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Preservice Special Education Teachers in Collaborative Partnerships:
Benefits and Challenges of Co-Teaching During Early Fieldwork

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

by

Jessica Cruz

2023

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Preservice Special Education Teachers in Collaborative Partnerships:
Benefits and Challenges of Co-Teaching During Early Fieldwork

by

Jessica Cruz

Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Sandra H. Graham, Co-Chair

Professor Anna Osipova, Co-Chair

To adequately prepare competent certified special education teachers, teacher preparation programs must incorporate early co-taught fieldwork experiences for preservice teachers to engage and acquire practical co-teaching and collaborative skill sets. As extant research has focused more on in-service teachers' co-teaching, existing studies on preservice co-teaching are less numerous, and less is known about two preservice special education teachers co-teaching in an inclusive co-taught fieldwork and their perceptions overall. This phenomenological qualitative study focused on eight preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching in a semester-long early co-taught fieldwork over time. Analysis of data sources included preservice teachers' weekly journals and semi-structured interviews, which resulted in understanding the factors that supported co-teaching, the benefits and challenges of co-teaching, and lessons learned from co-teaching for preservice teachers.

The dissertation of Jessica Cruz is approved.

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2023

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my brother, Peter; my sister, Sabrina; my two little ones, Melina and Derek; my mom, Clara; and my partner, Alex.

Lastly, I dedicate this work to those who have experienced similar life experiences as I have. Those who have experienced food, housing, and financial insecurities; to those who were raised in single-parent households and raised siblings while raising themselves; to those who are [or were] single parents and take it one day at a time; to those who have experienced traumatic experiences; to those who are the first in their families to have the opportunity to receive an education... You are enough. There will be barriers along the way but know that you can do anything you set your mind to. The sky is the limit, so take that leap of faith. You got this.

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To Mr. Blain Lamar Watson. A usted le debo mucho. One of the things I look forward to in school was attending your class (*Native Speakers & AP Spanish*). During that time of my life,

my family and I were going through financial, food, and housing insecurities; however, walking into your classroom was always a safe space for me. One of my fondest memories was when you brought your father to our class for the potluck. I hope my past, current, and future students remember me as I remember you. You were the most compassionate and relatable teacher I ever had—someone who genuinely cared for his students but also challenged and fostered their academic and personal growth. ¡Gracias Señor Watson! ¡Que Dios lo bendiga a usted y a su familia!

Para mi Mom, le doy gracias a Dios que estes presente para vivir este momento. Se que tu vida no ha sido fácil pero estoy infinitamente agradecida que no nos abandonaste cuando toda la responsabilidad de criarnos cayó en tus manos, que luchaste por nosotros día tras día, y que nos inculcaste la importancia de tener una educación para superarnos.

Este logro es de las dos. ¡Te amo mom!

To my little-not-so-little brother, Peter. I would not be here without you. Because of you, I learned about Special Education and became a Special Education teacher. This empowered me to advocate for you, Sabrina, Melina, and Derek. To my little baby sister, Sabrina. Thank you for being such an amazing sister and tía to the kids. Thank you for helping my mom take care of the kids when I was at school. You've helped me more than you realize. I love you both dearly. I will always be yours and Peter's fiercest advocate and supporter in everything you do. To my older sister, Clara, thank you for being there to reassure me, listen, and support me through this journey. It has been difficult, but as we say, "¡Sí se puede!" y ¡Sí se pudo! I know our kids will be proud of our accomplishments and we are living proof that through adversity, we can reach our goals.

To my partner, Alex. You have supported me every step of the way from Cal State Long Beach to Cal Poly Pomona and now, at Cal State LA and UCLA. You have and will always be my other half. Alex, I will never have the words to express my infinite gratitude for all the support and love you have shown me. Thank you for being my greatest supporter during my entire educational career and in my personal endeavors and struggles. I love you dearly.

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My infinite gratitude goes to my partner, Alex, my children and family, colleagues, and friends for your continuous support before, during, and after this program.

VITA

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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

- Cruz, J., & Zetlin, A. (2020). New Teacher Perspectives on Good Teaching. *CCTE Fall 2020 Research Monograph*.
- Cruz, J. (2022). Mentoring Special Education Clear Credential Candidates: Impact on Perceived Workload Manageability. *CCTE Fall 2022 Research Monograph*.

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7th Annual Mental & Behavioral Health Conference (MBH), Symposium Presenter

March 2023

Supporting Early Career Teachers Through Effective Collaboration and Co-Teaching Practices, examined effective collaborative practice with early-career special education teachers in co-teaching settings.

California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE), Virtual Roundtable Presenter

October 2022

The virtual roundtable presentation focused on new in-service special educators' perceptions of managing their workloads and the frequency and types of support their assigned district support providers provided them.

UC SPEDDR Conference, Oral Presentation Presenter

January 2022

The Oral presentation focused on Special Education Clear Credential Candidates' perceived workload manageability and perceived frequency and types of support provided by their district-assigned support providers.

Comparative & International Education Society Conference, Virtual Roundtable Presenter

April 2021

The presentation focused on new in-service special education teachers views on good teaching practices and the types of support provided by their support provider in achieving this goal.

TASH Virtual Conference, Oral Presenter

December 2020

The presentation focused on developing the initial feasibility and acceptability of a brief six-module online training for parents of young children who may be at increased risk for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and are not yet using language functionally developed by Dr. Robin Dodds.

California Council on Teacher Education (CCTE), Oral Presenter

October 2020

The proposal on New Teachers' Perspective on Good Teaching was accepted and will be featured in the Fall 2020 CCTE Virtual Conference. The video presentation intends to shed light on new special education teachers views on good teaching practices and the types of support provided by their support provider in achieving this goal. Moreover, how do these experiences impact their projections on remaining as a special education teacher in the future?

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. educational system continuously grapples with numerous problems, with diverse students' underachievement and teacher attrition being the two most critical areas that require the field's concentrated attention. With novice teachers leaving the profession within one to five years of teaching experience, teacher attrition is detrimental to the field because it continues to lose its most recently trained cadre who possess the most current knowledge and skills. Attrition is particularly acute among novice special education teachers. Approximately 90% of California's special education teacher shortage is attributed to special education teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas et al., 2020). Therefore, the failure at retention of novice special education teachers is detrimental to the teaching profession. The field of education is unceasingly looking for solutions to the problem of attrition, and many researchers see strengthening of teacher preparation programs as one of the possible solutions (Nava-Landeros et a., 2020; Rieg et al., 2007).

Underachievement of diverse students, especially those with disabilities is another acute ongoing problem. On average, students with disabilities perform more than three years below their general education peers (Gilmour et al., 2019). According to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium's (SBAC) English Language Arts Literacy Test, while 55% of general education students met or exceeded California's reading performance standards, only 16% of special education students met or exceeded performance standards (California Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b). The underachievement continues on the backdrop of educational policy requirements of holding high expectations for students with disabilities and the requirement to educate them to the maximum extent possible in inclusive general education

settings where they have access to the same curriculum as their peers (Kart & Kart, 2021). The requirement for educating students with disabilities in general education settings resulted in various co-teaching models where a special education teacher and a general education teacher jointly provide instruction in an inclusive classroom.

Understanding Co-Teaching

Co-teaching is defined as a partnering-instructional model between a general education and a special education teacher (Cook & Friend, 1995). The two most common scenarios/models for co-teaching in current schools include a) arrangements where certified general and special education teachers work in the same classroom or b) a set up where a certified teacher and a preservice teacher co-teach in an inclusive classroom during the preservice teacher's fieldwork. In both scenarios, teachers jointly develop lesson plans, deliver instruction through different co-teaching models, and co-assess students with and without disabilities in an inclusive classroom (Friend et al., 2010; Kamens & Casale-Giannola, 2004; Keeley et al., 2017; Ricci et al., 2017). They are also jointly responsible for the academic progress and achievement of students with disabilities within the least restrictive environment (LRE) which is often considered to be the general education or inclusive settings (McHatton & Daniel, 2008).

Research that focuses on co-teaching has shown some promise. Studies demonstrate that co-teaching can yield positive academic and behavioral outcomes for general and special education students (Idol, 2006; Nokes et al., 2008). Co-teaching has been shown to positively impacted teachers' confidence, classroom management, professional growth, and development (Keeley et al., 2017; Fenty & McDuffie-Landurm, 2011; Patel & Kramer, 2013).

Despite some of the recognized benefits, co-taught classrooms are plagued with problems. Studies on co-teaching have uncovered the inequities that exist in in-service co-

teaching. Within these co-teaching relationships, the lack of equality related to their roles and responsibilities led to special education teachers being treated as “glorified assistants” (Cook & Friend, 1995; Jackson et al., 2017). Special educators often find themselves in secondary or supportive roles to general educators which ultimately affects their ability to influence and contribute to the general education curriculum (Murawski & Lochner, 2011) and limits their opportunities to “become a collaborating teacher with equal responsibility and equal partnership” (Jackson et al., 2017, p. 26). The benefits of co-teaching are then unobservable due to the lack of fidelity in implementing co-teaching practices (Murawski & Lochner, 2011); Other problems include unpreparedness among teachers to work in co-teaching classrooms.

Since co-teaching is essential for educating students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, preservice teachers are expected to be proficient in co-teaching once they become certified in-service teachers (Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), 2020). Growing research has shown that beginning teachers must be adequately prepared to co-teach (Fullerton et al., 2011; Pettit, 2017). This requires extensive specialized knowledge (i.e., special education pedagogy and content knowledge). However, beginning teachers often possess limited knowledge and practical training on co-teaching models and generally misunderstand what collaborative partnerships entail once they become certified teachers (Hoppy & Mickelson, 2017; Kamens & Casale-Giannola, 2004).

Credential Requirements & Co-Teaching Program Practices

Preservice special education teachers in California must meet a minimum of 600 hours of clinical practice (Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC), 2020). At least 200 of the 600 hours must be in “supervised early fieldwork that includes guided observations and initial student teaching (i.e., co-planning and co-teaching or guided teaching)” in the general and

special education settings before their final directed teaching (CTC, 2020, p. 5). Therefore, co-teaching can and should be a part of preservice special educators' early clinical fieldwork. Nonetheless, the reality of how these 200 clinical hours are utilized in teacher education programs is significantly different and predominantly relies on passive observations by preservice teachers as they observe their expert teachers instruct. As a result, current teacher preparation practices have extremely limited co-teaching practices integrated into their programs.

Out of the 23 California State Universities (CSUs), 19 special education credential programs offer co-teaching only during traditional final fieldwork (expert-to-novice dynamics); one program offers a co-teaching pathway for preservice special educators that includes co-teaching with an expert teacher during the first and last semester of the program (expert-to-novice); and finally, one CSU teacher education program at California State University, Los Angeles (Cal State LA), offers its Education Specialist credential candidates an early co-taught fieldwork experience at the C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center where two novice preservice special education teachers co-plan, and co-teach in an inclusive classroom. This particular program and its early fieldwork co-teaching experience is the focus of this dissertation.

Why Focus on Early Fieldwork Novice-to-Novice Co-Teaching?

Studying novice-novice co-teaching dyads may shed some light on how to repair the current broken education system with its high teacher attrition rates stemming from under preparedness for the challenges of teaching and the dissatisfaction with the profession. Pairing up two novice teachers avoids the power hierarchies of expert-novice co-teaching dyads where the expert in-service teacher leads the co-teaching process, potentially stifling the novice teacher's creativity and leadership opportunities.

Furthermore, pairing two *special education* novice teachers allows the fieldwork experience to avoid specialization-specific hierarchies documented in the literature where special educators are seen as “glorified assistants” to content experts (i.e., general education teachers). Perhaps a model that allows special educators to break free from this stereotype would not force preservice special educators into a fixed role as a disability-specific instructional strategy expert. Studying two co-teaching novices who are naïve learners offers a glimpse of how they learn to co-teach free of power hierarchies and misconceptions.

Additionally, studying novice-novice co-teaching in early fieldwork experiences is crucial for the overall quality of teacher education programs. Hearing from the credential candidates firsthand is a unique opportunity to improve the quality of teacher training. The earlier we, as researchers, begin to examine novice teachers’ perceived benefits and challenges, the more interventions and supports can be provided to credential candidates by teacher education programs.

The Learning Center at Cal State LA offers a perfect setting to examine novice-to-novice special education co-teaching experiences. This dissertation focuses on relatively inexperienced preservice special education teachers in the second semester of their teacher education program who are undergoing a rigorous co-teaching experience. The program emphasizes monitoring of professional growth and professional self-reflection. Weekly journaling integrated into the experience allows for a detailed account of novices’ voices and examination of changes over time. The study added interviews at the end of the co-teaching experience to allow novices to address the benefits and challenges directly without censorship and involvement of the Learning Center staff.

Significance of the Study

Trends on current co-teaching research are evident. Most available literature published between 2004 and 2023 focuses on in-service co-teaching. Most in-service co-teaching studies feature general education settings. Several studies focus on co-teaching implementation during preservice teachers' *final* student teaching fieldwork (Darragh et al., 2011; Guise & Thiesse, 2016; Kamens, 2007). Only one study (Ricci et al., 2017) examines early fieldwork with novice-to-novice co-teaching at the beginning of their teacher training. The authors found significant positive changes in preservice special education teachers' perceptions of collaboration and co-teaching during their early co-taught fieldwork. In light of these promising findings, further examination of early fieldwork co-teaching experiences is warranted. Ricci et al. (2017) used surveys, journals, and ratings but did not integrate methods to give a voice to the preservice special education teacher participants. This dissertation extends Ricci et al.'s (2017) findings by including methods (i.e., journal entries and interviews) to represent the voices of the participants and comprehend what participants perceived as the benefits and challenges of co-teaching in early fieldwork.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The overall percentage of students with disabilities who receive instruction in the general education setting at least 80% of the time increased from 59% to 66% from fall 2009 to fall 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022b). Co-teaching is meant to support special education students in general education settings and increase all students' academic and behavioral outcomes while simultaneously guaranteeing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum with accommodations and/or modifications (Murawski & Dieker, 2004). The following literature review looks at the most used co-teaching configurations (i.e., two in-service teacher dyads; mentor teacher-novice teacher dyads, and novice-novice dyads), discusses critical themes of co-teaching research, and identifies research gaps that this dissertation study aims to address. Particular attention is given to the last 22 years of co-teaching research spearheaded by the 1997 and 2004 re-authorizations of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA (Public Law 94-142) that required inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings to the maximum appropriate degree; thus, necessitating co-teaching.

Between 2001 and 2022, a total of 16 empirical studies that focused on the distinct configuration of dyads, co-teaching, its benefits, and challenges were published. Three studies examined three types of co-teaching configurations. Six studies focused on two certified in-service co-teachers, one general education and one special education. Nine studies examined a mentor teacher and a novice teacher(s), and one study focused on novice-novice dyads.

Within the *in-service* teacher literature, interviews (50%), observations (60%), and surveys (80%) were the most frequent methods. Surveys were primarily used as methods for *mentor teacher-novice teacher(s)* studies (70%), followed by interviews (60%). Within the one

novice-novice study, surveys, preservice and supervisor evaluations, and journals were utilized as primary methods; that study did not use interviews.

Table 1 presents specific details about the studies. Additional studies on co-teaching discussed in this chapter are not included in the table because their focus was not specifically on the co-teaching dyads. The literature review revealed some common themes amongst the 16 empirical studies. These included factors supporting co-teaching and the benefits and challenges of co-teaching.

Table 1

Co-Teaching Studies and Data Sources

Type of Co-Teaching Dyad (n)	Study	Data Sources
Two in-service teachers (6 studies)	Alnasser (2021)	Observations and interviews
	Austin (2001)	Surveys and Semi-Structured Interviews
	Dieker (2001)	Observations, Field Notes, Interviews
	Hang and Rabren (2009)	Survey
	King Sears et al. (2020)	Questionnaire, Classroom Observations
	Pratt (2014)	Focus Group & Questionnaire
Mentor Teacher- Novice Teacher (9 studies)	Darragh et al. (2011)	Survey
	Dee (2012)**	Informal Interviews, Surveys
	Guise and Thiesse (2016)	Interviews
	Kamens (2007)**	Journals, Observational Reports, Cooperating Teacher Notes, E-Mail exchanges Communication, Field Notes
	McHatton and Daniel (2008)**	Surveys & Weekly Journals
	Nokes et al. (2008)**	Interviews

	Ricci et al. (2019)	Surveys, Written Reflections
	Tschida et al. (2015)**	Semi-Structured Interviews & Surveys
	Wischnowski et al. (2004)*	Evaluations, Survey, Observations, Interviews
Novice- Novice Teacher Dyad (1 study)	Ricci et al. (2017)	Surveys, Journals, Evaluations

Note. The term *in-service teacher dyads* refer to a co-teaching dyad of certified general and special education teacher. The term *mentor teacher-novice teacher(s) partnerships* refer to co-teaching partnerships where one or multiple novices are assigned to a certified mentor teacher. *Novice-novice teacher dyads* are a unique configuration where two preservice teachers are assigned to co-teach together. The study with one asterisk (*) represents a general education teacher-instructional assistant dyad. Studies with two asterisks (**) represent mentor teacher-novice teacher(s) partnerships.

