Regular and Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in a Collaborative Teaching Model

Kristen Philbrick

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/etd

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, Educational Methods Commons, and the Other Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons

Recommended Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Longwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses, Dissertations & Honors Papers by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Longwood University. For more information, please contact hnestm@longwood.edu.
Regular and Special Education
Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in a Collaborative Teaching Model
Kristen Philbrick

This thesis was approved by:

Dr. Rachel Mathews (Director)
Dr. Ruth Meese
Dr. Linda Tennison
Date of Approval: Dec. 1, 1995

Running Head: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS
Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my committee members: Dr. Rachel Mathews, Dr. Linda Tennison, and Dr. Ruth Meese. Each of your individual expertise and professional advice helped to make this thesis possible. I appreciate the time and energy all of you spent. A special thanks goes to Dr. Meese, whose enthusiasm and love for teaching has been a true inspiration.

I would also like to recognize my student teaching supervisor, Mr. E. Lloyd Pugh. Your constant support and belief in my abilities as a teacher will never be forgotten. During my experience, your encouragement pushed me right to the edge, but it was I who took flight!

Most importantly, I want to thank my family. Dad, you have given me a most valuable gift...my education. I can never thank you enough for your support and belief in me. Mom, thanks for being my sounding board, and thank you for all the laughs and all the love. Thanks to Kathy for all your advice, and to my brother Jeff- the best brother I could ever ask for. And to the love of my life, Jeffrey Eichler. Thanks for your growing knowledge and respect for my field, your endless support and understanding, and thank you for being my very best friend.
Teacher Perceptions 3

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate regular and special education teachers' perceptions of their role in a collaborative teaching model. The subjects of this study were (N=39) from elementary, middle, and high school levels. A self-developed survey was used in collecting data for this research. Responses were categorized as either regular or special education, and how much question items were representative of each teacher's particular classroom situation. An independent sample t-test was used to determine any significant differences between the perceptions of regular and special education teachers. A Pearson-r was used to examine any significant relationships between the amount of time spent co-planning, the number of years teaching, and the number of years collaboratively teaching with the teachers' overall perception of their role in a collaboratively taught classroom. Results of the study revealed that there was a significant relationship (r=.35 p < .05) between the amount of co-planning time and teachers' perceptions of their role in a collaborative classroom.
# Table of Contents

- List of Appendices by Title .................................. 5
- List of Tables by Title ........................................ 6
- Text of Thesis .................................................. 7
  - Review of Literature ......................................... 7
    - Inclusion .................................................. 7
  - Collaborative Teaching Models ............................... 11
  - Problems With Collaboration ................................. 17
  - Advantages of Collaborative Teaching ...................... 19
  - Perceptions of Teachers .................................... 20
  - Statement of Purpose ....................................... 23
- Method .......................................................... 26
  - Subjects ..................................................... 26
  - Procedure .................................................... 26
  - Instrument ................................................... 27
  - Data Analysis ................................................ 27
- Results ......................................................... 29
- Discussion ...................................................... 33
- Appendices ...................................................... 36
- Tables .......................................................... 44
- References ..................................................... 52
List of Appendices By Title

Appendix A ................................................................. 36
Letter to Superintendent ............................................. 37
Appendix B ................................................................. 38
Letter to Teacher ......................................................... 39
 Appendix C .................................................................. 40
Teacher Survey ............................................................ 41
List of Tables By Title

Table 1 .................................................. 44
  Comparison of Regular and Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Equality in the Classroom ..........................................45

Table 2 ................................................... 46
  Relationship Between Co-Planning Time and Perceived Role in the Collaborative Classroom ..........................................47

Table 3 ................................................... 48
  Relationship Between Number of Years Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration ..........................................49

Table 4 .................................................. 50
  Relationship Between Number of Years Collaboratively Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration ..........................................51
Regular and Special Education

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in a Collaborative Teaching Model

Students receiving special education services have been segregated from their peers in traditional school settings since before the early 1900's. With the enactment of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, students with mild to severe disabilities were guaranteed a public education in the least restrictive environment. This legislation propelled a movement toward including special needs students with their non-disabled, age-appropriate peers. Furthermore, since the passage of P.L. 94-142 the educational system has been devising models for teaching all individuals together, such as the collaborative teaching method. As education moves toward inclusion of special education students, one must recognize where the system has been in the past, and what it is moving towards for the future. From the inclusion model has stemmed the collaborative teaching model which strives to teach all students in the regular education setting.

