Three Voices, One Goal: A Narrative Study of High School Facilitators' Experience in a Community of Practice

Ebony Briggs

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THREE VOICES, ONE GOAL: A NARRATIVE STUDY
OF HIGH SCHOOL FACILITATORS’ EXPERIENCE IN A
COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

by

Ebony Nicole Briggs

A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Major: Adult Education

The University of Memphis
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Dedication

Strong, hardworking, and dedicated are some of the characteristics I use to describe my current self. When I was in high school, those adjectives were not connected to my identity, and instead, I was self-conscious, different, and a student with a disability. I had dreams of serving as one of the eight Supreme Court Justices, but my limited vision was personified and restricted my abilities. School officials tried to persuade my mother to send me to a school for the blind and visually impaired as they felt those schools with specialized services were better equipped to educate someone, such as myself, with special needs.

Often, I would sit in class, excluded from the lesson because it seemed my general education teachers had little knowledge of strategies that were effective in reaching all students. It was my fifth-grade teacher, Linda Gilliam, who saw in me what others did not see: my ambition. Mrs. Gilliam taught me to always work to my fullest potential, to use my resources, and that I can go as far as I wanted to go in life if I believed in myself.

For my mother and father, Linda and Derek Jones, for always being there and supporting my efforts. To my husband, Cedric A. Briggs Jr., who has always believed in me and has never once given up on me. To the Briggs kids, (Jazmine, Cedric III, De’Undre, Coby, Quincy, and Courtnei), who were my constant motivation and the reason why I worked so hard. To all my family and friends who did not understand why I could not hang out or wondered why I failed to return phone calls; know that I appreciate each and every one of you for your love and continued support through this dissertation journey.

To Grandma Rosie, for being so genuine and pure and helping me when no one else would. I miss you and I think about you often. I am working and taking care of my “chillins.”

To my uncle James “Poochie” Franklin, I too will love you forever.
I prayed His will and so it was. God has truly smiled on me! For His grace and mercy, I am truly thankful.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation would not have been completed without the help of Dr. Barbara Mullins Nelson. Although she was not able to work with me until completion, I am forever thankful for her guidance and mentorship as my very first doctorate advisor. She laid the foundation for this great accomplishment.

I acknowledge and appreciate Dr. Jeff Wilson, my second program advisor, for challenging my thinking. He has been very patient and kind throughout this entire dissertation process. When I wanted to rush through my program, he reminded me that the race is not always won by the swift. I sincerely appreciate his work and guidance.

I would like to acknowledge Dr. William Hunter for sharing his content expertise in Special Education and Wendy Griswold for stepping in as my third and final advisor to lead me to the finish line. I further thank my dissertation committee and the entire Department of Leadership at The University of Memphis.
Abstract


Special education and general education teachers must work collaboratively in a single classroom that serves the diverse needs of all children due to federal regulations such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. Evidence-based practices that foster collaboration are scarce. The purpose of this narrative inquiry research was to explore the perceptions of a team of educators which consists of a general education teacher, special education teacher, and an administrator on how their experience of participating in a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers. Within this purpose, the intent was to explore the value of learning that is attached to social learning. The addition of an administrator as a study participant supports the notion that administrator support is a key factor in establishing a collaborative culture. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?
2. How does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment?
3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis, participants were able to provide insight about their experiences and explain how the collaborative practice was successful in creating a more inclusive environment for students with disabilities in the general education environment. The common themes to emerge from the data collection were
that participating in a community of practice helped create a positive outlook on collaborative practice, helped create shared responsibility, helped increase administrative support of co-teaching teams, helped overcome the challenges of common planning for co-teachers, and helped strengthen co-teaching relationships. This study is significant to the field of special education and inclusive practices because the findings can be used to inform best collaborative practices and professional development for co-teachers.

*Keywords:* collaboration, community of practice, inclusive environment
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Chapter One

Introduction

“Alone we can do so little. Together we can do so much.”

-Helen Keller

Special education has undergone many changes in regard to placement, instructional strategies, and service delivery options for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). In an effort to create a more inclusive environment for students with disabilities, special education teachers and general education teachers are now charged with working collaboratively in a single classroom that serves the diverse needs of all children (Friend, 2015; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012). Special education was once a separate education program that has now been integrated into the general education curriculum due to federal regulations such as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. The majority of students with disabilities in American schools are served in the general education environment (Leader-Janssen, Swain, Delkamiller, & Ritzman, 2012; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012; Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007). Special education teachers and general education teachers must rely on each other for support with ensuring students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum (Hines, 2008). Little data-based research exists on what teachers are doing to be effectively collaborative (Da Fonте & Burton-Arwood, 2017; Friend, 2000; Weiss & Brigham, 2000).

In this study, I am interested in exploring the perceptions of secondary general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators’ experience of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaborative needs of team teachers in the inclusion environment. Particularly, I would like to know how their social participation in a community of
practice help inform the value of learning that is attached to social learning. This chapter begins with an introduction to the study along with the background. It is followed by the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions that are used to guide the study. The significance of the study is presented prior to the limitations and delimitations, assumptions, and definition of terms. Chapter 1 concludes with a brief summary of the chapter. The phrases children with disabilities (referenced by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and students with disabilities (referenced by most other literature including No Child Left Behind) will be used interchangeably.

**Background of the Study**

Strengthening America’s school system and providing a good, quality education for America’s students has consistently been a topic for exploration by the federal government. According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) as reported by Shaw (2010), “Its [K-12 Education] ills have been widely known and discussed for years, especially since 1983, when a federal panel issued a sweeping condemnation of public elementary and high school education called a ‘Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform’” (p. 243). The outcome of this report was based on student achievement results from standardized tests, high school dropout rates, and the poor quality of education that was being provided to America’s students (Shaw, 2010). The acclaimed report, “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”, attacked the state of America’s schools and pushed education reforms in an effort to change the negative direction of which public schools were headed (United States, 1983). The report produced statistical data to support that only one fifth of 17-year-old high school students could write a persuasive essay (United States, 1983). Although “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform” urged education reform, Blanton, Paugach, and Boveda
(2014) found the field of special education was not a major consideration in education reform initiatives and there was little agreement on how to prepare teachers to work with students with disabilities.

Several years after “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), formerly the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, was reauthorized in 2002 with the hopes of improving the “performance of America’s elementary and secondary schools” (U. S. Department of Education, 2004, para 2). Dee and Jacob (2010) noted the following:

NCLB dramatically extended the law’s scope by requiring that states introduce school-accountability systems that applied to all public schools and students in the state. NCLB requires annual testing of students in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 (and at least once in grades 10 through 12) and that states rate schools, both as a whole and for key subgroups, with regard to whether they are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward their state’s proficiency goals. (p. 54).

NCLB required states to analyze testing outcomes to see if all students, including students with disabilities as a subgroup, were making achievement gains through the use of school-level performance measures. This legislation required school districts to design a curriculum that ensured all students, including students with disabilities had equal access to core instruction (NCLB, 2004).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted by Congress in 1975, was developed “to ensure that all students with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent
living” (20 U.S.C.§1400(d)(1)(A)). The most recent reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 placed emphasis on access for students with disabilities in the general education classroom and on increased outcomes on state assessments. The push is to ensure that students with disabilities have access to a high-quality education based on high standards (Yell & Drasgow, 2005). Table 1 presents a summary of the 13 disability categories as recognized by IDEA.
### Disability Categories as Recognized by IDEA

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<th>Disability Category</th>
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<td>Autism</td>
<td>A developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deafness-blindness</td>
<td>Concomitant [simultaneous] hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deafness</td>
<td>Hearing impairment so severe that a child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Disturbance</td>
<td>A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing Impairment</td>
<td>An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance but is not included under the definition of “deafness.”</td>
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Table 1 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Multiple Disabilities</td>
<td>Concomitant [simultaneous] impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orthopedic Impairment</td>
<td>A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Health Impairments</td>
<td>Having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that</td>
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<td>(A) is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(B) Adversely affects a child’s educational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or Language Impairment</td>
<td>A communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic Brain Injury</td>
<td>An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Impairments (Including Blindness)</td>
<td>An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.</td>
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*Note.* Adapted from the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (2012) Disabilities Categories of Disability under IDEA.
Historically, students with physical and mental disabilities were educated in a separate classroom setting. Laws such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, State Schools Act, Handicapped Children’s Early Education Assistance Act of 1968, and the Economic Opportunities Amendments of 1972 all paved the way to the amended Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 which requires the least restrictive environment for SWD (United States Department of Education, 2010).

NCLB (2001) and IDEA (2004) intersect to increase access and outcomes for students with disabilities because both mandates require schools to focus on students with disabilities, provide proof of parental involvement, hire highly qualified teachers in subject areas, and set measurable goals and objectives. As a result, many districts are utilizing co-teaching as a collaborative inclusion practice (Leader-Janssen et al, 2012; Solis et al, 2012). Collaboration is a hallmark of special education and is not a new concept; however, the application of co-teaching in the general education classroom is a relatively new practice (Friend et al, 2010). Special education teachers have always formed partnerships with service providers such as speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, and occupational therapists but in the past, they have only acted as a consulting teacher to general education teachers (Wood, 1998). Special education teachers are now planning and co-teaching with general education teachers as an attempt to create a more inclusive environment for SWD (Hines, 2008).

Collaborative teaching or co-teaching is commonly defined as the act of a general education teacher and a special education teacher working together in a single classroom to plan, organize, and deliver instruction to the same group of students (Cook & Friend, 1995; Miller & Burden, 2007; Sileo, 2011). Friend (2015) identified six co-teaching models and reported that co-teaching as a service option is largely based on collaboration. Various authors have concluded
that common barriers to co-teaching are planning, communication between co-teachers, administrative support, and teacher preparedness (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Graetz, Norland, Gardizi, & McDuffie, 2005; Piechura-Couture, Tichenor, & Touchton, 2006). This study seeks to determine if some of those barriers are removed when participating in a community of practice.

**Statement of the Problem**

Due to recent changes in federal legislation, a greater emphasis has been placed on educating SWD in the general education environment since they are expected to achieve comparable success as other learners (Bouck, 2009; Cook, 2004; IDEA, 2004). General education teachers are charged with helping SWD meet “the demands of more challenging curriculum, leaving general education teachers and SETs [special education teachers] with the task of determining how to provide SWD appropriate instruction that achieves these high goals” (Haager & Vaughn, 2013 as cited in Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Theresa, 2015, pg. 26). With increased expectations for both general education teachers and special education teachers, it is important for general educators and special educations to collaborate and work as a team. A lack of collaboration among general education teachers, special education teachers, and related service providers may result in SWD being unable to access the general education curriculum (Leader-Janssen et al, 2012).

General education teachers are being held accountable for all student learning within the classroom including SWD (Obiakor et al, 2012). Since most teachers’ professional licenses endorse a specific category of learners (elementary or secondary; middle school, all grades; special education, etc.), one of the greatest barriers to an inclusive education is that too many teachers feel they have not been sufficiently prepared to address the diverse population of students and their needs (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017; McCray & Alvarez McHatton,
The historic belief among some teachers is that SWD may be better served by a special education specialist who has completed education and training in that field (Wood, 1998). Some special education teachers who once served more as consulting teachers for SWD are now working alongside general education teachers in a more inclusive environment (Fishbaugh, 1997; Leko et al, 2015). Soodak (2003) suggests educational policies and procedures should be more inclusive as well. Some districts are utilizing professional development in the form of communities of practice as a way to help teachers overcome the challenge of co-teaching (Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007).

Professional development is defined in the literature as the process of improving staff skills and competencies needed to produce outstanding educational results for students (Cowen, Barrett, Toma, & Troske, 2015; Hassel, 1999). The ultimate goal of professional development is to provide teachers with the tools and resources that leads to increases in student learning in the classroom (Cowen et al, 2015). Research shows that professional development is vital to teachers’ growth and support and is a key resource for initiating positive change in teachers’ instructional practice (Broko, 2004; Mizell, 2010). While professional development opportunities for teachers are available in a variety of contexts and forms, research of communities of practice and co-teachers is limited. Little data-based research exist on what teachers are doing to be effectively collaborative (Friend, 2000; Weiss & Brigham, 2000). Therefore, this research focused on teachers’ experiences of participating in a community of practice, a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time (Wenger, 1998).
Purpose Statement

The purpose of this narrative research study is to explore the perceptions of a team of educators which consists of a general education teacher, special education teacher, and an administrator on how their experience of participating in a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. Within this purpose, the intent was to explore the value of learning that is attached to social learning and participation within a community of practice. Although the administrator is not directly a part of this co-teaching team, the addition of an administrator as a study participant supports the notion that administrator support is a key factor in establishing a collaborative culture (Cook & Friend, 1995; Hines, 2008). Wenger, Trayner, and de Last (2011) explained, “Communities and networks can build shared understanding and develop a common language; social resources can facilitate further learning and communities” (p. 18). This study is positioned within an interpretivist and constructivism paradigm in order to understand co-teachers’ experiences of participating in a community of practice designed to support an inclusive classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks help to shape the research questions and the methods that will be used in a research study (Glesne, 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) states, “All research is interpretive; it is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied” (p. 33). The theoretical framework for this study is largely based on Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning. With roots in social learning theory, Wegner believed that Bandura’s social learning theory could be applied to a simple social learning system such as a community of practice “that locates learning, not in the head or outside it, but in the relationship between the person and the world” (Wenger, 2003, p. 1).
Bandura’s (1971) theory on social learning is mostly concerned with reciprocal interactions between behavior and its controlling environmental conditions. Bandura’s central topic was on how people behave in given situations. Bandura’s social learning theory supports the notion that learning by direct experience leads to new patterns of behaviors. Wegner (1998) stipulated that according to Bandura’s view of social learning theory, learning occurs in the relationship between the person and the world which results in new meaning. Wegner suggests that communities of practice can be used in education to provide peer-to-peer learning that offers a new perspective on education and learning.

Situated cognition is a learning process that also has its roots in communities of practice. According to Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) knowledge and the learning process is “a product of the activity, context, and culture in which knowledge is developed and used” (p. 32). Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasized that through peripheral participation such as in a community of practice, the participants are able to share diverse ideas, opinions, and skills which leads to active learning. Cafarella and Merriam (1999) expounded on situated cognition and reported that the learning process cannot be separated from the situation in which learning takes place. Situated cognition in practice can be incorporated into the learning process by simulations of real world activities and events (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000). Hung, Looi, and Koh (2004) state, “… it considers the system—context, persons, culture, language, intersubjectivity—as a whole coexisting and jointly defining the construction of meanings” (p. 193). Hung, Looi, and Koh (2004) further state, “As communities are central to the changing and evolving nature of persons acting (situated cognition), we cannot escape the issue of changing phenomena and practice” (p. 195).
Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice social learning theory is summarized as being the regular interactions of groups of people who share a common goal or passion for something they do in an effort to deepen their knowledge and understanding around that goal. As time progresses, the participants gain a unique perspective and a common knowledge on the topic (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Wenger identifies the four components that must be present to identify social participation as a process of learning as follows: meaning is the ability to experience the world in a meaningful way, practice is the way of talking about shared historical resources and sustain mutual engagement in action, community is the way of talking about the social configurations in which enterprises are defined, and identity is the way of talking about changing who we are (p. 5). Wegner (1998) emphasized that engaging in communities of practice is a process of negotiation of meaning which is a dual process of participation and reification where participation is described as being active in the process while reification is producing artifacts that reflect the meaning that was gathered from the experience. In this narrative inquiry research, Wegner’s (1998) components of a community of practice will be used to analyze whether a community of practice exists for the team of teachers in this study.

Research Questions

The primary goal of this research is to explore the perceptions of a collaborative teaching team that consists of a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator’s experience of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. To accomplish this goal, the following research questions will be posed:

1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?
2. How does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment?

3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?

In order to know if communities of practices are effective as an evidence-based practice for collaboration, it is important to know how collaborative success is measured. According to Scruggs, Mastropieri, and McDuffie (2007), “The perceived success of collaborative planning was generally defined as the special education and general education teacher being able to plan and implement a lesson with relatively equal input” (p. 16). In addition, it is important to know the value of learning that is attached to the experience.

**Significance of the Study**

I am interested in the experience of educators at a small public charter school in West Tennessee who participated in a community of practice designed to address the collaboration needs of special education teachers and general education teachers in the inclusive environment. The sample for this study will consist of a collaborative teaching team to include a special education teacher, a general education teacher, and an administrator. The findings of this study will be applicable to secondary educators who are charged with implementing evidence-based practices that ensure all students have equal access to core instruction in an inclusive environment. Scholarly research is scarce that explores secondary educators’ experiences of how the needs of SWD are being met through participating in a community of practice.

I am further interested in identifying the interpretation of the teachers’ personal perception in relation to the others who participated in the community of practice and the value of social learning and participation that is attached to the experience. Knowing the perceptions of
secondary co-teachers who participated in a community of practice may be used to help inform communities of practice as an evidence-based practice among team teachers who serve SWD. Establishing effective collaborative relationships is essential to creating an equally effective inclusion environment (Hines, 2008; Soodak, 2003. In addition, the experience of each teacher’s practice may be valuable as a learning resource (Wenger et al., 2011). Although collaboration is a key component for an inclusive environment, current research does not specify evidence-based practices for collaboration (Millier & Burden, 2007). Knowing the experience of these educators may help to improve collaborative practice for the field of special education and inclusion.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, this study focused on the findings from the experiences of one team of teachers and an administrator from a small public charter school in West Tennessee. Results of this study should be limited to the Dream Academy and not generalized for all charter schools in West Tennessee.

The next limitation of this study is the use of purposeful sampling. Participants used in this study are only those general education teachers, special education teachers, and administrators that participate in a community of practice and who co-teach in the inclusion classroom. Not all teachers at the charter school will be considered for the study. The findings should be limited to the participants of the study.

Another limitation of this study is that it is confined to a small sample size. Creswell (2007) explained, “Narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life experiences of a single life or the lives of a small number of individuals” (p. 55). This research is limited to three participants from no more than one team of teachers.
This study is also limited to a math co-teaching team that consists of one math general education teacher and one special education teacher.  

Finally, this research is limited to collaborative teaching as it relates to general education teachers and special education teachers who team teach in the inclusion environment. The focus is on teachers who are responsible for instructing students with mild to moderate disabilities.

**Delimitations**

The participants are limited to one team of secondary teachers from a small public charter school in West Tennessee. Although it would be interesting to speak with all team teachers who provide instruction to SWD in the inclusive environment at all public, secondary charter schools in West Tennessee, it is beyond the scope of this research.

**Definition of Terms**

_Collaboration._ How two or more people can effectively work together towards shared goals (Friend & Bursuck, 2007).

_Community of practice._ Wenger (1998) defines a community of practice as a process of social learning that occurs when people who have a common interest in a subject or area collaborate over an extended period of time.

_Inclusive environment._ The “practice of including students with exceptionalities in general education classrooms” (Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007, p. 440).

_Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)._ The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted by Congress in 1975, was developed “to ensure that all SWD have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” (20 U.S.C.§1400(d)(1)(A)).
No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). “NCLB dramatically extended the law’s scope by requiring that states introduce school-accountability systems that applied to all public schools and students in the state. NCLB requires annual testing of students in reading and mathematics in grades 3 through 8 (and at least once in grades 10 through 12) and that states rate schools, both as a whole and for key subgroups, with regard to whether they are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward their state’s proficiency goals” (Dee & Jacob, 2010, p. 54).