Supports and Benefits of Co-Teaching

In-Service Dyads

Studies focusing on in-service teacher dyads¹ examine the dynamics between a certified general education and a special education teacher. These participants completed their credential training and were co-teaching in inclusive settings. Research on this type of dyads shows that co-teaching is effective when in-service co-teachers have: a) preservice experience and professional development in co-teaching and collaborative practices (Walsh, 2012), b) school site support through observations, evaluations, and planning time integrated into their work schedules (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Ploessl & Rock, 2014), c) a collaborative perspective (Friend & Cook, 2017), and d) competency to teach culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (Barrocas & Cramer, 2014).

Additional factors that support co-teaching are sharing instructional and behavioral responsibilities, strong communication skills, and balance of authority across co-teachers. Shared

¹ In-service teachers are certified general education and special education teachers. Thus, in-service teacher dyads involve a certified general education and a special education teacher.

responsibilities in co-teaching partnerships are crucial to co-teachers' success (Friend, 2015a). Co-teachers in shared classrooms develop, understand, and use their distinct expertise and perspectives to complement their relationship. Typically, general education teachers share their content and curricular knowledge, instruction of large groups, and various teaching practices (Gerber & Popp, 1999) in the partnership. Special education teachers, however, specialize in individualized instruction, accommodations and/or modifications, behavioral management skills, and legal documentation skill sets (i.e., Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)) (Gerber & Popp, 1999; Parrot et al., 1992).

Strong communication skills that are instrumental to co-teaching include active listening, providing feedback and recommendations, “bouncing off” ideas with each other and explicitly addressing communication strengths and areas of need (Chang, 2018). Gately and Gately (2001) stressed the significance of interpersonal communication involving verbal, nonverbal, and social skill sets in co-teaching partnerships. Successful co-teaching communication involves explicit reflection, discussion, and a shared vision (Fluijt et al., 2016).

Co-teachers must have shared authority and balance the dynamics of personality traits, differing perspectives, interactions, and individual accountability to the co-teaching relationship (Bessette, 2008). Integrating both teachers' expertise and strategies into their shared instruction exemplifies strong co-teaching relationships (Pratt, 2014; Rytivaara et al., 2019). Pratt (2014) found that in-service teachers successfully developed parity in their relationships by recognizing how they could complement and balance the areas in which they struggled (i.e., content area, differentiation, etc.). Accountability also contributes to the balanced dynamics in co-teaching with teachers accountable for their contributions, the learning environment, and their roles in their co-taught classroom (Grant, 2014; Villa et al., 2008).

Studies of effective co-teaching described above pertain to in-service contexts. The topic of supports necessary for successful co-teaching is extended further in the literature that looks at partnerships that join mentor teachers with novice (preservice) teachers. It is critical to examine the studies that illuminate factors that support the co-teaching of *preservice* teachers for the following reasons:

- a) they provide insights on what supports are established early on;
- b) the nature of fieldwork settings and the relationships dynamics in mentor-novice partnerships are different from classrooms where two in-service teachers are co-teaching;
- c) having a strong initial co-teaching experience in a training context provides a solid foundation for more successful co-teaching later.

Mentor-Novice Partnerships

The majority of studies (n=9) focused on co-teaching partnerships and published in 2001-2022 examine mentor teacher-novice teacher dynamics. The context for these partnerships and collaboration within them is the final fieldwork/student teaching assignments. Within this body of literature, two distinct groups of studies emerge: a) mentor-novice dyads² where one mentor teacher is assigned to guide and support one novice teacher in their final fieldwork; b) one mentor-multiple novices partnerships³ where one mentor is assigned to two or three novice preservice teachers.

² Mentor-novice teacher dyads involve a certified experienced teacher (predominantly a general education teacher) paired with an uncertified novice teacher during their final student teaching fieldwork.

³ One mentor-multiple novices partnerships involve one certified teacher (usually a general education teacher) co-teaching with multiple uncertified novices.

Mentor-Novice Dyads. The following studies adds to the list of benefits of co-teaching in the context of preservice teachers' final fieldwork where co-teaching occurs with a more experienced mentor teacher (also known as "apprentice teaching" or mentor-novice dynamic (Friend, 2015b)). When co-teaching with an experienced mentor teacher, novices were afforded with increased collaborative and self-reflective opportunities that embraced working with others and continual learning; learning instructional and management practices from an experienced and effective mentor teacher, sharing ideas during planning and/or interactions, mutual feedback, and the impact of their instruction on students (i.e., reduced teacher to student ratios, differentiation) (Darragh et al., 2011; Guise & Thiesse, 2016; Ricci et al., 2019). Thus, most participants across studies agreed that co-teaching was beneficial to their professional training as new teachers (Darragh et al., 2011; Guise & Thiesse, 2016; Ricci et al., 2019).

One Mentor-Multiple Novices Partnerships. Within the available co-teaching literature focused on mentor-novice relationships, five studies explored slightly different configurations in co-teaching where multiple (two or three) novice teachers are assigned to one mentor teacher (Dee, 2012; Kamens, 2007; McHatton & Daniel, 2008; Nokes et al., 2008; Tschida et al., 2015). These studies add a very valuable insight to the overall mentor-novice co-teaching literature. They show a different novel co-teaching dynamics that emerges among novice teachers under the supervision of one mentor. The novice-to-novice relationships within these partnerships are less hierarchical and more collegial. Working together under the same mentor, novice teachers created shared co-teaching experiences that often led to multiple and unique supports and benefits: emotional support from peers and mentors, quicker professional growth, solidified self-esteem, and increased skill sets and knowledge within the classroom.

Notably, two of these studies discussed co-teaching dyads' effectiveness, a construct that has not been discussed in the in-service co-teaching literature (Dee, 2012; Nokes et al., 2008). Nokes et al. (2008) defined effectiveness as a continuum from fully independent team(s) to fully collaborative team(s). The authors evaluated the teams' effectiveness in regards to (1) collaborative planning and (2) collaborative instruction. Using a continuum approach, the authors evaluated student teaching pairs with their mentor teacher. The typologies that emerged were: (1) fully independent in their collaborative planning and instruction, (2) a mixture of fully collaborative yet minimal collaboration observed during instruction, and finally, (3) moderately collaborative during planning and instruction. Dee (2012) also evaluated dyads' effectiveness using a dichotomous approach (effective vs. ineffective) through analyzing participants' reflections on how their co-teaching partners enriched their experience. All participants in Dee's study indicated their partnerships were effective except for one participant. One participant reported that their co-partner's methods and planning skills differed significantly, which impacted the dynamics of the relationship. Therefore, the participant took on a coaching and mentor role for their co-teaching partner. The relationship was ineffective since it did not contribute to the other co-teacher's learning during their fieldwork experience. Both studies (Dee, 2012; Nokes et al., 2008) brought a new dimension of effectiveness to the co-teaching literature. However, because they studied the dyads of preservice teachers under the guidance of a mentor teacher, it is worth looking at whether the notion of effectiveness comes up in preservice teachers' reflections when they ponder their co-teaching experience.

Emotional Support. Kamens (2007) examined the impact of the fieldwork co-teaching experience on preservice special education and general education teachers. Identified themes

related to the benefits of the fieldwork co-teaching experience were: comfort from peer support, technical support, and perceptions of their developing co-teaching relationships.

Across several studies, preservice teachers' co-teaching relationships benefited from having their peers' comfort and emotional support early as they navigated co-teaching with little to no preparation. Having a peer who is also a preservice teacher allowed for greater emotional support and ease of discussing their successes, failures, frustrations, and fears (Baeten & Simons, 2014; Dee, 2012; Gardiner, 2010; Kamens, 2007). Tschida and colleagues (2015) explored preservice teachers' experiences in co-taught fieldwork. The participants stressed the importance of relationship-building as they navigated co-teaching. Dee (2012) and Ricci et al. (2019) found frequent feedback from their co-teacher was a form of emotional support crucial for preservice co-teaching. Frequent feedback was perceived as valuable in enhancing their teaching skills, strengthening communication, and increasing teachers' sense of efficacy as they prepared to become certified classroom teachers.

Technical Support. In addition to comfort and emotional support, research mentions “technical support” within relationship building as another benefit for co-teachers. Technical support was defined as sharing ideas during planning and/or interactions, which created frequent opportunities for self-reflection on teaching practices, personal growth as teachers, mutual feedback, and the impact of their instruction on students (Darragh et al., 2011; Dee, 2012; Kamens, 2007; Nokes et al., 2008).

Enhanced Self-Growth and Self-Esteem. Preservice general education teachers perceived their special education teacher counterparts as individuals with a wealth of information they did not possess (Kamens, 2007). In evaluating preservice teachers' weekly fieldwork reflections, McHatton and Daniel (2008) found that preservice general education teachers

developed a better understanding of the type of supports they could access to support the needs of all their students by collaborating with their preservice special education teacher counterparts. In having a greater understanding of the available supports through their preservice special education co-teachers, they identified modifications of lesson plans and special education-focused resources as areas of increased awareness and growth. The authors also found that preservice general education teachers recognized and appreciated the assistance their preservice special education co-teachers provided. This newfound role increased preservice special educators' confidence in providing unique support and recommendations to their peers (Kamens, 2007). Likewise, preservice special educators also gained awareness of vast content and instructional knowledge from their preservice general education co-teachers to implement with their students (McHatton & Daniel, 2008).

Increased Skills and Knowledge: Afforded Opportunities in the Classroom. Several studies of preservice co-teaching found that the presence of multiple teachers within the classroom created more instructional opportunities (Nokes et al., 2008; Ricci et al., 2017; Tschida et al., 2015). Preservice teachers reported their ability to differentiate a wide range of skill sets in the classroom, conduct small group instruction while their co-teacher instructed the larger group, increase one-to-one support, and monitor students' learning due to their co-taught preservice experience. Lower student-teacher ratios, improved classroom management, and minimal disciplinary actions were also reported as benefits that positively impacted instructional time (Nokes et al., 2008; Tschida et al., 2015) and ultimately led to increased active teaching for preservice teachers.

Novice-Novice Partnerships

Among 16 studies on co-teaching partnerships, only one study so far focused on the unique partnership dynamics of novice-novice dyads⁴. Ricci et al. (2017) studied the co-teaching among the preservice teachers in their early fieldwork at the C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center at California State University, Los Angeles. Their study recognized the absence of power hierarchies in novice-to-novice dyads and showcased positive processes emerging in such dyads: brainstorming and hearing each other, learning from one another, assessing their strengths and needs, receiving constructive feedback, self-reflection, collaboration, shared goals and expectations, and development of strong communication skills. The authors found that preservice teachers who reported positive growth in their collaboration and co-teaching skills developed as successful co-teachers. Preservice teachers also recognized how their collaborative skills (i.e., co-planning, co-teacher's collaborative participation, instructional delivery) were positively bolstered by their early co-taught fieldwork at the Learning Center.

Evaluating the benefits and challenges of exposing preservice special education teachers to co-teaching allows the opportunity for novice teachers to approach instructional and collaborative interactions distinctly from their pre-disposed perspectives reinforced in traditional teacher preparation programs (i.e., instructional strategy expert versus content area experts). This dissertation includes end-of-semester interviews with preservice special educators that Ricci et al. (2017) did not conduct to further enhance their written responses from their weekly journal entries.

Table 2 summarizes the benefits of co-teaching for in-service co-teaching dyads and mentor-novice partnerships. It demonstrates that the benefits somewhat differ for the two types

⁴ Novice-novice dyads involve two uncertified preservice teachers co-teaching together without a certified mentor teacher. They are supervised and mentored by the university faculty.

of partnerships, with the mentor-novice partnership literature extending our knowledge of such benefits and adding the socio-emotional benefits to the list.

Table 2

Comparison Table of Supports & Benefits for In-Service & Preservice Teachers

Supports & Benefits for In-Service Teachers	Supports & Benefits for Preservice Teachers
Professional Development in Co-Teaching and Collaborative Practices	Emotional Support
Shared Responsibilities	Enhanced Self-Growth
Strong Communication Skills	Enhanced Self-Esteem
Shared Authority & Balance	Increased Skills and Knowledge
	Afforded Instructional Opportunities in the Classroom

Barriers to Co-Teaching

In-Service Partnerships

Research has also identified barriers to effective co-teaching. When teachers and schools do not possess a strong understanding of co-teaching partnerships, teachers tend to be less collaborative and place special education teachers outside the teacher role (i.e., instructional aide) (Duran et al., 2021; Iacono et al., 2021; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016; Scruggs et al., 2007). Weiss and Lloyd (2003) studied the roles of special education teachers in co-taught classrooms and why special education teachers participate in co-teaching. Findings identified the following co-teaching specific barriers: a) perceptions that instruction delivery was the responsibility of general education teachers, b) general education teachers’ resistance to involving special education teachers, and c) special education teachers’ belief that they did not have autonomy in the general education classroom. Shaffer and Thomas-Brown (2015) concurred that teachers’

perceptions and attitudes regarding co-teaching impact co-teaching effectiveness and their sense of efficiency in terms of establishing their roles in the classroom, receptiveness toward their co-teaching partner and student interactions.

Literature focused on the in-service co-teaching dyads exposes barriers that point to the deep-rooted hierarchies and inequalities existing between general and special education teachers. In this context, studies that look at *preservice* teachers in co-teaching partnerships extend our understanding of obstacles and challenges in co-teaching. Uncovering barriers and supports of co-teaching at earlier stages within the profession can help teacher education programs better prepare teacher candidates for in-service co-teaching.

Mentor-Novice Partnerships

Mentor-Novice Dyads. The barriers experienced by co-teaching preservice teachers in their final fieldwork included:

- a) differences in power dynamics in the relationship between a preservice and mentor teacher (Guise & Thiesse, 2016; Ricci et al., 2019),
- b) confusion in leadership roles (Darragh et al., 2011), and
- c) limited or lack of fidelity in co-teaching implementation (Guise & Thiesse, 2016; Ricci et al., 2019).

These studies highlight the hierarchy and power dynamics that continue to exist and create additional challenges for preservice teachers in co-teaching relationships with mentor teachers.

One Mentor-Multiple Novices Partnerships. Within this literature, barriers that novices experienced included difficult interactions, feeling undervalued (as a preservice special education teacher candidate) and confusion in leadership roles within a classroom with multiple

teachers. These studies focused on mentor-multiple novices partnerships show that the power hierarchies within co-teaching begin to form early on and need to be addressed in teacher preparation programs.

Difficult Interactions and Feeling Undervalued. Preservice teachers have also reported difficult interactions with their mentor co-teachers and feeling undervalued as barriers in their co-teaching experiences. In some studies, preservice teachers felt undervalued and experienced challenges in their co-teaching relationships. The nature of the problematic interactions between cooperating teachers and preservice special educators included cooperating teachers' conflicting views of co-teaching practices between general and special educators and explicit differential treatment between general and special educators. Preservice special education teachers in McHatton and Daniel's (2008) study expressed that their preservice and in-service general education counterparts were not "using" them as a resource, eliciting their feedback on their lesson plans, nor co-teaching with their general education peers.

Consequently, they developed estranged feelings and a lack of belongingness within their classroom placements (McHatton & Daniel, 2008). Nokes et al. (2008) recommended matching preservice teachers with veteran teachers who: a) "genuinely value collaboration and collaborative learning communities" (p. 2175) and b) encourage open dialogue about their differences while still valuing these disagreements. These recommendations aimed to improve paired-placed preservice teachers' experience in inclusive classrooms.

Kamens (2007) emphasized the power struggle when strong personalities and differences in self-confidence impede a preservice teacher's ability to find common ground between both parties. Resolving their differences and 'working it out' is encouraged as they develop rapport. In some cases, as demonstrated by Nokes et al. (2008), there are situations where finding a neutral

compromise is nearly impossible when both professionals do not share similar goals and dispositions.

Confusion in Leadership Roles. Confusion in leadership roles was cited as an additional challenge in co-teaching classrooms. Specifically, multiple teachers (i.e., cooperating teacher(s), preservice teacher(s)) within the classroom created confusion in identifying a “leader” within the co-teaching partnership or who would specifically support students (Kamens, 2007). Darragh et al. (2011) reported that 4.7% of preservice teachers indicated that students were helped twice. This led to questioning teacher roles, specifically, who held the lead instructional role within the classroom.

Novice-Novice Partnerships

The study of the unique novice-novice partnerships by Ricci et al. (2017) uncovers similar barriers to co-teaching including initial challenges in adapting to each other’s personalities, difficulties with compromising, partners’ preference to teaching independently instead of co-teaching with another novice peer, and inequity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities. Research on co-teaching between preservice special educators is needed to evaluate distinct benefits and barriers this type of partnership produces compared to traditional special education and general education co-teaching. Moreover, research is warranted on the development of preservice special education teachers’ collaborative and co-teaching skill sets, and their perceptions during their teacher preparation programs. The findings from this dissertation addresses these understudied gaps in the literature.

Table 3 compares barriers for co-teaching for in-service and preservice teacher populations. It illustrates how barriers recognized by preservice teachers lead to a snowball effect in which initial barriers develop into more complex and more numerous challenges for the in-

service co-teaching. The barriers to co-teaching require early intervention from teacher education programs and may be potentially resolved early in one’s teaching career.