Inclusion

The term inclusion has been defined in many ways by many people. As noted by Friend and Cook (1993) the term inclusion is an educational philosophy based on the belief that all students are entitled to participate fully in their school community. Students with moderate to severe disabilities have traditionally been educated in settings physically and socially isolated from their peers without
disabilities (Wisniewski & Alper, 1994). This separation among students became a concern to parents as well as educators in the 1950's, and is still a pertinent issue in the educational system today.

The desire for inclusion stemmed from several legal decisions. In Brown v. Board of Education, the 1954 Supreme Court decision abolishing the legality of school segregation for blacks and whites, the stage was set for emerging concerns about segregated educational models for students with disabilities (Schattman & Benay, 1992). Legal support for inclusion of students with disabilities can also be found in Brown v. The Topeka Board of Education (1954), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and Daniel v. The Board of Education in 1989. The effects of these court cases and legal actions are that schools must provide free and appropriate educational services for students with disabilities (Wisniewski & Alper, 1994). Also pointed out by Wisniewski and Alper is that whenever possible, students with disabilities must be enabled to participate in the same general education settings as students without disabilities and be provided supplemental services that meet their unique needs.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142, 1975) assured exceptional children the right to an education provided in the least restrictive environment. Categories of handicapping conditions resulted from this legislation, and funding of programs began to rely heavily
on this categorical model (Pearman, Huang, Barnhart, & Melblom, 1992). However, while P.L. 94-142 required educational services for students with handicaps, it does not require a separate educational system. Yet, general and special education have frequently developed into separate, parallel programs within the educational system (Pearman et al., 1992).

Inclusion is most often used to describe programs for students with disabilities. In the case of children with disabilities, the goal is to integrate them, with the support they need, into classrooms with non-disabled peers. Philosophical support for inclusion can be found in the principle of normalization, the zero reject policy, and the concept of partial participation (Wisniewski et al., 1994). These concepts, pointed out by Wisniewski, hold that persons with disabilities should participate in the same settings and activities that their peers without disabilities may access, even if they cannot perform all of the same skills. When inclusion works, Cook and Friend (1991) suggested that students with disabilities become members of their classroom communities, valued for their abilities and who they are as individuals.

The common denominator in an inclusion model is the principle of the least restrictive educational environment (Sailor, 1991). Sailor (1991) also pointed out that inclusion allows disabled individuals the opportunities for mainstreamed socialization as well as academic experiences.
Teacher Perceptions 10

in an inclusive setting. Sailor concluded that reform efforts within special education to achieve greater levels of integration within general education offer a more attractive possibility for a shared educational agenda for all students.

As new legislation began focusing on more inclusion for individuals with disabilities, the efficacy of mainstreaming was questioned. Special education reform considered more inclusive models where children with disabilities would participate with non-handicapped peers in both academic and non-academic areas. In the early 1980's, new reform referred to as integration, full inclusion, and the regular education initiative, came about (Schattman & Benay, 1992). The general education reform movement has provided an opportunity to restructure the education system to include all students, rather than separating regular and special education (Pearman, Huang, Barnhart, & Mellblom, 1992).

Proponents of an inclusive system of educating students believe that this change has the potential to provide a more effective education for all students (Pearman et al., 1992). Wisniewski & Alper (1994) documented the results of several studies, which indicate that students with severe disabilities can be provided effective educational services in general classrooms with support services. The studies have documented that inclusion benefits students with severe disabilities by providing increased opportunities for communication and social interactions, as well as by
providing models of age-appropriate social behavior. Moreover, students without disabilities have the opportunity to learn to value differences and develop positive attitudes towards those with disabilities.

With the growing popularity of inclusive educational models, the educational system is also evaluating what methods can be used to teach a classroom of disabled and non-disabled students. As many more individuals with disabilities are included into regular education settings, teachers must evaluate and plan ways to meet the needs of these integrated students, as well as the needs of the general student population. Legally, students with disabilities have the right to an appropriate education. As inclusion is on the rise, the appropriateness of placement and instruction must be carefully monitored by educators.

Collaborative Teaching Models

As inclusive teaching models became a trend in educating special needs students, various methods of teaching classes with both disabled and non-disabled students were developed. One of the more popular styles is the collaborative teaching model. This is one model used to instruct a diverse student population in the same educational setting.

Team teaching, a forerunner of the collaborative teaching model, first gained widespread popularity in the late 1950's when Trump (Trump, in Friend, Reising, & Cook, 1993) proposed re-organizing secondary schools so that teams
of teachers could share responsibility for large-group presentations, follow-up sessions for groups of 12-15 students, and individualized study (Friend, Reising, and Cook, 1993). Trump's idea stemmed from a need to overcome the then acute shortage of teachers and his belief that such a model would enable schools to offer interdisciplinary and individualized instruction to students (Friend et al., 1993).