Many acronyms are used in the education field, including the participants who have been included in this study. Table 2 provides a listing of the acronyms most commonly used in this study with a brief definition for each.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FAPE</td>
<td>Free Appropriate Public Education</td>
<td>Education right of children with disabilities in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA</td>
<td>Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act</td>
<td>Legislation that ensures students with disabilities are provided with a Free Appropriate Public Education individualized to their specific needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LRE</td>
<td>Least Restrictive Environment</td>
<td>Opportunity for students with disabilities to be educated with non-disabled peers to the maximum extent possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWD</td>
<td>Students with Disabilities</td>
<td>Students who require special education services because of autism; communication disorders; deaf blindness; emotional disturbances; hearing impairments, including deafness; intellectual disability; orthopedic impairments; other health impairments; specific learning disabilities; traumatic brain injuries; or visual impairments, including blindness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Study Overview

This qualitative dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 of the study provides background information, a statement of the problem, purpose of the study and the research question addressed, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations, and definition of terms. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. Chapter 3 describes the research design, methodology, theoretical framework, research design, rationale for its use, explanation of participants, research context, data collection process, the data analysis process, and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study from the combined perspectives of the participants. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by providing a discussion of the themes in relation to the literature, implication of research for evidence-based practices for collaboration among general education and special education team teacher, and makes recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

In this narrative inquiry research study, Wenger’s (1998) community of practice learning theory is the lens used to view the perceptions of a team of educators’ experience of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing the collaboration needs in an inclusive environment. I wanted to further analyze the value of learning that is attached to social participation. As policymakers and stakeholders continue to address school reform efforts for the American school system, the push to determine best practices for collaboration among co-teachers remains in focus. Although the expectation is that all students are effectively served by both the general education teacher and the special education collectively in spite of a teacher’s education, training, and content area, little data-based research exists on what teachers are doing to be effectively collaborative (Friend, 2000; Weiss & Brigham, 2000).

Chapter 1 served as an introduction to the study by providing a brief overview of the problem, its purpose, and the significance of this study to the field of special education. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to review and synthesize current research and to explain the theoretical framework that connects back to the goal of this research. Special education and school reform literature was reviewed to provide a background of special education and its relationship to collaborative teaching. In addition, adult learning theories were reviewed to situate adult learning for educators in context for this study. This literature review is therefore divided into four sections: special education and school reform, collaborative teaching, adult education and learning, and adult learning for educators.
Special Education and School Reform

Before legislation was passed mandating public education for students with disabilities (SWD), parents were limited to home school or out of pocket private education expenses to educate their children with disabilities (Winzer, 1993). These two options only came available as a result of changing societal views as to what extent individuals with disabilities should be feared, segregated, or educated (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011; Winzer, 1998). It was not until the turn of the 20th century that children with disabilities were included in public education (Winzer, 1998; Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998).

Prior to the 1700s, individuals with disabilities were mistreated and at times, were subject to death (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). Philosophical beliefs about human dignity emerged in the 16th and 17th century that changed the way in which society viewed individuals with disabilities (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011).

In the 1800s, individuals with disabilities were isolated from society and were housed in institutions for the disabled, excluded from public education (Winzer, 1993). The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled in 1893 that a child with disabilities could be disqualified from public school if the child was unable to take physical care of himself (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). Within these institutions, teachers offered specialized educational services to children who were deaf, blind, or mentally retarded (Winzer, 1998). Deaf students were taught “oarlism”, identified in the literature as an alternative to sign language created by Pedro Pounce de Leon, blind students were taught braille, and students with intellectual disabilities were given specialized interventions targeting their learning needs (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). These institutions began to grow by the end of the 19th century due to positive advances in
individuals considered as uneducable learning and the increase in parents sending their children to be educated (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011; Winzer, 1998).

In the early part of the 20th century, parents set up advocacy groups that helped to emphasize the educational needs of (SWD) to society (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998). The ground-breaking advances in special education and advocates for the disabled helped set the stage for individualized education for SWD (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011). The first White House Conference on Children was held in 1910 which began conversation around developing remediation for special children (Winzer, 1998). In 1922, the Council for Exceptional Children was formed whose aim was to bring together individuals interested in the education of special children and to establish education standards for special education (Council for Exceptional Children Milestones, 2017). The landmark decision in the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) was the first significant court case to influence equal education opportunity for all people regardless of race, gender, or creed. The ruling in this case made segregation of white and colored children in public schools unconstitutional (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). As a result, parents of disabled children began to bring lawsuits to public school districts on the grounds of segregating and excluding children with disabilities (Winzer, 1993).

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) was passed to address the educational inequality of disadvantaged and underprivileged children (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965). Grant funds were made available to primary and secondary schools for the authorization of professional development, instructional materials, and resources, and for the promotion of parental involvement (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 2016). The ultimate goal of ESEA was to close the achievement gap between students by providing each child access to a quality education. Congress amended ESEA in 1966 to include a provision
for handicapped children. In 1970, a separate education act was passed called the Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) to encourage states to develop and improve programs for children with disabilities through grant funding (Coates, 1985).

Parent advocates and the court systems began to accept the idea that children with disabilities had been treated similarly to minorities in regard to educational opportunity (Coates, 1985; Winzer, 1993). In 1971, after the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) succeeded over the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania of an equal right to education for disabled children, a class action lawsuit was filed arguing that separation of children with disabilities was unconstitutional (Coates, 1985). In the suit known as Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia, a favorable decision was made ruling that the Board of Education of District of Columbia must provide an equal and constitutionally adequate education to children with disabilities (Coates, 1985). In 1975, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed to ensure all children would have the right to a free public education and to ensure states established a process for providing educational services to children with disabilities. The Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was renamed several times by Congress since its inception. In 2004, it was again reauthorized and renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004. Table 3 provides a summary of significant invents in special education as described in this research.
### Table 3

*Significant Events in Special Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court ruled that a child with disabilities could be disqualified from public school if the child was unable to take physical care of himself; private institutions that served individuals with disabilities began to grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s</td>
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</tr>
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<td>The first White House Conference on Children was held which began conversation around developing remediation for special children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
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**Special Education Reform** Education reform initiatives have been the topic of discussion among American policymakers and educators for many years. Although the initiatives and movements have taken on many shapes, the primary goal of education reform since the 1980s has been a push for higher student achievement to include high quality curriculum standards and standardized testing (Hardman, McDonnell, & Welch, 1993; United States, 1983). In 1981, the first appointed Secretary of Education, Terrel Bell, was directed by President Reagan to examine the quality of America’s education system. As a result, The National Commission on Excellence in Education was created (United States, 1983). The outcome was an alarming report titled “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform”. David Gardner, the Commission’s chair, identified the report’s purpose as, “…to help define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions, not research for scapegoats” (United States, 1983, p. 1). The report concluded that declines in educational performance was due to four aspects of the education process: content which was described as general track
curriculum for all students; low expectations of students for knowledge, ability, and skills; less
time spent on schooling by students as compared to other countries; and not enough highly
prepared teachers are available in key educational fields (United States, 1983).

Although “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.” reported
deficiencies in America’s education system as a whole and referenced a shortage of “specialized
teachers in areas such as specialists in education for gifted and talented, language minority, and
handicapped students” (United States, 1983, p. 24), Blanton, Pugach, and Bovedo (2014) suggest
findings and recommendations for special education programing was not a major consideration
in the report. The researchers further noted not many occasional papers written 1986-1999 on
education reform featured special education. Blanton et al. (2014) report Valli and Rennert-
Arieve’s 2000 study, “Identifying Consensus in Teacher Education Reform Documents: A
Proposed Framework and Action Implications,” was the only study to address special education
reform efforts prior to their historical analysis “Teacher Education Reform Initiatives and Special
Education: Convergence, Divergences, and Missed Opportunities” that was presented in 2014.
Common themes to emerge from the literature as it relates to special education reform were
teacher preparation, standards-based reform, and the inclusion movement.

Teacher preparation. Teacher education programs and their quality became the focus of
school reform following the publication of “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational
Reform” (Valli, Rennert-Ariev, & Hardman, 2000). Hardman et al. (1998) provided an overview
of policy trends and preparation of special education teachers and general education teachers
entitled “Special Education in an Era of School Reform: Preparing Special Education”. As a four
part series in school reform and special education, the authors examined the three major
principles they felt were guiding special education reform which were outlined as
“…collaboration and cross-disciplinary training, a common core of knowledge and skills for both general and special education teachers, and field-based training that involves building and sustaining partnerships between higher education and public schools” (Hardman, McDonald, & Welch, 1998, p. 2). Based on the practices and policy trends that were identified in school reform initiatives, the authors suggested that school reform initiatives have ignored the alignment of standards-based reform efforts and national expectations with the preparation of teachers.

Van Learhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, and Rouse (2007) conducted a program evaluation of Project ACCEPT (Achieving Creative & Collaborative Educational Preservice Teams) offered at the Department of Teaching and Learning at Northern Illinois University. The researchers looked directly at a teacher preparation program that provided collaborative training to special education teachers and general education teachers in an inclusive setting. This program was developed as a result of the K-12 learning standards that were issued by the Illinois State Board of Education for both special education and general education students as an effort to restructure teacher preparation programs (Van Learhoven et al., 2007). Project ACCEPT provided an additional training class for new special education teachers, offered enrichment for traditional special education classes, and involved minimal additional requirements for general education teachers (Van Learhoven et al., 2007). Although data collected in this study reflected year one implementation of Project ACCEPT, the researchers were able to conclude that participants had “positive effects on the attitudes and abilities of preservice teachers” (Van Learhoven et al., 2007, p. 453). However, the researchers were unable to determine if special education and general education teachers were prepared to teach SWD in the inclusive environment.
Blanton et al. (2014) conducted a historical literature analysis on teacher education reform documents to determine the connections between the preparedness of general education and special education teachers working with SWD. Included within this document was a reference to Hardman, McDonald, and Welch’s (1998) study. The goal of Blanton et al.’s research was to offer new perspectives on education reform as it relates to effectively preparing all teachers to work with SWD. The researchers first looked at general education and special education reform initiatives separately. They then looked at how the two fields intersect around education reform (Blanton, Pugach, & Bovedo, 2014). The assumptions guiding the analysis was that both general education teachers and special education teachers are responsible for teaching SWD, education reform is influenced by the preparation of teachers, and that the preparation of teachers occurs along a continuum beginning with preservice years to experienced teaching.

Blanton et al. (2014) recommended that special education and general education teaching preparation programs should intersect by providing general education teachers the knowledge base that is needed to support SWD in the general education classroom and by providing special education teachers the knowledge base to provide instruction in the general education areas that are offered. In addition, Blanton, Paugach, and Bovedo recommended a shift to a collaborative enterprise among general education and special education teacher preparation programs. Although Blanton, Paugach, and Bovedo noted that the preparation of teachers occurs along a continuum beginning with preservice years to experienced teaching, recommendations for preparing experienced general education and special education teachers for collaboratively working with SWD was not provided.

**Standards-based reform.** Another focus of special education school reform has been on standards-based reform. The passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 placed a larger
emphasis on high quality education for all students, increased proficiency on state academic achievement standards, accountability, and more choices for parents (Breslin, 2009; Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015; Voltz & Fore III, 2006). The accountability provision of NCLB requires states to develop and implement standards that are directly connected to an end of the year assessment that is used to determine proficiency. Voltz and Fore III (2006) note, “…students with disabilities are held to the same standards as their nondisabled peers and participate in accountability assessments with their nondisabled peers” (p. 329). As a result, districts and policymakers often disagree as to whether or not NCLB aligns with IDEA.

Breslin (2009) examined NCLB and its unintentional effect on SWD as it relates to the accountability measure of NCLB. Breslin maintains the following:

Although the stated purpose of NCLB is to raise the academic standards for all students, its homogenized system of assessment and accountability inevitably leaves many students behind. This issue is particularly acute among the counties’ nearly six million students with disabilities. SWD who are required to perform at the same academic level, on the same grade level assessments as their non-disabled peers are being systematically set up for academic failure (p. 660).

Breslin’s conclusion was based on the fact that NCLB requires all states to assess all students at their grade level when most SWD are performing below their grade level.

Cortiellia (2006) maintains the opposite in her article “NBLB and IDEA: What Parents of Students with Disabilities Need to Know and Do” which outlines how the two federal laws align to improve academic outcomes for SWD. Cortiellia affirms a shared responsibility now exists between special education and general education teachers as a result of NCLB and IDEA. NCLB mandates rigorous academic content standards for all students which is noted in the article to
align with IDEA’s requirement of carefully planned, individualized special instruction for students while participating in the general education curriculum (Cortiellia, 2006). Ideally, accommodations and modifications are made available to help SWD achieve high standards and raise achievement. Cortiellia identified key points of each law and provided suggestions of what states must know about the law and what they must do to be in compliance as a guide to help better understand the intersection of NCLB and IDEA.

**Inclusion movement.** The LRE is a guiding principle that guides the education of SWD and is a part of IDEA (Bouck, 2009; Obiakor et al, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to IDEA, students must be educated with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible, and removal from the general education environment if the IDEA disability category is extremely severe that supplementary aids and services cannot provide the student with an appropriate education (IDEA, 2004). Although a solid definition exists in IDEA public law for LRE, IDEA does not require inclusion, but it does require that a reasonable effort be made to educate SWD alongside their peers rather than separately. Determining the LRE for SWD requires looking into the unique needs of each student (Obiakor et al., 2012).

Winzer (1998) reports that inclusion emerged in special education literature in the 1980s and is considered to be the inclusion of SWD in the general education environment with supports from special education teachers. Winzer conducted an analysis of assumptions, theories, and visions of the inclusion reform movement and examined how they applied to real life classrooms. Winzer found that as inclusion became widely implemented, a continuum of views emerged ranging from partial inclusionist to full inclusionists. Winzer notes partial inclusionists believe inclusion should be incremental while full inclusionists believe inclusion should apply to all SWD. Winzer concludes, “While acceptance is the responsibility of every teacher, not all
have the skills needed for successful inclusion, nor are all receptive to the principles and the demands of inclusion” (p. 245).

The inclusion environment ideally brings services to students instead of students to services (Obiakor et al., 2012). The special education teacher goes into the general education environment to support the student through collaboration with the general education teacher. This is to ensure that the special education student has access to the same content that nondisabled peers have access to. Because school districts and IEP teams understand that the general education placement may not be the best option for all SWD, a continuum of services are offered. Figure 1 outlines the continuum of special education services most widely used by Tennessee school districts. This research study will focus on experiences of general education and special education teachers who provide services to students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education classroom via inclusion.

![Figure 1. Continuum of Special Education Services](image)

Source: Adapted from Tennessee Department of Education, Special Education Manual, 2008
In an inclusion environment, the special education teacher works with the SWD in the general education environment along with a general education teacher (Friend, 2015; Idol, 2006; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011; Winzer, 1998). Idol (2006) reports, “inclusion is when students with disabilities receive their entire academic curriculum in the general education program” (p. 78). Idol (2006) conducted a program evaluation of eight schools, four elementary and four secondary, to determine to what degree inclusion was taking place and embraced in these schools. Idol found that most educators favored inclusion and was willing to try to support all students including their SWD, but educators also felt more professional development was needed that related to inclusion practices.

Another finding in the literature that relates to inclusion is that all teachers must be able to teach all students (Friend, 2015; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011; Winzer, 1998). The general education teacher is responsible for teaching all students grade level content material while the special education teacher uses program supports and modifications outlined in the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to help the SWD access the curriculum (Idol, 2006). Scruggs and Mastropieri (2012) suggest that in order to make inclusion work, special education teachers must engage in effective collaboration with their co-teacher and focus on providing explicit instruction to SWD. Scruggs and Mastropieri maintain having good communication skills, having allotted planning time for co-teachers, and employing content mastery are all essential in the inclusion. While special education teachers have been trained to teach SWD, challenges presented by diversity among students’ background, needs, and abilities is a common task, general education teachers must overcome to be successful in the inclusion environment (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). The next section will provide an overview of collaborative teaching and its practice.
Collaborative Teaching

Early education in the United States consisted of teachers being responsible for groups of children in their own classrooms. Teachers were single handedly accountable for planning, implementing, and assessing content specific curriculum to about 30 students (Fishbaugh, 1997). SWD were educated, either in a separate classroom or in a separate school altogether. As IDEA went into effect, the requirement to provide SWD a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) increased the need for shared responsibility among teachers for student outcomes (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Inclusion, the “practice of including students with exceptionalities in general education classrooms” (Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, & Rouse, 2007, p. 440) became the most common practice many school districts used to adhere to the LRE and FAPE mandates. From it, collaborative teaching or co-teaching was born.

Legal foundations for collaboration. The passage of IDEA changed the landscape of special education. IDEA mandates that youth between the ages of 3 and 21 with disabilities must be provided a free and appropriate public school education (Hunt & Marshall, 2013). The most recent amendments to IDEA require SWD to be educated in the general education environment with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible termed the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) (Bouck, 2009; Obiakor et al, 2012). IDEA (2004) defines a child with disabilities as follows:

In general, the term child with a disability means a child with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments including (blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this title as emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health
impairments or specific learning disabilities who by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (p. 118, stat. 2652).

The Advisory Council for the Education of Students with Disabilities (2013-2014) reports that during the 2013-2014 school year, 66.0% of SWD served under IDEA was done so in the general education classroom for more than 80% of the day.

IDEA also mandates that all school-aged students who receive special education services must have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) which considers the students’ unique needs and outlines the services the school will provide and how progress will be measured (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The goal of the IEP is to ensure high quality teaching and learning, ensure access to related services, and to improve outcomes for SWD (IDEA, 2004). The ultimate details of an IEP include team input from parents, special education and general education teachers, administration, related service providers, and in some cases, the student (U. S. Department of Education, 2000). Collectively, the IEP determines how the student will access the general curriculum, considers how the disability adversely impacts the student’s academic process, identifies what environmental accommodations and instructional modifications can be made for the student, and reviews assessment data about the student that includes the student’s strengths, weaknesses, and present level of performance (IDEA, U.S. Government, 2004).

It is during the IEP meeting that placement options in the LRE for SWD are discussed and determined. Although there are many special education placement options available, most public school districts in Tennessee are moving towards the inclusion placement option. Other IDEA mandates include multidisciplinary assessments, related services as needed, parental permission and participation, compliance to Federal Rights to Privacy Act, and a due process
procedure for complaints and disputes (IDEA, U.S. Government, 2004). The specifics and requirements of these other mandates are beyond the scope of this study.

**Collaboration models.** The use of collaboration models in the inclusion environment helps to promote shared responsibility among teachers (Welch, Brownell, & Sheridan, 1999). The increase in diversity demands collaboration among education related professionals who are equally aware of students’ specific learning needs and abilities (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend et al, 2010). Because collaboration among professionals is mandated under IDEA for the IEP process, establishing positive collaborative relationships increases the chances for better outcomes for SWD (Leader-Janssen et al, 2012). Therefore, SWD in the general education environment require the expertise of the general education teacher and special education teacher collectively. This study will briefly discuss the consultation collaboration model, the oldest model of collaboration and provide a more detailed explanation of team teaching, the newest model of collaboration.

The consultation model is an indirect method to providing services to students and has a longer history of being present in special education (Fishbaugh, 1997; Welch et al., 1999). In consultation, the special education teacher offer recommendations to the general education teacher for supporting the student with disabilities in the general education classroom (Welch et al, 1999). Consulting teachers do not provide direct instruction to SWD, but instead, work with teachers who have SWD in their classrooms. The special education expert is charged with passing instructional strategies and resources on to the general education teacher. Prior to the passage of IDEA, this was the most commonly used model of collaboration in special education (Fishbaugh, 1997).
The consultation collaboration model is one of the least intensive service delivery models that requires full communication, cooperation, and collaboration of both the general education teacher and the special education teacher. Klingner and Vaugh (2002) completed a case study on the experience of a teacher’s journey where the goal was to describe the changing role of a teacher from a resource teacher as consulting teacher to an inclusion teacher and finally, to an inclusion specialist. Through individual interviews, focus group interviews, notes and meetings with general education teachers and special education teachers, journals, and a think aloud process, the researchers were able to conclude that although consultation was present in the inclusion model, the participant in the study lost planning time and was unable to fully co-plan with general education teachers (Klingner & Vaugh, 2002).

In a similar study that targeted more participants, Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, and McGinley (2011) conducted a longitudinal case study of consultation at the high school level to examine the teachers’ responsibilities and relationships inclusion environment through the examination of field notes, monthly project reports, and interview transcripts. Teachers included in this study were former self-contained teachers whose role change included collaboration with other teachers (Eiseman et al, 2011). The researchers found the consultation collaboration model resulted in a shifting of responsibilities, renegotiation of teachers’ and students’ relationships, and benefits for teachers and students, but the researchers could not determine the efficiency of the consultation model (Eiseman et al, 2011). Also, Eiseman et al., (2011) found this model limited the option of intensive, specialized instruction and did not allow for full inclusion.