Table 3

Comparison Table of Barriers for In-Service & Preservice Teachers

Barriers for In-Service Teachers	Barriers for Preservice Teachers
Limited Understanding of Co-Teaching Partnerships	Difficult Interactions
Perceptions that Instructional Delivery is the Responsibility of General Education Teachers	Feeling Undervalued
General Education Teachers’ Resistance in Involving Special Educators	Confusion in Leadership Roles
Special Educators’ Belief They do not have Autonomy in General Education Classrooms	

Summary

Current research on co-teaching configurations has focused primarily on mentor-novice(s) partnerships in the context of final fieldwork experiences and on in-service teachers’ experiences. These partnerships are hierarchical and do not allow for equity in teacher roles and responsibilities. It is worth noting that research sees preservice teachers’ co-teaching as a more dynamic and malleable construct than that of in-service teachers. Preservice teachers learn from their mentors and each other. They are also more inclined to support each other when co-teaching together with other preservice teachers. The takeaways from the literature examined above include notable ability of preservice co-teachers to grow, change perspectives, and demonstrate mutual respect for each other’s expertise as a result of co-teaching experiences. A closer look at preservice teachers’ perceptions of the benefits and challenges of *early* co-teaching

is needed to gain a deeper understanding of how to best support the teacher candidates during their credential training and professional development beyond initial training.

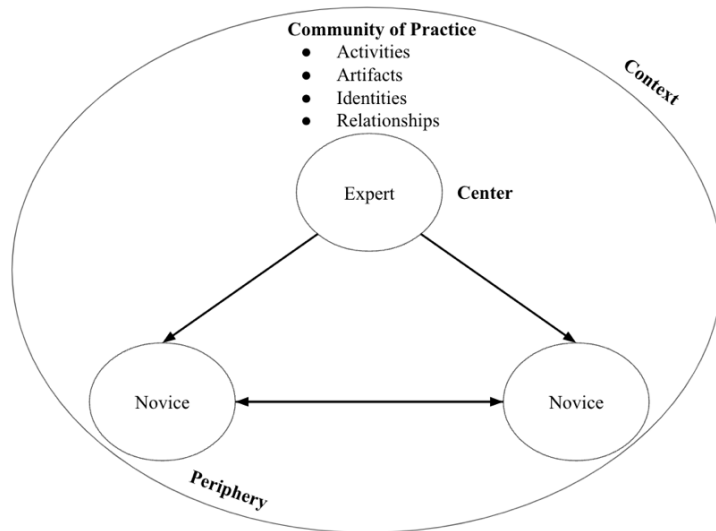
Novice-to-novice partnerships and dynamics within them are understudied, and so are early practical experiences in co-teaching. A reconceptualization of the broken hierarchy-ridden educational system and current fieldwork practices is warranted. Preservice teachers need more field experiences in their teacher preparation programs to prepare them for the professional expectations of collaboration and co-teaching. These expectations must be addressed by providing candidates with adequate opportunities to practice co-teaching in teacher preparation programs (Drescher, 2017) in order to cease the perpetuation of barriers. Thus, studying novice-novice dyads in-depth and hearing their voices at multiple points during the co-teaching experience through examining their journals and interviews will allow teacher education programs to intervene early and better prepare preservice teacher candidates to co-teach in inclusive classrooms after completing their teacher training.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the Situated Learning Theory (SLT) (Lave & Wenger, 1991). SLT provides the conceptual foundation for this study in enhancing our understanding of preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching during co-taught fieldwork through a social—rather than an individual—process. The SLT consists of three main concepts: (1) Authentic Learning Contexts, (2) Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), and (3) Community of Practice (see Figure 1). This model guides the current study by examining preservice teachers' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of co-teaching while considering the context, community of practice, and their participation in the fieldwork experience.

Figure 1

Working Model of SLT



Authentic Learning Contexts

Authentic Learning Contexts represent genuine learning environments and situations where individuals actively participate in activities replicating real-world situations. Individuals then explore explicit and implicit knowledge emerging from “hands-on” experiences with expert support. Within this study, preservice special education teachers were situated in their university’s Learning Center, which strives to mirror real-life inclusive settings. In the Learning Center, the experts were university supervisors who observed and evaluated preservice special educators throughout their fieldwork. Preservice teachers explored implicit and explicit skills—collaboration, communication, working with others with different perspectives, planning, self-reflection, etc.—in their early co-taught fieldwork to develop and engage in collaborative practices required of certified special educators.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) describes the journey in which novices (or *newcomers*) become experienced members and, ultimately, experts (or *old timers*) of a particular community of practice. In the early stages of *legitimate peripheral participation*, novices engage in low-stakes tasks in a specific community of practice. A gradual transition occurs in which novices acquire competency and significant roles within the community. In this study, preservice teachers participated in two orientation days (weeks one and two) and developed rapport with their peers in a large group setting. For the next 13 weeks, preservice teachers immediately took on the responsibilities of a classroom teacher and participated in professional development after their instructional responsibilities. However, to understand how a well-developed LPP operates, three areas in which learning is embedded must be explored: (1) contexts, (2) activity, and (3) culture.

Context

Context plays a crucial role in shaping LPPs since it governs the environment in which novices will learn. The LPP environment includes the physical area, technology, and social and economic conditions (i.e., income, education, employment, social support) outside the LPP that impacts the learning environment. These factors may directly impact how positively and/or negatively novices perceive their learning experiences in LPP. In this study, the Learning Center consisted of 12 inclusive K-12 grade classrooms located at an urban university. Preservice teachers had access to technological devices—computers, document cameras—and school materials necessary to engage students from the immediate community for academic enrichment. The Learning Center students attend schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Nearly eighty percent of LAUSD students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch

services during the 2019-2020 academic year (Los Angeles Unified School District [LAUSD], 2019).

Activity

Activity is another area in which learning is embedded within LPP. As novices begin to immerse themselves in low-level tasks, novices acquire and comprehend strategies, skill sets, knowledge, and values that are important for their communities. As novices engage in more intricate tasks, they develop expertise in their field and community. These activities provide opportunities for novices to receive feedback and recommendations, increase their awareness of their strengths, needs, and learning, and, lastly, learn how to improve their practices within their communities. In the study, preservice teachers review the principles of culturally responsive teaching, co-teaching models, and the scope and sequence of short and long-term instructional planning. Preservice teachers begin taking on some of the responsibilities of a teacher by initiating contact with their students' families, collaborating, and dividing their shared responsibilities with their co-teacher, and reflecting on their journal entries. By the third week, preservice teachers begin to engage in co-teaching practices and learn more about their co-teacher and students. Supervisors provide teachers feedback based on their individual and paired dyad performance.

Culture

Culture represents ideas and behaviors obtained from a particular community. It determines what is considered plausible regarding novices' participation in a given community. Legitimate participation is based on the afforded opportunities to participate in activities and receive feedback and guidance during the experience. Additionally, culture impacts novices'

identity and perceptions as they gradually transition from novice status to experts. Culture impacts novices' perceptions of themselves, their roles and competencies, and their community.

Community of Practice

Community of Practice is the third central concept of SLT. Community of Practice is developed through collaboration, interactions, motivation, and shared goals between novices and experts. It is a collaborative platform that can gradually evolve and depends on the social interaction processes of constructing and sharing information, knowledge, and support. Therefore, learning is an ongoing process that provides opportunities to generalize useable knowledge into real-world contexts and environments. In this study, most preservice teachers noted their individual and paired professional growth that enabled them to collaborate, trust, respect, and depend on their co-teacher to increase their success as a team.

Current Study and SLT

Within the context of this study, preservice special education teachers in this study embarked on a unique experience. Preservice teachers immersed themselves in early co-taught fieldwork that combined context, activities, and culture into their expertise. These preservice special education teachers recognized their shared passion and motivation to work in the special education field; however, they had to navigate a 13-week fieldwork—as a dyad—which required them to interact and share knowledge regularly with their assigned peers. Preservice teachers co-constructed practical collaborative and co-teaching skill sets with their co-teachers and supervisors with extensive classroom experience. Preservice teachers had to be committed to actively engaging in real-world problem-solving contexts ranging from personality traits, relationship building, negotiation, collaborative skill sets, instructional practices, and developing teaching effectiveness that may have resulted in unintended contextual learning from their

Learning Center community (Alvarez & Anderson-Ketchmark, 2011). Unintentional contextual learning included the impact of cultural values and attitudes prevalent in co-teaching partnerships and the Learning Center on preservice teachers' identity formation and as members of the special education community. The idea is that they gradually acquire professional knowledge, techniques, and collaborative skills, resulting in situated learning for preservice teachers in their partnerships. Overall, the SLT conceptual model guides the study by identifying the key factors contributing to novices' growth into experts.

Aims and Research Questions

This study focused on co-teaching partnerships within four dyads of preservice special education teachers earning their teaching certification. The participants were co-teaching in inclusive fieldwork classrooms for the duration of the semester. Specifically, this study aimed to identify and analyze preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching over time (i.e., at the beginning, middle, and at the completion of the practicum) in early co-taught fieldwork. Thus, this inquiry led to the following two research questions:

RQ1: What are the benefits of co-teaching over time perceived by preservice special education teachers in an early co-taught fieldwork experience?

RQ2: What are the challenges of co-teaching over time perceived by preservice special education teachers in an early co-taught fieldwork experience?

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Positionality Statement

Research embodies a shared space influenced by the researcher and participants (England, 1994). Their perceptions, values, beliefs, and biases contribute to their identities, leaving room for potential impact on the research process (Bourke, 2014). As such, explicit self-assessment and consciousness by the researcher are warranted over time throughout the process since positionality is dynamic and malleable depending on the context and situation (Holmes, 2020).

I want to address my positionality and motivation for this research. Reflecting on my own experiences as an educator, I consider myself an “insider” and an equal to my participants since I have co-teaching experience. I experienced co-teaching as a general education certified teacher and as a certified special education teacher. I have been on both sides. Some of the challenges I experienced included becoming acquainted with my co-teachers, understanding the differences in our personalities, perspectives, and instructional approaches, the expectations related to our shared instructional responsibilities, and students’ limited growth during that time. Some of the benefits I experienced while co-teaching included self-reflecting on my attitudes, perceptions, and expectations of co-teaching, developing a friendship with my co-teachers, and seeing positive academic outcomes for our students once we were in sync.

However, I must acknowledge the unrealistic notion that I am equal to my participants regardless of the shared similarities in co-teaching experiences. Power paradigms exist between researchers and participants. In this case, I am the researcher. “Reflexivity informs positionality” (Holmes, 2020, p. 2), and as the researcher, I acknowledge my limited understanding of my

participants' lived experiences and positionalities holistically. Having been a preservice special education teacher and my past experiences with co-teaching may leave room for biases. However, to address my own bias, I consulted with an expert in the field of teacher preparation with extensive knowledge in credential programs and with a fellow doctoral student knowledgeable in special education and qualitative research throughout the process to ensure the analysis of the sources accurately represents the data.

Consequently, to understand the unique co-teaching experience of four preservice special education teacher dyads, this inquiry led to identification and analyzation of their perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching over time in early co-taught fieldwork.

Phenomenological Qualitative Study

A phenomenological qualitative approach was utilized for this study. A phenomenological approach seeks to identify the general essence of a phenomenon derived from the experiences of different individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also recognizes a shared lived experience among individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Within the context of this study, the phenomenon analyzed was *preservice teachers co-teaching at the Learning Center*. By analyzing this phenomenon, it provided insight into how preservice special education teachers interpret their experiences, professional growth, and perceptions. This approach was best suited to identify, examine, describe, and comprehend the perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching over time for preservice special education teachers in their early fieldwork experience.

Setting

The C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center and the Selection Process

The current study used a purposive sampling method since the preservice teachers participating were from a single cohort enrolled in the Spring 2023 semester at the C. Lamar

Mayer Learning Center. The C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center—commonly known as the Learning Center—is an academic enrichment and intervention program for kindergarten to 12th grade students from the surrounding community. The Center operates on Saturdays for five hours, three of which are dedicated to instruction during the Fall and Spring semesters at California State University, Los Angeles (CSULA) (*The C. Lamar Mayer Learning Center*, 2020). The Learning Center also serves as the setting for Special Education early fieldwork for preservice teachers pursuing their preliminary teaching certification.

A week before the semester began, preservice special education teachers are paired in dyads at the Learning Center for the semester based on their submitted application and survey responses. The application and intake survey are the “business as usual” documents that candidates submit before enrolling in the early fieldwork course. The application focuses mainly on preservice teachers’ credential specializations (MMSN or ESN), their year in the program, and courses they have completed prior to their early fieldwork. The survey asks the candidates several questions pertaining to their prior and current experience in school settings, grade levels with which they worked, working with students with disabilities, and languages that they speak besides English. The Director of the Learning Center and a senior supervisor consider the above-mentioned factors when pairing preservice teachers. For example, they try to ensure that each dyad has a Spanish-speaking co-teacher (since almost all K-12 students’ parents speak Spanish), that grade level placement extends the candidates’ existing education-related experiences, and that the candidates’ desired credential type (i.e., MMSN or ESN) matches the profiles of the children enrolled in that particular grade level.

In spring 2023, 26 preservice teachers took the course. Fourteen preservice teachers were paired in dyads, while the other 12 formed co-teaching triads. The forming of triads was due to

the low K-12 student enrollment at the Learning Center. All the teachers in seven dyads were invited to participate in the study (during Week 2), and four dyads (8 participants) consented.

Preservice teachers participated in a 15-week co-teaching early fieldwork experience (two weeks of orientation and 13 weeks of co-teaching) in which they co-taught each Saturday during the Spring 2023 semester. Since the Learning Center offers instruction to kindergarten through 12th grade students, the preservice teacher dyads were assigned a specific grade level-inclusive classroom with approximately 12 students. Within each classroom, there were at least three to five students with special needs whose disabilities varied from specific learning disabilities (SLD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), physical disabilities, and mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (ID) (Ricci et al., 2017). Co-teachers were supervised by the university faculty, who observed them and provided weekly written feedback on their teaching and assignments.

Table 4

Table of Schedule of Activities and Assignments for Weeks 1-4 of Early Fieldwork

Weeks	Important Activities and Assignments
1	First day of teacher orientation
2	Second day of teacher orientation Teachers submit their first weekly journal entry reflection Teachers are put into dyads Teachers divide the students’ families to initiate contact Brainstorm the theme for the unit lesson planning

-
- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3 | First week of instruction with K-12 students |
| | Teachers co-teach their first lesson |
| | Teachers submit their second weekly journal reflection |
| | Teachers receive their first observation feedback from supervisors |
| | |
| 4 | The second week of instruction with K-12 students |
| | Teachers co-teach their second lesson |
| | Teachers submit their long-term unit plan (scope and sequence for the semester instruction) |
| | Teachers submit their third weekly journal reflection |
| | Teachers receive their second observation feedback from supervisors |
-

Table 4 presents the schedule and activities for the first four weeks of the semester-long fieldwork at the Learning Center. The first two weeks were dedicated to orientation. During this time, preservice teachers reviewed principles of effective culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, the basics of long-term (scope and sequence of the instruction during the semester, thematic unit plan) and short-term (lesson plans) instructional planning and co-teaching models (i.e., models of instruction such as direct instruction, collaborative learning, Socratic Seminar).

By week 2, preservice teachers were paired into dyads and began co-planning and working with families, making phone calls home, and surveying students' strengths, needs, interests, etc. Co-teachers also began to reflect, in writing, on their co-teaching and connecting with families and student experiences. By week 3, preservice teachers delivered their first lesson and submitted their second reflection entry. By the end of week 3, all four dyads responded and accepted the invitation to participate in the study.

Participants: Preservice Special Education Teachers

Table 5

Participant Demographics and Credential Focus

Dyads	Assigned Co-Teachers	Grade	Gender Identity	Credential Type	Languages Spoken
1	Macy & Derrick	10th-12th	Female/Male	ESN	English & Spanish
2	Stacy & David	9th	Female/Male	MMSN	English
3	Danielle & Nancy	7th-8th	Female/Female	MMSN	English
4	Dolores & Sandy	5th	Female/Female	MMSN	English & Spanish

Note. The table presents the pseudonyms of participants. All participants are Latinx. The abbreviation, *MMSN*, is Mild to Moderate Support Needs, a special education credential type. Teachers with a MMSN Education Specialist credential are expected to teach individuals with various disabilities in academic, social, behavioral, and vocational skills. On the contrary, *ESN*, an Extensive Support Needs credential type, prepares educators to work with students with disabilities who require more intensive support and assistance with independent living skills.

Table 5 summarizes all the information about the participants (pseudonyms were used). There was a total of eight preservice special education teachers selected to participate in this study. As shown in Table 5, the majority of the eight preservice special education teachers were female (n=6; 75%); two participants (25%) were male. Six preservice special education teachers were pursuing their Mild/Moderate Support Needs (MMSNs) credential, and the remaining participants (n=2) were pursuing their Extensive Support Needs (ESNs) credential (see Table 5). None of the participants have been classroom teachers of record before this fieldwork. Four

participants had prior experience as an instructional aide, two had begun their internship⁵ that semester, one was a substitute teacher that started simultaneously with the co-taught fieldwork, and the last participant was a classroom volunteer in a preschool setting.