During the 1960's, a number of variations of team-teaching evolved. For example, in England, Warwick (1971) proposed a model that comprised two components, a lecture to a large group of students followed by additional instruction in traditional class groups (Friend, et al.). By the early 1970's, team teaching became a widespread practice. It occurred in both elementary and secondary schools, and in an entire range of subject matter (Friend, et al.). Even before P.L. 94-142 became a law, special educators were stressing the importance of partnerships between general education and special education teachers (Friend, et al.). Teaming, as Friend pointed out, became an integral part of mainstreaming, and teamwork between classroom teachers and special education teachers was critical for the success of mainstreaming.

Recently, team teaching has been regaining popularity among general education teachers. The rationale for these contemporary efforts, explains Friend, is to provide students with a more individualized and diversified learning
experience, and to enable teachers to compliment each other's expertise while providing professional support to one another. However, like earlier team teaching models, the current methods vary tremendously in the amount of shared planning, the extent to which teachers share a classroom during instruction, and the degree to which the teaching is interdisciplinary (Friend, et al.).

By the early 1980's, team teaching was identified as a strategy borrowed from general education and applied to special education as a means for mainstreaming (Friend, et al.). The terms team-teaching, cooperative teaching, and co-teaching are used inter-changeably, and all mean essentially the same thing and include the same principles. All these terms refer to a collaborative style of teaching between two or more teachers in one classroom. Most recently, educators have been carefully distinguishing among the many strategies for addressing student needs in general education classrooms. In addition, team teaching has been labeled cooperative teaching or co-teaching to distinguish it from the teams of general education teachers who may share instructional responsibilities (Friend, et al.).

Cooperative teaching, according to Cook and Friend (1992) refers to "... an instructional arrangement in which general and special educators work together in a coordinated manner to teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students" (p.6).

Today, the vast majority of students with disabilities
spend at least a portion of their day in regular education settings and receive instruction alongside students without disabilities. Furthermore, instruction generally occurs within the context of a single classroom. In co-teaching, the teachers strive to create a classroom environment in which all students are valued members, and they develop innovative teaching strategies that would not be possible if only one teacher was present (Friend, et al.). For many students with disabilities, the regular classroom represents a potentially beneficial educational placement (Gable, Hendrickson, Evans, Frye, and Bryant, 1993).

In cooperative teaching, both general and special education teachers are simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibility for specified classroom instruction that is to occur within that setting (Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend, 1989). While some teacher specialization of subject or content areas and skills may exist, decisions on specific teacher assignments and duties within that classroom are based on performance-based assessments of individual teachers' skills and strengths, not on artificially determined student categories of presumed disabilities (Bauwens, et al., 1989).

Collaborative teachers are approaching their shared instruction by employing a range of options. Most co-teachers reported that they establish a schedule for co-teaching and follow that schedule for either a semester or an entire school year (Friend, et al.). There are also many
variations in how teachers share instructional responsibilities. In some classes, the teachers take turns; one leads the whole class group while the other observes students or quietly offers assistance to students. In others, the two teachers share an active role, jointly sharing a discussion (Friend, et al.). Some special education teachers are present and take part in all five classes during the day, while others use class within a class into which the special education student is scheduled (Dougherty, 1994). The class within a class model refers to one teacher instructing a group of students, while the other teacher instructs the other part of the class. Special education teachers can schedule time with individuals or groups whenever they wish. As Dougherty (1994) pointed out, special education teachers are already adept at cooperation and collaboration. In preparing IEP's, special educators are accustomed to teaming with parents, teachers, and administrators to meet a student's needs. In each teaching format, collaborative team members are responsible for meeting the needs of special education students under the direction of the special education teacher and according to the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Collaboration is discussed by Cook and Friend (1991) as a critical factor in school reform. Collaboration is a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal (Cook, et al., 1991). A
critical component of collaboration, explains Cook et al., is parity. The parity element of collaboration encompasses the idea that participants must believe that they have something valuable to contribute to the collaborative activity and that this contribution is valued by others. Successful co-teachers have distinct but very essential roles in a co-taught classroom (Adams & Cessna, 1993).

