lessons together. Otherwise, teachers may operate from two different points of view. In this study, the co-teachers expressed attendance at these workshops together helped them be more comfortable in stepping into the co-teaching partnership because they learned curriculum initiatives as a teaching team. A unique finding of this study was the fact that the building principal attended many of the same in-services and workshops as her teachers, which solidified a bond between her and the co-teachers. She learned the same strategies so she could walk-the-talk, participate in collaboration time to share ideas, provide support, and participate in discussions on curriculum.

Differentiating instruction. Given the varying student needs they encounter on a regular basis, differentiated instruction has long been a staple for special educators who are taught how to modify lessons and make accommodations for diverse learners. As the field of education shifts toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms, all teachers need to know how to differentiate instruction. Therefore it was imperative at SRES that the school administrator and teachers worked together to research different school-wide intervention

programs that emphasized differentiated instruction and adopt one that met the specific needs of their students. Study results show that one program for schools to consider is Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) (Kansas State Department of Education, 2008a). This intervention program was implemented by school staff at SRES for reading instruction and provided the structure for differentiated reading lessons taught to all students to meet whole group, small group, and individual student reading needs.

Teacher collaboration. A collaborative school environment supports teaming among all school staff (Schein, 2004) and helps eliminate the traditional two track educational system for regular education and special education who have traditionally belonged to two different professional and organizational cultures (Senge, 2000). To promote teacher buy-in, it is recommended that school administrators cultivate a school environment for staff to become active participants in the collaboration process and work together in teams (Senge, 2000).

Collaboration between special education teachers and regular education teachers is the most promising initiative in schools today (Bauwens & Hourcade, 1997). Many special education and regular education teachers express a desire to collaborate but the organizational structure of schools leaves little time during the school day for them to collaborate to develop appropriate curriculum and teaching strategies (Skrtic et al., 1996). This study illustrates that teacher collaboration for all teachers, regular education and special education, occurs at Swan River Elementary School and is supported in a school environment that also follows a traditional structure by scheduling collaboration time during the school day. Collaboration time is necessary to build relationships between teachers, all teachers, and to support an inclusive school environment for all students to have success.

For students with disabilities to be successfully integrated in regular education classes, collaboration between a special education teacher and a regular education teacher is imperative (Weiss & Lloyd, 2002). When two highly qualified teachers with complementary sets of skills and areas of expertise co-teach in the same classroom, instruction can move to a higher level (Friend & Cook, 2007). Partnering with another teacher also provides opportunities for the two teachers to gain different perspectives of teaching strategies by opening doors to share ideas and gain insights to formulate a collective focus on student learning (O'Shea et al., 1999; Senge, 2000). Information obtained from this study support the importance of co-teachers having compatible personalities by demonstrating support of each other, respect for each other, and trusting each other as well as both teachers possessing complementary people-skills to support a successful co-teaching partnership. It is vital for the success of all students, including students with disabilities, that both teachers share a belief that all students can be successful in a regular education classroom.

Co-teaching. This study also confirms what is written in literature on co-teaching. The regular education teacher has the content knowledge while the special education teacher specializes in intervention strategies, modifications, and accommodations (Friend & Cook, 2007). Because of these combined teacher skills, the ability to reach and teach more students is possible in the regular education classroom setting. Literature on co-teaching also suggests that co-teachers develop a shared sense of ownership for all students as they work together to create an inclusive, nurturing environment for all students (Dettmer et al., 2005). Differentiating lessons for an inclusive class with students with varying academic needs can be challenging and time consuming for one teacher to do alone. When a regular education teacher and a special education teacher collaborate, they utilize the strengths of both teachers to create differentiated lessons to

meet the academic needs of all students. Co-teachers provide support and guidance to help all students meet their maximum potential and see themselves being accountable for all students to achieve (Kim et al., 2006). Having two highly qualified teachers willing to change how they teach in order to provide differentiated instruction and interventions helps meet the individual needs of the diverse student population. In addition, having two teachers co-teach in the same classroom increases student engagement time and presents a natural setting for the students to observe and learn collaboration skills.

The co-teaching team expressed their enjoyment of teaching together and that the relationship “works” for them as they team-teach the 5th grade reading, spelling, and language arts curriculum. The two teachers believe this co-teaching arrangement benefits the learning for all students in the regular education classroom where all students, including students with disabilities, are meeting success in academic classes.