Data Sources and Collection

Two instruments were used for this study for triangulation and reliability purposes during the Spring 2023 semester (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 6 summarizes each data source, collection timeline, and purpose. The combination of journal entries collected at three different time points in the semester and individual interviews allowed me to examine participants’ attitudes about co-teaching and perceptions of their effectiveness. Additionally, the data sources provided the opportunity for the exploration of participants’ perceptions, ideologies, interests, and values for co-teaching throughout their 15-week co-taught experience with their preservice co-teacher (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995).

Table 6

Data Sources, Collection Timeline, and Purpose

Data Source	<i>n</i>	Collection Timeline	Purpose
Journal Entries	24	Weeks 2, 7, and 12 of co-teaching.	To examine participants’ attitudes about co-teaching and perceptions of their effectiveness.
Individual Interviews	8	Week 16 of the semester	To explore participants’ intended or unintended perceptions, ideologies, interests, and values for co-teaching throughout their 15-week co-taught experience with their preservice co-teacher

⁵ Internship entails an alternative route for preservice teachers to earn their teaching credential. It provides preservice teachers the opportunity to acquire classroom experience as classroom teachers while completing coursework requirements for their preliminary credential.

Journal Entries

Three journal entries from weeks 2, 7, and 12 were collected for each participating co-teacher during the semester. A total of 24 journal entries—three per participant—were analyzed. These weeks represented the beginning, middle, and end points of their co-taught fieldwork, which allowed to examine the participants' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching over time. Participants were required to write a minimum of one paragraph per reflection question, and all journal entries were submitted through an online platform. The journal entries consisted of four sections. Two of these sections are reserved for collaboration and co-teaching reflections.

Week 2's journal entry examined the participants' perceptions of their ideal co-partner and collaborative partnership they desired for their early co-taught fieldwork (see Appendix B). Journal entries from week three and onward had six guiding questions that asked participants to reflect on their perceptions and attitudes towards co-teaching during the time of co-teaching. The journal entries were guided by the following questions:

- a) What were the key factors that contributed to your success in co-teaching this week? Why?
- b) What were the key factors that hindered your success in co-teaching this week? Why?
- c) What bolstered your professional growth this week? Why?
- d) What impeded your professional growth this week? Why?
- e) What bolstered your personal growth this week? Why?
- f) What impeded your personal growth this week? Why?

Interviews

The second source of data collected for the study was individual interviews. I sent interview requests to each participant from all four dyads. Participants were notified that each

interview would be approximately 30-60 minutes, audio-recorded, and transcribed with Otter.ai—a speech-to-text software. Additionally, participants were notified that identifying information would not be included in the study data. All participants accepted. The eight individual interviews were conducted via Zoom during Week 15 and 16 at the conclusion of the co-teaching experience to promote further reflection on their co-taught experiences, perceptions, feelings over time, and possible connections to prior and/or future co-taught experiences.

For this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen for data collection since they allow reciprocity between the participant and I and follow-up questions when needed (Kallio et al., 2016). I had 10 pre-determined open-ended questions designed to focus on the perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching, self-reflection, and the impact of their collaborative partnerships on their professional and personal growth, co-teaching skills, and identity over time (see Appendix C). Probing questions were asked throughout the interview that were unique to the context and situations participants discussed throughout their interviews. Some probing questions involved past teaching experiences, perceptions of their university supervisors from early fieldwork and their co-teachers, obstacles encountered, and compatibility. I piloted the interview questions with the Learning Center's Fall 2023 cohort during week 16 of the semester.

Data Analysis

Journal Entries

Qualitative coding was used to analyze participants' journal entry data. Strategies included deductive (a priori codes), inductive (emerging) coding, axial coding, and theme development. First, I developed a codebook before viewing the participants' journal entries with a priori (deductive codes)—a pre-established set of codes—found in the co-teaching literature relevant to the benefits and challenges of co-teaching as well as from practicing certified and

preservice co-teaching literature (see Appendix D). The pre-established codes allowed for in-depth analysis and directly responded to the study's research questions (Saldaña, 2016). For example, some of the a priori codes used were *equity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities, compatibility in co-teaching relationships, limited or lack of administrative support, and comfort from peer support*.

Since journal entries from Weeks 2, 7, and 12 were collected from an online platform to which participants submitted, I downloaded the entries and converted them into PDF files. The PDF documents were imported directly into a qualitative data analysis software, NVivo, designed to organize, code, analyze, and visualize qualitative data. NVivo was used for the study since it is a suitable platform that helps “prioritize and honor the participant’s voice” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 106) and encapsulate the overall significance of people’s experiences (Saldaña, 2016; Stringer, 2014).

After importing documents into NVivo, each journal entry was opened, and read line by line across the eight participants to maintain focus on the text. I coded all participants’ journal entries using a priori codes from the codebook created before reading the data. I then created and assigned new inductive codes to data that were unsuitable or relevant to the initial a priori codes and concepts. Thus, the newly assigned emerging and a priori codes to the data were similar to the initially established codebook.

After assigning deductive and inductive codes, axial coding was conducted. The purpose of axial coding is to “determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones...[and to] reorganize the data set:...redundant codes are removed, and the best representative codes are selected” (Boeije, 2010, p. 109; Saldaña, 2016). Thus, refining and narrowing (i.e., through revision or removal) the initial codes assigned and arrive at specific

elevated categories. To analyze and refine identified codes into categorized themes, the I determined which assigned codes were prevalent versus less critical related to perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching and how these codes were related (Boeije, 2010; Williams & Moser, 2019). Refining and categorizing these codes reduced the number of initial codes and relabeled them into general categories (Saldaña, 2016). For instance, the codes *of open-mindedness, flexibility, and mutual trust and respect* were combined to construct the category of *compatibility in co-teaching relationship*. Ultimately, specific thematic categories were created in which it depicted the relationships between inductive and deductive codes and overall themes (Strauss, 1998).

For the final level of coding, I developed themes from the categories created during the last phase. The Coding and Data Reduction Table in Appendix E summarizes each code, category, and overarching theme for the journal entries. Week 2's journal entries focused on preservice special education teachers' ideal co-teacher and collaborative relationship. Thus, week 2's journal entries' categories, subcategories, and overall patterns within the data significantly differ from Week 7's and 12's entries. Week 7 and 12 journal entries focused on preservice teachers' professional and personal successes and failures. They also discussed factors that participants identified as propelling or hindering their success for those weeks. Themes from the journal entries analysis included: *compatibility in co-teaching relationship, equity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities, comfort from peer support, awareness of strengths and needs, inequity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities, limited or lack of administrative support, positive administrative support, perceived positive and negative co-planning, negative and positive impact on students, and self-reflection*.

Individual Interviews

Like the journal entries, interviews were analyzed in NVivo using qualitative coding, following the same process as above. Since the interview data initially consisted of audio files, there was some additional work to translate interview files into PDFs for NVivo. To do this, I used Otter.ai and reviewed each transcript individually before converting it into a PDF. Similar to the above process, I developed themes. See Appendix E for the Coding and Data Reduction Table for the interviews.

Each of the questions prepared in advance focused on preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching and reflecting on the impact of their collaborative partnerships on their professional and personal growth, co-teaching skill sets, and identity. Journal entry themes such as *compatibility and incompatibility in the co-teaching relationship, equity, and inequity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities, comfort from peer support, positive and limited or lack of administrative support, perceived positive and negative co-planning, perceived efficiency and inefficiency of the co-teaching partnership, and negative and positive impact on students* emerged from the interview analysis as well. These themes encompassed preservice teachers' perceived benefits, challenges, factors supporting co-teaching, and disadvantages emanating from the co-taught field experience. The *generalization of skill sets learned, and mental preparation beforehand* were additional themes that emerged from the interview analysis.

Inter-rater Reliability

To ensure consistency and transferability, I conducted the inter-rater reliability process. In this study, inter-rater reliability refers to the degree to which the two raters agree on their assigned codes within the journal entries and interview transcripts. A second rater—a doctoral student with a special education background—was trained to use the codebook and was provided

with one-third of the journal entries and interviews ($n=8$; $n=2$) to code individually. Upon completion of coding, the codes were compared across the two raters. An agreement ratio was created by dividing the number of agreed upon codes by the total codes; 55% agreement was reached for both journal entries and interviews. A second round of code comparison was conducted. After discussion, 85% agreement was reached. A third round of code comparison was conducted, and after discussion, 100% agreement was achieved for journal entries and interviews. According to Saldaña (2016), although there is not a “standard percentage of agreement among qualitative researchers,...80%-90% range [is] a minimal benchmark to those most concerned with an evidentiary statistic” (p. 37). For this study, 85% was considered the minimum acceptable agreement level.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

Inclusive co-taught fieldwork between two preservice special education teachers is a unique experience in which they explore the practicality of co-teaching as they progress toward meeting the Education Specialist (Special Education) credential requirements. This study analyzed preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching in early fieldwork throughout the process. The analyzed data are presented in response to each research question and data source, as seen in Table 7.

Table 7

Thematic Table of Findings for RQs 1 & 2

Research Question	Themes and Categories	Data Sources and Codes
1	<i>Factors Supporting Co-Teaching:</i>	
	Supporting Factors out of Preservice Teachers' Control	<p>Journal Entries: Compatibility with the Co-teaching Partnership, Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities, and Positive Administrative Support</p> <p>Interviews: Compatibility within the Co-Teaching Partnership</p>
	Supporting Factors Within Preservice Teachers' Control	<p>Journal Entries: Positive Co-Planning, and Evaluating Strengths and Needs</p> <p>Interviews: Cultural Connection</p>
	Benefits of Co-Teaching	<p>Journal Entries: Perceived Positive Impact on Students, Comfort From Peer Support, Reflecting on One's Own Strengths and Needs, and Professional Growth</p> <p>Interviews: Comfort From Peer Support,</p>

		Reflecting on One’s Own Strengths and Needs, Professional Growth, Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership, and Generalization of Skill Sets Learned
2	<i>Challenges of Co-Teaching:</i>	
	Challenges Prior to the Experience	<p>Journal Entries: Incompatibility Within the Co-Teaching Partnership</p> <p>Interviews: Incompatibility Within the Co-Teaching Partnership</p>
	Challenges During the Experience	<p>Journal Entries: Limited Administrative Support</p> <p>Interviews: Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities, Limited Administrative Support, Limited or Lack of Peer Support, and Mental Preparation Beforehand</p>
	Disadvantages Resulting from Co-Teaching	<p>Journal Entries: Perceived Negative Impact on Students</p> <p>Interviews: Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership, and Perceived Negative Impact on Students</p>

Research Question #1: Benefits of Co-Teaching

The first research question of this study was “*What are the benefits of co-teaching over time perceived by preservice special education teachers in an early co-taught fieldwork experience?*” Analysis of this question yielded four themes that included “factors supporting co-teaching” and “benefits of co-teaching” from participants’ journals and interviews.

Factors Supporting Co-Teaching

Factors Supporting Co-Teaching was a theme that emerged from preservice special education teachers’ journal entries and interviews. The theme was a precursor to identifying the

benefits of co-teaching on behalf of the preservice teachers. This theme represented what the participants considered necessary for their further professional growth and development of co-teaching skills within their partnerships. It encompassed two categories: *supporting factors within and out of preservice teachers' control*.

Supporting Factors out of Preservice Teachers' Control. The category "Factors out of preservice teachers' control" emerged from the participants' descriptions of the perceived success factors that supported their co-taught partnerships in both journals and interviews. Codes that comprised this category included *compatibility within the co-teaching partnership, equity in shared teacher roles and responsibilities, and positive administrative support*.

Compatibility Within the Co-Teaching Partnership (Journal Entries and Interviews).

Only one code, "compatibility within the co-teaching partnership," was present in both journal entries and interviews. This code related to the co-teachers' characteristics, degree of agreement in co-teachers' personal and professional approaches, and shared ideals that existed before the participants entered the co-teaching relationship. The code also referred to how both co-teachers related to one another and their co-teachers' goals, commitment, motivation, and interests to benefit their partnership and their individual growth as future certified special educators. Compatibility ultimately made co-teaching relationships much more straightforward for some partnerships than the ones that encountered incompatibility. This was a crucial factor out of candidates' control since preservice teachers had no say in selecting their co-teaching partners. Seven out of eight preservice special education teachers agreed that there were distinct similarities between their individual and their co-teachers' professional and personal attributes that contributed to their co-teaching and overall partnership success. In her week 7 journal, Danielle concluded that similarities exemplified their team strengths as they continued to learn

about each other, *“As weeks go by, collaborating has become more accessible...My partner shares similar beliefs, and her behavior confirms that she cares about the success and accomplishment of our lesson plans.”*

Compatibility within the co-teaching partnership was a quality that gained importance over time. As co-teachers recognized the power of compatibility, two out of eight participants reported considering further developing their professional relationship outside of the fieldwork setting. In her week 12 journal, Danielle shared, *“...we stick together due to our common goals. We have built a solid-healthy relationship that I hope we can continue beyond this course.”*

Participants’ interviews further corroborate this code. One dyad out of four emphasized not only their compatibility but also that their assigned co-teacher was similar to their ideal co-partner. Stacy, for example, shared in her interview how she and her co-partner, David, were both effective communicators and *“were flexible with [their work] schedules, other classes, and family life...”* She added that being open to each other’s input was a vital quality in a co-teacher for her. David’s interview added that they were compatible in their commitment to their co-teaching and their students’ success.

Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities (Journals). Seven of eight preservice teachers also felt that equity in their shared teacher roles and responsibilities supported their co-teaching. In her week 3 journal entry, Stacy expressed that being on *“the same page”* and respecting the co-teacher and shared teaching roles were necessary:

My co-teacher and I were on the same page about our lesson plan and our roles for each activity, which made it easier for us to follow during instruction. We both have led an equal amount of lessons and activities and worked to support each other when the other is teaching.

Other participants shared that being equally responsible and accountable for the outcomes of their partnership allowed them to achieve their individual and partnership co-teaching goal(s) for the semester.

Positive Administrative Support (Journals). Three out of eight preservice teachers felt positive administrative support supported their co-teaching. Consistent feedback from their supervisor(s) allowed them to assess their strengths and needs as individuals and as a team. Supervisors' support validated their improvement in the areas of identified needs, increased their confidence as future special educators, and finally, furthered their professional development. For example, Danielle in her week 12 journal shared, “[Our] supervisor’s feedback helped [us] grow professionally. I considered many of her suggestions and applied them to my teaching. The feedback has helped [us] discover and explore other teaching methods and made [us] better educators.”

Supporting Factors Within Preservice Teachers’ Control. Responses from journal entries and interviews also revealed that there were aspects of co-teaching (primarily co-teachers’ behaviors) that preservice teachers had control over to further develop and promote their co-teaching skill sets within their partnerships. Codes included within these behaviors were *positive co-planning, awareness of strengths and needs, and cultural connection.*

Positive Co-Planning (Journals). Six of eight preservice teachers viewed themselves as equal and involved partners in the co-planning process. As Macy noted in her weekly journal (week 7), “...brainstorming and hearing each other’s ideas” reinforced (1) co-teacher equity within three partnerships, (2) enhanced co-teaching practices, and overall (3) team morale. Strengthening their individual and partnership input was also a direct result of co-teachers’ opportunities to enhance their “...communication and being flexible with content suggestions.

This is important because we can express our ideas freely, which leads us to create more engaging and meaningful lessons” (Stacy, Week 7 Journal). Discussing their thoughts, mistakes, feedback, and instructional direction created a safe environment for teachers to feel comfortable and valued.

A key factor that contributed to my success of co-teaching this week was talking about how this week would look like. We looked back at the Unit Plan to make sure we were both on the same page as to where we were. We communicated throughout the week about thoughts and feedback.

-Dolores, Week 7 Journal.

Overall, this process further helped participants understand the specific actions, behaviors, dedication, and collaborative efforts required to improve their planning practices to support their long-term co-teaching.

Evaluating Strengths and Needs (Journals). Evaluating participants’ own and each other’s strengths and needs was another behavior that supported the participants’ co-teaching. During their first journal (week 2), three out of eight preservice teachers in the study initially showed a growing awareness of their strengths and areas of need. As time progressed (week 7 and 12 journals), five out of eight preservice teachers increased the identification and evaluation of the strengths and needs they both possessed as a partnership.

I now understand what contributes to each other's success is knowing our strengths and needs. For example, [Derrick's] strength is projecting to the class and knowing how to get the students' attention when they start to get unmotivated. His weaknesses in my opinion are not really sharing the teaching time. My weakness would be not communicating with Derrick to get more time instructing and knowing if the students are

understanding. What impeded our growth together was the lack of understanding what we should be teaching.

-Macy, Week 7 Journal.

In assessing and understanding one's strengths and needs, Stacy, Nancy, Danielle, and Macy constructed opportunities for their co-teachers to serve as support systems in the areas they needed the most support in; in addition to the areas they already excelled in to develop their co-teaching further. As a result, four of eight participants reciprocated a supportive role for their co-teachers in which they focused and assisted with their co-teachers' areas of need. Nancy's week 12 journal entry stated that being supported by one's co-teaching partner increased the co-teacher's confidence:

This week, [Danielle] had to record a lesson as a CalTPA requirement. I helped her and I allowed her the space she needed to be successful in her lesson. We discussed it and reflected about it after. The support that [Danielle] and I gave one another made our co-teaching feel synchronized and allowed us to teach with confidence knowing we each could rely on one another when needed.