A number of essential variables must be present when a collaborative teaching model is in practice. Friend and Cook (1991) suggested that collaboration should be voluntary, and teachers should not be forced to co-teach a class. Collaboration also includes shared responsibility for decisions and implies that the classroom activities carried out are jointly owned by both teachers. Furthermore, collaboration requires that professionals trust one another enough to undertake an activity. Teachers could simply divide a class of students into two parts, each take responsibility for one and proceed to offer the instruction they choose. Although this is still co-teaching, Friend and Cook explain it would not be collaborative.

Even within the literature, there is a very fine line drawn between co-teaching and collaboration, and in some cases the terms are interchangeable. Adams and Cessna (1993) stated that the role of the general educator is to teach the content to the group. On the other hand, the special education teachers' primary area of expertise is instructional processes to teach individual students who may
learn in atypical ways. Thus, the special educator's primary role is to design and deliver specialized instruction to teach students the content they need. Most of the literature is in agreement that in a team-based approach, the roles of the teachers are different than they appear in more separate and segregated models (Schattman & Benay, 1992). Teams provide all parties with a support network. No one individual has all the skills needed to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities, and teams are a powerful tool for problem solving. It is not disputed that two professionals working together can bring an impressive combination of skills to the fully integrated classrooms (Bauwens, et al.).

Problems With Collaboration

As collaborative co-teaching is adopted as an educational model across the country, professionals are beginning to recognize several problems. For example, Gable, Arllen, and Cook (1993) mentioned that teachers may be directed to engage in a collaborative relationship to mask or carry the work of a colleague whose actions are unproductive or unprofessional. Accordingly, problems that arise because of misuse (e.g., professional role confusion, undermining future collaborative efforts) can weigh against the likely benefits of teacher collaboration. Furthermore, the risk is great that the general education teacher will resent the presence of the special education teacher, and therefore, the parity of the relationship is dissolved.
Friend and Cook recognized two relatively common problems in co-teaching. The first is that in some co-taught classes the fundamental classroom structure, instructional format, and leadership do not change. That is, the classroom teacher may assume that the special educator's presence should not have any impact on the class. In such situations, the second problem is that the special educator typically functions more like a paraprofessional or student teacher in the class. Problems such as these result from too little planning prior to co-teaching, or because of a sense of losing instructional control. Friend and Cook stressed that what cannot be justified is a classroom that looks just like it did with one teacher except now there are two teachers, one of whom is "helping-out" or acting as an instructional assistant.

Still another problem, expressed by Gable et al. (1993), may exist because collaboration, by its very nature, encourages teachers to share information and ideas, mutually define problems, engage in non-judgemental communication, and overall, seek mutual trust and respect. Teacher attitudes and training are significant variables in determining the success of collaboration, and Gable et al. state that collaboration is a more appropriate arrangement with strong, effective teachers.

Friend and Cook suggested three potential items identified as having the greatest potential influence for
widespread implementation of cooperative teaching. These were time, cooperation, and increasing workload. Also, the authors bring to light an additional salutory effect that team teaching may help the special educator avoid stress and effects of burnout, which may in part result from working in the unique climate of segregated special education settings.

Advantages Of Collaborative Teaching

Collaboration does seem to have positive effects on students. For example, in a study by Johnston (1994), the Virginia Literacy Passport Test (LTP), a criterion-referenced minimum competency exam, and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) were used to check academic achievement. Students with learning disabilities in collaborative classrooms outscored those in non-collaborative rooms on all sections of both tests. Non-disabled students in collaborative rooms outscored those in non-collaborative rooms in seven of eight ITBS areas. Johnston also evaluated self-esteem by using two standardized measures: the Self-Esteem Index (SEI), and the Multi-Dimensional Self-Concept Scale (MSCS). Both students with LD and regular education students in collaborative classrooms scored higher on these instruments than did their peers in non-collaborative settings. These studies indicated collaborative settings effectiveness for students.

The tremendous growth in teacher collaboration is, in large part, attributable to a desire to integrate more students with disabilities into the mainstream (Friend et
In order for co-teaching to be effective, teachers must have opportunities to plan together and to evaluate their shared instruction. Educators must ensure that the instruction that occurs in a co-taught classroom is quantitatively and qualitatively different from that offered in other classrooms to justify use of the model (Friend et al.). Cook and Friend are also concerned with what should occur when a student with disabilities is to receive instruction in a general education setting, but the teacher in that setting does not want to work collaboratively with the special educator who shares that responsibility. The instructional setting may be appropriate, but the collaborative aspect of the service delivery option may not be.