Collaborative practice. Team-teaching is interactive and is referred to in the literature as collaborative teaching or co-teaching for short (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend & Cook, 1995). A common definition of co-teaching as it relates to the field of special education is the general
education teacher and the special education teacher working collaboratively in the general education setting (Cook, 1995; Fishbaugh, 1997; Solis et al, 2012). Friend and Cook (1995) described six different options for co-teaching which are utilized for various purposes in the inclusion environment which are as follows:

- Station teaching where students are divided into three or more groups while teachers deliver different parts of a lesson at a station. Students rotate among stations so each teacher works with every student in the classroom. One station can be set up for independent work.
- Parallel teaching where teachers simultaneously teach students who are divided into two groups.
- Alternative teaching where most students work with one teacher while the other teacher works with a small group of students for remediation, intervention, or enrichment.
- Teaming where students remain in one group while teachers co-instruct.
- One teach, one assist where one teacher lead instructs while the other teacher monitors and assists students individually throughout the lesson.
- One teach, one observe where one teacher lead instructs while the other teacher monitors students (Friend & Cook, 1995).

Figure 2 further displays the six co-teaching models and shows what it would look like in the inclusive environment.
Figure 2. Adapted from Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger 2010. The Six Models of Co-Teaching

Co-teaching has become relatively common in the inclusive environment as it offers many benefits to the students in the co-taught classroom. Cook and Friend (1995) explained that co-teaching allows teachers of different expertise to teach to better meet the needs of a diverse group of students thereby increasing the instructional options for children. The unique perspectives of special education teachers, general education teachers, and related services providers allows for a variety of instructional strategies and teaching approaches. In addition, co-teaching allows struggling learners who do not receive special education services to get the help in their areas of need. With co-teaching, students can have greater teacher support with two teachers in the classroom which reduces the student-teacher ratio (Cook & Friend, 2005).

Classrooms that have two individuals in the room can address students’ needs more hastily than classrooms with just one teacher in the room.

The inclusion of SWD in the general education environment requires a team approach to educational programming (Fishbaugh, 1997). Welch et al (1999) conducted a study on teaming in schools based on a literature review of various articles and concluded that although teachers have
positive attitudes about team teaching in the classroom, little information about planning and implementing team teaching was present in the literature. The general education teacher may need training on how to best meet the needs of SWD while the special education teacher may require additional training on grade level content materials (Welch et al. 1999).

Establishing successful collaborative relationships. Collaboration is identified in the literature to not only be desired, but is also necessary to implement effective inclusion programs (Soodak, 2003; Hines, 2008). Review of the literature identified several variables that affect the success of the co-teaching relationship with establishing a collaborative teaching relationship reoccurring the most. Establishing a collaborative teaching relationship is defining roles and responsibilities for co-teachers (Cook & Friend, 1995; Fishbaugh, 1997; Leader-Janssen et al, 2012). Teachers often feel that as their roles and responsibilities change, community building strategies should also be implemented in an effort to help with the collaboration needs of teachers (Soodak, 2003; Hines, 2008; Levine 2010).

Wood (1998) investigated teachers’ perceptions of their educational roles in collaborative teaching by interviewing team teachers. Wood found that teachers were unclear as to what role they were to play in the inclusive environment and suggested training on the responsibilities of team teachers in the inclusive environment. Leader-Janssen et al., (2012) explained that in order to create a learning environment for all students, understanding others’ professional roles and how to work together is essential for collaboration. Cook and Friend (1995) suggest effective and ongoing communication can aid in developing clear goals and expectations.

Damore and Murray (2009) investigated the perceptions of urban educators regarding their experiences of collaborative teaching with the use of a Collaborative Teaching Survey developed by the researchers. Damore and Murray distrusted surveys to 200 elementary students
which consisted of one fourth special education teachers and the remainder were general education teachers. Based on the results of the study, Damore and Murray found that although collaborative teaching was used at the respondents’ schools, only 57% of the respondents used a form of collaborative practice in their classrooms. In addition, respondents felt that factors such as resources and professional development were extremely important for successful collaboration.

Another variable mentioned in the literature that helps establish successful collaborative relationships is administrative support (Cook & Friend, 1995; Hines, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007). Administrative support helps with the planning and facilitating of co-teaching relationships and programs, provide incentives for reflective practice, and assist teachers with setting priorities (Cook & Friend, 1995). Administrators assist with fostering collaborative relationships by promoting open communication among teachers, offering staff development training programs, and by facilitating joint leadership roles between the general education teacher and special education teacher (Hines, 2008). Administrators may also partner with co-teaching teams to provide input and feedback on co-teaching plans and may help to “create a school culture in which co-teaching is valued and expectations are clear” (Kamens, Susko, & Elliott, 2013, p. 169).

Kamens et al. (2013) surveyed school principals, vice principals, and supervisors to investigate the supervision of co-teachers in an inclusive environment by asking “In what ways do administrative support co-teachers’ practice” (p. 169). The findings indicated that study participants felt providing professional development for teachers was the most frequent means to supporting co-teachers. Allowing co-teachers to observe other co-teachers and having meetings
with co-teachers were identified in the study as other ways school principals, vice principals, and supervisors support co-teachers (Kamens et al., 2013).

Professional participation in collaborative activities such as a community of practice was another reoccurring theme for establishing a successful collaborative relationship. Wenger (1998) notes participating in collaborative activities promotes effective communication among professionals. Friend and Cook (1995) states, “…professionals require opportunities for additional skill development in communication skills, instructional strategies, and collaborative planning” (p. 15). When adults collaborate for teacher career development, individual collaborators consider and contribute to the learning their own personal experience, adult development and life stages, and understanding and acceptance of other perspectives (Fishbaugh, 1997). Teachers then have the opportunity to implement what they have learned, and in turn, the most intensive professional development has occurred (Cook & Friend, 1995).

Wong (2003) proposed providing new special education teachers with professional development in the form of an induction program. The purpose of an induction program is to provide ongoing professional learning for educators. Wong asserts an induction program is different from a mentoring program in that an induction program is “a collaborative process, one that organizes, one that organizes the expertise within a shared value of culture” while a mentoring program is a “one-on-one process, concerned with supporting individual teachers” (p. 2). Wong emphasizes that improving the teacher through learning will result in an improvement in student learning.

The next section will discuss adult education and learning, provide a brief overview of adult learning for educators, and explore how adult learning intersect with a community of practice.
**Adult Education and Learning**

According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2007), “Adult education activities are formal activities including basic skills training, apprenticeships, work-related courses, personal interest courses, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and part-time college or university degree programs” (p. 31). Adult education can also occur through workplace learning experiences or in an environment that is situated for the purpose of learning.

The word education generically refers to the structured system of formal education while learning can be thought of as a process by which knowledge, skills, and attitudes are acquired (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Cross’s (1981) characteristics of adult learners suggests that adults participate in these courses for personal reasons such as physiological development, motivation, and knowledge or for situational reasons such as for a job or for life transactions. The adult learner’s participation in learning activities is further influenced by attitudes, experiences, and styles of the individual learner (Caffarella & Merriam, 2000; Cross, 1981). A recurring theme of adult learning is that adults grow as learners as a result of their experiences (Knowles, 1980; Miller, 2000). Life experiences are important for adults in terms of learning because these experiences help shape their worldview (Cross, 1981). Adults are able to think about aspects of their lives in different ways and create new contexts and identities (Miller, 2000).

**Adult learning theories.** In 1968, Malcom Knowles proposed a different label for adult education to distinguish it from pedagogy. This term became andragogy, the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980; Merriam, 2001; Knowles et al, 2005). Knowles (1980)
noted the teaching and learning process was different for adults than for children due to adults’ accumulated knowledge and experience and adults’ quest for practical application of knowledge.

Andragogy, grounded in humanism, is based on five fundamental assumptions:

- as adult experience needs and interests that learning will satisfy, adults are motivated to learn;
- learning is life centered;
- experience is the richest source for adult learning;
- there is a deep need for autonomy and self-directed learning; and
- individual differences among people increase with age (Knowles et al, 2005, p. 40).

From these assumptions, Knowles suggests that the adult classroom should be one that has openness where adults are respected, accepted, and supported (Merriam, 2001). In the adult education classroom, the facilitator plans procedures for pulling the adults into the learning which include the following elements: preparing the learner, establishing a learning environment, creating mutual planning, diagnosing the need for learning, formulating program objectives, designing a pattern of learning experiences, evaluating the learning outcomes and rediagnosing learning needs (Knowles et al, 2005, p. 115).

**Andragogical model for learning.** The andragogical model for learning “is concerned with providing procedures and resources for helping learners acquire information and skill” (Knowles et al, 2005, p. 115). The andragogical model takes into account the different cognitive development stages of the adult learner, the needs and experiences of the learner, and the individual goal of the learner. Pratt and Nesbit (2000) noted that the concept of andragogy changed the discourse of adult education by shifting the focus of what was to be learned by the
adult to secondary, making the adult’s experience and participation primary to the learning experience.

**Self-directed learning.** Another theory of adult learning is self-directed learning. Based on the early works of Houle (1961), Tough (1967), and Knowles (1975), self-directed learning is a model of learning that “is widespread, that occurs as part of adults’ everyday life, and that is systematic yet does not depend on an instructor or classroom” (Merriam, 2001, p. 8). Self-directed learning is further divided in two dimensions. The first dimension involves the adult taking control of the teaching by engaging in self-teaching while the second dimension consists of adults deciding for themselves what is important and what must be learned (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 185). Theorists debate about whether the first dimension described is considered self-directed learning.

**Transformational learning.** Another adult learning theory is transformational learning. Established in the work of Jack Mezirow (1990), transformational learning theory is a process where the learner becomes aware of unconscious roles, beliefs, and assumptions which leads them to forming a different meaning and value for their social environment (Duerr, Zajonc, & Dana, 2003). Transformational learning begins with a disorienting dilemma which results in the learner undergoing change in self, beliefs, and lifestyle and ultimately, a total different understanding (King, 2005). The disorienting dilemma is usually a crisis of some sort that results in the learner adapting a different worldview as a result of the experience. The transformational learning process is also a type of critical reflection for the adult educator.

**Informal and incidental learning.** Informal learning is another adult learning theory that is intentional but not highly structured within a formal educational system and incidental learning is unconscious learning that occurs when individuals learn incidentally (Marsick &
Watkins, 2001). The origins of this theory developed from the works of Marsick and Watkins (1990) and Garrick (1998). Informal learning induces reflection and action, is integrated with daily routines, and is linked to the learning of others. Incidental learning allows for interaction and sharing of personal experiences. Informal and incidental learning occur as individuals have the desire, motivation, and space for learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001).

**Adult learning process.** The learning process for adult learners focuses on how adults learn which begins with the learners’ need to find meaning. King (2005) notes, “Adult learning is more than academic theory and research; it is fundamentally rooted in the lives and experiences of our increasingly diverse adult learners” (p. 3). Adult learning occurs if the adult learner is engaged in a process of inquiry, decision making, and analysis. In essence, the learning process for adults is present when the learner is moving through different levels of cognitive development, making meaning out of ideas and experiences, and when adults go through whole person learning.

**Cognitive development.** William Perry (1970) was interested in how college students learned and developed. Through his theory of intellectual and ethical development, he developed nine positions divided into four categories explaining one’s level of thinking as it relates to the world and situations). They are summarized as follows:

- **Level 1:** Dualism or polarized thinking where everything is seen as black or white and learning is viewed as information exchange only;
- **Level 2:** Multiplicity where knowledge is viewed in quantitative terms and no opinion can be called wrong;
- **Level 3:** Contextual realism where the person making judgment takes into account the content of the issue and is able to create one’s own thinking; and
Level 3: Commitment or integrated thinking where keen awareness of one’s own thought process occurs.

Perry’s scheme suggests that as adult students move through the learning process, their thinking develops to a higher level.

Another theory of cognitive development is Eric Erikson’s eight ages of man which provides a framework for understanding personality development from childhood to the adult years. There are eight distinct stages that can result in two different outcomes (Scheider, 2011). Erikson theorizes that successful completion of each stage results in healthy personalities and successful interactions with people. If an individual fails to complete a stage then this may result in unhealthy personalities and unhealthy sense of self (Scheider, 2011).

**Meaning making.** Learning from experience is a common theme in adult education. David Kolb (1984) as reported by Kasl and Yorks (2002) “theorizes that learning from experience is an interaction between two processes-experience is first taken in or grasped, then transformed into meaning” (p. 180). Much of Kolb’s theory is concerned with the learner’s internal cognitive processes. From Kolb’s work, the experiential learning cycle was developed which works on two levels: a four-stage cycle of learning and four separate learning styles (Kolb, 1981).

The experiential learning cycle begins with a concrete experience where the learner is actively doing something and a new experience is encountered. The next stage is the reflection/observation phase which takes into account discrepancies between experiences and understanding. The learner takes a step back to think about what has been done and what has been experienced. The third stage is abstract conceptualization where reflection gives rise to a new idea. The learner is able to make sense of what has happened and interpret it into new
meaning. The final stage is the experimentation stage where the learner applies what has been learned and put it into practice (Knowles et al, 2005). Kolb’s learning stages suggests that knowledge results from four forms of knowledge or four learning styles: accommodator (feel and do), diverger (feel and watch), converger (think and do), and assimilator (think and watch) (Kolb, 1981).

**Whole person learning.** Whole person learning is the idea of incorporating emotion and feeling into the learning process. This process is further divided into “ways of knowing” (Kasl & Yorks, 2002). “Ways of knowing” is a theory of knowledge that explains how we acquire knowledge in the world around us. This theory is based on knowledge being acquired in the “social context that dictates gender roles, cultural norms, and expected behaviors” (Bierma, 2001, p. 2) which also considers how power and relationships affect learning. Affective learning is a theory of learning that is often omitted in institutional learning environment, but is vital to “whole learning.” Mezirow (1990) explains the conditions required for affective learning is creating a learning environment that promotes safety, openness, and trust.

**Adult Learning for Educators: Communities of Practice**

The options for promoting adult learning have expanded. Program design and delivery for adult learners vary by format, information, duration, and by intensity. Hansman and Mott (2010) notes, “Adults may engage in learning throughout their lives in a variety of venues and formats, as participation pattern data inform us” (p. 18). Programs can be designed for one learner or many learners with virtual or face to face meetings. Caffarella (2002) explains the following:

The commonalities between and among these models are the attention paid to the needs and ideas of learners, organizations, and/or communities as central to the program
planning process; the importance of context in the planning process; and identifiable components and practical tasks that are important to the planning process (p. 20).

Adult education programs offer variety and differences that define the who, what, when, where and how of program design and delivery for adults. The facilitators of these programs also vary based on the context. Caffarella (2002) notes, “Education and training programs for adults are planned and coordinated by people in numerous roles who have varied backgrounds and experiences” (p. 3).

Adults are able to obtain knowledge and vocational practice through daily interactions with workplace learning. According to Knowles et al. (2005), “Workplace learning activities include all learning activities that occur in the workplace such as on-the-job training, social learning, and informal learning” (p. 317). Billet’s (2002) research suggests there exists a need to develop a workplace pedagogy whose aim is to develop “expert vocational practice through work and throughout working lives” (p. 1). It is suggested that having a workplace pedagogy would introduce learners to their vocational skill, make important contributions to enhancing vocational practices, contextualize what has been learned in higher education, and would provide ongoing development of the workers’ skills (Billet, 2002).

As it relates to education, workplace learning is the umbrella term for professional education (Avalos, 2011). Continuing professional education courses are non-formal courses designed to improve the knowledge and professional practice of educators (Cervero, 2000). The use of the phrase continuing professional education came into use in the 1960s even though variations of continuing professional education was already in use. In the 1970s, continuing professional education became a tool for recertification and relicensure in such fields such as nursing, law, medicine, and administration (Cervero, 2000). Houle (1980) explained the need for
continuing professional education is “…to refine their [professionals] sensitiveness, enlarge their concepts, add to their knowledge, and perfect their skills so that they can discharge their responsibilities within the context of their own personalities” (p. 316). Although those words were written almost 30 years ago, continuing professional education continues to be a key component of professional practice in most professions.

Key features of continuing professional education includes integrating knowledge into classroom practices, learning cooperatively with colleagues, and being actively engaged in meaningful instruction (Van den Bergh & Anje Ros, 2015). With the rapid changes and developments affecting the K-12 educational environment, “most states require teachers to participate in some form of continuing education known as in-service training or professional development” (Cowen et al., p. 3). At the federal level, Title I of the No Child Left Behind Act require districts to designate at least five percent of federal program dollars to improving instructional practice through professional development (United States Department of Education, 2002). Professional development, a form of continuing professional education for teachers, is noted as being opportunities for learning that will enhance knowledge and result in the development of new instructional practices (Borko, 2004). Although professional development encompasses a variety of formats, topics, and contexts that is intended to help educators and administrators improve competencies and skills in education, this research will focus on Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning as a form of professional development for educators which is discussed in the net section.

**Communities of practice as a theory of learning.** The concept of a community of practice was inspired by anthropology and social theory and can be viewed as a social learning system (Wenger, 1998). A community of practice has the ability to “organize themselves, set
their own agendas, and establish their own leadership” (Hansman, 2001 p. 48). It is the way in which people make meaning of their experience and construct their identities in social participation with members of common interests (Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, & Volpe, 2006). Although the actual setting can be where formal learning occurs such as on site at the school, the participants in this study will be engaged in an informal learning experience in the form of a community of practice that is intentional but not highly structured within a traditional education system. Table 4 displays Wegner’s (1998) indicators to determine whether or not a community of practice has formed.
Table 4

Wenger’s (1998) Indicators that a Community of Practice has Formed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Wenger’s Indicators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shared ways of engaging in doing things together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mutually defining identities</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Local lore, shared stories, inside jokes, knowing laughter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Certain styles recognized as displaying membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>A shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note Adapted from Wenger (1998, p. 125)

Albert Bandura (1971) combined cognitive learning theory (learning is influenced by psychological factors) with behavioral learning theory (learning is based on response to environmental stimuli) to develop social learning theory which suggests that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling. Community of practice, which has its roots
in social learning theory, is commonly self-selected groups of people whose ultimate goal is to learn what each other knows (Hansman, 2001). “Participants have their own experience of practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 2) that is brought to the group as a new element of practice that may or may not be embraced by the community. Learning while engaging in a community of practice is derived from individual identities, reflection of the landscape from which the participants live, and from the experience of it (Wenger, 1998). Wenger (1998) describes four premises of learning as follows:

- Humans are social beings
- Knowledge is a matter of competence with respect to valued enterprises
- Knowing is a matter of active engagement in the world
- Meaning, our ability to experience the world and our engagement with it as meaningful, is ultimately what learning is to produce (p. 4).

Wenger further outlines components of a social learning theory as:

- Community-Learning as belonging
- Practice- Learning as doing
- Identity- Learning as becoming
- Meaning- Learning as experience (p. 5).

Learning occurs as a direct participation in the events of life and is achieved through everyday reflection. This type of learning aligns with constructivism as a theory of knowledge.

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge that “stresses that all knowledge is context bound, and that individuals make personal meaning of their experiences” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 192). Adult education has been studied to see how context impacts learning. Learning in context involves examining the interaction and intersection people, resources, and context in a
learning situation (Hansman, 2001). Daley (2000) asserts, “In professional practice, the context shapes how professionals look at new information, influencing not only what information professionals seek to learn but also what information they try to incorporate into their professional practice” (p. 38). Adult learners are lifelong learners in constant interaction with the context of work, family, and community (Cross, 1981). Learning in context is being mindful of the interaction and intersection of people within a learning situation. Adult learning in context is also individual and unique to the learner (Caferella & Merriam, 2000).

Pratt (1988) proposed “a learner may exhibit very different behaviors in different learning situations” (Knowles et al, 2005, p. 147). Situated cognition, another theory to influence communities of practice, then becomes the idea that learning is social in nature. For example, joining a club, group, or some other community of learning allows learning to be situated in the interactions among the learners and the context of practice. Hansman (2001) writes, “The nature of the interactions among learners, the tools they use within these interactions, the activity itself, and the social context in which the activity takes place shapes learning” (p. 45). Communities of practice connects to situated cognition in that learning is recognized as a social phenomenon that is situated in the experience.