Cultural Connection (Interviews). Considering participants did not have an input in the selection and pairing of the partnerships, only one participant (Danielle) in the study reported that finding a mutual cultural connection was a factor that contributed to the partnership's success. While the cultural backgrounds of most participants were similar, it is interesting that one participant decided to capitalize on cultural connections as an asset and a cultural fund in which she continued to acquire strength. Consequently, cultural connections were a source of strength and a factor that strengthened co-teaching and promoted cohesion within the partnership.

...maybe it's our cultures. She's Latina. I'm also Latina. So we did a good job together. It also reflected on our co-teaching in front of the students, the environment, the vibe that we that we portrayed to our students...you could feel it was a cohesive environment.

Benefits of Co-Teaching

The *Benefits of Co-Teaching* emerged as a theme, and it referred to the advantages recognized by participants that originated from co-teaching during and/or after the fieldwork experience. This theme consisted of the following codes that emerged across journals and interviews: Comfort from Peer Support, Reflecting on One's own Strengths and Needs, and Professional Growth. Additionally, journals elicited the code of *Perceived Positive Impact on Students*, while interviews elicited two additional codes: *Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership*, and *Generalization of Skill Sets Learned*. The theme of benefits of co-teaching emerged during and/or after the experience were Week 7 and 12 journal entries and Week 16 interviews.

Comfort From Peer Support (Journals and Interviews). This code emerged from both data sources. Participants viewed the impact of two preservice teachers undergoing the same fieldwork experience simultaneously as beneficial over the length of their partnership. In their journal entries, participants recalled instances where their partner's knowledge or skills helped them in a difficult teaching situation. For example, seven participants described how the technical support provided to one another—especially during critical fieldwork moments—strengthened their professional growth; *“What strengthened my professional growth was the support of my co-teaching partner. I could not have done my recordings and lessons without her encouragement and assistance.” -Danielle, Week 12 Journal.*

Participants' reflections of interviews furthered the meaning of the code by extending it beyond other skills and knowledge to emotional sympathy and support. David, in particular, described how his co-teacher, Stacy, supported him during a medical issue that impacted his contribution to the partnership; *"...when I was going through that personal issues, I would tell her because I felt comfortable enough to even express my personal issue...she was definitely a huge help in that aspect."*

This response illustrates the degree to which four preservice teachers connected with their peers on an emotional level to minimize stressors. Sharing similar life and/or professional experiences created a space for participants to feel physically and emotionally safe and build mutual trust and strength within their partnership. Thus, preservice teachers' sense of safety and vulnerability became deeply rooted in their connection, and ultimately, strengthened their co-teaching.

Reflecting on One's Own Strengths and Needs (Journals and Interviews). Reflecting on one's own strengths and needs is a benefit that emerged during and after their co-taught experience. This code was prevalent by Week 7 in participants' journals and those who engaged in reflecting on their own strengths and needs reported improvements in self-and co-teaching partnerships. For Derrick (Week 7 journal), reflection led to improvements in his collaborative work, confidence, and attitude toward the co-taught fieldwork. *"...we had a successful class because we were trying to teach for all students as opposed to [one]...I am capable of doing the work successfully and...look forward to duplicating [this] success."* Derrick's reflection also led to identifying and evaluating his time management skills which hindered his growth in his Week 7 journal. *"I spend a lot of time on the lesson plan, but I'm not sure if all of that time is paying off."*

In her seventh weekly journal, Derrick's co-teacher, Macy, reflected on her improved evaluation scores and attributed them to her increased confidence and comprehension of her instructional practices. *"I have definitely seen a huge growth in last week's evaluation in comparison to this one because I have changed my ways of teaching...[and]...[I] understood the lesson I was teaching."* Another dyad, Stacy and David, also discussed in their Week 12 journals their need to improve their differentiation skill sets for their students and their own benefit. *"Another area I focused on was differentiation of instruction...for our students with IEP is very helpful not only for the students but to me as well."* Reflecting on the change over time, participants' journals revealed that identifying their strengths and needs, became an ongoing practice for these four preservice teachers who intended to continually grow professionally.

The same code coming from interviews revealed a higher level of self-awareness and purposeful decisions made based on recognition of participants' own strengths and needs. During the interviews, six out of eight preservice teachers came back to reflection on their individual strengths and weaknesses. When asked in the interview to reflect on how co-teaching at the Learning Center contributed to their personal growth, Nancy commented how *"[her] personal growth was bolstered by [her] practice of self-reflection. She was able to "...analyze [her] teaching practices," work with others, and "...identify areas that need improvement."* This led her to heightened consciousness about her teaching and motivated her to purposefully act upon the areas she *"...want[ed] to improve in and...want[ed] to change."*

Professional Growth (Journals and Interviews). This code emerged during Week 7 and 12 journal entries. This indicates that the participants started to recognize more benefits of co-teaching as they progressed within the course. Three preservice teachers shared similar sentiments in becoming aware of the professional growth they have experienced. Stacy (Week 7

journal) expressed how this experience bolstered her time management skills and collaboration: “*What bolstered my professional growth [was] using my time wisely. [We] always plan to work on our [assignments] early and throughout the week to fine tune it as needed.*” David (Week 7 journal) further elaborated how working with his co-teacher, Stacy, frequently led him to develop more effective communication and collaborative skills. Macy—who did not have prior teaching or classroom experience—shared in her Week 12 journal how this fieldwork made her aware of the immense technical responsibilities of a teacher, yet it solidified her commitment to continuing learning to become a competent teacher.

Over time, the language participants used in their journals began to feature more collaborative language that reflected the collegial status of their partnerships. Participants switched from using *I*, *me*, and *my* to words such as *we*, *us*, and *our*. These terms reflected: *we are both learning, we are learning from each other, and we are stronger as a teaching unit* in journal entries for Weeks 7 and 12.

During the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on how they were different due to the fieldwork experience. Six preservice teachers stated that it increased their confidence as an educator. Six preservice teachers notably indicated that they felt more prepared to teach a different grade level they have not had prior experience with within a different capacity (i.e., instructional aide, volunteer, substituting),

In the beginning, I was very I wasn't confident to take on...high schoolers...I definitely grew up from the beginning to now knowing how to like work with these high schoolers. [They've] grown on me. I know how to work with high school now and I just got confidence. -Macy

Teaching a different grade level in a co-taught environment created new challenges and opportunities for six preservice teachers to acquire a refreshed perspective in enhancing their content knowledge, teaching techniques, strategies, and approaches.

Six preservice teachers felt more prepared to develop lesson plans with their co-teachers; *...this was a different experience. I had never [co-taught] before...I'm a Special Education Assistant...working together and making time to create lessons and talk about it and do research was different. -Danielle.*

Having practical lesson planning opportunities with a co-teacher further empowered participants to identify their growth in this area since they hold different positions within the educational field (i.e., instructional aide, volunteer, substituting) that do not require them to engage in the process and development of lesson planning.

Perceived Positive Impact on Students (Journals). The perceived benefits of co-teaching were mostly focused on preservice teachers with minimal references to perceived positive impact on students. This code emerged in the middle of the semester (Week 7). Two participants briefly described how adjusting the classroom content structure led to increased student interaction, *“I really enjoyed this class session the most because we had all the students participate, and they were eager to continue the discussion.” -Sandy*

Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership (Interviews). Seven participants discussed the perceived efficiency of the co-taught partnership as a code. They agreed that they positively perceived their co-teaching relationship as efficient and successful. These partnerships were described as *solid, healthy, and a dream team*. The seven participants agreed that their partnerships were successful since they gained practical knowledge and experienced:

1. Equitable division of responsibilities

2. Working collaboratively with an individual with similar mindsets and/or values
3. Building mutual trust and respect
4. Providing mutual technical and/or emotional support

These four areas overlap with the factors that make co-teaching successful and the benefits of co-teaching.

In her interview, Danielle was the only participant who spoke about her desire to continue building a relationship with her co-teacher after their fieldwork. She further elaborated that their communication and shared goals allowed both co-teachers to succeed throughout the semester; thus, Danielle hopes to develop a friendship outside the fieldwork setting to continue collaborating in other courses of their teacher preparation program.

Generalization of Skill Sets Learned (Interviews). The *generalization of skill sets learned* referred to the transferability of skill sets acquired from the co-taught experience into the “real world.” Dolores and David described how they actively applied strategies learned at the Learning Center in their current classrooms as new special education interns in the same semester. In the interview, David shared that “*all the skills I learned at the Learning Center, I apply it simultaneously at my job. I’ve done Socratic seminars...I’ve tried to implement the graffiti strategy too...*” In the interview, Dolores also discussed how she informs her current school site of the co-taught fieldwork as her school prepares to transition to a fully co-taught site for the next academic school year. It is important to note that participants also used their Learning Center classrooms to apply new ideas and/or strategies to determine their effectiveness before implementing them in their “real world” school sites. “*I’ve been applying what I’ve learned at [my] school site and with the students... I feel like that’s my lab over there...I’m apply[ing] what I’ve learned in real-time...*” -David, Week 16, Interview.

Summary

The first research question illuminated the factors that supported preservice teachers' co-teaching based on their descriptions of their perceived successes in each journal entry and the interviews. These factors prelude to preservice teachers identifying the benefits of co-teaching over time in the experience. Needless to say, preservice special educators found that specific elements supported their development as beginning teachers and their partnerships as a whole.

Research Question #2: Challenges of Co-Teaching

The second research question of this study asked: *What are the challenges of co-teaching over time perceived by preservice special education teachers in an early co-taught fieldwork experience?* The following section describes the challenges preservice special education teachers reported related to co-teaching and the disadvantages that resulted from their early co-teaching fieldwork at the Learning Center.

Challenges to Co-Teaching

The theme of *Challenges to Co-Teaching* emerged in journal entries and interviews. *Challenges to Co-Teaching* referred to factors and issues that the participants perceived as standing in the way of co-teaching. The theme emerged in data sources collected before the co-taught experience began (i.e., journal entry #1; Week 2) but it was mainly discussed during the fieldwork experience. This allowed me to examine the participants' perceptions of challenges over time: *Challenges Prior to the Experience* and *Challenges During the Experience*.

Challenges Prior to the Experience. A challenge that participants perceived prior to the co-taught experience emanated from preservice teachers' descriptions of incompatibility. The data sources used to identify challenges prior to the start of the experience were Week 2 journal entries. *Incompatibility within the co-teaching partnership* was the sole code that both journals

and interviews elicited. *Incompatibility* is difficult to recognize between two unfamiliar individuals unfamiliar with each other, at the start of a relationship. Within the context of this study, in each partnership, two preservice teachers who did not have a chance to work together prior to the fieldwork possessed different personalities and interests that they brought into the co-teaching relationship.

Incompatibility Within the Co-Teaching Partnership (Journals and Interviews). One out of eight preservice teacher (Sandy) initially explicitly stated in her first journal how she did not “*want to have problems with [her] co-teaching partner because of [communication difference]...[that] can cause some issues.*” David, on the other end, appeared to have a more proactive attitude to potential incompatibility with his co-teaching partner. He described in his first journal entry how he and his co-teaching partner could resolve communication differences by communicating any disagreements.

During the interviews, five of eight preservice teachers reflected back on *communication differences, differences in teaching backgrounds, and pedagogical approaches* as reasons for their professional incompatibility with their co-teachers. Nancy revealed that her co-teacher, Danielle, needed to be more responsive to her request to share the lead and/or support teaching role throughout the experience. Nancy found Danielle’s unresponsive nature consistently problematic over time during the experience and realized that she internalized this issue since she continued to “*accept all of that.*” Similarly, Derrick also shared how he “*never really said anything to [his] co-teacher [Macy]*” during the experience which may have been a contributing factor in why he was struggling and “*felt like [he] was doing more of the work [over time] and felt like [he] couldn't quite rely on [Macy]...*”

Dolores also explained how their teaching backgrounds contributed to the personal and professional differences that impacted her compatibility with her co-teacher over time.

It [was] the grade level because she worked with middle school. I understand a lot of her personality now. I worked with Kinder...maybe that's why we were so different because we're coming from different places...we had different opinions and thoughts...our [Learning Center] classroom was fifth grade. So that was closer to her than me [and she took the] leadership on this..."

Sandy was the last participant who explained how distinct differences in their pedagogical approaches negatively contributed to her outlook on co-teaching moving forward.

My initial response [of my ideal co-teacher for fieldwork] has changed because I wanted somebody who isn't afraid to speak their mind. My co-teacher was in fact the opposite...I would be the first one to reach out and to ask questions...I thought that with our reflection [submitted before being paired], we were gonna get paired up with somebody that shared those same beliefs. That didn't turn out...that was also a learning moment for myself...we're not always going to get somebody that meets eye to eye...[and] it has changed completely for me [about co-teaching].

Dolores acknowledged that Sandy was direct in her interactions with her and was always “a step ahead” in terms of initiating communication, outlines, course assignments, and shared responsibilities. This made it “easier for me to just do my part;” Yet Dolores felt that “[they] were both very responsive [and] work[ed] as a team.” Strikingly, Sandy was the only participant in the study who explicitly stated she was in an incompatible partnership.

Challenges During the Experience. Preservice teachers reported several challenges that became apparent during the experience. This theme consisted of the following codes: *limited*

administrative support (emerged across journals and interviews) and three additional codes: *Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities*, *Limited or Lack of Peer Support*, and *Mental Preparation Beforehand* (found in the interviews only).

Limited Administrative Support (Journals and Interviews). Limited administrative support refers to the limited guidance and support supervisors provided to preservice teachers during the co-taught fieldwork. Only one preservice teacher, Nancy, indicated that she received limited or lack of guidance in two areas: *consistent feedback* and *support during challenges with collaboration*.

The *lack of consistent feedback* was an area where supervisors should have provided increased support. In her Week 7 journal, Nancy shared the lack of consistent individual feedback during observations toward the mid to end of the fieldwork. Since she did not “...*have feedback for five weeks*,” it was difficult for her to pinpoint the areas she needed to improve. She became frustrated when Danielle received feedback for those weeks compared to her. On the contrary, when she received feedback consistently at the beginning of the fieldwork, Nancy expressed how she purposefully worked on her identified areas of improvement as suggested. However, “*she wouldn’t come in during those moments...I wasn’t really able to show that I grew or that I was considering the feedback [my supervisor provided me with]*.” Ultimately, across time in the co-taught fieldwork, her supervisor missed opportunities to witness Nancy’s continued growth.

The *lack of support during challenges with collaboration* was another identified area where supervisors should have provided increased support. In her Week 7 journal, Nancy described how she “*wish[ed] there was a little bit more help*” from her supervisor in dealing with her co-teacher, who refused to co-teach for the next two class sessions due to her leading two

lessons for the Cal TPAs. Nancy became overwhelmed and frustrated throughout the experience and decided to write about the incident in her Week 7 journal that supervisors should read.

Unfortunately, she “*did not g[e]t feedback from that journal so I don’t know if she read it.*”

Subsequently, Nancy felt she had no other choice but to “*get through this [experience] and it’ll just be a better experience for me [next time].*”

Limited administrative support refers to the limited guidance and support supervisors provided to preservice teachers during the co-taught fieldwork. The limited or lack of guidance was identified in *lesson planning*. The *lack of guidance in lesson planning* was identified by Derrick during the interview. Derrick acknowledged that his supervisor checked their lesson plans and course assignments throughout the fieldwork; however, they had “free range to do what [they wanted]. “*There was no one telling you what [you] needed to do*” so he and his co-teacher had to “*figure out*” how to approach unit planning, in particular. Hence, increased planning freedom and independence hindered developing essential lesson planning skill sets over time. Derrick compared the limited administrative support from his supervisor to his substitute experience, in which lessons were given to him without support.

Nancy also expressed a similar sentiment of needing guidance from her supervisor in lesson planning. She shared how she and her co-teacher were not provided with sample lesson plans and were not given specific criteria to develop their lessons. This was evident when they submitted their lesson plan and were told it was “*not what they were asking for*” from the beginning to the midpoint of the experience. Once they felt they understood the criteria and how to use the designated lesson plan template, a new one was provided without their supervisor's warning or guidance towards the end of the fieldwork. Thus, the change reflected negatively in their co-teaching across the 13 weeks.

Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities (Interviews). According to Sandy, the unfair distribution of their shared roles impacted their relationship throughout the co-taught experience. In her interview, Sandy expressed her disappointment with what she expected from an ideal partnership to the actual lived experience with Dolores. *“I wanted a 50/50 [partnership] like for example, when it comes to sharing the lesson plan and all of [the responsibilities] ...I was expecting more in a sense, someone who was meeting me halfway [in our relationship].”* From her point of view, the disappointment derived from executing her own and the majority of Dolores’ individual and shared responsibilities required of their partnership over time from the first week to the last week of their co-taught experience. Sandy further shared how 75% of their shared responsibilities were carried through on her part, whereas Dolores contributed the remaining 25% of their partnership. The perceived unfair distribution of their individual and shared responsibilities created long-term tensions within the relationship over time and negatively impacted how Sandy perceived co-teaching moving forward.