Perceptions of Teachers Regarding Collaboration

As special education students become more included in general education settings, more teaching strategies are being developed to serve these children. The call for reform of special education service delivery systems has been referred to as the regular education initiative (REI). The concept of "regular education initiative" is similar to inclusion, and both terms refer to educating special needs students in the regular classroom with non-disabled peers. The collaborative teaching model is one technique which aims to unite special education teachers with general education teachers in a class of diverse student abilities. The teaching model requires two teachers to play distinct and
important roles in the classroom, which creates both positive and negative teacher perceptions of the model.

In order for teachers to be effective, they must feel that they are an important entity in the classroom environment. A research study conducted by Karge, McClure, and Patton (1995) examined collaboration practices of resource programs at middle school levels (i.e., grades 6 through 8). The researchers surveyed 124 special education resource teachers and teachers serving students with special needs outside of the general education setting for at least one hour per day, about the collaboration model at their school site. For the purposes of this research, collaboration was defined as "a process in which one or more professionals with expertise share information for implementing a plan" (Karge, et al., 1995, p.81). The results of this research showed that teacher attitude was viewed as the most important factor for successful collaboration. The teachers encountered two high ranking problems that hindered collaboration. They were the teacher's attitude toward the collaboration process and lack of planning time. Most resource teachers were in favor of collaboration, and felt that this teaching model was meeting the needs of their students. This research clearly identified the importance of teacher attitude and personality as essential components in the collaborative teaching model.

A study by Stoller (1992) attempted to determine if the
attitudes and perceptions of regular education teachers toward inclusion of handicapped children into their classrooms differ by educational level or previous training in special education. Stoller (1992) surveyed 182 teachers at the middle school level. The results indicated that teachers with differing educational levels have different perceptions of inclusion. Teachers with higher levels of education had less positive attitudes toward inclusion. Furthermore, those teachers who have had special education coursework had more positive perceptions of inclusion than did those without this education. Clearly this research further emphasized the important role of teacher perceptions in the movement towards inclusion.

With more teachers implementing the collaborative teaching model, educators develop perceptions and attitudes about the model. Research conducted by Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, and Lesar,(1991) assessed special and regular educator perceptions and opinions surrounding inclusion. A survey of 381 teachers (i.e.,310 regular classroom teachers and 71 special educators) was evaluated. The results indicated that teachers are more likely to view themselves as participants in a single, not dual, educational system. That is, the regular educators assume the primary responsibility for students with mild disabilities who are placed in their classes. Also, a relatively high percentage of respondents believed that full time placement of students with mild disabilities in the regular classroom could
negatively effect the distribution of instructional classroom time. Regular educators were significantly more pessimistic regarding this issue. Moreover, the results of this study indicated that regular classroom teachers do not perceive themselves as having the skills for adapting instruction. This research highlights many issues which arise from the growing trend toward inclusion.

Although there is inadequate research regarding teachers' perceptions of collaborative teaching models, several studies discuss the importance of perceptions. Teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion and collaborative teaching are key factors directly related to the effectiveness of these models. In general, teachers have positive feelings toward the inclusive model. However, specific studies about special and regular educator's perceptions of their role in a collaborative setting have not been widely published. In order for a full movement of the education system toward inclusion and then collaborative teaching, more research is needed to analyze adequately teachers' perceptions and beliefs about the movement.

Statement of Purpose

Current reform in education is a movement towards the inclusion of special education students with their non-disabled peers. Furthermore, collaboration between special educators and general educators is becoming a popular model to handle the demands of a variety of student needs. Certainly professionals need to share their expertise with
one another in order to give each student the best education possible in an array of academic and intellectual areas. Collaborative teaching is one model which will give each student in a given classroom direction from more than one teacher. Moreover, in an area in which one teacher may lack knowledge, the other may excel. Thus, exceptional children can have all their needs met while not being excluded from the general education setting.

With a movement towards collaboration in many school systems nationwide, a question is being raised about the collaborative relationship between a special educator and a general educator who co-teach. What are the teacher's perceptions of the importance of their role in the classroom? A positive working relationship is a key in making collaboration successful. Teachers, whether regular or special educators, need to feel valued in their work environment, and collaborative settings may encourage one individual to receive more attention than the other. The focus of this research, then, is to evaluate the perceived importance of each member of a collaborative team, the general and special educator, and what each perceive to be their role in the collaborative classroom. More specifically, the following questions were addressed:

Do teachers who collaborate feel like equals in the classroom?

Is there a relationship between the amount of time spent co-planning and the perception of equality in the
collaboratively taught class?

Is there a relationship between the number of years teaching and preference for collaborative teaching?