**Summaries of communities of practice research.** Several studies in various fields including education have explored communities of practice as a process of learning in an effort to understand how others learn from each other through social participation and interaction. Gray (2004) conducted a study on professional development in the field of human services that involved 43 female coordinators of Alberta Community Adult Learning Councils. The participants took a seven week long online professional development course that was directly related to work that the participants performed. The purpose of Gray’s study was to explore the
potential of online communication as an orientation to new employees to the profession and to act as ongoing support of the human service profession in addition to exploring the nature of the learning that occurred. Since Gray was interested in adult and workplace learning, the theoretical framework for this study was situated within Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice learning theory.

Gray’s (2004) interpretive qualitative mixed method research used data sources from online discussion boards, live chat transcripts, and email communications between participants. The findings of this study indicated that the online professional development course did function as a community of practice where participation was a tool for informal learning and as well as a tool for defining the identity of the human service profession. Gray suggests other professional organization who face the challenges of high turnover and geographically disbursed members should utilize communities of practice as a professional development tool to enhance learning and build community.

Hodges and Jong (2014) used a multiple case study methodology to explore the practice of two middle school mathematics teachers who participated in professional development programs designed to increase knowledge around mathematics content pedagogy. The researchers used Remillard and Bryans’ (2004) categorization of curriculum to analyze their integration of Standards-based curriculum materials. The following research questions quided the study:

1. What is the nature of teachers’ use of Standards-based curriculum materials for instruction in school settings with a conventional adopted textbook?

2. How did the design of professional development courses support of these Standards-based materials? (Hodges & Jong, 2014, p. 25)
The researchers were also interested in the differences in the communities of practice for each case at their school site as a result of using curriculum materials.

Hodges and Jong (2014) collected multiple forms of data that included interviews, field notes from observations, and classroom artifacts in “for understanding the teachers’ perception of the local norms and expectations for mathematics instruction and their construction of communities of practice at their local schools” (Hodges & Jong, 2014, p. 28). Hodges and Jong (2014) found that since each case in the research study employed different mathematics curriculums at their school site, the level of collaboration differed as it relates to what would constitute Wenger’s communities of practice learning theory.

Levine (2010) conducted an analysis of the conception of teacher community as a method of learning and discussed how teacher community can help contribute to teacher development for pre-service and in-service teachers. Levine identified inquiry community, teacher professional community, community of learners and a community of practice as the four different conceptions of teacher community. An inquiry community was described as being a way in which teachers learn from asking questions and finding answers about observations of practice and student work while a teacher professional community focuses on social norms, beliefs and shared trust that teachers develop together. A community of practice was summarized as learning developed from active participation in shared practices among people which contrasts to a community of learners whose school personnel is on adult and student learning (Levine, 2010).

Within the discussion, Levine explained the function of each teacher community conception, discussed how knowledge is generated, explored their limitations, and provided implications and research suggestions for each concept. Levine (2010) revealed that although each concept of teacher community had varying levels of activities, conditions, and goal
outcomes, a common idea among them was “that ongoing collaboration among educators produces teacher learning, and this ultimately improves teaching and learning for K-12 students” (p. 110).

In a comparative case study that explored the professional learning of six learning communities that consisted of principals ran by central office administrators, Honig and Rainey (2014) attempted to determine in what ways central office administrators are helping to strengthen the leadership of principals. The researchers also wanted to know to what extent did a community of practice exist. Wegner’s (1998) communities of practice learning theory was the conceptual framework used for this study. The researchers’ primary method of data collection consisted of non-participant observations across 25 meetings with detailed notes of what was happening at each meeting. In addition, artifacts from the meeting were collected that included classroom observation protocols, small group conversation guides, and charts and frameworks for data analysis. Honig and Rainey found that although the elements of communities of practice were present, instructional leadership directors varied in how they participated in the weekly meetings which resulted in both and negative results as it relates to helping improve the leadership of principals. The researchers suggested that further research should be conducted that explores how leaders can productively facilitate the learning for principals in a community of practice.

Hall (2015) conducted a study that examined evidence-based strategies for use with students on the autism spectrum six years after finishing a graduate degree program focused on the acquisition and implementation of the strategies. The purpose of the study was to determine how many teachers remained in the field of special education, if they continued to use the learned strategies, and whether the program constitutes a community of practice. Participants
who held Education Specialist Credentials were invited to participate in this study. The sample for Hall’s study produced 12 participants from which data was gathered by surveys, data summary forms, and interview protocols.

Hall (2015) reported that all 12 participants from the graduate program remained in the special education field supervising students on the autism spectrum. In addition, the participants indicated that they continue to use most of the evidence-based strategies learned in the graduate program. Hall found that respondents who included support from peers and opportunity to visit programs and attend conferences as factors that contributed to their learning supports the idea that a community of practice contributed to their extended use of evidence-based strategies. Hall (2015) concluded that the findings and results of this study “serve as an initial look at the possible contribution that a university preparation program can make to the sustained use of evidence based practices by their graduates” (p. 41).

**Critics of communities of practice.** Although communities of practice has been utilized in various organizations as a process of learning for group members, critics argue that communities of practice has its drawbacks (Amin & Roberts, 2008; Emad & Roth, 2016; Kerno, 2008). In Kerno’s (2008) article titled “Limitations of Communities of Practice: A Consideration of Unresolved Issues and Difficulties in the Approach” challenges of communities of practice are explored. Kerno suggests that since communities of practice are informal in nature, they are unaffected by structured supervision and interference by the overarching organization from which communities of practice are operating and therefore may be meaningless. In addition, Kerno asserts availability of time, adhering to organizational hierarchies during the communities of practice (communities of practice are thought to be peripheral to command where no true hierarchy exists), and sociocultural environments that favor individualism over community
practice are all challenges to Wenger’s (1998) community practice theory of learning. Kerno concludes the outcomes of communities of practice may fall short in an organization if the challenges are not addressed.

In another article that critiques the use of communities of practice as a process of learning, “Knowing in Action: Beyond a Community of Practice”, Amin and Roberts (2008) argues that knowing in action should be differentiated based on context and the purpose of the learning outcome. Amin and Roberts (2008) suggests the need to avoid the homogenous instrumentation of communities of practice as a process of learning and urges organizations to move towards “a more heterogeneous lexicon for different types of situated practice” (p. 366). Within this article, Amin and Roberts argues the space of learning defines the geography of knowledge, and as a result, communities of practice should be avoided as the generic umbrella approach to defining and applying situated and social learning.

Emad and Roth’s (2016) case study that followed practicing marines titled, “Quasi-Communities: Rethinking Learning in Formal and Adult Vocational Education” suggests there exists a variation of communities of practice as a process of learning in more formal adult education settings termed quasi-communities. Emad and Roth notes that although communities of practice is most often used to address informal learning that encompasses collectively continuing practices that evolve over time, in a modified way, the idea of a community may also apply within a temporary more formal adult classroom. The researchers in this study were interested in developing a conceptual framework to better understand the interactions of learners in an adult classroom that lacks space and time where mastery of a task is specific to the learner and not the community (Emad and Roth, 2016).
Moving away from the concept of communities of practice which considers the social connections of others in their natural setting, Emad and Roth (2016) explained, “In a quasi-community, mastery is defined relative and in terms of the relation between individuals and the occasioned, temporally limited community they form while they attending formally organized training” (p. 586). The researchers used an ethnographic case study of a Canadian based vocational institute for 15 marines: 12 males and three females. Through video recordings of the participants inside and outside of the adult classroom, interviews, and field notes, the researchers were able to conclude the participants in this study were able to develop a community which motivated them socially though joint enterprise to reach their goal and thus create a quasi-community. A summary of communities of practice research methodologies and their focus is displayed in Table 5.
Table 5

Summary of Communities of Practice Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gray (2004)</td>
<td>Professional Development-Human Service</td>
<td>Mixed methods research</td>
<td>Explore the potential of online communication as an orient to new employees to the profession and to act as ongoing support of the human service profession in addition to exploring the nature of the learning that occurred</td>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Position</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Hodges and Jong (2014)</td>
<td>Professional Development-Education</td>
<td>Multiple case study</td>
<td>Explore the practice of two middle school mathematics teachers who participated in professional development programs designed to increase knowledge around mathematics content pedagogy</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Honig and Rainey (2014)</td>
<td>Professional Development-Education</td>
<td>Comparative case study</td>
<td>Determine in what ways central office administrators are helping to strengthen the leadership of principals and to what extent a community of practice existed</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Hall (2015)</td>
<td>Pre-service Graduate</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Determine how many teachers remained in the field of special education 6 years after the completion of the graduate program, if they continued to use the learned strategies, and whether the program constitutes a community of practice</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Support</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Education</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Kerno (2008)</td>
<td>Organizations</td>
<td>Document analysis of communities of practice literature</td>
<td>Challenges of communities of practice are explored</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Against</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Amin and Roberts</td>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Document analysis of communities of practice literature</td>
<td>Argues that knowing in action should be differentiated based on context and the purpose of the learning outcome.</td>
<td>Article</td>
<td>Against</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2008)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Emad and Roth</td>
<td>Military-Adult Education</td>
<td>Ethnographic case study</td>
<td>Suggests there exists a variation of communities of practice as a process of learning in more formal adult education settings</td>
<td>Face-to-face</td>
<td>Against</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2016)</td>
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Contributions to the literature. The work of Lave and Wenger (1991), Situated Cognition: Legitimate Peripheral Participation, first mentions the term communities of practice and suggests that communities of practices exists everywhere in various formats and in different aspects of life. Wenger’s (1998) book titled Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identify focus more on communities of practice as a theory of learning through social participation and explains how communities of practice is important to the competencies and the evolution of those competencies in organizations. As it relates to education, Wenger (1998) notes the development process for individuals go beyond socialization and focuses more so on identify formation that changes as a result of context and experiences.

Although communities of practice exists as a process of learning in education, this research study sought to expand on the current research by exploring the perceptions of a team of teachers’ experience of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing the collaboration needs in an inclusive environment. I wanted to further analyze the value of learning that is attached to social participation. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?
2. How does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment?
3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined special education and school reform, collaborative teaching, adult education and learning, the adult learning process, and adult education for educators such as wok
place pedagogy and community of practice which are both relevant to this study. In addition, a
description of the inclusion environment was provided. The review of adult education literature
hopefully provided an overview of how adults learn, specifically educators, and in what context.
Chapter 3 will outline the qualitative methodology and methods that will be used in this study.
Chapter Three

Methodology

Students and scholars of various disciplines have conducted research of some sort in their quest for knowledge. Whether their journey surrounds understanding characteristics of a social class or exploring the value of a new education program, research is a common practice in investigation discovery. Leedy and Ormord (2005) suggest the following:

In virtually every subject area, our knowledge is incomplete and problems are waiting to be solved. We can address the holes in our knowledge and those unresolved problems by asking relevant questions and then seeking answers through systematic research (p. 1).

Although research can be a complicated process requiring much time and effort from the researcher, the outcome may produce a fix for the problem under investigation. In essence, research helps to enhance our understanding of a phenomenon that can further help to enrich our daily lives.

The purpose of this research was to explore the perception of a team of educators’ experience of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. I was interested in those educators at a secondary charter school in West Tennessee that service special education students in the general education classroom. To accomplish this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?
2. How does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment?
3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?

This chapter describes the methodology of the study and consists of the following sections: description of the research design, research context, explanation of participants, and the data collection process. Finally, I will describe the data analysis process, assumptions, trustworthiness, present a subjectivity statement, and conclude with a summary.

**Research Design**

Qualitative research is used to answer questions about the nature of phenomena with the purpose of describing and understanding this phenomena from the participants’ perspective (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 95). This approach to research is viewed as the interpretative, constructivist, or postpositive approach. Qualitative research studies are typically used for one or a combination of the following; exploring description, interpretation, verification, and evaluation. A research study where the purpose is description would produce findings containing information that reveal the nature of certain situations, settings, and relationships of a people (Glesne, 2011). An interpretation research product, such as this study, will provide new insights, develop new theoretical perspectives, or discover problems within the phenomenon (Glesne, 2011). Research that produces verification of a group as the final product will allow the researcher to test claims and generalization about the real world contexts of a social group. Lastly, if the purpose of a study was for evaluation, then the researcher is judging the effectiveness of the practice of policies and procedures as it pertains to a social group.

The assumption of qualitative research is that phenomena are viewed holistically, in their natural setting and that reality exists as the participants under study sees it (Merriam, 2002). A qualitative research study, then, begins when an individual is curious about some phenomena.
which usually develop from some social and/or political issue or event. “Questions are then formed about why things are the way they are or how might they be better” (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggests, “…they [qualitative researchers] recognize that the issue they are studying has many dimensions and layers, and so, they try to portray the issue in its multifaceted form” (p. 133). This is achieved through capturing study participants’ perspectives through direct observation and interviewing, by examining the constraints of everyday life, and by producing rich descriptions of the social world and its relation to the phenomena under study.

This study sought to understand the perceptions of team teachers’ experience of participating in a community and how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. In order to accomplish this goal, this study examined the experiences of a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator who participated in a monthly community of practice. Using a qualitative research design is most effective in understanding subjective assessments of attitude and behavior such as in this study (Kothari, 2004). The plan that was used to guide this study is summarized in the paragraphs that follow.

**Epistemology.** According to Glesne (2011), “Epistemology is the word used to refer to the study of the nature of knowledge” (p. 5) including how it is formed and shared. It is a way of explaining how we know what we know and provides the philosophical grounding for research. As it relates to this research, a constructivism epistemology stance was taken. Constructivist believe that reality is socially constructed and aims to understand how people interpret and make meaning of an object, event, action, or perception (Glesne, 2011). Individuals operating under a
Constructivist worldview makes subjective meanings by gathering information personally and by interacting with their natural context.

Constructivism is a perspective of qualitative research that seeks to understand the world in which individuals live and work. Since different people may construct a different meaning for the same phenomenon, the researcher is concerned with the complexity of views as opposed to generalizing a specific view (Andrews, 2012). In this research study, my goal is to understand the perceptions of team teachers’ experience of participating in a community and how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. Since teachers live within familiar worlds of interaction as it relates to their discipline or content, understanding the meaning that is constructed from interactions of working with a team teacher of a different discipline in the same classroom may possibly help to provide insight to communities of practice as an evidence-based collaborative practice.

**Theoretical perspective.** The theoretical perspective for this research was framed from an interpretivism paradigm which is a form of social science research rooted from the work of German philosopher Immanuel Kant (Glesne, 2011). Other philosophers to expand on Kant’s work are Wilhelm Dilthey, Max Weber, and Edmund Husserl who believe that the world exists independently from the knower and understanding is interpreted from the mind Glesne (2011). The interpretivist’s research goal is to interpret “the social world from the perceptive of those who are actors in the social world, [and] it follows that the research methods include interaction with people in their social contexts and talking with them about their perceptions” (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Theoretical frameworks are developed from comparative analysis and predictive actions which can be applied to categories of events in adult education or in any field (Brookfield, 2010). The interpretivism theoretical perspective fits within this study because exploring the experience
of teachers that interacted with each other in a community of practice may help identify the benefits of collaborative planning needs of team teachers and its value in an inclusion environment based on the judgment of the participants who lived through the experience.

**Methodology.** According to Schwandt as cited by Glessne (2011), methodology can be defined as a theoretical analysis “of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry” (p. 14). Methodology differs from the term method in that a method refers to a tool used for inquiry while methodology combines various tools and techniques to use in developing theories or ways questions should be asked (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Many methodologies have emerged to accommodate the different forms data takes on due to the variation in questions asked during the research process. Common qualitative research methodologies include basic interpretive qualitative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnographic study, narrative analysis, critical qualitative research, and postmodern research (Merriam, 2002). The research methodology chosen is influenced by the theoretical perspectives and in turn, is influenced by the researcher’s epistemological stance (Gray, 2004). Regardless of the approach taken, rigorous research begins with a defined methodology.

The function of methodology is to systematically solve the research problem and explain the logic behind the techniques that were used (Kothari, 2004) which results in the transformation of thought, idea, objects, or perspectives into meaning and/or form. Methodology is a direct variation of the scientific method which is also a technique for investigating phenomena and acquiring new knowledge through inquiry (Gray, 2004). The scientific method is based on scientific principles of reasoning as opposed to cognition and philosophical thought.

**Narrative inquiry research.** Since this research is focused on the lived experiences of teachers participating in a community of practice, the research methodology selected for this
study is narrative inquiry research. Narrative inquiry was previously identified by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) as being used most often in educational experience. In the field of education, teachers’ culture which includes their perspectives, thoughts, and beliefs around their experience in the classroom is considered to be crucial to understand as policy makers and stakeholders make education reform decisions that directly affect teachers (Cortazzi, 1993).

Narrative inquiry is defined in the literature as the study of experiences as expressed in lived or retold experiences of individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Cortazzi, 1993; Creswell, 2007). Clandinin (2013) explained, “Narrative inquiry is an approach to the study of human lives conceived as a way of honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding” (p. 17). Narrative inquiry, most specifically, focuses on the way individuals experience the world (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The narrative researcher’s goal then becomes to describe the lived stories, collect stories, and retell the stories through narratives (Connelly & Clandinin 1990; Clandinin, 2013). Connelly and Connelly (1990) states, “The education importance of this line of work (narrative inquiry) is that it brings theoretical ideas about the nature of human life as lived to bear on educational experience as lived” (p. 3).

Methods. Research methodology is used to extract meaning from the data collected during the research process and in essence, is the design process (Kothari, 2004). Method, on the other hand, is the technique used to conduct the research methodology (Kothori, 2004). Therefore, the data methods should align with the research methodology. The research methodology helps to link the overall research questions to the focus in the study which is linked to the data collection method. It is important for the researcher to know which techniques are relevant to the study and which are not (Gray, 2004). “Researchers also need to understand the assumptions underlying various techniques and they need to know the criteria by which they can
decide that certain techniques and procedures will be applicable to certain problems and others will not” (Kothari, 2004, p. 8). Since methodology constitutes a systematic way to solve the research problem, the data and unknown problems of the research must be related otherwise the study may lack rigor, relevance, and value in the final product. The methods employed in this research utilized three levels of life story interviews, non-participant observations, and archival documents to create participants’ narratives. Cortazzi (1993) suggests, “Use of narrative methods of research can allow us to develop descriptions of teachers’ culture which preserve their voices” (p. 1).


Participants from this study were representative of an independent operator from the Achievement School District that is slated to serve students from local schools that were performing at the bottom 5%. For confidentiality purposes, a pseudonym was used for the charter school and will be called Dream Academy. Situated in an urban community with only two high schools remaining, Dream Academy enrolls students from all parts of West Tennessee provided students’ home schools were failing schools. As of 2014, Tennessee had a public student
enrollment of 991,000 students with 2,128 charter student enrollments from the Achievement School District, and 538 students enrolled at Dream Academy. The Tennessee Department of Education (2015) reports that approximately 12.5% of the student body are students with disabilities (SWD). Dream Academy participated in the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) during the 2016-2017 school year whose goal is to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. This study does not contain any data as it relates to SPDG participation even though the participants may reference their participation during the narratives.

**Participants.** This study focused on a general education teacher, special education teacher, and administrator who are charged with educating SWD in the inclusive environment. The participants for this study were recruited by me through purposeful sampling. Patton (2002) as cited by Glesne (2011) suggests, “The logic and power of purposeful sampling…leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 44). I selected participants from Dream Academy who would “purposely inform an understanding of the research problem and the central phenomenon of the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). In narrative research, the unit of analysis is studying one or more individuals (Creswell, 2007). Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998) assert, “In spite of the fact that most narrative studies are conducted with smaller groups of individuals than the sample size employs in traditional research, the quantity of data gathered in life stories is larger.”

For the purpose of this research, I was interested in a team of educators that consists of one general education teacher and one special education teacher who were held equally responsible for teaching SWD in the inclusive environment. An administrator who oversees the teachers’ instructional delivery and collaboration efforts was also included in this study.
References to the participants were made through the use of pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality.

**Site entry.** Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Executive Director in the form of a letter of collaboration. Those who could share their knowledge as it relates to interacting with colleagues during a community of practice were considered. Teachers were contacted by email to be informed of the research opportunity. Those who replied to the email expressing interest were given an informed consent document to read, sign, and return (Appendix A). For manageability and so in-depth interviews could be conducted, the first team of educators who returned the signed informed consent document were included as participants of this study. A copy was given to them and the signed copy is locked away in a file cabinet to be stored for three years.