Limited or Lack of Peer Support (Interviews). The *limited or lack of peer support* was cited as a challenge throughout the fieldwork experience. In his interview, Derek described the limited motivational and technical support he received from Macy. He described how their age difference (seven years) and teaching experience contributed to their struggle to motivate each other during their co-planning sessions and receiving constructive feedback on his teaching throughout the fieldwork experience. Although he felt that Macy provided limited support for his growth, he continued to support her during her lessons, till the end of the fieldwork, to make *“her feel comfortable in the class.”*

Sandy also expressed the limited collaboration and lack of feedback Dolores provided during the entire fieldwork experience. Initially, Sandy held high expectations in these two

support areas since Dolores became a special education teacher intern at the beginning of the semester. Thus, Sandy assumed Dolores would engage in similar supportive behaviors (i.e., providing feedback and “*bouncing ideas*”) encouraged at her current school site.

Mental Preparation Beforehand (Interviews). *Mental Preparation Beforehand* emerged as a code from three preservice teachers. David reflected how his fieldwork expectations differed tremendously from his initial impressions of the co-taught fieldwork component to the reality he experienced.

Before everything starts, they should prepare students on the mental aspect and toughness of being there. I was thinking I'm gonna come home at this time. I'm gonna do this and that like, No, you come home. It's not even the students itself. It's the aftermath that I struggled with.

Danielle shared a similar sentiment since she was included in the first special education Cal TPA (California Teaching Performance Assessment) seminars right after their fieldwork. “*We are the guinea pigs with the Cal TPAs...It would be great if they add a course just for the CAL TPAs because it's pretty intense...*” Danielle recommended for the Learning Center staff to “*...improve a little more in just prepping [future preservice teachers]. Not sugarcoating it too much in regard to co-teaching and practice and [Cal TPA seminars].*”

Macy and Danielle also discussed the need for transparency on the mental preparation required of working preservice teachers taking other credential courses with the early co-taught fieldwork. Macy stated in her interview, “*My co-teacher only had this class to focus on, but I have six other classes to work on...It's just hard to manage time.*” Danielle elaborated how early fieldwork should be taken individually since “*it's a lot to do while taking four other classes, so five classes in total.*” They stressed the need for the Learning Center staff to disclose the amount

of work required behind the scenes—such as co-planning and preparing materials throughout the week—and the physical and mental exhaustion one feels “*by the time Saturday came along*” when required to co-teach with students at the beginning of the fieldwork. Hence, future preservice teachers should understand difference between their assumptions and the reality of this fieldwork's mental and physical demands.

Disadvantages Resulting From Co-Teaching

The theme *Disadvantages Resulting From Co-Teaching* referred to any unnoticed or adverse effects of preservice teachers and/or students. This occurred during or after the co-taught experience. This theme consisted of the following code that emerged across journals and interviews: *Perceived Negative Impact on Students*. In addition, interviews elicited an additional code: *Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership*.

Perceived Negative Impact on Students (Journals and Interviews). The only two co-teachers teaching in the Extensive Support Needs (ESN; formerly known as Moderate to Severe) 11th-12th grade Learning Center classroom—Macy and Derrick—reported perceived negative impacts on their students. Macy’s Week 7 journal identified student confusion as a perceived negative impact that resulted from the difficulty of supporting students with a wide range of academic skills. Macy and Derrick also identified a lack of understanding of what they should be teaching since their students in different grade levels in their classroom.

During the interviews, Macy and Derrick shared that they continued to “*struggle with [planning] appropriate work*, “and to *getting the students to think critically...*” throughout the experience. Derrick specifically described how deviating from their unit plan that focused on the art of movies and presenting a lesson on metaphors and similes in poems perplexed students since it was not aligned with the classroom theme. He further shared how he and Macy were

trying to “*dig themselves out of the hole*” they made for themselves in consistently making these changes and their limited knowledge to better support students academically. However, these areas contributed to students' confusion about the material being presented and what they should work on from the beginning to the final week of the co-taught fieldwork.

Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership (Interviews). Sandy was the only participant in the study who explicitly stated in her interview that she and Dolores were incompatible and perceived their partnership as inefficient. Sandy had a negative outlook on the partnership and Dolores since her expectations of the ideal co-teacher and relationship were unmet. Sandy expressed that she felt Dolores focused solely on herself, which promoted a “*fend for yourself*” survival mentality since “*each one of [them] [wa]s graded individually.*” Although this mentality provided Sandy the opportunity to learn how to handle situations out of her control, become more resourceful when facing adversity, and increase her confidence as a special educator through her merit, she further stressed how unfair this was to her since the experience focused on developing positive co-teaching partnerships over time and taking ownership of their students regardless of individual motives. As a result, Sandy stated that this negative experience unfavorably changed her perspective about co-teachers and co-teaching overall.

Summary

Salient points were focused on the challenges occurring prior to and during the experience that resulted in disadvantages from co-teaching. Major barriers included preservice teacher perception of incompatibility and inequity within the partnership, limited administrative and peer support, and lack of mental preparation for the fieldwork beforehand. These barriers

brought adverse effects on preservice teachers (perceived inefficiency of their partnerships) and students (perceived confusion) that developed over time in their fieldwork.

Additional Findings

Analyzing both journals and interviews led to a better understanding of the benefits, challenges, and disadvantages of co-teaching perceived by the study participants who co-taught in novice-novice dyads in an early fieldwork course. Similarities in some of the codes and overall themes that emerged from participants in the same dyads (i.e., reflecting on their strengths, incompatibility, and perceived inefficiency of the co-teaching partnership) led to the identification and classification of three types of co-teaching partnerships based on the concept of effectiveness. This typology is described below.

Typology of Co-Teaching Partnerships

The notion of co-teaching dyad effectiveness was derived from two earlier studies that focused on novice-novice co-teaching dyads under the guidance of one mentor teacher. Nokes et al. (2008) defined effectiveness as a continuum (from ineffective to effective) and placed each dyad on such continuums by analyzing novices' interview transcripts while triangulating with mentor teacher and student focus group transcripts. Dee (2012) also assessed the effectiveness of dyads labeling their teaching as effective versus ineffective approach. These categorical labels were assigned through Dee's analysis of observations and preservice teachers' reflections and ratings. It is important to note that neither Nokes et al. (2008) nor Dee (2012) elaborated on what constitutes effectiveness or ineffectiveness in their studies. My study extends this early line of literature by approaching the construct of effectiveness in a more structured while still qualitative way.

Based on the limited effectiveness in special education literature on classifying dyads and broader literature that identifies factors strengthening co-teaching (i.e., Duran et al., 2021; Pancsofar & Petroff, 2013; Pugach & Winn, 2011), I identified three elements crucial to becoming an effective dyad (see Figure 2). To be considered effective, co-teachers must possess a positive attitude about co-teaching, self-empowerment, and must proactively seeking resources and/or help when barriers present themselves, instead of waiting for others to change or come to their rescue. Overall, three types of dyads were identified: ineffective, somewhat effective, and effective. Participants’ journal entries and interviews were reviewed, and the type of dyad by effectiveness was determined using the three criteria listed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Types of Dyad Effectiveness

Type of Dyad	Elements of Effectiveness
Effective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Positive attitude to co-teaching, initially and over time. 2. Recognized the power of “self” to grow professionally; did not wait for supervisors to rescue them and supported each other. 3. Proactive.
Somewhat Effective	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One teacher had a more positive attitude towards co-teaching, while the other one had a more negative attitude to co-teaching, initially and/or over time. 2. Were centered on “self” but did not recognize the power to grow without constant support.

Ineffective	<p>3. Inconsistently proactive.</p> <p>1. Negative attitude to co-teaching and or anxiety over incompatibility, initially and over time.</p> <p>2. Kept waiting for others to help them (supervisors or co-teaching partner); did not recognize co-teacher as a support consistently.</p> <p>3. Not proactive.</p>
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Table 8 summarizes the typology of dyads at the end of the co-teaching experience. The vignettes that follow illustrate this typology.

Table 8

Categorized Dyad Effectiveness

Dyads	Effectiveness
Macy & Derrick	Ineffective
Nancy & Danielle	Somewhat Effective
Sandy & Dolores	Somewhat Effective
Stacy & David	Effective

Note. The table presents the pseudonyms of participants.

Macy and Derrick

It was interesting that both Macy and Derrick indicated that their co-taught experience was primarily positive. However, their responses and behaviors were inconsistent. Of all the partnerships, Macy and Derrick were the only ineffective partnership. In his late twenties, Derrick had experience as a substitute teacher working with students with and without

disabilities in a general education setting and instructional delivery. Macy, on the other hand, was in her early twenties, and an inconsistent preschool volunteer wanting to explore a vocation in special education. In her seventh weekly journal, Macy acknowledged that she “*struggled to find [her] confidence and comfortability with teaching...*” She also struggled to find her “teacher voice” as a novice teacher. She also compared the areas she lacked to the identified strengths of her partner, Derrick, in her seventh journal. “*I was not competent at all, I didn’t have like [these things] I know Derrick has...he has more like a teacher perspective...students looked at him more as a teacher than me.*” Moreover, Macy suggested how the age discrepancy contributed to their distinctness in teaching experiences, approaches, and support provided to one another.

In his interview, Derek detailed his significant challenges with Macy’s unresponsiveness and limited experience. First, communication created barriers to co-planning fluidity.

...we kind of had a hard time communicating. We weren’t able to meet up on the same days. We weren’t really talking as much as I had hoped...[when trying] to set something up where [I] have an idea but now [I’m] waiting for hours before touch[ing] base and discuss[ing] it.

A second identified barrier to effectiveness was their ability to “...*push [and] motivate each other*” when collaborating in an unequal partnership. Derek felt that he was essentially “*taking over*” and “*put in a role of more responsibility tha[n he was] used to...*” in terms of their shared responsibilities outside and within the classroom setting. Derek also shared that besides leading their partnership, he also barred the responsibility of guiding and “*leading [his] co-teacher [since he] had more experience.*” After several weeks of taking the lead in the partnership, he reported that he decided to encourage her to develop lessons “...*she wanted to do*” so she could “...*feel comfortable in the class.*” Quite the opposite, Macy cited that after her

supervisor made her aware that Derrick was taking on a more prominent role in the classroom, she communicated her “*need to take more of a leadership role in the class because the students did not see [her] as a big role in th[e] classroom*” to Derrick. As a result, Macy indicated that Derek “*allowed her*” to take on a more significant role in the classroom.

Overall, Derrick did not feel confident they performed well as classroom teachers or passed the fieldwork requirement. He further elaborated on this sentiment during the interview:

Even at the end of the semester, I’ve still really been stressing over with what we’ve done in the classes...[since] it was pretty stagnant [and] the [unit plan] didn’t quite come into existence...the students who were struggling [at the beginning] were] still struggling...we struggled from week to week and we weren’t able to build the blocks throughout the semester to do anything that showed great improvement.

Nancy and Danielle

Nancy and Danielle represented a somewhat effective co-teaching partnership. They both perceived their co-teaching partnership positively initially and over time. However, when they were describing the actions of their partners, the picture of co-teaching they presented was far from positive. Nancy’s interview responses characterized her co-teacher, Danielle, as inflexible, inconsiderate, and rigid. “*I felt that she could have [been] more flexibl[e] and [take] initiative...she relied on me [and] would delegate roles to me...if I asked her to share the roles she wasn’t receptive to that.*”

Danielle in her interview reflected that she was unaware that she came across as inflexible commenting on how she had to accommodate her partner and her needs. “*I was trying to grasp her ideas but sometimes I [thought] how does that fit with [the lesson]? So it took a lot of flexibility [on my end].*” Nancy also felt that she had to be “*a little more flexible.*”

Nancy said she had her lessons learned from her experiences: “*This experience made me more confident about teaching, teaching alongside someone [who] could have helped me out...to gain more experience...*” Ironically, Danielle wanted to continue her friendship with Nancy. “*I definitely [want] to extend my relationship with [Nancy] and I hope we continue after this experience and still keep in touch [so] she can give me some advice or suggestions...and I could help her too.*” Their perceptions did not match their reported experiences and their feelings towards each other differed greatly.

Sandy and Dolores

Sandy and Dolores represented a second somewhat effective pattern, slightly different from Nancy and Danielle. Their dynamics were unique in comparison to the three other partnerships. According to Slatcher et al. (2008), specific words and language used in conversation “convey information about who they are, their motives, their audience, and their situations” (p. 407). More precisely, some studies have indicated that using specific words—such as pronouns—provides insights into the quality of relationships (Simmons et al., 2005; Williams et al., 2010). In Sandy’s case, her responses across journal entries and the interview demonstrated that using specific pronouns such as *she* and *her* to refer to her co-partner was associated with negative perceptions. For example, “*she would never let me know anything.*” “*...she was really closed off...*” “[*she*] *left me along with the kids...twice...*” These negative perceptions led her to view her partner as an individual rather than a dependable partner.

Sandy’s use of *I*, *my*, and *me* pronouns in her responses demonstrated a lack of focus and connection to their relationship. It also provided insight into the strain that existed in the relationship overall. “*I’m gonna make sure I’m prepared one way or another...*,” “*I felt there wasn’t really encouragement of collaboration...*,” “*...I felt [I] could have been better with my*

classroom [alone] because my co-teacher and I we just never met eye to eye...” Sandy felt she was put in a position to feel alone, looking out for herself, and lack of dependency and trust required between teachers in a partnership. Thus, these types of words highlighted the incompatibility in the collaboration on Sandy’s behalf.

Dolores, however, used a mixture of *we* and *I* language patterns. Dolores used *I* pronouns when she reflected. In one instance, she acknowledged one of her shortcomings in taking the *easier* route in allowing her partner, Sandy, to take the initiative on all their shared responsibilities. In other instances, Dolores used *we/us* statements when negotiating *power* and *conflict* within the relationship.

...we had different ideas...we were trying to like, come to a safe space. But like one of us had to lean in more to agree than other times...it was me that would lean in...she[had] too much leadership it's like, okay, you want things your way...I need to be heard a little bit more. -Week 16 interview

Even though Sandy was the only participant who explicitly perceived her experience negatively, and Dolores stated she had a positive co-taught experience, their partnership was somewhat effective because they shared limited successes in completing their course assignments, dividing some of the responsibilities, and communicating frequently about their upcoming lessons. The differences in their personalities, attitudes, approaches, and teaching experiences created barriers impacting their effectiveness globally. Overall, Sandy and Dolores were effective as individual teachers but differed in their positive (Dolores) and negative (Sandy) attitudes toward co-teaching.

Stacy and David

Based on their journal entries and interview responses, Stacy and David exemplified an effective partnership with positive attitudes toward co-teaching throughout the experience. Even though Stacy and David did not have an input in selecting their co-partners, they developed a friendship early on due to their shared similarities in their attitudes toward their fieldwork and personal experiences. They mutually identified their strengths as a team throughout the experience: “...we had effective communication from day one...,” “we worked together...,” “...we’re both coachable...,” “...we both learned from each other...,” “...we thought of like creative ideas together...,” and “...we were always there early. We were always the first ones in the morning seminar and the evening seminar.” As a result, their collaborative behaviors enhanced their co-teaching skill sets and positive attitudes toward co-teaching in the moment and near future. “I am really thankful we work together as a team...[and] nothing hindered our success in co-teaching [throughout] the semester...”

Summary

The concept of effectiveness emerged in the present study. Similar to Nokes et al.’s (2008) study, I see the dyads’ effectiveness on a continuum from ineffective – to somewhat effective – to effective. There were clear distinctions in the levels of dyad effectiveness. The unique individual and shared attitudes and behaviors contributed to the evolution of these formed dyad typologies. Extending Dee’s (2012) typology, participants who were “not effective” (i.e., somewhat effective, and ineffective) did not see their dyads as a “one solid whole partnership” of which they were a part of but continued to see each other as separate participants of the process.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to identify and examine the perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching over time for preservice special education teachers in their early co-taught fieldwork. Besides discussing the perceived benefits and challenges they experienced in the fieldwork, preservice teachers also considered the factors that supported and hindered their co-teaching. In this chapter, I propose a modified conceptual framework for the early fieldwork experiences in the context of Situated Learning Theory (SLT), examine the contributions of this study to the existing research on co-teaching, and discuss factors that influence the typology of dyads and the professional growth they accomplished.