**Definition of Terms**

**Collaborative Teaching:** Both general and special education teachers simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibility for specified classroom instruction that is to occur within that setting (Bauwens, Hourcade, and Friend, 1989).
Teacher Perceptions 26

Method

A survey research design was used to obtain regular and special education teachers' perceptions of their role in a collaborative teaching model. A self-developed questionnaire was used to obtain data. A .05 significance level was used to test for any differences among teachers' perceptions.

Subjects

For this study, subjects were regular and special education teachers who were teaching collaboratively. The total number of subjects in this study was 39. Subjects were selected from elementary, middle, and high school levels. The subjects were chosen from schools using the collaborative teaching model in public school divisions in central Virginia.

Procedure

A letter requesting permission to survey pairs of teachers who collaboratively teach was sent to the appropriate administrative offices in the school divisions to be surveyed (see Appendix A). Once permission was granted, principals in the schools for each school division were contacted to identify teachers who teach collaboratively. Surveys with a cover letter and a self-addressed stamped envelope were mailed to the teachers. In the cover letter teachers were directed not to share their answers with anyone, including the teacher with whom they collaborate. Participation in this study was completely
voluntary, and this was made clear to everyone receiving a survey before they began (See Appendix B). Teachers' answers were held confidential and were only seen by the researcher. Furthermore, participants remained anonymous as no names were given and no information identifying participants, schools, or school divisions was included in this study. Participation in this study presented no more than minimal risk to any subject.

**Instrument**

For the purposes of this study, a self-developed questionnaire was used (See Appendix C). The first part contained demographic information, such as number of years teaching, gender, and teaching certifications. The second part contained questions regarding the collaborative teaching model including the teachers' perceptions of their role in the collaboratively taught classroom. Questions on the second part were arranged according to a four-point Likert scale with the following choices:

1-Not at all like
2-Not usually like
3-Somewhat like
4-Very much like

The survey contained 15 questions pertaining to how much 'like' or 'unlike' the statements were to the teacher's particular situation.

**Data Analysis**

The results of the survey were analyzed by descriptive
and quantitative statistics. Thus, means and percentages, Pearson r, and t-tests were used to analyze the data from this study.
Results

Thirty-five regular educators were surveyed, of which twenty-one responded (60%). Twenty-six special educators were surveyed, of which eighteen responded (69.23%). All of the returned surveys were included in the results. A Descriptive analysis of teaching experience showed that the average number of years taught ranged from two to thirty with a mean of 11.3 years. The number of years collaboratively taught ranged from one to five, with a mean of 2.7 years. The mean number of total students taught in the collaborative class was 24, while the mean number of students with disabilities in the collaborative class was 8. With only one exception, all respondents to the survey were female.

Testing The Hypotheses

Several questions were the focus of this research.

Hypothesis 1

Regular and special education teachers collaboratively teaching feel like equals in the classroom.

The total number of subjects responding to this portion of the survey was thirty-nine. Of those, twenty-one were regular educators and eighteen were special educators. Regular and special education teachers' responses to the Likert-scale portion of the survey were added and a t-test was used to examine significant differences between the two groups. Questions in this portion of the survey included, "I take part in developing classroom policies as much as my
co-teacher does," "I am an equal to my co-teacher in the classroom," and "My co-teacher values my presence in the classroom." Teacher's responded according to how like or unlike these statements were to their collaborative situation. The mean score for regular educators was 43.4, and the mean score for special educators was 45.3. The t-calculated value was .67, which was not significant at the .05 level (see Table 1). Therefore, the hypothesis indicated no significant difference between regular and special education teachers' perceptions. That is, on this survey, both regular and special educators perceive themselves as equals in the classroom.

Hypothesis 2

A relationship exists between the amount of co-planning time and the teachers' perceptions of their role in the collaborative teaching model.

The total number of subjects responding to this question was thirty-nine. Of those, twenty-one were regular educators and eighteen were special educators. The average number of periods spent co-planning for both groups was 1.89 periods per week. This average and the total scores for the Likert-scale portion of the survey for both regular and special educators were tested using a Pearson-r. The r-value obtained was .35 which exceeded the critical value of .33 at the .05 level (see Table 2). The correlation indicated a significant relationship between the amount of time spent co-planning and the teacher's perceived role in a
collaboratively taught class.

**Hypothesis 3**

A relationship exists between the number of years teaching and preference for collaborative teaching.