In summary, this elementary school eliminated a traditional two track educational system between regular education and special education and created an integrated culture where the two became fused as one (Senge, 2000). Swan River Elementary School was assigned a principal who believed a supportive school culture was best for students, teachers, and support staff and took this opportunity to create a more inclusive and collaborative environment. With the emphasis on inclusion, the principal fostered staff buy-in and established ownership with the staff by helping them focus on how to provide differentiated instruction to all students in regular education classes, including students with disabilities (Zigmond, 2001). They all assumed the responsibility to create a school-wide differentiated learning environment that supported the reading needs of all students with the student outcome being improved academic achievement.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Definition of Key Terms

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

IDEIA mandates that FAPE be available to any individual child with a disability who meets qualifying guidelines to receive special education and related services, even though the child has not failed or been retained in a course, and is advancing from grade to grade (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Inclusion

Students with a special education need receiving an appropriate education including specific special education services in regular education classrooms along side their peers (Friend, 2007).

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The IEP is the key legal document developed by a multidisciplinary team, including parents, school staff, and other personnel, that details how the student receives a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

LRE is one regulation of IDEA to help ensure children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities are educated to the maximum extent appropriate with non-disabled children and are educated in the school he or she would attend if not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the use of supplementary

aids and services cannot achieve satisfactory education for students with disabilities in the regular education environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1997).

Student with a Disability

Student with a disability and identified need who receive special education and related services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, 2004).

Appendix B

Swan River Elementary School Individual Interview Protocol and Questions

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Mickelson, a Wichita State University doctoral student. I am conducting a research case study on a teaching partnership consisting of one elementary regular education teacher and one elementary special education teacher who co-teach together in a regular education classroom where students with disabilities are included. Your co-teaching team was recommended to me by your principal as one which effectively supports the learning of all students. Co-teaching is considered by educators as one strategy to meet individual learning needs of all students plus satisfy academic guidelines of NCLB and inclusive guidelines of IDEIA 2004. Your participation is valued and it is hoped the data gained from this co-teaching study will serve as a reference to other teachers who may choose to co-teach and add to the body of current, scholarly literature.

Let us review the letter explaining the study and the consent form. Your participation in this study is voluntary and if you choose to participate, please sign the consent form. If you choose not to participate, you may leave without any fear of retribution from me, Swan River Elementary School, Frage Education Cooperative, or Wichita State University.

REVIEW EXPLANATORY LETTER AND CONSENT FORM

I would like to audiotape our interview to transcribe for analysis. Audiotaping the interview allows me to check accuracy of content and later use when memberchecking the information with you. Your anonymity will be protected in the final written document. Before we begin, your participation in this case study is appreciated.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

As we begin this individual interview, please state your name and teaching assignment.

Please describe your day-to-day experiences as a special education (regular education) teacher in an elementary school.

Please describe how special education services are delivered in your elementary school.

Please describe how NCLB has impacted your day-to-day duties as a teacher in your elementary school.

How have the increased requirements of NCLB influenced your role as a teacher in your elementary school?

Please describe how IDEIA 2004 has impacted your day-to-day duties as a teacher in your elementary school.

How have the increased requirements of IDEIA 2004 influenced your role as a teacher in your elementary school?

Please describe inclusion as it means to you.

How are students with disabilities included in regular education classrooms in your elementary school?

Please describe teacher collaboration as it means to you.

Please describe how teachers collaborate in your elementary school.

Please describe co-teaching as it means to you.

Please describe what co-teaching looks like to you.

Please describe your co-teaching experience.

What teacher do you co-teach with?

How did you first learn about co-teaching?

What professional development did you receive to prepare you for co-teaching?

What class(es) do you co-teach in?

Please describe strategies you use to maintain your co-teaching partnership.

How do you plan your co-teaching lessons?

When do you plan your co-teaching lessons?

What co-teaching role do you play in this partnership?

Please describe the support you have from Swan River Elementary School administration for your co-teaching partnership.

Please describe the support you have from Frage Education Cooperative administration for your co-teaching partnership.

Please describe your feelings on how the students in the classroom react to having two teachers co-teach in the classroom.

Please describe your feelings on how other teachers in the school react to two teachers co-teaching in the classroom.

Appendix C

Swan River Elementary School Group Interview Protocol and Questions

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Mickelson, a Wichita State University doctoral student. When I conducted individual interviews, I began the interview by explaining the study and reviewing the consent form with each of you. Today, I am conducting our first group interview.

If you recall the study, I am conducting a research case study on a teaching partnership consisting of one elementary regular education teacher and one elementary special education teacher who co-teach together in a regular education classroom where students with disabilities are included. Your co-teaching team was recommended to me by your principal as one which effectively supports the learning of all students. Co-teaching is considered by educators as one strategy to meet individual learning needs of all students plus satisfy academic guidelines of NCLB and inclusive guidelines of IDEIA 2004. Your participation is valued and it is hoped the data gained from this co-teaching study will serve as a reference to other teachers who may choose to co-teach and add to the body of current, scholarly literature.