**Data Collection**

Creswell (2007) states the following:

The procedure for implementing this research consists of focusing on studying one or two individuals, gathering data through the collection of their stories, reporting individual experiences, and chronologically ordering (or using life course stages) the meaning of those experiences (pg. 54).

To accomplish this goal, there were three stages of data collection in this study: in-depth life story interviews, observations, and document analysis. The development of files, audio recordings, and interview protocol sheets were used to help gather, store, and record ideas, questions, and observation details gathered during the data collection process.

**Life story interviews.** Three phases of interviews took place with the participants. The first phase was personal face-to-face interviews guided by an interview protocol (Appendix B).
The interview protocol, modeled after Cresswell’s (2013) interview protocol plan, was created with open-ended questions to encourage the participants to share details from their life experiences. In narrative inquiry research, “…those whose studies are based on in-depth interviews aim specifically at transforming the interviewer-interviewee relationship into one of narrative and listener” (Chase, 2005, p. 660). The purpose of the study and how the data will be used was explained to the participants prior to conducting the interviews. The interview questions that related to background information was identical for all participants and were asked at the beginning of the interview. The latter part of the interview questions were more focused on the specific life experience of the team teacher. This round of interviewing lasted about 45-60 minutes. Table 6 displays the alignment of Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning components to the interview protocol questions used to “retell” the participants’ story.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COP Component</th>
<th>Interview Questions Eliza General Education Teacher</th>
<th>Interview Questions Samuel Special Education Teacher</th>
<th>Interview Question Nathan Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community (learning as belonging)</td>
<td>What impact, if any, do interactions with special education teachers have on your professional work?</td>
<td>What impact, if any, do interactions with general education teachers have on your professional work?</td>
<td>Describe professional development opportunities you made available to special education teachers and general education teachers specifically targeted at delivering content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe your experience of working with a special education teacher in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?</td>
<td>Describe your experience of working with a general education teacher in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?</td>
<td>Describe professional development opportunities you made available to special education teachers and general education teachers specifically targeted at collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe your experience of working with a special education teacher in a community of practice. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?</td>
<td>Describe your experience of working with a general education teacher in a community of practice. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?</td>
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<tr>
<td>COP Component</td>
<td>Interview Questions Eliza General Education Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice (learning as doing)</td>
<td>How have interactions with special education teachers affected your delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
<td>How have interactions with general education teachers affected your delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
<td>What teaching methods do you suggest are used in the inclusion classroom and why do you think they should be used? How successful are these methods? In your experience, how successful are they in reaching students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What teaching methods do you use in the inclusion classroom and why do you use them? How successful are these methods? How successful are they in reaching students with disabilities?</td>
<td>What do you use to guide your instruction of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
<td>Describe your experience of overseeing the collaboration of special education teachers and general education teachers in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What do you use to guide your instruction of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
<td>Describe professional development you have had designed specifically for delivering content to students with disabilities in the general education classroom.</td>
<td>Describe your experience of overseeing the collaboration of a special education teacher and a general education teacher in a community of practice. What are challenges you have observed? What are successes you have observed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COP Component (learning as becoming)</td>
<td>Interview Questions Eliza General Education Teacher</td>
<td>Interview Questions Samuel Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>Interview Question Nathan Administrator</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Tell me about your experience of collaborative planning with a team teacher outside of a community of practice. What role, if any, do you feel collaboration with special education play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?</td>
<td>Tell me about your experience of collaborative planning with a team teacher outside of a community of practice. What role, if any, do you feel collaboration with general education teachers’ play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?</td>
<td>What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, personal experiences) shape your idea of instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Meaning (learning as experience) | What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, and personal experiences) shape your instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? How effective do you think participation in a community of practice is at helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? Why? | What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, personal experiences) shape your instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? | What role, if any, do you feel collaboration among special education teachers and general education teachers play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment? How effective do you think participation in a community of practice is at helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? Why? |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COP Component</th>
<th>Interview Questions Eliza General Education Teacher</th>
<th>Interview Questions Samuel Special Education Teacher</th>
<th>Interview Question Nathan Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tell me how overseeing a community of practice was more or less beneficial for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion environment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Adapted from the Interview Protocol*
The next phases of interviews were focused interviews that were based on shared experience from the first phase of the personal interview. While the interviews were audio taped, notes were jotted down from the first interview that helped inform questions that were asked during the focused interviews. Using a narrative inquiry method allowed me to ask clarifying questions about experiences and helped me to understand the effect those experiences had on the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

The final phase of the interview process was a group interview where all participants were interviewed collectively. The interviews were untimed, face to face, and held independently from the participants’ scheduled work hours. With the participants’ permission, the interviews were audio recorded and later, direct quotes from the interview were transcribed into a computer file. I captured notes during each phase of the interview process.

Non-participant observations. A series of non-participant observations was conducted. The observations occurred during the community of practice. Permission was given by the teachers and the administrators for me to observe during this time. During the community of practice observations, I took note of the topics being discussed, the planning materials being viewed, all dialogue that occurred, and whatever activities that were completed at that time. I used the Non-participant Observation Guide to record observation details (See Appendix C) for the Non-participant Observation Guide).

Archival data. I reviewed archival documents such as course content curriculums, lesson plans, community of practice agendas and materials, and any other information that was pertinent to this study. Content curriculums were requested from the general education teachers so I can understand what information is presented to students in the inclusive environment. From there, a collaborative lesson plan was requested from the special education teacher and the
general education teacher. I was looking for any accommodations and modifications to the content curriculum and whether or not the expertise of both teachers were represented in the lesson plan. I collected community of practice agendas to see what information was discussed as it relates to the lesson plans presented as well as request any administrator observation feedback, teacher to teacher email communication, or anecdotal notes that all align to the lesson or lesson plan the community of practice is covering. The purpose of requesting this information is so I will have a “historical and cultural content” (Glesne, 2011, p. 82) for this study.

**Data Analysis**

The data analysis process allows the researcher to organize the information that was gathered during the data collection process and helps the researcher to make sense of it all (Glesne, 2011). The most appropriate approach to the data analysis process in this study was a thematic analysis approach which requires searching though the data to uncover emerging themes. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to understand important events in the narrative and how those events affected the participant telling the story (Riessman, 2008). The thematic analysis process for this study was modeled after Braun and Clarke (2006) six phases of analysis which is summarized in Figure 3.
Figure 3. Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006) Six Phases of Thematic Analysis

**Phase 1: Become familiar with the data.** I began the data analysis process by listening to the audio recording of the first level of interviews from beginning to end. I then transcribed direct quotes from the interviews into a password protected Microsoft Word file. I read and reread each interview transcript along with the accompanying notes for each participant. I also listened to the audio recordings numerous times and compared them to the transcripts to ensure the participants’ voices were captured as accurately as possible.

Next, the observation details were recorded into the Microsoft Word document “Non-participant Observation Guide” and stored in a password protected file. Reflective field notes were used to record key items, jotting them down as they occurred. Glesne (2011) states, “By
writing memos to yourself or keeping a reflective field log, you develop your thoughts by getting your thoughts down as they occur…” (p. 189). The information recorded on the Non-Participant Observation Guide was compared to the information that was transcribed into the word document. Follow-up questions for the focused and group interview were developed during this stage.

After the second and third levels of interviewing were complete, the focused and group interview questions and answers were transcribed from audio recordings in a similar manner that was executed for the first level of interviews. This information was also placed into a password protected Microsoft Word file.

The final stage of this phase consisted of me reviewing the course content curriculums, lesson plans, community of practice agendas, and reflection notes and comparing and contrasting this information to the interview transcripts.

Phase 2: Begin the coding process. After the interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word files, I uploaded each interview transcript, observation details, and archival data documents into Atlas ti 7 (I used The University of Memphis student provided application of the software program). After the documents were loaded into Atlas ti 7, I created a memo document to record my steps and capture my thoughts. It was at this point that I decided to begin coding the data directly on a hard copy of the transcripts by marking up the interviews and color coding them with color pens prior to coding in Atlas ti 7. Saldana (2009) explained that in qualitative research, a code is a word or phrase used to symbolically represent language-based or visual data in order to capture the content and essence of the data. This initial coding step helped me, “…read through the pieces of data coded in the same way and first try to figure out what is at the core of that code” (Glesne, 2011, p. 186).
**Phase 3: Uncover themes.** Once the data was coded on the hard copy transcripts, I was able to assign codes to the transcript in Atlas ti 7 more quickly by transferring the codes from the hard copy transcripts to the soft copy transcripts with the use of the Codes drop down menu. If there was a portion of the transcript that was not previously coded, then I used the Create Free Code(s) menu option from the Codes tab as displayed in Figure 4.

![Figure 4](image-url)  
*Figure 4. Illustration of the creation of free codes in Atlas ti 7*

The use of this program allowed me to “…graphically represent coding structures and patterns, demonstration relations among codes and creating hierarchies of classifiers” (Glesne, 2011, p. 206-207) across all data sources. In addition, I was able to transform, sort and analyze the data which aided me in being prepared to retell the story of the participants’ experience.

**Phase 4: Review themes.** Glesne (2011) suggests, “…you might look at the data scraps coded the same way for one case and see how it changes or varies in relationship to other factors…” (p. 187). I looked at themes and ideas across participants and then looked at themes across the various levels of data. The Code Co-Ocurrence feature of Atlas ti 7 was used to help with this phase of the thematic analysis process as seen in Figure 5.
Figure 5. Illustration of the The Code Co-Ocurrency feature of Atlas ti 7 used to help link the association between codes and quotations.

Phase 5: Identifying themes. As recommended by Bazeley (2013), I further reviewed the transcripts and the notes for emerging themes and narrowed my data by assigning labels to various pieces of text. This allowed for easy identification of information that pointed directly to the main ideas in my research questions: perspectives of collaboration resulting from the experience of participating in a community of practice, impact of participating in a community of practice on the inclusion environment, and sense of success in the inclusion environment as a result of participating in a community of practice.

Phase 6: Thematic write up analysis. The thematic write up phase of the data analysis process consists of telling the story of your data and presenting it in a way that persuades the audience of its quality and legitimacy (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes function as a way to bring meaning and identity to a recurrent pattern (Saldana, 2009). The themes that are documented in the thematic write up must be evident and identifiable in the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the purpose of this research study, I extracted information from three levels of interviews, a non-participant observation, and archival data in an effort to uncover
evidence of how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment as told by the participants. It was from the participants lived experiences that I was able to identify repeated patterns of meaning and include it in the narrative analysis and discussion found in chapter 4 and 5, respectively.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a research study helps to evaluate the study’s worth. The literature suggests several ways to evaluate this worth. In this research study, an interview protocol was used for the first interview to be sure each participant is being asked the same questions. Also, I compared the audio recordings to the transcripts to ensure the transcripts are free of errors. Direct quotes from the audio recording were captured in Microsoft Office while coded data was loaded into excel. Another procedure that was in place to ensure reliability of the research was the use of a code book with code names and descriptions to ensure themes that emerge during the research are being labeled as accurately as possible.

**Assumptions**

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) states, “Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist” (p. 62). The participants were selected with the belief that they would be able to provide meaningful insight into the phenomenon of participating in a community of practice that address collaboration needs of general education teachers and special education teachers in an inclusive environment at a small public charter school in West Tennessee. I assumed that although the special education teacher, general education teacher, and administrator would all have different perspectives on collaboration, common themes may emerge from their experience.
Subjectivity Statement

A subjectivity statement explains who the researcher is in relation to who or what the researcher is studying and is associated with bias. Glesne (2011) declares, “Subjectivity, in this sense, is equated with bias and seen as something to control against and to mitigate its influence in research” (p. 151). The purpose of a subjectivity statement is to explain how personal feelings or beliefs about a phenomena may affect the research and to convey this to the audience to consider in terms of authenticity, validity, and creditability of the research.

My role in this research is shaped by my interactions with general education teachers in the inclusive environment. As a special educator, I have been afforded the opportunity to build caring or nurturing relationships with my students because I have had to pay extra attention to their needs in the self-contained setting. Serving them in a smaller setting ensures that I am able to teach to their deficits and help to push them towards mastery of foundational skills. As a former student with a disability, I know firsthand the obstacles and challenges that emerge when the needs of the student are greater than what a traditional general education classroom can provide. The school I currently work for now pushes towards educating students with mild to moderate disabilities in the general education environment to the greatest extent possible. One of the greatest obstacles has been employing evidence-based strategies that foster collaboration among the general education teacher and the special education teacher.

The challenge is combining my skills and knowledge as the special educator with the general education content specialist’s skills and knowledge to create a fully inclusive environment that meets the needs of all students. In my opinion, in order for this team teaching strategy to work, there has to be some type of planning and collaboration to take place even when the school schedules do not always allow it. I understand that not all teachers may feel the
same way that I do about team teaching relationships and collaboration so I attempted to remain neural and allow the data collected to shape my interpretations of their experiences of participating in a community of practice that targets collaboration.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the methodology of the qualitative research narrative study that was conducted. A description of the research design and its rationale, participants, research context, the data collection and analysis process, trustworthiness, and the assumptions of the study were all explained in this chapter. The use of interviews, observations, focus groups, and archival data were used to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 will discuss the findings of the research organized by the participants’ narratives and then by the themes and patterns. Chapter 5 will summarize and discuss the results, reflecting on the findings and integrating them with current themes and meanings.
Chapter Four

Narrative Analysis

This narrative inquiry research sought to explore the perceptions of a team of educators regarding how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs in an inclusive environment. Chapter 4 presents the background of the participants, the findings of the participants’ narratives individually, and the findings for the participants collectively. The experiences of a team of educators were viewed through Wenger’s (1998) community of practice learning theory. The participants in this study shared their experiences through three levels of interviews, a non-participant observation, and through archival documents. Each participant narrative is divided in three parts. First, background information is provided explaining how each participant came to be a part of the community of practice. Next, details of the participant’s experience and his or her views of participating in a community of practice will be retold. Lastly, common themes experienced by the participant as it relates to Wenger’s communities of practice learning theory will be shared. A summary is provided at the conclusion of this chapter.

Backgrounds of the Participants

The participants of this study are current teachers for Dream Academy who meet weekly in a community of practice. The three participants are all African American: one female and two males. Each participant was given a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. This section of chapter 4 will provide a brief background of each participant that is included in this study. Table 7 provides a summary description of the participants.
Table 7

*Description of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Highest Degree</th>
<th>Team Role</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Experience in Administration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eliza</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>General Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nathan</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you can see from the table, there is a variation in teaching experience which ranges from three to eight years. Samuel and Nathan both have advanced degrees while Eliza has obtained only her bachelor’s degree. Nathan has both teaching experience and experience as an administrator. Nathan has also worked as a special education teacher prior to becoming an administrator. Samuel and Eliza work together in one community of practice while Nathan serves as an administrator in additional communities of practice. This research focuses on the teaching team that included Eliza, Samuel, and Nathan as a teaching team.

**Eliza the general education teacher.** Eliza is a 24-year-old African American female secondary math teacher. She went to a small university in Mississippi and majored in math education. Eliza graduated in May 2015 as a math education major and began working for Dream Academy in June of the same year as a summer school math teacher. Eliza currently teaches Algebra II to both general education and special education students in the inclusion environment. Eliza has three 80-minute class period blocks but only co-teaches with a special education teacher for one block a day. Eliza participates with her special education co-teacher in a community of practice for two hours each week.
**Samuel the special education teacher.** Samuel is a 48-year-old African American male special education teacher with a teacher’s certification to teach students with mild to moderate disabilities. Samuel served in the military for six years prior to going to college for music education. As a music major during his undergraduate study, Samuel took general education courses that introduced him to basic studies in education. He went on to complete his Master’s of Arts in Special Education. Once his degree was conferred, Samuel accepted a teaching position at a large high school that served socioeconomically disadvantaged urban kids. From there, Samuel took a teaching position with Dream Academy and became one of two special education teachers his first year there. Samuel co-teaches with two general education teachers, but he participates in a community of practice with only Eliza, the Algebra II teacher.

**Nathan the administrator.** Nathan is a 36-year-old African American male secondary school principal. Nathan was in his eighth certified year of education although he has been working in the education sector for over ten years. Nathan has been with Dream Academy for four years where he served as an assistant principal for two years. Prior to coming to Dream Academy, Nathan served as an assistant principal for the local public school district. Before that, Nathan served as a special education teacher. Nathan has a Master’s in Education and is a certified administrator. He is currently the head principal at Dream Academy. Nathan has an active role in at least three communities of practice at Dream Academy.

**Communities of Practice Participants’ Narrative**

This next section will present a detailed narrative for each participant as gathered from all levels of the interview questions and memo notes. The interview protocol was used during the first phase of interviewing in an effort to begin the conversation and to get the participants talking about their experiences. Since this is a narrative inquiry study, the interview protocol was
designed as an inquiry-based conversation tool that is useful for helping facilitate conversation and is helpful to understand the educators’ experience of participating in the community of practice (Castillo-Montonya, 2016). The interview questions were aligned with Wenger’s (1998) key components of social learning which are used to determine whether social participation exists as a process of learning for the team teachers. Table 8 revisits the four key components of Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning that was mentioned in chapter two and provides a description of each.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Components to Characterize Social Participation as a Process of Learning</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meaning</td>
<td>Learning as experience; a way of talking about our (changing) ability-individually and collectively-to experience our life and the world as meaningful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Learning as doing; a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Learning as belonging; a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>Learning as becoming; a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Wenger’s (1998) Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity

**Eliza’s voice** When this study was conducted, Eliza was a third-year general education math teacher. As she reflected on her program of study in college, she was able to conclude that she was only required to take six hours of coursework as it related to exceptional learners and
none that dealt with co-teaching. During the summer school period where she taught math, Eliza had very little interaction with students with disabilities (SWD). It was not until the start of her regular school year teaching contract that she encountered SWD in her classroom. Eliza stated there was very little coaching available during her first year of teaching that offered potential strategies for reaching all learners. Her only support, at the time, was a contracted math coach who would only come 20 days out of the 180-day school year to provide training for delivering grade level, math content. Eliza recalled there being a special education teacher employed at Dream Academy that year, but she explained due to staffing capacity, the special education teacher was not always available to plan lessons with her.

As the number of special education teachers grew at Dream Academy, Eliza recalled how she was able to work more closely with a special education teacher during her second year in the classroom. The expectation of administration at Dream Academy was for Eliza and the special education teacher to co-teach in Eliza’s classroom. Although co-teaching was a familiar term to Eliza, she was unsure of how this would look in the general education classroom. Her interactions with the special education teacher occurred almost daily, but rarely was there much planning time. Administration proposed developing a mandatory, weekly, community of practice for all general education and special education teaching teams. They were to be overseen by an assigned administrator to help combat the planning and collaboration barriers experienced at Dream Academy. It was not until this moment, her third year of teaching that Eliza felt she was making progress with her SWD and struggling learners. Eliza’s experience of participating in the weekly meeting is captured in the narrative that follows.

Community of practice experience. Eliza has been a full time, certified math teacher with Dream Academy for all three years of her teaching career. She explained her class size has
always been 25 students or less with a mixture of special education and general education students. Eliza was able to identify the value in interacting with special education teachers on a regular basis since she struggled with finding instructional strategies that would reach her lowest learners. Eliza explained that she often visited the special education office when she was in need of finding alternative ways of teaching her math content to students who were performing below grade level. She found value in being assigned a co-teacher who would work with her in her classroom for the remainder of the year.

Eliza had to get accustomed to having someone share her space. During her first year of teaching, she was solely responsible for planning and implementing lessons. She found that the more she was able to plan with her co-teacher during her third year of teaching, the better her lessons would go, especially in those classes where enrollment of SWD was high. The challenge Eliza states she faced was opening up “her space” to share it with an outsider. Eliza proclaimed, I have always thought of the kids I taught as “my kids.” Going from having full autonomy over my content delivery to having to co-plan and co-teach with another person is kind of foreign to me. I had gotten used to working with my math department on planning instruction, but never had I planned math instruction with someone of a different discipline prior to being assigned a co-teacher and to participating in a community of practice. Since we have different teaching styles and strengths, my co-teacher is able to reach those kids I cannot and vice versa. I like that I am able to converse and really plan with my co-teacher during the community of practice. Eliza explained how being a part of a co-teaching team has really helped her with fully understanding the needs of her students.
Since Eliza participated in a community of practice as a state improvement grant the previous year, Eliza felt her craft as well as achievement for her students could only improve. Her thinking around “her kids” and “her space” shifted to become “our kids” and “our classroom” the more she and her special education teacher was able to plan together. Eliza thought about how at first, she was hesitant to open up to her teaching team. She did not want the other teachers in the building to think she was incapable of reaching her students. It was only after the first two meetings Eliza realized she can help her co-teacher with content specific instructional strategies and her co-teacher could help her with instructional strategies for struggling learners.