The total number of subjects responding to this question was thirty-nine. Of those, twenty-one were regular educators and eighteen were special educators. The total number of years teaching and the total scores on the Likert-scale portion of the survey were correlated using the Pearson-r with a significance level of .05. The r-value was -.02 which was less than the significance level of .33 at the .05 level (see Table 3). Therefore, no significant relationship was found between total number of years teaching and teachers' perceptions of the collaborative teaching model.

**Hypothesis 4**

A relationship exists between number of years collaboratively teaching and teachers' preference for collaborative teaching.

The total number of subjects responding to this question was thirty-nine. Of those, twenty-one were regular educators and eighteen were special educators. The mean number of years collaboratively teaching for both groups of teachers was 2.71 years. A Pearson-r correlation was used to examine the relationship between the number of years collaboratively teaching and the total scores from the Likert-scale portion of the survey. The r-value was .07,
which was less than the critical value of .33 at the .05 significance level (see Table 4). Therefore, no significant relationship was found between the number of years collaboratively teaching and teachers' preference for collaborative teaching.

Qualitative analysis of the comments written on the surveys by a few of the teacher's uncovered some interesting and beneficial feedback. One special educator made a comment regarding the Likert-scale portion of the survey. To clarify the terms "I" and "co-teacher" in each statement, this teacher assumed that "I" referred to the regular educator and that "co-teacher" referred to the special educator. This illustrates that special education teachers may feel that the regular educator takes the primary role in the classroom, while the special educator serves as more of an aide to the regular educator. Regular educators also felt that the special education co-teachers choose the role of an aide in the collaborative classroom. One must wonder if a teacher would choose to be an aide or if there were some difficulties in that relationship which prevented collaboration and equality in the classroom.
Discussion

The results obtained on the question regarding equality in the classroom between regular and special educators who collaborate revealed that there was no significant difference between the two types of teachers and perceptions of their role in the classroom. In regard to the hypothesis that there was a relationship between the amount of time spent co-planning and teachers' overall preference for collaborative teaching, a significant relationship was found. With the two remaining hypotheses, one regarding the total number of years teaching with preference for collaborative teaching, and the other regarding the total number of years collaboratively teaching with preference for collaborative teaching, significant relationships were not found in either case.

The review of the literature indicated that there were no previous research studies which focused on regular and special educators' perceptions of their role in a collaborative teaching model. However, many researchers have suggested that equality and parity among teachers who collaborate are essential in order for effective use of this teaching model. Although this research found no significant difference between regular and special education teachers' perceptions of their role in a collaborative situation, the researcher suspects some areas in which equality does not exist. For example, many teachers perceived equality on every issue except decision making in the classroom, where
teachers did not perceive as high a level of equality with that of their co-teacher.

The significant relationship found between the amount of time spent co-planning and the perceived equality in the classroom needs serious attention. As noted previously, communication between teachers is an essential element of the collaborative teaching model. Teachers who plan together most likely respect one another's ideas, which surely builds a stronger and more equal relationship between the two.

Limitations of the Study

The sample size was small and this may have affected the generalizability of the results. The teachers were not matched pairs and this would have allowed for direct comparisons between the perceptions of regular educators and special educators. Finally, the researcher had to assume that the teachers did not share their answers with their co-teacher, and that teachers responded honestly.

Recommendations

First, it would be interesting to examine whether or not teachers have a choice to collaborate, or if the teaching model is forced upon them. This information may be related to how teachers feel about collaboration. Second, matched pairs of teachers could be surveyed and then their answers compared to find out if and in which areas perceptions vary. Third, observational research should be conducted as this type of qualitative analysis would allow
an outside person to observe teachers in a collaborative teaching model and record relationship variables as they occur.

Clearly, as collaborative teaching becomes more widely used across the country, more research is needed. In order for collaboration to be successful, many issues need to be addressed. Further research would benefit teachers, administrators, and students.
Appendix A

Letter to Superintendent
To Whom It May Concern:

I am a graduate student at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. Currently, I am working on my masters in special education. I am requesting permission to survey pairs of teachers, one general and one special educator, who collaboratively teach within your school district. This will include any elementary, middle, and/or high schools which use the collaborative teaching model. The teachers, school; and school division will be guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. The survey focuses on the collaborative teaching model, and will take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Enclosed is a sample of the survey.

Your permission to conduct this research will be greatly appreciated. I will follow-up this letter with a phone call approximately one week after mailing to ensure that the letter was received and to answer any questions you may have. Please return this permission sheet by August 30 in the envelope provided. In your response, please include the number of surveys you will need. One survey is needed for each teacher collaborating. I will provide the teachers with self-addressed stamped envelopes to allow them to return the surveys directly back to myself. Thank you for your time and consideration.