The Situated Learning Theory (SLT)

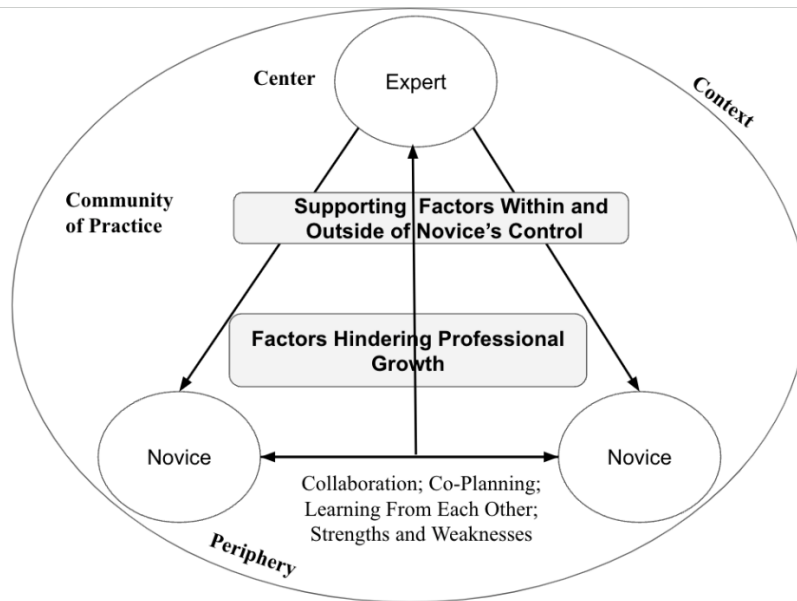
Situated Learning Theory (SLT) research generally examines the advantages and opportunities to generalize theory into practice. Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that learners gradually acquire knowledge and specific skill sets to transition from trainees/novices to experts. In the communities of practice, this transformation is gradual and takes time. For participants in this study, the time spent in early fieldwork was limited to 15 weeks. It would be too ambitious to expect the preservice participants to transform into experts within this limited time. Therefore, this study suggests a possible modification of the working model of SLT, where the factors that promoted and hindered collaboration along with the limited time, contribute to different stages of growth (see Figures 3 and 4).

Lave and Wenger (1991) also focused on the significance of the interactions and overall relationships “*between newcomers and old-timers or more knowledgeable others to frame learning as a dynamic process of guidance, support, and co-construction*” of a phenomenon (in

the case of the study, co-teaching at the Learning Center) (O'Brien & Battista, 2020, p. 483). Notably, in the context of co-teaching at the Learning Center, the *old timer* or *more knowledgeable others* were the supervisors. In addition to their expertise, within the co-teaching partnership, two *newcomers*, or preservice teachers, took the reins of the learning process and created a pathway through trial and error. The combination of their strengths, weaknesses, and factors specific to each dyad also impacted the guidance, support (or lack of), and co-construction of co-teaching within each dyad. Therefore, the modified SLT model suggested by this study also features the lines of interdependence between the novices in the dyads (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

SLT Model for Early Co-Teaching Fieldwork

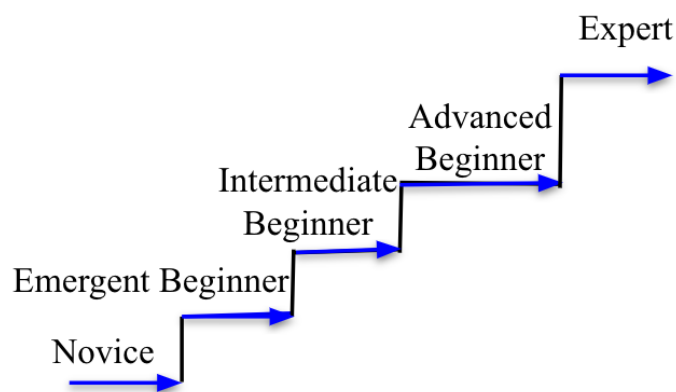


The findings of the study further presented three types of dyads based on their co-teaching experience: effective, somewhat effective, and ineffective. Mapping these types on the SLT model's line from novice to expert, it appears that the three types of dyads can be placed at

different stages on their way to expert status. Based on the findings of the study, I would like to suggest that the participants' dyads could be seen as advanced beginners (for effective dyads), intermediate beginners (for somewhat effective dyads), and emergent beginners (for ineffective dyads), thus making the trajectory from novice to expert a less linear and more stage-by-stage process. Figure 4 illustrates the gradual transformation that occurred within this study.

Figure 4

Stage-By-Stage Process Toward Expert Status



Study's Contributions to Research

Findings Consistent With Previous Literature

The study was consistent with the previous literature findings describing the factors that support co-teaching, the benefits and challenges of co-teaching, and the drawbacks that resulted from the experience.

Factors Supporting Co-Teaching. My study's findings showed that *positive co-planning* was a factor that was within preservice teachers' control and supported the co-teaching for the majority of the participants. Similar to Gallo-Fox and Scantlebury's (2015) student teachers, several preservice special educators in this study co-constructed their co-planning experience for their success during the planning process. Positive co-planning processes allow

teachers to “develop a shared language, mutual goals for teaching, and agreement” (Drewes et al., 2021).

This study also found that *compatibility* in the relationship was a crucial factor contributing to preservice special educators’ co-teaching and dyad success. In both studies, co-teachers indicated that personal compatibility positively shaped their experiences and was important for co-teaching success (Dee, 2012; Scruggs et al., 2007). Compatibility was also recognized in Keefe and Moore’s study (2004), where co-teachers identified the importance of teacher compatibility as a significant theme representing their practices. In this study, preservice teachers found that their personal and professional compatibility embodied their shared strengths as a team as they continued to learn about each other, thus contributing to a positive outlook toward their co-teacher and their partnerships overall.

Benefits of Co-Teaching. Similar to Kamens (2007), most of my study’s participants emphasized the impact of the technical support they received from each other. Like Simmons et al.’s (2020) study, student teachers expressed how their paired placement was a source of support as they navigated their student teaching together.

Challenges of Co-Teaching. Administrative support was one of the challenges of co-teaching documented in prior literature (Moore & Keefe, 2001). Lack of or limited administrative support must be addressed to foster co-teaching success amongst co-teaching partnerships (Friend, 2008). Administrative support coupled with verbal and actionable behaviors enable administrators (i.e., university supervisor, principal, etc.) to lay crucial conditions that will make co-teaching feasible and positive (Friend, 2008; Scruggs et al., 2007).

In this study, preservice teachers identified differences in pedagogical approaches as an area of professional incompatibility and as a challenge of co-teaching. Prior research has found

that differences in philosophical pedagogy negatively impacts successful co-teaching (Scruggs et al., 2007; Pratt, 2014). Pesonen et al.'s (2021) study found that teachers developed negative attitudes toward the co-teaching partnership when incompatibility is apparent. This outcome aligned with one preservice teacher in this study who developed more negative perceptions of her co-teacher and their relationship.

Disadvantages Resulting from Co-Teaching. Very few studies examine the disadvantages resulting from co-teaching. The research that exists on this topic examines the impact of co-teaching on students. Wilson and Michaels (2006) found that secondary general education students reported confusion due to co-teaching. This was similar to the current study where two ESN preservice teachers discussed how student confusion was a perceived negative impact resulting from difficulties with co-teaching. While it is fortunate that the themes of benefits of co-teaching prevail over the disadvantages resulting from it, it is concerning that the negative impact on students remains as a consistent disadvantage across the literature. Furthermore, research on student perceptions of co-teaching is limited and warrants further exploration.

Findings Extending Previous Literature

The typology of co-teaching dyads has been explored in previous literature. For instance, Nokes et al. (2008) placed three of the study's student teaching teams on the "collaboration during planning" and "collaboration during instruction" continuum and described the position of the co-teaching teams on it. In this study, I see the trajectory from novice to expert as a similar step-by-step continuum. The dyads of advanced beginners in my study (Stacy and David) shared some characteristics of Nokes et al.'s fully cooperative participants with their collaborative approach when planning and brainstorming over time. Becoming fully collaborative in the co-

planning process took time and commitment to discuss different ways and ideas to increase the rigor of their lessons while keeping students at the forefront of their work throughout the 13 weeks. This resulted in positive results that benefitted both dyads' co-planning fluidity. Sandy and Dolores also had similar parallels to a dyad in Dee's (2012) study in which a teacher candidate shared that her partner did not consistently contribute to their partnership as time progressed. Although this teacher candidate's co-partner required early intervention due to gaps in skill sets, Sandy—similar to the teacher candidate in Dee's study—indirectly became the stronger candidate who did not receive the planning and instructional feedback expected from Dolores throughout the 13 weeks. Both Sandy and the teacher candidate in Dee's (2012) study perceived that they did not benefit from an inequitable relationship. Sandy and the teacher candidate developed more negative attitudes about co-teaching partnerships than when they started their experiences and preferred working independently. Thus, a partnership must be “mutually beneficial” to be viable and increase both co-teachers' interest to collaboratively and equitably participate in partnerships (Duffield et al., 2013; Kaplan et al., 2017).

Participants' Actions and Attitudes Contributing to Success

Review of participants' journal entries over time and their interviews also revealed some patterns in their actions and attitudes that contributed to success of the co-teaching experience and professional growth or lack of progress. Notably, preservice teachers who were initially positive and open-minded performed better and contributed to their partnership's success. Additionally, co-teachers who channeled their *ideal partner*—described in their first journal—and embodied the attributes of their *perfect partner* themselves, developed more quickly compared to those who waited for their co-teachers to become the ideal partner they envisioned or blamed others for the absence of the desire to change in their co-teacher. Therefore, those who

waited or blamed others for the lack of their co-partners' development into the *ideal* partner had less noticeable growth by others and themselves.

Overall, this study observed growth based on preservice teachers' self-report over time as they completed their semester-long fieldwork. The self-reflection accomplished by preservice teachers in their journals and interviews did not solely lead to rapid growth in the dyads that were effective and somewhat effective. Instead, increased growth was achieved through self-reflection and the attitudes and actions towards the construct of the *ideal* partner model that each preservice teacher constructed before starting their co-taught fieldwork. Macy and Derrick, the ineffective dyad, for example, grew less for two reasons. First, they expected their supervisor to dictate what they should and should not accomplish throughout the fieldwork. Secondly, Macy and Derrick dwelled on each other's weaknesses that fed into "the little hole they dug" for themselves. Hence, this study suggests some new mechanisms of how preservice teachers can grow and develop co-teaching and collaborative skill sets over time, in addition to how an attempt to reproduce real-world inclusive settings like the Learning Center may not be conducive for some preservice teachers to learn under these conditions.

Study's Contributions to Practice

Unique Fieldwork Setting

Generally, traditional field experiences involve student teachers taking more responsibility as time progresses, while the certified master teacher gradually releases the responsibility of the classroom to a student teacher. A more modern co-teaching approach in student teaching is between certified cooperating mentor teachers and teacher candidates collaborating face-to-face in a real-world classroom. To enhance preservice special education

teachers' learning experience, the Learning Center is a unique model that approximates what the candidates may experience in inclusive classrooms once they become certified special educators.

The Learning Center, as a unique fieldwork setting, contributes to ongoing research in its efforts to build co-teaching skill sets of preservice special educators through practical field experiences. The Learning Center also contributes to a novice-novice dyad exploration. Although the structure of the experience was a simulated setting that attempted to resemble the co-teaching and collaboration in a real-world inclusive co-taught classroom, it produced interesting results.

Preservice teachers who always expected support from their supervisor(s) grew less than those who did not wait for their supervisor's approval. The expectation that supervisors are *powerful* and should provide step-by-step directions and guidance to the dyads was unrealistic.

Conversely, preservice teachers who did not expect step-by-step support from their supervisor(s) grew more than those who waited for their supervisor's support. Stacy and David were prime examples of a strong and effective dyad who shared the same supervisor as Macy and Derrick. Rather than involving their supervisor, Stacy and David took the initiative to collaborate, trust, and depend on each other to advance their success. Unlike Macy and Derrick, Stacy and David focused on their similarities and the benefit of learning from each other's experiences and expertise. Consequently, the strongest dyad held realistic views of their supervisor's role compared to the weakest dyad, which relied heavily on their supervisor and required extensive support.

Pairing Co-Teachers

Traditionally, co-teachers are matched by their educational experience. In the literature, preservice teachers, regardless of the fieldwork experience, are generally paired with a veteran

teacher who is certified and knowledgeable in content areas and classroom and behavioral management. Thus, the more experienced teacher is paired with a less experienced educator in these dynamics. In the Learning Center, preservice teachers are paired utilizing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) conceptualization where one preservice teacher is more advanced and experienced than the other in addition to the compatibility of candidates' expertise, skills, and interests.

In the study, three partnerships experienced incompatibility in their co-teacher relationships. Two of the three partnerships had distinct differences in personal and professional agreement that caused tensions, frustrations, limited equity, and collaborative behaviors that negatively impacted their relationship. Interestingly, as participants reflected on their professional and personal growth throughout the fieldwork experience in their interviews, one participant, Sandy, expressed how she wished and expected to be paired with someone who shared the same attitudes, values and beliefs as her. This expectation significantly differs from past research in matching co-teachers based on experience, compatibility, and co-teaching needs. While in a perfect world—or a setting like the Learning Center—this expectation is idealistic, it is a difficult request to satisfy. Within the context of the Learning Center, there are between 20 to 25 preservice teachers enrolled per semester; thus, it is unrealistic to pair co-teachers with who they envision is their *perfect* and *ideal* co-teacher. Therefore, teacher preparation programs must train preservice teachers to collaborate with people with different attitudes, values, and/or beliefs to better prepare themselves for the obstacles they may encounter in real-life classrooms.

Working with individuals with different attitudes, values, and/or beliefs may prompt preservice teachers to get to know their peers. In the Learning Center, practices in the first two weeks of orientation include providing opportunities for preservice teachers to introduce

themselves, share a physical space, and get acquainted with each other. Preservice teachers are not informed who their co-teachers are during this time as enrollment and withdrawals fluctuate during these initial weeks. Notably, one of the participants, Dolores, suggested that the Learning Center staff engage in ice-breaking activities (i.e., blurbs of self) and notify teachers of their co-partners the first week of orientation rather than the week before they begin co-teaching. This would allow preservice teachers to get to know each other beforehand. Ultimately, these recommendations emphasize preservice teachers' opportunity to actively have some input into the pairing decision. This study's practical contexts and outcomes require further research to validate these preliminary findings.

Limitations

The study had several limitations. This study used a limited number of data sources (journals and interviews). Only one set of semi-structured interviews was conducted at the end of the experience. This limits the study's conclusions about participants' growth primarily qualitative changes. The limited number of participants precluded any possibility of quantitative analysis. The data collected for this study was self-reported by participants and was not accompanied by observations to validate preliminary findings or further triangulate the data. This allows for potential participant bias and limits our understanding of the data from dyads that presented contrasting representations of the partnerships.

Most participants were enrolled in the Mild/Moderate Support Needs (MMSN) credential program, and only two participants were in the Extensive Support Needs (ESN) credential program. This limits the study's ability to comprehend and measure specific perceived benefits, challenges, and overall experiences of Extensive Support Needs (ESN) preservice teachers who must have further specialization in supporting students requiring extensive support

needs. All participants were enrolled in a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located in Southern California and completed their fieldwork in a unique setting that attempted to replicate the realities of real-life inclusive classrooms where they may teach in the future. This type of fieldwork limits how researchers apply this data more broadly since co-teaching during in-service teaching involves a general educator and a more experienced teacher in the partnership. The sample size for this study was small, and participants shared similar demographic and linguistic backgrounds. These participants are less likely to be representative of the population of MMSNs and/or ESNs preservice teachers engaging in early co-taught fieldwork and co-taught partnerships across the nation since novice-novice co-teaching fieldwork is not a standard fieldwork setting in teacher education programs.

Future Directions

Based on the findings of this study, there are several suggestions for future research. First, future studies focusing on preservice special educators' co-teaching in early fieldwork should extend the timeframe in which preservice teachers reflect on their professional and personal growth. The current study analyzed preservice teachers' data sources for 13 weeks within the semester; thus, it would be interesting to determine if participants experience more growth long term.

Second, future research should measure the personal individual growth of preservice teachers and dyad growth. Measuring both personal and dyad growth will provide insight into whether both these areas moved in the same direction, were consistent, or possibly one area (i.e., personal or dyad) grew while the other did not.

The current study followed a qualitative methodology. Future research should consider conducting both quantitative and qualitative studies to further explore several factors. First, the

number of total participants (n=8) and co-taught partnerships (n=4) was very small. Larger studies should be conducted to study participants' growth quantitatively. Second, six participants pursued a Mild to Moderate Support Needs (MMSN) credential, whereas two pursued an Extensive Support Needs (ESN) credential type, and the geographical area was in the Southern California region of the United States. Future research extending this study should increase the number of participants in each specialization. Co-taught partnerships across different regions of the United States should be studied for findings to generalize across broader contexts. In doing so, a larger sample may assist in learning whether confounding factors such as credential type, age, and experience of preservice teachers in dyads affect candidates' professional growth.

Finally, research should focus on exploring and measuring the locus of control of preservice special education teachers in fieldwork. Locus of control refers to an individual's beliefs about the extent of control they have over their own fate or actions that affect them (Rotter, 1966). Although this study did not measure locus of control, preservice teachers in successful and effective dyads like Stacy and David manifested internal control since they attributed their successes to their combined dedication, commitment, efforts, and abilities; thus, there was a strong association between their actions and results (Rotter, 1966). Those in ineffective dyads displayed a more external locus in which they attributed their success and failures to outside factors (i.e., supervisors, etc.). Preservice teachers' locus of control must be explored in future studies to validate initial findings. Moreover, future research should explore whether the effectiveness of dyads stems from individual participants being effective or if effectiveness is a collective quality of the dyad.