Regardless of the learning level of each student, Eliza was charged with teaching grade level content material to all of the students who are enrolled in her course. Eliza felt that at first, this was a bit of a challenge. She explained,

My first year at Dream Academy was the most challenging. It was difficult for me to determine which strategy was best for each student. When I first got into the classroom, I would plan a lesson with very little variations for my struggling students. I did not realize at first, how important it was for me to have smaller mini lessons embedded in my larger big picture lesson.

Eliza explained that since there is now planning and collaboration time built into her schedule as a result of the community of practice, she is able to learn best practice from her special education colleague that is suitable for supporting students with disabilities.

In the inclusion classroom, Eliza explained she mostly uses grouping as an instructional strategy. During a community of practice meeting, the special education teacher shared with
Eliza his experiences of using flexible grouping to deliver instruction. Just hearing about his positive experience persuaded Eliza to try it in their classroom. She described,

Flexible grouping as an instructional delivery strategy allows us to either teach the class as a whole class group or break the classes down into smaller groups as to maximize student performance. When the students are in groups, my co-teacher and I are able to target learners with similar learning styles or similar abilities. In addition, the co-teacher and I are able to parallel teach. Since we learn as doing, even as adults, we are able to reflect and discuss the pros and cons of the grouping strategy we used during the community of practice. It is there, we are able to adjust our practice for the next day of class.

Eliza concluded the discussion and practice part of the community of practice is the most rewarding and most effective part of the meetings because it allows for a critical reflection of each individual’s own practice. In addition, Eliza felt she was able to hear from her colleague and the administrator about their similar experience and learn from them what worked well and what did not. She could then apply to her practice what she learned from her teaching team during the community of practice.

Eliza understood the importance of connecting with teachers to develop her lessons. She mentioned being very present and engaged in any time that allowed for coaching and development as to enhance her craft. She mentioned that most of the professional development she experienced at Dream Academy occurred at the building level. The community of practice she participated in was the most beneficial for enhancing her craft because it allowed her to improve her ability to reach all students through learning from her teacher peers. Through case
study learning, and critical reflection, Eliza felt she could get immediate assistance with real life problems that emerge in her classroom.

Prior to participating in the community of practice, Eliza felt that the traditional planning with her co-teacher was ineffective because the co-teacher was not always available during her planning period. Eliza understood that her co-teacher was assigned to multiple teachers in the building so a schedule conflict was almost always possible. Eliza found value in the community of practice in that it alleviated the school conflict by allowing an agreed upon meeting time which also involved the presence of an administrator. She felt the addition of the administrator placed urgency on the collaboration between co-teachers. It was during the community of practice meetings Eliza felt she has evolved into a more seasoned teacher as opposed to a novice teacher even though this was her third year of teaching.

Eliza could appreciate the connections she made with her co-teacher from participating in the community of practice. She is currently considering getting her educational specialist degree in special education. She expressed,

Because I have had an opportunity to not only co-teach, but to also work in a community of practice, I would pursue an educational specialist degree in special education to better serve all my students. I feel like I did not learn enough in my undergraduate program to truly differentiate my lessons. My goal is to make the content accessible to all.

Eliza feels that activities, the dialogue, the feedback, and the collaboration are all essential to reaching all students. She compared participating in a community of practice as being an easel. Eliza stated, “The colors of our world come together during the community of practice to create a beautiful masterpiece; a space where all students are engaged and connected to the learning.”
**Themes as it relates to Wenger’s community of practice.** Reoccurring themes from Eliza’s narrative as it relates to Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning was joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire which all have to be present for learning to occur in a community of practice. Eliza never hinted that the presence of the administrator made her feel as if she was unable to engage freely in the shared space of the community of practice. This contradicts Kerno’s (2008) assertion that the hierarchy of organizations manifests in a community of practice where power should not exit. As Eliza told her story, she noted finding value in all the interactions of the community of practice participants including the administrator who is an equal “member” (Wenger, 1998) during that shared space.

Wenger (1998) explained joint enterprise related to a collective understanding of a community, mutual engagement symbolized establishing relationships and expectations, and shared repertoire meant using artifacts, tools and resources to foster learning. For Eliza, participation in a community of practice was a major learning process. Where she stood in her thinking about collaboration and co-teaching later evolved to become something else. As Eliza explained during her interview, her thinking around “her kids” and “her space” shifted to become “our kids” and “our classroom” the more she and her co-teacher were able to work together during the community of practice.

This was a significant shift because it exemplified the sense of ownership that she once felt towards her practice and the students she taught. Prior to working in the community of practice, Eliza was a newcomer in the sense that she was unable to fully engage with her co-teacher in the inclusion environment without first mutually engaging with her co-teacher during the community of practice. This shift in Eliza’s thinking is evidence of Wenger’s (1998) property
of learning which explains “..newcomers can be integrated into the community, engage in its practice, and then—in their own way—perpetuate it [learning]” (p. 99).

Eliza evolved in her thinking and learning around being a content area teacher to being a teacher, period. She gained a deeper understanding of what co-teaching looked like in the inclusion environment and was able to carry this learning with her to her classroom. Her participation in a community of practice was a valuable and rewarding learning experience. She noted the following:

If I were asked to rate my ability to serve SWD in my classroom on a scale of 1 to 5, then last year I would have rated myself as a 1, but this year, I would definitely say I am approaching a level 4. I feel I am better equipped to serve all my students so much so that I have decided to pursue an Education Specialist degree in special education.

Eliza’s desire to further develop her knowledge of teaching SWD support’s Wenger’s principle of identity. Wenger (1998) states the following:

Because learning transforms who we are, and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills and information, but a process of becoming—to become a certain person or, conversely, to avoid becoming a certain person (p. 215).

Eliza no longer wants to be that teacher who has to wait on her co-teacher to arrive before she can differentiate or modify instruction for her struggling learners and students with disabilities. She explained how taking this additional step in her practice may potentially help to raise her effectiveness level. Eliza states that in no way is she hinting at avoiding collaboration with a co-teacher altogether, but instead, she would like to bring different meanings and experiences to the shared space of learning. Eliza
**Samuel’s voice.** At the time of this study, this was Samuel’s second year at Dream Academy and eighth year in education. Samuel explained there have been very few opportunities for professional development as a special education teacher at Dream Academy. He further explained that although whole staff professional development was offered at the building level, he could not recall a time where any of the presentations provided any updates on enhancing his special education craft. The professional developments often focused on general education instructional design and delivery. Samuel felt that although it was good to see what other content area teachers were doing, it would also be beneficial to see what schools were doing around special education programming.

**Community of practice experience.** At Dream Academy, Samuel is one of three special education teachers. He has a caseload of about 20 students whose disabilities are all mild to moderate per IDEA disability guidelines. Dream Academy is full inclusion so the range of services include consultation, push-in, and pull out support. Samuel co-teaches with three different content area teachers. As a result, he is a part of three co-teaching teams and two communities of practice. For the purpose of this study, Samuel’s experience with Eliza in the community of practice is explored.

Samuel has spent the last two years of his teaching career at Dream Academy. All of his teaching experience has been in the inclusion environment. Samuel states he has never had his own classroom where students reported to him daily. When asked about the impact teacher-teacher interactions had on his professional work, he responded,

*It is very important for me to have a good working relationship with the general education teacher in order for me to provide the best service for our students. If I am*
working with someone that does not want to share their classroom and they feel like it is just their classroom, then there is no way we can effectively co-teach.

He further stated,

My experiences with working with general education teachers has been good and some has been frustrating. The experiences were good when the general teacher was open to new ideas, different strategies, and was open to the concept of co-teaching. In those instances, we were able to reach not just the special education students, but all learners equally despite the various challenges that each student had. The students enjoyed the environment more. They felt special because they had two teachers and not just one and they respected the fact that they could bounce ideas off both of the teachers. In essence, they were able to see two different individuals model what it was like to work cooperatively. Conversely, when I was challenged with working with someone who did not want to open their classroom and only wanted to utilize their ideas, you could see the disparity in the classroom because not all of the students were being reached.

Samuel noted that on some occasions, the students would gravitate towards him because of the way he was able to break the information down. This in turn, made the general education teacher feel even more territorial Samuel explained. That feeling of ownership did not create a good environment for Samuel, the students, or for the general education teacher Samuel concluded.

Samuel acknowledged that when he and the general education teacher actually had the ability to co-plan during the community of practice, their lessons were more fluent. The everyday challenges of the classroom were always addressed during the community of practice which minimized the individual challenges for each student. Samuel felt it helped to have the administrator present so he and his co-teacher could address planning, student behavior, or any
other issues that may arise throughout the day. Samuel states this helped their co-teaching team to be proactive instead of retroactive. Samuel added,

It is not always possible to plan together, especially where there is not an administrator included, so participating in a community of practice has helped us to overcome this challenge.

Samuel felt working with general education teachers has allowed him to be well versed in the different subject areas that he co-teaches. He explained that his primary model of instruction in the inclusion environment is one teach, one assist, where one teacher led instruction while the co-teacher works with students, in one of his classes and using team teaching, where the teachers contribute equally to the lesson, in the other. One teach one assist is a method of co-teaching that allows one teacher to lead teach the students while the other teacher assist the students. (Friend, 2000; Friend, 2015), which he states works out fine because he has a wonderful working relationship with his co-teachers. Samuel explained,

Using one teach, one assist in an English class allows me to work one-on-one with students, in a small group with special education students only, or in a mixed group of non-disabled students and special education students to help them achieve their daily objective. Alternatively, team teaching is successful in the Algebra II class where we are able to plan together. We both teach the subject matter simultaneously to the students. Samuel credits his participation in the community of practice for the great working relationship he has with his Algebra II co-teacher. Samuel offered,

Being able to go into a safe place to ask content specific questions about daily lessons is a very valuable resource. Since I am not the content specialist, that extra time is needed for me to look at the curriculum and break it down in a way that I can give it back to our
students. If I have questions or get stuck, because I sometimes do, then I am able to ask the Algebra II teacher during our time together. Since I do not have this planning and work time set aside with the English teacher, there is a big difference in the flow of our teaching and the responsiveness to instruction of the students.

Samuel hopes that someday, the opportunity to participate in a community of practice with all of his co-teachers would be made available to him soon.

Samuel is very confident in his teaching abilities. Prior to coming to Dream Academy, Samuel noted that most of his professional developments consisted of monthly meetings with other special education teachers around the district. The only time that he received content specific professional development for other subjects was when he voluntarily signed up to attend the monthly math and English meetings. Samuel felt taking this extra step would help him on a personal level to grow as a special education teacher. Samuel noted,

I am the math teacher, the science teacher, the Spanish teacher, and whatever other kind of teacher my students need me to be. Although I provide push-in support to students in the inclusion environment, I may have to pull students out to help with those other subjects they may be struggling in. For this reason, I make myself available to attend whatever training in whatever content so that I can better serve my students. In a situation where common planning is not obtainable, special education teachers who are assigned to one general education teacher or who are content specific would be ideal.

Samuel understands that helping students reach their fullest potential requires work and a lot of collaboration. As a result, Samuel felt that,

Collaboration plays a big part of serving SWD in the inclusion environment. When the special education teacher and general education teachers take the time to work each
lesson out together, they have an opportunity to discuss and be proactive about the challenges that each individual student may have. Also, working on scenarios to counter the students’ challenges during the community of practice helps with growing my craft. For example, if a certain strategy doesn’t work, then we would use another strategy and if that strategy doesn’t work then we would use another strategy which ensures the student can be reached.

Samuel further commented,

I believe collaboration is very important because it sets a tone for educating our students with disabilities. I feel that if it’s done effectively in each supported class, then the students will become used to the interactions between the teachers. Their expectations for learning and the learning environment will increase thus increasing more engaged students. We will in turn grow as teachers of students and not as teachers of content. With the administrators present, he or she can identify growth areas and learning opportunities that speak to those target areas.

Samuel found worth in participating in the community of practice. He explained it would be much more meaningful to have the opportunity to work with all of his co-teachers in a community of practice. Samuel really loves the idea of the administrator being included in the work space. Samuel commented,

I feel that I have a solid foundation for understanding the needs of students with disabilities. This foundation has been built from working with great general education teachers as well as with struggling general education teachers. On the other hand, I am continuously working on building content knowledge in subjects such as in math and in English so that I can understand the needs of all students.
Themes as it relates to Wenger’s community of practice. The most reoccurring themes from Samuel’s narrative as it relates to Wenger’s communities of practice theory of learning were engagement, imagination, and alignment. These three areas combine to create a sense of belonging to a community where engagement denotes completing tasks together and developing artifacts, imagination indicates seeing self as a member of the practice, and alignment represents aligning self with expectations and organizing actions to complete a shared goal (Wenger, 1998). The actual sense of belonging to a team, or in this case, a community, had been absent from his interactions with general education teachers prior to his participation in a community of practice because Samuel felt working with a co-teacher was merely his duty as a special educator.

Wenger et al. (2002) explained, “Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). For Samuel, this is the very essence of his practice since he is assigned to various general education teachers throughout the year as a co-teacher. Aligning the definition of communities of practice to Samuel’s role with his co-teachers, Samuel is charged with planning and collaborating with general education teachers which entails bringing individual knowledge and competencies about instructional strategies together in an effort to determine ways to reach all students in the general education classroom. In Samuel’s past practice, planning and collaboration was done during traditional planning time that is given to teachers. Samuel elucidated co-teaching with general education teachers is simply what special education teachers are paid to do.

Samuel explained that he has never had his own classroom, but instead, he has always gone into general education teachers’ classrooms to help deliver instruction. In the community of practice meetings, Samuel had an equal voice in planning instruction with his co-teacher and was
able to add or take away things from the lesson as Samuel saw fit (engagement). Samuel noted in his narrative,

Being able to go into a safe place to ask content specific questions about daily lessons is a very valuable resource. Since I am not the content specialist, that extra time is needed for me to look at the curriculum and break it down in a way that I can give it back to our students. If I have questions or get stuck, because I sometimes do, then I am able to ask the Algebra II teacher during our time together (imagination).

Samuel credits the sense of shared responsibility of students and his knowledge of general education content to his interactions with his co-teacher to his participation in a community of practice (alignment). As identified in the literature, shared responsibility among co-teachers helps to increase outcomes for students with disabilities (Cortielia, 2006; Welch et al., 1999)

Another theme to emerge from Samuel’s narrative as it relates to Wenger’s (1998) community of practice theory of learning was boundary. Wenger uses boundary to refer to “…explicit markers of membership, such as titles, dress, tattoo, degrees, or initiation of rites” as it relates to participation in a community of practice (p. 104). Samuel’s participation in a community of practice with his co-teacher, Eliza, enhanced his working relationship in the inclusion environment while his relationship and teaching practice with his other co-teachers was not as polished. Samuel noted,

Since I do not have this planning and work time [participating in a community of practice] set aside with the English teacher, there is a big difference in the flow of our teaching and the responsiveness to instruction of the students.

This statement supports Wenger’s idea that, “…such histories [of learning as in a community of practice] create discontinuities between those who have been participating and those who have
not” (p. 103). In this sense, discontinuities relate to the difference between interactions with his co-teachers during a community of practice and interactions of co-teachers with the absence of a community of practice. Samuel noted his desire to work with all co-teachers in a community of practice because he explained the teaching and learning aspect of instruction is more meaningful in the inclusion classroom. Samuel could appreciate Nathan being a part of the community of practice because this allowed the Nathan to take a more active role in overseeing the collaboration efforts of Samuel and his co-teachers.

**Nathan’s voice.** At the start of this study, Nathan was the head principal for Dream Academy. Over the years, Nathan has held titles such as team leader, co-department chair, master teacher, special education teacher, assistant principal, and head principal. He is the only participant in this study who has held all team teaching roles. Nathan’s focus area in his training and development has been on supporting administrators and teachers and providing strategies for teaching students with disabilities. He expressed the importance of professional development for educators as a means to enhance educator’s skills.

**Community of practice experience.** Nathan explained how he and the other administrators wanted to determine a way the special education teachers and general education teachers could build a better collaborative working relationship. He reflected on the work he did the previous year through the state improvement grant participating in a community of practice and how the experience helped to better shape co-teaching relationships. Nathan, along with the other administrators, decided to launch weekly communities of practices to see if this would help his co-teaching teams build better collaborative relationships. This would in turn, assist with instructional design and delivery in the inclusion environment.
Nathan described how collaborative professional learning is essential to most professions, especially education. With the educational practice evolving over the years, Nathan feels it is very important for educators to take part in community learning of some sort so all participants in the community can grow their practice. Nathan explained that his role sometimes sets him apart from the teachers he leads. He feels that some teachers will not open up about their practice freely while in his presence. He asserts,

As an administrator, my role is more so of a coaching role. Most teachers look to me for guidance and feedback about their craft. I am not the all-knowing but I have enough experience and knowledge to know what good teaching looks like. Good teaching is being able to take part in professional development opportunities with a positive mindset, take from the experience what you have learned, and then applying it to your classroom. The “good teacher” will value these experiences.

Nathan explained that he offers building level professional development to all teachers and staff of Dream Academy on Wednesdays. Wednesday is an early release day for the students so the teachers stay behind for what he calls professional learning. This is when the communities of practice meet for an hour to discuss content, instructional strategies, problems, and any other issues that may come up during daily instruction. The teachers at Dream Academy also have available to them content specific professional development at the building level, district level training, and in some instances, out of state professional development.

This is the first year Dream Academy decided to conduct communities of practice school-wide. Nathan explained that in the previous year, one of his teaching teams was able to participate in a state improvement grant that included participating in a community of practice. The experience was a rewarding experience for everyone in the building who participated so
Nathan decided to continue the practice and to add more teachers. Each teaching team consists of a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator. Nathan’s role in the community of practice is the administrator, but he states he is also an active participant. He explained,

When we first began conducting communities of practice, the misconception was that I was there to act as the overseer of the teachers work. For me, it is the direct opposite. My purpose for being included is so that I can provide input into whatever issue each team of teachers is currently working on. I get how my presence was threatening in the beginning, but as time progressed, we were equal participants in this community space.

Education is a passion of Nathan’s. He conveyed his goal is to help make a positive impact in the lives of the students he serves. In order for him to do that, he has to recruit and train highly qualified staff. Nathan explained that when he worked as a special education teacher in the inclusion environment, no one could tell who the lead teacher and who was the special education teacher. Nathan remarked,

When I was in the classroom with a co-teacher, no one could tell who the special education teacher was and who the general education teacher was. We bounced ideas off each other and made a point to include each other in the planning phase of the lesson. At times, there would be content that I was uncomfortable with teaching so the general education teacher would take the lead. I would still be present in the lesson, but I would more so be the one to assist the students who were not quite grasping what was being taught.

Nathan continued,
It’s experiences like the one I just described that makes the learning meaningful in the communities of practice. The teachers are able to hear my experiences and if they have experienced something similar, then they are able to relate to what I have shared and reflect and adjust their own practice.

Nathan understands that no two teachers are alike but he feels everyone can learn from someone else’s mistakes.

Nathan explained how he attempts to share instructional strategies that are useful in the inclusion environment. Nathan feels that special education has undergone many changes since his days of being in the classroom so it’s important for him to attend professional development that speaks to special education. When Nathan was a special education teacher, he explained the concept of co-teaching was relatively new. Less SWD were included in the general education environment so the lines of special education and general education were more solid. Nathan observed,

The lines of special education and general education are more blurred so building a practice where the two areas merge is a much needed practice.

Nathan maintained that all students can and will learn if high expectations are maintained and careful planning is executed. Nathan has seen teachers come to work and attempt to teach lessons that were not thoughtfully planned out. He explained the classroom would then be in total disarray and the students will be unengaged in the lesson. Nathan shared that since he has experienced all three roles, special education teacher, general education teacher, and administrator, he knows firsthand the different set of challenges each role presents. Nathan felt,

Communities of practice would allow for teams of teachers, with different roles, to come together to share knowledge about their common goal of teaching students in the
inclusion environment whether they were special education students or general education students. This sets us apart from what others are doing because as a community, we are able to address immediate issues in the classroom.