I ______________ grant_/do not grant__ permission to Kristen Philbrick to conduct research in the __________ school district. I will need ____ copies of the survey, cover letter, and self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Sincerely,

Kristen Philbrick
Longwood College
Graduate Student
Appendix B

Teacher Survey Cover Letter
Dear Teacher,

I am a graduate student at Longwood College in Farmville, Virginia. I am currently working on my masters in special education. During my student teaching experience I became particularly interested in the collaborative teaching model. My research study focuses on teachers' perceptions of their role in a collaboratively taught classroom. The survey enclosed is intended to gather information regarding this topic.

As a participant in this study, you will be guaranteed confidentiality. None of the information enclosed will identify you or your school division. Your survey should be completed individually, and even the teacher with whom you collaboratively teach should have no access to your responses. Participation is completely voluntary, and would require only a few minutes of your time. Upon completion of my study, I am willing to share the results with anyone who wishes to see them. If you choose to participate, please return the survey by September 25 in the self-addressed stamped envelope enclosed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kristen Philbrick
Longwood College
Graduate Student
Appendix C

Teacher Survey
Regular and Special Education

Teachers' Perceptions of Their Role in a Collaborative Teaching Model

Part I

Collaborative Teaching (Co-teaching): Both general and special education teachers simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibility for specified classroom instruction that is to occur within that setting. Using the given definition of collaboration, please answer the following questions.

1. Are you co-teaching in a collaborative teaching model at the present time?  yes__  no__

2. What is your gender?  male__  female__

3. Are you a regular educator or a special educator?  regular__  special__

4a. If you are a regular educator, what subject(s) do you teach currently?

4b. If you are a special educator, in what areas are you certified?

LD__  MR__  ED__  other__

5. How many years have you been teaching?  ____ years

6. How many years have you been collaboratively teaching?  ____ years

7. How many periods/bells per day do you collaboratively teach?  ____ periods
8. How many planning periods per week do you co-plan with the teacher with whom you collaborate? ___ times per week

9. How many students with disabilities are mainstreamed into your collaboratively taught class? ___ students

10. Check what type of disabilities these students have.
    - LD__  MR__  ED__  other__

11. What is the total number of students taught in your collaborative classroom? ___ students

Part II

Think about the classroom in which you collaboratively teach. Please respond to the following items according to how much "like" or "unlike" each statement is representative of your situation. Circle the number according to the following scale:

1-Not at all  2-Not usually  3-Somewhat  4-Very much like like like like

1. I instruct the entire class for the full period, while my co-teacher circulates throughout the classroom assisting students individually. 1 2 3 4

2. I instruct a group in the class while my co-teacher instructs the remainder of the class. 1 2 3 4
3. My co-teacher participates in the instruction of students as much as I do.

4. My co-teacher participates in planning lessons and activities as much as I do.

5. My co-teacher recognizes my strengths and weaknesses regarding instruction.

6. I take part in developing classroom policies as much as my co-teacher does.

7. I take part in the discipline of students as much as my co-teacher does.

8. I am an equal to my co-teacher in the classroom.

9. My co-teacher values my ideas and opinions.

10. My authority in the classroom is equal to that of my co-teacher.

11. My co-teacher values my presence in the classroom.

12. The students recognize my authority and my co-teacher's authority equally in the classroom.

13. In the classroom, I make as many decisions as my co-teacher does.

14. Students ask for my help as often as they ask for my co-teachers help.

15. Collaborative teaching has made me a more effective teacher.
Table 1

Comparison of Regular and Special Educator's Perceptions of Equality in the Classroom
Table 1

Comparison of Regular and Special Educators' Perceptions of Equality in the Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular Ed.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Ed.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Perceptions 45
Table 2

Relationship Between Co-Planning Time and Perceived Role in the Collaborative Classroom
## Table 2

### Relationship Between Co-Planning Time and Perceived Role in the Collaborative Classroom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-planning Time</td>
<td>1.89</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>.35*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05*
### Table 3
Relationship Between Number of Years Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration
Table 3

Relationship Between Number of Years Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years Teaching</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

Relationship Between Years Collaboratively Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration
Table 4

**Relationship Between Years Collaboratively Teaching and Perception of Role in Collaboration**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>r</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years Collab.</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>44.3</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
References


Johnston, W. F. (1994). How to educate all the students...together. Schools in the Middle, 3(4), 9-14.

Teacher Perceptions 53

success of collaboration resource programs for students with disabilities in grades 6 through 8. Remedial and Special Education, 16(2). 79-89.