Before we begin, do you have any questions on the study or want me to explain or review any portions of the study or consent form? I would like to audiotape our interview to transcribe for analysis. Audiotaping the interview allows me to check accuracy of content and later use when memberchecking the information with you. Your anonymity will be protected in the final written document. Before we begin, your participation in this case study is appreciated and I remind you that your participation is voluntary and if you choose not to participate or withdraw, you may leave without any fear of retribution from me, Swan River Elementary School, Frage Education Cooperative, or Wichita State University.

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. As we begin this group interview, please state your name and teaching assignment.
2. Please describe the professional relationship you have with each other as teachers in the same elementary school.
3. Please describe your co-teaching partnership.
4. Please describe how you support each other in the classroom while you are co-teaching.
5. Please share the academic areas you feel stronger in.
6. Please share the academic areas you feel weaker in.
7. Please describe how you support each other in these areas.
8. Please describe how you both support the learning of all students in the classroom.
9. How do you define differentiated instruction?
10. Please describe your knowledge of differentiated instruction strategies.
11. Please describe how you provide differentiated instruction to all students in the classroom.
12. Please describe how a co-teaching arrangement supports differentiated instruction in the classroom.
13. Please describe how you feel the students in the classroom react to a co-teaching classroom environment.
14. What are some of the descriptors you hear the students say?
15. Please describe how you feel the students treat you as a teacher in a co-teaching environment?

16. Please describe the level of support you have from Swan River Elementary School administration for your co-teaching partnership.
17. Please describe the level of support you have from Frage Education Cooperative administration for your co-teaching partnership.
18. Please describe the level of support you have from other teachers in the elementary school.
19. Please describe how you plan your co-teaching lessons.
20. Please describe when you plan your co-teaching lessons.

Appendix D

Swan River Elementary School Introduction Letter of Consent

April 2008

Dear Swan River Elementary School Teacher:

PURPOSE: I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University who is conducting case study research on an effective co-teaching partnership between a regular education teacher and a special education teacher in an elementary school. With inclusive regular education classrooms where students with disabilities are included, this study proposes to understand an effective co-teaching partnership where all students benefit by having two teachers teach in the regular education classroom at the same time. This study also proposes to understand what strategies and what organizational conditions are present that supports this co-teaching partnership. Research will be conducted for six weeks during the spring 2008 and fall 2008 semesters of school at Swan River Elementary School.

PARTICIPANT SELECTION & EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES: You have been recommended by your elementary school principal as a teacher who co-teaches with another teacher in an elementary regular education classroom where students with disabilities are included. Your co-teacher team is recognized by your principals as being effective and supports the learning of all students in the regular education classroom. Your participation is voluntary and your anonymity will be protected in the final written document. The data collection for this study will include: 4-5 individual interviews lasting at least 30 minutes each, 2-3 group interviews lasting at least 45 minutes each, 6 observations of co-teaching lesson planning sessions lasting at least 45 minutes each, 12-

15 co-teaching classroom observations lasting approximately 60 minutes each, participant journal writing consisting of at least 3 entries each week, and a review of relevant documents.

No minors or members of vulnerable populations are participating in this study. There are no known risks or discomforts, physical, psychological, or social, connected to this study.

BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY: The results of this study have the potential to benefit teachers who are considering or are currently co-teaching by describing strategies and organizational supports that help maintain an effective co-teaching partnership. It will also contribute to current literature by providing an expanded understanding and a description of an effective partnership between a regular education and a special education teacher who co-teach in a regular education classroom where students with disabilities are included.

REFUSAL/WITHDRAWAL/CONFIDENTIALITY: Participation in this study is voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate. Should you choose not to participate in this study, or choose to withdraw from the study, your decision will not affect your relations with Swan River Elementary School, Fraage Special Education Cooperative, or Wichita State University. Your privacy will be protected and confidentiality of information guaranteed. By signing one copy of this form, you are granting your permission to participate in this study. Findings from this research may be presented at national conferences or result in publication in scholarly journals. If this is the case, you are guaranteed anonymity. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and voluntarily agree to participate in the study. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or fear of reprisal.

If you have questions regarding this study, please contact me at home at 785.828.3481 or at the Frage Education Cooperative office at 785.828.3113. Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Administration at Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas, 67260-0007, telephone 316.978.3285. A copy of this form is provided for your records. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Kathy Mickelson

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____