Collaboration is a big piece of team teaching Nathan explained. Collaborative time must be embedded in the regular school day. The communities of practice serve a deeper purpose, Nathan explained, because it allow educators to take a deeper look at teaching and allows teachers to move to the next stage of development. Nathan elucidated that he understands now why administrator support is critical to building positive co-teaching teams. Nathan felt,

I can see the difference in co-teaching teams who work together in a community of practice and the ones who do not. When I walk into classrooms of co-teachers who participate in a community of practice, the classroom flows better and the co-teachers are more in sync with one another.

Nathan explained staffing and resources at Dream Academy hinders the ability of all co-teachers to work together in a community of practice. He noted that since support from special education teachers must exist across four grade levels and two subject areas, the number of special education teachers would have to increase in order for all co-teachers to work together in a community of practice.

Our goal at Dream Academy is to someday have all co-teaching teams participate in a community of practice. We can learn from each other by doing and by talking about what was done. I was able to recognize and see those things that happen in a classroom that I would not have ordinarily seen had I not participated in the community of practice alongside my teachers. Success in the inclusion class then becomes both teachers having a voice in the teacher in learning process.
Themes as it relates to Wenger’s community of practice. The most reoccurring theme from Nathan’s narrative as it relates to Wenger’s communities of practice theory of learning was knowledge management. Wenger et al. (2002) state, “Their health [communities of practice] depends primarily on the voluntary engagement of their members and on the emergence of internal leadership” (p. 12). Nathan served as a member in a community of practice, but as a lead administrator, his role was more so a supporting role. During each meeting, Nathan contributed information to discussions, but his participation was not as interactive as the other members of the community of practice. To illustrate Nathan’s views of knowledge, the following comments made by Nathan are revisited,

The lines of special education and general education are more blurred so building a practice where the two areas merge is a much needed practice…Communities of practice would allow for teams of teachers, with different roles, to come together to share knowledge about their common goal of teaching students in the inclusion environment whether they were special education students or general education students.

Nathan’s admission supports Wenger’s notion that participants in a community of practice “develop unique perspectives on their topic as well as a body common knowledge, practices, and approaches” (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 5). Nathan observed that the members of the community of practice are able to learn and grow from the other members.

Three Voices Combined

To explore the teachers’ perception of their experience of participating in a community of practice, three levels of interviews, observations, and archival data was utilized. These data sources were used to construct the narratives of the participants’ experience. The unit of analysis for this research study was a team of educators. Wenger’s community of practice social theory of
learning focused on workplace learning and explored how social participation helped shaped learning, meaning, and individual identities (1998). This section will discuss the common themes to emerge from the participants’ data as it relates to Wegner’s communities of practice theory of learning and will present findings from the literature.

**Themes as it relates to Wenger’s community of practice.** The first common theme to emerge from the participants in this study was value creation. Value creation as defined by Wenger et al. (2011) is “the value of learning enabled by community network and involvement” (p. 7). Eliza mentioned countless times that her experience in a community of practice was extremely valuable due to her ability to interact with Samuel on a regular basis. She felt the interactions with Samuel during the community of practice helped tackle the barrier she experienced of reaching her lowest learners. Samuel felt his ability to co-plan during a community of practice added value to daily lesson plans and instructional delivery because challenges that emerged during instructional time was discussed and tackled during a community of practice. Nathan further added that a good teacher would value the interactions of a community of practice because it brings with it meaningful learning.

Another common theme to emerge was the concept of shared practice. Wenger (1998) explained shared practice connects members of a community of practice to each other in a diverse and complex way. This was realized when Eliza shifted her thinking from “her kids” to referring to hers and Samuel’s students as “our kids.” Samuel felt collaboration was the hallmark of special education, so for him having access to constant communication with Eliza helped him to reach his idea of shared practice. Nathan explained sharing instructional strategies in the classroom eliminates the distinction of general education teacher and special education teachers to simply become teachers of students.
Findings as it relates to the literature. The findings in this study supports Hardman, McDonald, and Welch’s (1998) suggested collaboration and cross-disciplinary training that is designed to build a common core of knowledge and skills for both general and special education teachers. The purpose of designing cross-disciplinary training is so that “teachers have expertise in the subject matter being presented to the student and the ability to adapt curriculum and instruction to address individual learning characteristics” (p. 17). Although this training is suggested to take place during preservice training, a community of practice also allows teachers the opportunity to apply skills and knowledge acquired during participation and immediately apply them to the classroom.

Hardman, McDonald, and Welch (1998)’s findings for building models for teaming and coordination is reflected in the overall purpose of the community of practice that was formed at Dream Academy. As Nathan explained, communities of practice allowed teachers with different content backgrounds to come together and learn instructional strategies that each teacher could take into the general education classroom to serve all students. Hardman, McDonald and Welch (1998) proposed a collaboration training program for special education and general education teachers to meet the complex changes of special education programming.

Cortiellia’s (2006) study emphasized the shared responsibility that exists between general education and special education teachers. During the interview process, each participant expressed their desire to develop ways to support all students in spite of their ability in the inclusion classroom. Nathan further highlighted this point by explaining his desire to develop communities of practice for all co-teachers that exist at Dream Academy. Nathan felt this would create a sense of shared responsibility across disciplines.
In an inclusion environment, the special education teacher works with the SWD in the general education environment along with a general education teacher (Friend, 2015; Idol, 2006; Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 1998; Winzer, 1998). The same was depicted in the community of practice under study at Dream Academy. This study focused on a general education teacher and a special education teacher’s participation in a community of practice. Since both teachers from different disciplines are charged with serving students with mild to moderate disabilities in the inclusion environment, each teacher was hopeful in that the participation would enhance each of their practices. All strategies learned were implemented in the inclusion classroom. To further streamline and oversee this process, an administrator was present whose purpose was to ensure any challenges that were presented were resolved and all acquired learning was demonstrated.

Idol’s (2006) study found that teachers favored the inclusion model but felt more professional development was needed. Nathan too felt this way and expressed his desire to make professional development available to all teachers in various modes of learning as well as open communities of practice to all co-teachers during the next school year.

Eliza felt she needed more professional development when she first began teaching but explained her interactions with her co-teacher during her community of practice helped build her confidence as she brought her learning back to her general education classroom. This is an example of Mezirow’s (1990) transformational learning theory because Eliza was able to shift her thinking from what she thought her role was as an educator to a more conscious reality of what her role of an educator actually was.

Samuel mentioned his desire to seek professional development that went beyond what was expected of him. He mentioned signing up for training that was not required as a means to develop a deeper learning for math and English content. Samuel’s efforts align with Cross’s
characteristics of adult learners which suggests that adults participate in adult learning activities for personal reasons such as physiological development, motivation, and knowledge or for situational reasons such as for a job or for life transactions. In this case, Samuel wanted to enhance his teaching craft.

Team teaching is interactive and is referred to in the literature as collaborative teaching or co-teaching for short (Fishbaugh, 1997; Friend & Cook, 1995). The ultimate goal of the team teachers in the community of practice of this study was to develop ways in which the special education and general education teacher could work together cooperatively in the inclusion environment. Samuel and Eliza were able to develop strategies and instructional tools they could use immediately in the classroom.

The knowledge and skills the participants gained as a result of participating in a community of practice directly relates to the andragogic model of learning for adults. As noted in chapter 2, the andragogic model of adult learning takes into account the different cognitive development stages of the adult learner, the needs and experiences of the learner, and the individual goal of the learner (Knowles et al, 2005). From the participants’ narratives, we can see that Eliza was in a different cognitive stage of learning as a new teacher as compared to Samuel. Samuel had a more solid understanding of his co-teaching role whereas Eliza was still learning. Nathan was a little further along in his cognitive development due to his past roles of being a special education teacher turned administrator.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the participants’ narratives first individually for each participant and then collectively for the team of educators as transcribed from three levels
of interviews, non-participant observations, and archival data. Eliza, Samuel, and Nathan’s stories were told from their direct participation in a community of practice. Findings from the narratives that point directly to Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice theory of learning and the review of the literature indicates social participation that fostered learning for each participant was present during the community of practice under study. Chapter 5 will provide a conclusion, discussion, and implications, reflecting on the findings of this study.
Chapter Five

Conclusion

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study while chapter 2 and chapter 3 presented a review of the literature and the study methodology, respectively. In chapter 4, Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice key components of social learning were used to determine whether social participation exists as a process of learning for the team teachers. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the study, discuss the findings, share implications for future practice, and provide recommendations for continued research.

Summary of the Study

As noted in Chapter 1, the increased numbers of students with disabilities (SWD) being educated in the general education classroom has increased the expectation for effective collaboration among general education teachers and special education teachers (Hines, 2008). The push for inclusion is supported by such mandates as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Educational Act of 2004. Minimal data-based research exists that shares what teachers are doing to be effectively collaborative in the inclusion environment (Friend, 2000; Weiss & Brigham, 2000). For this reason, I sought to explore the perceptions of a team of educators of how their experience of participating in a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. I was further interested in the value of learning that is attached to social participation.

In this narrative inquiry research study, the unit of analysis was a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator. The general education teacher and special education teachers, Eliza and Samuel, work cooperatively in the inclusion environment while the administrator, Nathan, oversees their efforts. Nathan, the administrator, is an important
addition to this study because research suggests that administrator support is essential to the special education practice because administrators helps with the implementation of the inclusion practice by setting the tone and the culture for the collaboration environment (Hines, 2008; Kamens et al., 2013). The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?
2. How does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment?
3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?

The participants were all African American and included one female and two males. Participants from this study were representative of an independent operator from a charter school network in West Tennessee at a secondary high school referred in this study as Dream Academy. Site entry was granted by the Executive Director for Dream Academy.

Three levels of interviews were used to retell the participants’ story. The use of interviews in narrative inquiry allows the narrator to tell his or her story while the listener reshapes the experience to share the narrator’s voice. Cortazzi notes, “By studying the oral accounts of personal experience, we can examine the tellers’ representation and explanations of experience” (p. 1). The interviews were untimed and held face to face outside of the operating hours of Dream Academy. The first level of interviews used an Interview Protocol (Appendix B) to capture the participants’ voices and facilitate a conversation of inquiry. The interview protocol was modeled after Cresswell’s (2013) interview protocol plan. Follow up questions for the second level focused interviews were developed after the first interview was conducted and
transcribed into a Microsoft word file and loaded into Atlas ti 8. The same process was completed to develop the interview questions for the third level of interviews.

Non-participant observations were conducted with the use of a Non-Participant Observation Guide (Appendix C). In narrative inquiry research, non-participant observation allows the researcher to observe in action then ask the participant open ended questions about the action which results in reflection and meaning of an experience (Cortazzi, 1993). I was able to capture the interactions of the team of teachers in their shared space and collect artifacts such as lesson plans, meeting agendas, and Algebra II curricular resources. The interviews, non-participant observation, and document artifacts were the data sources were all loaded into Atlas ti 8 and were used to develop my narrative analysis.

The data was analyzed first individually for each participant and then collectively to determine if components of Wenger’s (1998) community of practice was present for Eliza, Samuel, and Nathan as they met each week. For Eliza, a theme to emerge that aligned with Wenger’s community of practice was joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoire. For Samuel, boundary and engagement, imagination, and alignment emerged. For Nathan, knowledge management was a theme to emerge that aligned with Wenger’s communities of practice principles of learning. Value creation was the collective theme to emerge for Eliza, Samuel, and Nathan. The next section will discuss the findings as it relates to the main idea of each research question and is organized first by the emerging themes for each participant and then by the emerging theme shared collectively among the participants.

**Discussion of Findings**

This narrative inquiry research study is framed from Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice learning theory which is mostly concerned with thinking about learning as social
participation. More specifically, Wenger’s idea of social learning encompasses the “process of being active participants in the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities” (p. 4). The members are formed as a result of a common, real life issue whose goal is to find better ways to improve their performance as is the case of the group of educators in this study. Marsick et al. (2006) suggest Wenger’s communities of practice learning theory aligns with reflective learning in the workplace which gives structure and meaning to what we do. Founded on four distinct premises, the community of practice theory of learning offers a unique perspective on knowledge and learning that connects members to making meaning from experience (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al., 2002).

As it relates to this study, a group of educators who are charged with working collaboratively in an inclusion environment participated in a community of practice in an effort to grow their knowledge around serving all students. The general education teacher was mostly concerned with enhancing her knowledge of instructional strategies that can help her reach all learners in the inclusion environment, while the special education teacher was mostly concerned with building his math content knowledge for all learners. The administrator in this study was mostly concerned with improving collaborative practices for co-teaching teams. This supports Winzer’s (1998) idea that professional development that fosters collaborative practices should be made available to in-service teachers.

It was apparent that each individual teachers’ perception of collaboration and coaching shifted as a direct reflection of participating in a community of practice. The data collection method utilized in this study attempted to capture the participants’ voices as it relates to how their experience of participating in a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. Cortazzi (1993) asserts
teachers’ experiences are essential to understand since education reform decisions that are made by policy makers and stakeholders directly affect teachers. Englert and Rozendal (2004) noted a gap in research and practice as it relates to the field of special education. This research study helps to bridge that gap as it allows collaborative teachers to work together collectively to develop solutions to common problems and apply them immediately to the classroom. The work in this community of practice is the research while the collaborative teaching in the inclusion environment because the practice.

Through the data collection sources, I tried to identify reoccurring themes across participants that connected to the main ideas of this research study. This next section will first provide the study’s findings as it relates to the research question for each participant and then a discussion of the findings as it relates to the literature will follow. The themes are listed in Table 9 for each participant. The common themes among participants are highlighted.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Eliza General Education Teacher</th>
<th>Samuel Special Education Teacher</th>
<th>Nathan Administrator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration?</td>
<td>1. Collaboration requires an open mind</td>
<td>1. Collaborative practice is essential for co-teachers in the inclusion environment</td>
<td>1. Collaborative professional learning is essential for co-teachers in the inclusion environment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Collaboration requires time, effort, and leadership support</td>
<td>2. Collaboration avoids disparity among groups of co-teaching relationships</td>
<td>2. If effective, promotes growth as a community</td>
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<td></td>
<td>3. Collaboration is priority for planning instruction in the inclusion environment</td>
<td>3. Valuable resource and experience</td>
<td>3. Promotes transformation in thinking and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Valuable resource and experience</td>
<td></td>
<td>4. Valuable resource and experience</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Collaboration enhances the learning environment</td>
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<td>5. Allows immediate attention to issues and problems</td>
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<td>6. Creates shared responsibility</td>
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<td>7. Promotes reflective practice</td>
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<td>8. Promotes teacher-to-teacher learning</td>
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<td>9. Collaboration among co-teachers is required for a successful inclusion environment</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Table 9 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Eliza General Education Teacher</th>
<th>Key Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. To what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice?</td>
<td>1. Reflective practice 2. Immediate application of knowledge in the inclusion classroom</td>
<td>1. Increased expectations from students of teaching and learning 2. Positive impact on teachers’ growth</td>
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**Findings of research question 1.** Research question one asked, how does a collaborative teaching team’s experience of participating in a community of practice provide insight into their perspectives of collaboration? Eliza’s perspective of collaboration after participating in a
community of practice is that collaboration requires an open mind, time, effort, and leadership support; is priority for planning instruction in the inclusion environment; is a valuable resource; and collaboration enhances the inclusion learning environment for all students.

Samuel felt collaborative practice is essential for co-teachers in the inclusion environment; collaboration avoids disparity among groups of co-teaching relationships; it is a valuable resource; helps create a positive outlook on co-teaching; helps create shared responsibility; increases administrative support; it helps overcome the challenge of common planning; strengthens co-teaching relationships; avoids disparity among groups of co-teaching relationship; and has a positive effect on the co-teacher’s teaching craft.

Nathan felt collaborative professional learning is essential for co-teachers in the inclusion environment; promotes transformation in thinking and practice; is a valuable resource and experience; allows immediate attention to issues and problems; creates shared responsibility; promotes reflective practice; promotes teacher-to-teacher learning; and collaboration among co-teachers is required for a successful inclusion environment and if effective, promotes growth as a community.

All participants described their experience of participating in a community of practice as a valuable and rewarding experience. Although informal in nature, Eliza and Samuel felt the experience was meaningful because it allowed them to build relationships and to learn instructional strategies from one another while Nathan asserted collaborative professional learning is essential for co-teachers to growing their practice. Their participation in a community of practice aligned with Knowles et al. (2005) concept of workplace learning in that each participant was able to participate in informal, social learning activities designed to help develop their collaborative teaching practice.
Eliza’s assertion that collaboration enhances the inclusion learning environment for all students aligns with Levine’s (2010) study that found ongoing professional learning for educators helps to improve teaching and learning for students. The knowledge and skills Eliza obtained while working in a community of practice enhanced her ability to support students with disabilities in her classroom. From her admission, Eliza was unknowledgeable of best inclusion practices, but as she collaborated more with Samuel, she was able to build up a better understanding of what it meant to scaffold and differentiate Algebra II content so it can be accessible for all students in her classroom.

Eliza, as a third year teacher, had very little training on teaching SWD during her undergraduate study. All that she learned about inclusion and inclusive practices came from learning while doing at Dream Academy. Eliza felt she was not adequately prepared to address the varying needs of all students in her classroom and assumed that it was Samuel’s job as the special education teacher to work with the students with disabilities. The fact that Eliza had to develop her collaboration skills in order to be effective in the inclusion classroom supports Winzer’s (1998) idea that not all teachers are equipped with the skill level to successfully implement inclusion initially. As a result, Winzer suggested teacher training that includes collaborative practices at the pre-service and in-service teaching levels should be made available to general education teachers.

Samuel, on the other hand, understood that his duty as a special education teacher was to collaborate with general education teachers and other stakeholders on the creation and implementation of students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEP). Samuel also understood that it was his job to deliver Algebra II instruction to all students in the inclusion environment. These findings connect to Leader-Johnson’s et al. (2012) idea that in order for teachers to
effectively collaborate, professional roles must be defined and understood so collaborative teachers can determine the best ways to work together. Samuel took it upon himself to attend content specific professional development opportunities in an effort to reach all the students he served in the general education classroom. He also relied on Eliza as one source of knowledge as it relates to Algebra II content during the community of practice.

The fact that Nathan felt participating in a community of practice helped to promote transformation in thinking and practice is evidence of Mezirow’s (1990) transformative learning theory which occurs when individuals transform meanings and perceptions to a revised system of beliefs and behaviors. Nathan could see a shift in Eliza’s lesson plans as she moved from a one size fit all lesson to including mini lessons within her bigger lesson plan to reflect the various learning styles in her classroom.

Nathan’s views on professional learning support the findings of Kamens et al. (2013) study that indicated administrators who provide professional learning for teachers is the most frequent way to support co-teachers, especially teachers like Eliza who is new to the idea of co-teaching. Also, this contradicts Kerno’s claim in his (2008) study that communities of practice are unaffected by structured supervision. Even though the actual roles as defined by the organization structure are absent in the community of practice, Nathan was a valuable contributor to the learning.

**Findings of research question 2.** Research question two asked, how does participating in a community of practice help or hinder the experience of the collaborative teaching team in the inclusion environment? Eliza felt participating in a community of practice enhanced her experience of collaborative teaching in the inclusion environment because it helps create a positive outlook on collaborative practice; creates shared responsibility; creates collaborative
learning environment; helps overcome the challenge of common planning; promotes teacher-to-
teacher learning; allows immediate response to daily challenges; enhances teaching and learning;
and strengthens co-teaching relationships.

Samuel felt participating in a community of practice helps create a positive outlook on
collaborative practice; helps create shared responsibility; increases administrative support;
overcomes the challenge of common planning; strengthens co-teaching relationships; avoids
disparity among groups of co-teaching relationship; and has a positive effect on the teaching
craft.

Nathan felt participating in a community of practice helps create shared responsibility;
promotes teacher-to-teacher learning; helps merge special education and general education
practice; transforms teachers of content into teachers of teachers and not teachers of content; and
helps build positive relationships.

All participants felt collaboration helped to create a sense of shared responsibility in the
inclusion environment. The idea of shared responsibility is similar to Wenger’s (1998) concept
of mutual engagement which is summarized as being a “joint-enterprise, and a shared repertoire
of ways of doing things” (p. 49). Samuel stated,

The lines of special education and general education is blurred and we [educators] are
less territorial and are more opened to a shared space.

Eliza commented something similar and stated,

The division in the classroom that I created between the special education students and
general education students is dissolved as a result of participating in the community of
practice because my personal view of my teaching has shifted to include all students
despite their learning level and ability.
Nathan declared,

Participating in a community of practice reveals the importance of working cooperatively in the inclusion environment which is not always easily visible without a community of practice. Educators understand the equal work that is required from all members in order to create an effective learning environment for all students.

It is apparent here that Eliza, Samuel, and Nathan have come to a common understanding of how important it is for each member to be open to sharing his or her practice during a community of practice as noted by Wenger (1998) and how important it is for each member to have shared responsibility for student outcomes in the inclusion environment as Fishbaugh (1997) and Friend et al. (2010) suggests.

Eliza and Samuel further agreed that participating in a community of practice helps create a positive outlook on collaborative practice, overcomes the challenge of common planning, and helps strengthen co-teaching relationships. Nathan felt participating in a community of practice helps to promote teacher-to-teacher learning which aligns with the idea of strengthening co-teaching relationships as felt by Eliza and Samuel.

Reviewing the course content curriculums, lesson plans, and community of practice agendas, I was able to see how each piece of data was aligned to one another and supported each participants’ narratives. For example, the Algebra II math content standards provide a common set of expectations of what students should be able to know and do after having completed the Algebra II course (Tennessee Department of Education, 2017). The standards are the same for all students who are enrolled in the Algebra II course, including students with mild to moderate disabilities. Ideally, teachers are charged with scaffolding, or providing supports students need to access the content, and differentiating instruction, or making changes to instruction based on the
students’ needs and abilities (Hall, Stramgman, & Meyer, 2002). Looking at Eliza’s Algebra II lesson plans for the previous year in comparison to the current year shows proof that Eliza modified her lesson plan to fit the varying abilities of Eliza and Samuel’s students. Eliza explained that she now works with Samuel to finalize her lesson plans and she now includes mini lessons in the daily lesson plans to reteach skills students will need in order to perform Algebra II coursework.

**Findings of research question 3.** The third and final research question asked, to what extent does a collaborative teaching team feel a sense of success in the inclusion environment as a result of participating in a community of practice? Although there were no common themes for this question, each participant felt a sense of success as a result of participating in a community of practice. In addition, each was able to learn something from their experience. This research question speaks to the meaning that was made as a result of their experience. As explained in chapter 2, learning from experience is a common theme in adult education. David Kolb (1984) as reported by Kasl and Yorks (2002) “theorizes that learning from experience is an interaction between two processes-experience is first taken in or grasped, then transformed into meaning” (p. 180).

Eliza felt a sense of success in the inclusive environment as a result of participating in a community of practice when reflective practice and immediate application of her knowledge was applied to the inclusion classroom. According to Marsick and Watkins (1990), reflective practice has a great impact on informal learning. As noted in chapter 2, informal learning induces reflection and action. The meaning that is made of people’s experience is conceptualized through reflection and is executed through action (Marsick et al., 2006). As it relates to Eliza, she was
able to use her learning experience from the community of practice to think about reframing her teaching practice to include all students in the inclusion environment.

Samuel felt a sense of success when there was increased expectations from students of teaching and learning and when there was a positive impact on teachers’ growth. Although beyond the scope of this study, Samuel noted differences in student achievement when students had two highly qualified teachers in the classroom. Both teachers could assist all students without restriction which maintains Cook and Friend’s (2005) idea that students have the ability to have greater teacher support with two teachers in the classroom which reduces the student-teacher ratio as noted in chapter 2.

Nathan felt a sense of success when equal voice among co-teachers on teaching and learning is present in the inclusion classroom. Nathan understood the expectation of each teacher prior to the community of practice, but he could see an improvement in practice as a result of the community of practice. The improvement in the co-teaching practice aligns to Cook and Friend’s (1995) idea that co-teachers of different expertise who work together are better able to meet the needs of diverse children. Nathan could see that Eliza picked up strategies to reach struggling learners from Samuel while Samuel was able to learn Algebra II content knowledge from Eliza. As a result, both teachers could serve all students in the inclusion environment without restriction.

**Collective findings as it relates to the review of the literature.** The findings of this study align with many of the studies discussed in chapter two. Eliza’s experiences with interacting with students with disabilities prior to participating in a community of practice aligned with Blanton, Pugach, and Boved’s (2014) idea that the ability of general education teachers to serve students with disabilities lies in the educator’s overall preparedness. Blanton et
al. suggested the way in which general education and special education teachers collaborate should start at the pre-service level which would be true if the participants in the study had the opportunity to work with each other prior to receiving students in their inclusion classroom.

Hodges and Jong’s (2014) multiple case study that explored the teacher’s perception of the local norms for mathematics instructions and the construction of communities of practice aligns to the Samuel’s need to participate in content specific professional development and feeds his desire to experience a community of practice with his all his co-teachers. Samuel explained in his narratives that although he participates with one of his co-teachers during a community of practice, there is a noticeable variation in the level of collaboration that he experiences with his other co-teachers. Samuel, like Levine (2010), feels that collaboration among co-teachers can improve teaching and learning.

Nathan being present in this community of practice supports Honig and Rainey’s (2014) finding that administrators who are fully engaged in communities of practice are able to support the leadership of principals. As it relates to this study, Nathan was able to use reflective practice as explained by Marsick and Watkins (1990) to think about strategies that strengthen the relationship and collaborative efforts of all teachers that he supervises in his building.

Amin and Roberts (2008) article suggests that communities of practice is a homogeneous, cookie cutter process and should be avoided as a process of learning. The participants in this study disagreed with this idea and found value in their interaction. Each participant was able to identify meaningful learning that took place during their work in a community of practice. Also, they were able to recognize shifts in their thinking around collaborative practice.
Implication for Practice

The inclusion of SWD in the general education curriculum has been a continuous effort of education reform since the enactment and reenactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004, respectively. As a result, it is important for special education teachers and general education teachers to implement best practices for collaboration. It was noted in chapter 1 that little data-based research exists as to what co-teachers are doing to be effectively collaborative in the inclusion environment (Friend, 2000; Weiss & Brigham, 2000). The aim of this study was to explore team teachers’ perspective of their experience of collaboration as a result of participating in a community of practice. This research study’s findings have several implications of significance to the field of special education and inclusion practices as the findings may help to inform evidence-based collaborative practices among general education teachers and special education teachers.

Implication for general education teachers. This study revealed that effective collaboration among co-teachers enhances the learning environment. While special education teachers have been trained to teach SWD, overcoming the challenges presented by diversity among students’ background, needs, and abilities is a common task general education teachers face (Jenkins & Yoshimura, 2010). The findings for this study suggests that there is a need for general education teachers to learn more about special education students and their needs prior to being exposed to them in the classroom. It may be beneficial for general education teachers to enroll in education courses beyond the minimum required so general education teachers could gain a more conceptual understanding of educating students with disabilities.

Implication for special education teachers. Since special education teachers are responsible for teaching all students, the findings in this research suggest that special education
teachers should be required to select a content specific discipline that supplements their special education teaching certification. As Samuel mentioned in his narrative, he attends general education professional development to help build his content knowledge in various subjects. He also explained this helps him better support his students in the inclusion environment. This idea aligns with Blanton et al.’s (2014) study which recommends teacher preparation programs should provide special education teachers the knowledge base to provide general education instruction.

**Implications for administrators.** The findings in this study suggest that administrators should take a more active role in overseeing the collaborative relationship between general education teachers and special education teachers. Cook and Friend (1995), Hines (2000), and Kamens et al. (2013) note the push has been on administrators to find time within the school day for co-teachers to plan collectively, to set the tone for collaboration, and to help oversee and facilitate collaborative activities. Having these norms embedded in the regular school day could possibly ensure that teachers are building positive teacher-teacher relationships in addition to promoting student learning for all students. Kamens et al. (2013) suggest, “Administrators should seek professional development opportunities to learn more about effective inclusion practices and how co-teaching is a part of this practice” (p. 188). Administrators could benefit from participating in a comprehensive professional development program in special education and inclusive practices.

**Implications for collaborative practice.** Most of the educational reform efforts have focused on reforming preservice teaching programs to include collaborative study for general education and special education teachers (Hardman et al., 1998; Blanton, Pugach, & Bovedo, 2014; Altieri, Colley, Daniel, & Dickerson, 2015). Hardman, McDonnell, and Welch (1998)
suggest teacher preparation programs should work together in the preparation of new teachers, both general education and special education, to help the collaboration needs of teachers in the inclusion setting. Since pre-service programs that offer collaboration among co-teachers has not been made available to all practicing teachers, it is recommended that school districts make in-service staff development opportunities that foster collaborative learning for co-teachers, such as a community of practice, available for all teachers.

In-service educators who can learn from one another in a community of practice “can provide all students with the most engaging and successful educational experience” (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012, p. 112). Developing an organized, weekly community of practice based on the needs of the general education teacher and special education teacher in the inclusion environment should be an ongoing initiative to help with staff development and knowledge enhancement. Communities of practice connect people in a learning partnership that is related to a common domain within the context of lived experiences (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al. 2011).

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The findings of the data show that co-teachers who participate in a community of practice improved their collaborative teaching relationships. Since this study did not explore the effectiveness of co-teachers in the inclusion environment after participating in a community of practice, it would be interesting to see this study expanded to gather data on instructional delivery of co-teachers after participating in a community of practice to see what that looks like in the inclusion environment.

It would also be interesting to conduct an experimental case study of the effectiveness of co-teachers who participate in a community as compared to co-teachers who do not to determine if there is a significant difference in teaching practice. Since only one team of teachers was
included in this study, opening this study up to more co-teaching teams and other content areas, as this study was limited to a math co-teaching team, may prove beneficial.

A final recommendation for research would be to build on the suggestions of Wong (2003) by implementing an induction program as an ongoing professional development opportunity for in-service teachers. There is a lot of information available that exists in the literature as it relates to reforming pre-service teaching preparation programs, but very little research exists as it relates to reforming professional development practices for in-service teachers.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry research study explored the perception of a team of teachers that consisted of a general education teacher, a special education teacher, and an administrator on how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing the collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusion environment. Since a greater number of students with mild to moderate disabilities are being served in the inclusion classroom, it is important for school districts to employ inclusive practices that promote positive teacher collaboration. Administrators play a huge role in collaboration because they are charged with modeling expectations as they relate to collaboration and professional learning.

I used Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice social learning theory as the frame to view this research. The use of narrative methods helped me to capture the voices of each participant in this study. From the data collection, I found that participation in the community of practice left the participants with a positive outlook on collaboration as it relates to the inclusion environment. In addition, the participants found value in the experience, they were able to grow in their thinking about collaborative practices, and the participants were able to build more
meaningful collaborative relationships that helped support students with disabilities in the inclusion environment.
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Appendix A
Consent to Participate in a Research Study

WHY ARE YOU BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

You have been invited to take part in this research study that seeks to explore the perceptions of a team of educators which consists of a general education teacher, special education teacher, and an administrator regarding how a community of practice is beneficial to addressing collaboration needs of team teachers in an inclusive environment. You were invited to take part in this survey because you meet the pre-determined criteria. If you agree to take part in this study, then you will be one of 3 team teachers from Dream Academy who elected to do so.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The person in charge of doing this study is Ebony Briggs in the Department of Leadership at the University of Memphis. She is guided by the research of Dr. Jeffery Wilson, Professor and advisor in the Higher and Adult Education degree program.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

By conducting this study, the researcher hopes to explore collaborative practices of special education and general education teachers and learn about their experiences and the nature of their work. Examining the perspectives of team teachers may help to improve collaborative practice for the field of special education and inclusion and could potentially help us better understand what leads to better academic outcomes for students with disabilities in the general education environment. The findings may help to design more effective professional development activities for public education programs.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

You can be excluded from this study if you are not a paid teacher of Dream Academy, you are not a part of a teaching team that consists of a special educator and a general educator, and an administrator, and if you are not charged with educating students with disabilities in an inclusion environment.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Observations will take place on site at Dream Academy when the community of practice meets. No dialogue is to take place during this time. You will be asked to participate in three level interviews not to exceed 1.5 hours each to be conducted on site at Dream Academy or at a small restaurant/cafe of your choice. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 2-4 hours per week over the course of 6 weeks during the months of June, July, and August. 
WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

As a participant in this study, you will be observed during a community of practice. This is not a critique, but instead, an observation of teacher-teacher-administrator interactions. You will be asked to participate in an initial interview that asks about your experiences and perceptions of being a team teacher and a participant in a community of practice. In the focused interviews, you will be asked clarifying questions regarding the information that was gathered in the first interview. The time between the interviews will be about 2 weeks.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more harm than you would experience in everyday life. This research does not involve any procedures that could cause physical harm. If you find any questions during the interview that are upsetting or stressful, then please let me know so I can tell you about some people who may be able to help you with those feelings.

WILL YOU BENEFIT FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

You will not get any personal benefit for taking part in this study.

DO YOU HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this study is strictly voluntarily. You should participate only if you really want to volunteer. You can stop at any time during the study and you will still keep any rights and benefits you had before volunteering.

IF YOU DO NOT WANT TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY, ARE THERE OTHER CHOICES?

If you feel that you do not want to take part in the study, then the only other choice is to not take part in the study.

WHAT WILL IT COST YOU TO PARTICIPATE?

There are no costs to take part in the study.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY REWARDS FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

For your participating in the interviews, you will receive two complimentary meals with non-alcoholic beverages. At the conclusion of the study, you will receive either a $25 Visa, Mastercard, or Walmart gift card. Should you decide to withdraw early from the study, your gift card will be reduced to $10.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT YOU GIVE?
I will make every effort to keep private all research information that identifies you to the full extent of the law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be personally identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

All written documents and electronic information related to this research will remain secure, and only accessible to the researcher and his advisor.

**CAN TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY?**

If you decide to take part in the study you still have the right to decide at any time that you no longer want to continue. You will not be treated differently if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

The individuals conducting the study may need to withdraw you from the study. This may occur if you are not able to follow the directions they give you, if they find that your participation in the study is more risk than benefit to you, or if the agency funding the study decides to stop the study early for a variety of scientific reasons.

**ARE YOU PARTICIPATING OR CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN ANOTHER RESEARCH STUDY AT THE SAME TIME AS PARTICIPATING IN THIS ONE?**

You may take part in this study if you are currently involved in another research study. It is important to let the investigator know if you are in another research study. You should also discuss with the investigator before you agree to participate in another research study while you are enrolled in this study.

**WHAT HAPPENS IF YOU GET HURT OR SICK DURING THE STUDY?**

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions, suggestions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you can contact the investigator, Ebony Briggs at (901) 930-1485. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact the Institutional Review Board staff at the University of Memphis at 901-678-2705. We will give you a signed copy of this consent form to take with you.

**WHAT IF NEW INFORMATION IS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY THAT MIGHT AFFECT YOUR DECISION TO PARTICIPATE?**

If the researcher learns of new information in regards to this study, and it might change your willingness to stay in this study, the information will be provided to you. You may be asked to
sign a new informed consent form if the information is provided to you after you have joined the study.

**WHAT HAPPENS TO MY PRIVACY IS I AM INTERVIEWED?**

Your privacy will be protected at all times. Your real name will not be identified on any documents or other transcripts, and will be replaced by a pseudonym (false name) assigned by the participant or the researchers.

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<th>Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent</td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of [authorized] person obtaining informed consent</td>
<td>Date</td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix B

Interview Protocol

All Participants

1. Describe your education background.

2. What content area do you teach and in what setting?

3. What is your experience working with students with disabilities?

4. In your own words, explain inclusion.

5. How would you describe working with learners from diverse educational levels and socioeconomic backgrounds?

General Education Teachers

6. What impact, if any, do interactions with special education teachers have on your professional work?

7. How have interactions with special education teachers affected your delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

8. What teaching methods do you use in the inclusion classroom and why do you use them? How successful are these methods? How successful are they in reaching students with disabilities?

9. What do you use to guide your instruction of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

10. What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, personal experiences) shape your instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?
11. Describe professional development you have had designed specifically for delivering content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom.

12. Tell me about your experience of collaborative planning with a team teacher outside of a community of practice.

13. What role, if any, do you feel collaboration with special education plays in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?

14. Describe your experience of working with a special education teacher in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?

15. Describe your experience of working with a special education teacher in a community of practice. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?

16. How effective do you think participation in a community of practice is at helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? Why?

Special Education Teachers

17. What impact, if any, do interactions with general education teachers have on your professional work?

18. How have interactions with general education teachers affected your delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

19. What teaching methods do you use in the inclusion classroom and why do you use them? How successful are these methods? How successful are they in reaching students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?
20. What do you use to guide your instruction of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

21. What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, personal experiences) shape your instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

22. Describe professional development you have had designed specifically for delivering content to students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

23. Tell me about your experience of collaborative planning with a team teacher outside of a community of practice.

24. What role, if any, do you feel collaboration with general education teachers play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?

25. Describe your experience of working with a general education teacher in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?

26. Describe your experience of working with a general education teacher in a community of practice. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?

27. How effective do you think participation in a community of practice is at helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? Why?
28. What teaching methods do you suggest are used in the inclusion classroom and why do you think they should be used? How successful are these methods? In your experience, how successful are they in reaching students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

29. What factors (i.e. ideas, philosophy, people, personal experiences) shape your idea of instructional delivery of content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom?

30. Describe professional development opportunities you made available to special education teachers and general education teachers specifically targeted at delivering content to students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom.

31. Describe professional development opportunities you made available to special education teachers and general education teachers specifically targeted at collaboration.

32. What role, if any, do you feel collaboration among special education teachers and general education teachers play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?

33. Describe your experience of overseeing the collaboration of special education teachers and general education teachers in the inclusion environment. What are challenges you have faced? What are successes you have encountered?

34. Describe your experience of overseeing the collaboration of a special education teacher and a general education teacher in a community of practice.
What are challenges you have observed? What are successes you have observed?

35. How effective do you think participation in a community of practice is at helping to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion classroom? Why?

36. Tell me how overseeing a community of practice was more or less beneficial for meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the inclusion environment.
Appendix C
Non-Participant Observation Guide

The non-participant observation collects data that helps answer questions about teacher-teacher interactions and teaching methods utilized in the classroom addressed in questions 9, 10, 22, and 23 of the interview guide (Appendix B). It will supplement the questions listed below:

1. What role do special education, general education, and administration team teachers feel collaboration play in serving students with disabilities in the inclusive environment?
2. What role does communities of practice have in addressing the collaboration needs of team teachers in the inclusive environment?

Spatial Arrangement of Inclusion Classroom

Below, is a diagram of the arrangement of the space being observed. Observation of teacher-teacher-administrator interactions.

| Lighting: |  |
| Seating: |  |
| Visual Displays: |  |
| Other: |  |
Non-Participant Observation Guide

Participant Activity and Interaction in a Community of Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Activity/Interaction</th>
<th>Observation/Comments</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How is the teacher interacting with the team teacher and administrator?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How does the teacher interact with the team teacher, administrator, and or presenter before, during, and after the community of practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Any difference with teacher/administrator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Any difference with presenter</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How enthusiastic does the teacher appear to be while information is being presented? While presenting information?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What inclusion strategies are being discussed? Are team teachers receptive?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there evidence of research-based inclusion strategies being discussed?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Differentiated instruction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Scaffolding</td>
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| | • Co-teaching  
| | • Standards based instruction  
| | • Skills based  
| | • Stations and rotations |
Appendix D

IRB Approval Notice

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<tr>
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<th>Title: Three Voices, One Goal: A Narrative Study of High School Facilitators' Experience in a Community of Practice</th>
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<td>Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td>Ebony Briggs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review Board:</td>
<td>University of Memphis Full Board</td>
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**Study History**

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**Key Study Contacts**

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<tr>
<th>Member</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Contact</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebony Briggs</td>
<td>Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:esoward@memphis.edu">esoward@memphis.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeffery Wilson</td>
<td>Co-Principal Investigator</td>
<td><a href="mailto:jwilson4@memphis.edu">jwilson4@memphis.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebony Briggs</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td><a href="mailto:esoward@memphis.edu">esoward@memphis.edu</a></td>
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