Implications for Teacher Education

The study provided insight for designing co-taught fieldwork that prepares teachers-in-training for co-teaching and collaborative practice. Although not all dyads were considered, “effective,” the findings suggest that preservice special educators engaging in co-taught fieldwork *during* their teacher preparation programs enhanced their co-teaching and collaborative practice to different degrees. Preservice teachers can gain practical co-teaching skills and critical high-leverage practices (collaboration, assessment, social-emotional, behavioral, and instruction). They also have the opportunity to gain experience in fostering a professional and collegial relationship with a co-partner who is at the same level (uncertified) before they earn their full certification. Creating power balanced preservice partnerships in their fieldwork is a significant component that distinguishes traditional student teaching (i.e., a certified cooperating teacher paired with a preservice teacher) and/or a “real world” co-teaching partnerships with certified teachers (i.e., general education and special education teacher). Current study findings also revealed that preservice teachers who attributed their successes to their own behaviors and abilities and did not expect support from their supervisors were effective dyads. Thus, they experienced personal and professional growth from co-teaching. On the contrary, those who required supervisory support at every step of the way noticeably grew less.

Furthermore, future certified special education teachers need particular skills and supports to engage in the co-teaching process competently. The study participants expressed how teacher preparation programs may need to focus on the importance of the following areas for them to engage in the co-teaching process to improve their practices skillfully.

1. frontloading *beforehand* the physical and mental demands of such field experience,

2. increasing guidance from their supervisors in implementing co-teaching models, navigating instructional practices, and delivering lessons with a co-partner,
3. providing observational opportunities for preservice teachers to see different grade levels (than the ones they were assigned to co-teach), other preservice teachers' instructional methods, and varied classroom and behavioral management skills.

Conclusion

The study described preservice special education teachers' perceived benefits and challenges of co-teaching in early fieldwork. Notably, preservice teachers also considered how factors that supported their co-teaching and the disadvantages they experienced impacted their perceptions. Through analysis of participants' journal entries and interviews, the findings of this study suggest that early co-taught fieldwork as a requirement in teacher preparation programs has the potential to prepare preservice teachers with co-teaching and collaborative expectations required of special education teachers for California's Education Specialist Instruction credential.

Overall, this study adds to the limited but growing literature that highlights elements that will prepare future special education teachers for the realities of teaching in diverse and inclusive classrooms. This study also provides a starting point for evaluating the impact of co-taught field experiences between two preservice special educators rather than practicing general education and special education teachers.

Appendix A

Terminology

The following terminology is critical to holistically understand the complexity of teacher education and special education.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

“...is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children” (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA], 2004).

Preservice Teachers

Individuals enrolled in a teacher education program who complete necessary coursework, gain classroom experience through supervised teaching, and frequently collaborate with a mentor teacher while pursuing their teaching credentials. Preservice teachers are also referred to in the literature as teacher candidates or student teachers. The study will focus on special education preservice teachers.

In-Service Special Education Teachers

Individuals who have already completed basic training in their teacher education programs and have received their Preliminary credential. They are now classroom teachers.

Mild Moderate Support Needs (MMSN)

The abbreviation, *MMSN*, is Mild to Moderate Support Needs, a special education credential type. Teachers with a MMSN Education Specialist credential are expected to teach individuals with various disabilities in academic, social, behavioral, and vocational skills.

Extensive Support Needs (ESN)

The abbreviation, *ESN*, an Extensive Support Needs credential type, prepares educators to work with students with disabilities who require more intensive support and assistance with independent living skills.

Internship

Entails an alternative route for preservice teachers to earn their teaching credential. It provides preservice teachers the opportunity to acquire classroom experience as classroom teachers while completing coursework requirements for their preliminary credential.

Co-Teaching

For this study, co-teaching is defined as a partnering-instructional model between a certified general and special education teacher who collaboratively plan, deliver instruction together, and co-assess culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with and without disabilities in an inclusive classroom setting to meet the educational and behavioral needs of all students (Friend et al., 2010; Kamens & Casale-Giannola, 2004; Keeley et al., 2017; Ricci et al., 2017). Co-teaching focuses on two or more teachers teaching in the same classroom environment who engage in collaborative teaching, planning, evaluation, and reflection. They are jointly responsible for the academic progress and achievement of students with disabilities within the LRE (McHatton & Daniel, 2008).

Fieldwork Experiences

Fieldwork experiences are unpaid direct experience(s) designed for preservice teachers to develop and practice teaching and pedagogy skills within a real-world classroom setting. In these classroom settings, they develop and engage in instructional experiences for students with and without disabilities under the close supervision of an assigned and experienced university field supervisor and/or classroom mentor teacher. Within the literature, fieldwork experiences are also

referred to as student teaching, clinical practice, clinical experiences, directed teaching, or practicums.

Appendix B

Weekly Journal Entry Prompts

Week 2 Journal Entry Prompt

Describe your ideal partner and collaborative partnership for the next 13 weeks.

Week 7 and 12 Journal Entry Prompts

- a) What were the key factors that contributed to your success in co-teaching this week?
Why?
- b) What were the key factors that hindered your success in co-teaching this week? Why?
- c) What bolstered your professional growth this week? Why?
- d) What impeded your professional growth this week? Why?
- e) What bolstered your personal growth this week? Why?
- f) What impeded your personal growth this week? Why?

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions

1. Refer to the first teacher journal entry you completed before beginning your early fieldwork with your assigned partner. In your first entry, you described your ideal partner, ideal collaborative partnership, and ideal co-teaching for the rest of the semester. Now that you have completed your co-taught experience, how did your experience compare or differ from your initial response? Why?
2. How are you different at the end of this co-taught fieldwork?
3. Has co-teaching at the Learning Center bolstered your professional growth? If so, how?
4. Has co-teaching at the Learning Center bolstered your personal growth? If so, how?
5. Have your values and beliefs changed as a result of your co-teaching at the Learning Center? If so, how?
6. What are your thoughts on special education preservice teachers co-teaching with other special education preservice teachers?
7. What do you see as the most challenging aspects of participating in a co-taught fieldwork with another special education preservice teacher rather than a general education preservice teacher?
8. How has co-teaching at the Learning Center enhanced your understanding and knowledge of co-teaching as well as co-teaching skills?
9. How has this fieldwork helped promote your identity as a future certified special education teacher?
10. What ideas do you have for improving co-teaching practices at the Learning Center?

Appendix D

Codebook

Benefits of Co-Teaching		
Code	Definition	Cited Literature
Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities	Related to roles and responsibilities co-teachers take on. This code refers to agreed shared roles co-teachers take on within their co-teaching relationship and models (i.e., content/curriculum experts versus disability-specific teaching adaptations experts; lead versus supportive assistance in the classroom) and structure of classroom interactions (i.e., interactions in classroom amongst both teachers and Teachers and students). Additionally, the equitable division of responsibilities within the relationship and/or positive perceptions related to executing their individual and/or shared responsibilities (i.e., time management, grading, differentiation, accommodations, adjustments/modifications, progress monitoring, data collection, classroom/behavioral management and rules, creating hands-on activities and instructional processes, and co-planning). Furthermore, responsibility in claiming ownership of all students, and serving as motivators for their students.	Bessette (2008) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers. Kamens (2007) : Preservice teachers (dual elementary/SpEd) candidates Mastropieri et al. (2005) : Mixture of certified Gen Ed & SpEd teacher dyads Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) Brendle et al. (2017) : In service teachers (Gen Ed & SpEd teachers)
Compatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship	Related to the degree to which individual co-teachers within a co-teaching relationship have distinct similarities in personal and professional agreement. This code refers to personal characteristics related to personality traits, personal opinions, and perspectives that complement the co-teaching relationship. Professional compatibility refers to similarities in teaching and management styles, intrinsic motivation toward teaching, and the co-teaching relationship. This also refers to co-teachers' ability to attempt and/or resolve difficulties they may encounter and negotiate (i.e., come to a middle ground) an outcome that is fair, equitable, and agreeable to both teachers. Co-teachers have mutual trust and respect for one another. Thus, similarities and differences encourage individual personal and professional reflection and introspection.	Bessette (2008) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers. Kamens (2007) : Preservice teachers (dual elementary/SpEd) candidates Mastropieri et al. (2005) : Mixture of certified Gen Ed & SpEd teacher dyads Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) McHatton & Daniel (2008) : Gen Ed Master Teacher with 1 SpEd
Perceived efficiency of the co-teaching partnership	Related to co-teaching arrangements/relationships. This code refers to how teachers positively perceive their co-teaching relationship whether they did or did not have any input into the arrangement decision. They perceive the co-taught relationship as efficient and/or attribute an overall purpose of co-teaching and/or the relationship.	Mastropieri et al. (2005) : Mixture of certified Gen Ed & SpEd teacher dyads Brendle et al. (2017) : In service teachers (Gen Ed & SpEd teachers) Ricci et al. (2019) (Persiani): 25 Single Subjects Gen Ed Preservice Ts and 12 SpEd Preservice Ts with Mentors (n=24 Gen Ed) and (n=11 SpEd). Ricci et al. (2017) (O'Leary): 57 preservice
Positive Administrative Support	Related to the support provided by school administrators, university field supervisors, fieldwork supervisors, and/or doctoral students to preservice and/or in-service teachers. This code refers to the commitment administrators have to support an inclusion model and how teachers and administrators/supervisors positively relate to and perceive each other when working in inclusive classrooms. Lastly, support also encompasses professional preparation, training, expectations, co-teaching and inclusion perspectives, supervising, and evaluating co-teachers.	Brendle et al. (2017) : In service teachers (Gen Ed & SpEd teachers) Darragh et al. (2011) : Mentor teacher paired w/preservice gen ed Teachers in K-12 internship Pratt (2014) : 4 co-teaching teams (in-service) Gen Ed and SpEd.
Comfort from Peer Support	Related to the emotional and technical support provided to one another (co-teachers). This code refers to sharing similar experiences with a co-teacher, the impact of having two teachers support one another, and the technical and emotional support involved in supporting one another.	teachers (dual elementary/SpEd) candidates Dee (2012) : 4 dyads in Elementary and 2 dyads in MS. Preservice Gen Ed Teachers 6 Mentor Teachers. (1 Mentor T & 2 Preservice T's). Tschida et al. (2015) : 1 Mentor

Challenges of Co-Teaching		
Code	Definition	Cited Literature
Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities	Related to roles and responsibilities co-teachers take on. This code refers to difficulties in shared roles co-teachers take on within their co-teaching relationship and models (i.e., content/curriculum experts versus disability-specific teaching adaptations experts; lead versus supportive assistance in the classroom). Additionally, the an inequitable division of responsibilities within the relationship and/or negative/inequitable/areas of improvement perceptions related to executing their individual and/or shared responsibilities (i.e., time management, grading, differentiation, accommodations, adjustments/modifications, progress monitoring, data collection, classroom/behavioral management and rules, creating hands-on activities and instruction, and co-planning). Furthermore, a lack of responsibility in claiming ownership of all students (i.e., general education teachers supporting and taking ownership of SWODs and SWDs' academic and socio-emotional outcomes and not solely SWODs), inadequate instruction (i.e., subject matter confusion, lack of student engagement), and lack of student engagement.	Bessette (2008) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers. Kamens (2007) : Preservice teachers (dual elementary/SpEd) candidates Mastropieri et al. (2005) : Mixture of certified Gen Ed & SpEd teacher dyads Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) McHatton & Daniel (2008) : Gen Ed Master Teacher with 1 SpEd preservice teacher and 2 Gen Ed preservice teachers. Brendle et al. (2017) : In service teachers (Gen Ed & SpEd teachers) Dieker (2001) : 9 gen ed in-service teachers and 7 SpEd teachers
Incompatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship	Related to the degree to which individual co-teachers within a co-teaching relationship have distinct differences in personal and professional agreement which may causes difficulties or tensions (i.e., strong disagreements, inability to find common ground, competition between co-teachers, frustrations, limited or lack of equity and/or respect, unresponsiveness) that negatively impact the co-teaching relationship. This code refers to distinct personal characteristics related to personality traits, personal opinions, and perspectives. Professional incompatibility refers to distinct teaching (i.e., structured versus less structured approaches, individualistic versus collectivist approaches, etc.) and management styles and intrinsic motivation toward teaching and the co-teaching relationship.	Mastropieri et al. (2005) : Mixture of certified Gen Ed & SpEd teacher dyads Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) McHatton & Daniel (2008) : Gen Ed Master Teacher with 1 SpEd preservice teacher and 2 Gen Ed preservice teachers. Ricci et al. (2019) (Perstani): 25 Single Subjects Gen Ed Preservice Ts and 12 SpEd Preservice Ts. with Mentors (n=24 Gen Ed) and (n=11 SpEd). Ricci et al. (2017) : (Osipova): 57 preservice special education Teachers at
Perceived inefficiency of the co-teaching partnership	Related to co-teaching arrangements/relationships. This code refers to how teachers negatively perceive their co-teaching relationship as a "marriage" that they did not have any input into the arrangement decision-making. Also, negatively questioning the efficacy or purpose of co-teaching and/or the relationship and perceive co-taught relationship as a need of volunteerism or self-selection not an imposed assignment.	Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) McHatton & Daniel (2008) : Gen Ed Master Teacher with 1 SpEd preservice teacher and 2 Gen Ed preservice teachers. Ricci et al. (2017) : (Osipova): 57 preservice special education Teachers at LC. Darragh et al. (2011) : Mentor teacher paired w/preservice gen ed Teachers in K-12 heterochic
Limited or Lack of Administrative Support	Related to the lack or limited support provided by school administrators, university field supervisors, fieldwork supervisors, and/or doctoral students to preservice and/or in-service teachers. This code refers to the lack of or limited commitment administrators have to support an inclusion model and how teachers and administrators/supervisors negatively relate to and perceive each other when working in inclusive classrooms. Lastly, the limited or lack of support also encompasses minimal professional preparation, training, expectations, co-teaching and inclusion perspectives, supervising, addressing concerns, and evaluating co-teachers.	Scruggs et al. (2007) : Certified Gen Ed & SpEd teachers (Metasynthesis) Pratt (2014) : 4 co-teaching teams (in-service) Gen Ed and SpEd.

Appendix E

Coding and Data Reduction Table

Codes	Categories	Themes
Journal Entry #1		
Desired Personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Compatibility in Co- Teaching Relationship
Desired Professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	
Desired roles within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Desired skillsets in differentiation, Classroom & Behavioral Management, Instructional delivery, Co- Planning	Equal Division of Shared Responsibilities	
Open-minded, flexibility, responsible, creative, same passion, and commitment to	Expectations of their ideal Co-Teacher	Expectations

teach, leadership skills, constructive feedback		
Effective communication, mutual respect and trust, collaborative, learning from mistakes	Expectations of their ideal Co-Teaching Partnership	
Positive attitude, open-mindedness, learning from their co-teacher	Individual Expectations	
Potential differences in personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Incompatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship
Potential differences in Professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	
Potential Difficulties in the roles taken within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Potential Difficulties equitable division in differentiation, Classroom & Behavioral	Equal Division of Shared Responsibilities	

Management, Instructional delivery, Co-Planning		
Willing to work as a team, share communications and concerns effectively, similar expectations	Desire to perceive co-teaching relationship positively and efficient	Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Attributing an overall purpose to co-teaching, co-teachers, and/or relationship		
Unwilling to work as a team, uncommunicative and unwilling to share concerns, dissimilar expectations	May perceive co-teaching relationship as negative and inefficient	Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Questioning co-teaching, co-teachers, and/or relationship		
Promoting personal and professional growth	Self-Reflection	Self-Reflection
Bringing specific educational experiences and abilities into the partnership	Reflecting on their partnership	
Allocating time to plan together	Ideal Co-planning	Positive Co-Planning

Desire to discuss ideas, roles, responsibilities for upcoming lessons		
Journal Entries #2 & 3		
Similar Personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Compatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship
Similar Professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	
Roles within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Differentiation, Classroom & Behavioral Management, Instructional delivery, Co-Planning	Equal Division of Shared Responsibilities	
Working as a team, communicating and sharing	Perceived co-teaching relationship positively and efficient	Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership

concerns effectively, had similar expectations		
Attributed an overall purpose to co-teaching, co-teachers, and/or relationship		
Suggestions from supervisors, promotes motivation, increased guidance, discussion with supervisor	Commitment to support teachers	Positive Administrative Support
More guidance, and feedback requested	Limited/lack of support from supervisors	Limited or Lack of Administrative Support
Contributed with ideas, equal amount of feedback and support, support with modeling or expanding on thoughts during instruction	Technical Support	Comfort from Peer Support
Sharing similar personal experiences	Emotional Support	
Differences in personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Incompatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship

Differences in professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	
Difficulties in the roles taken within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Difficulties in equal contributions in differentiation, Classroom & Behavioral Management, Instructional delivery, Co-Planning	Unequal Division of Shared Responsibilities	
Unwilling to work as a team, uncommunicative and unwilling to share concerns, dissimilar expectations	Perceiving co-teaching relationship as negative and inefficient	Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Questioning co-teaching, co-teachers, and/or relationship		
Reflecting one's own strengths		Reflecting on One's Own Strengths and Needs
Reflecting one's own strengths		

Communication with parents, better communication, organized, building rapport with students, bring open and accepting suggestions	Growing awareness of their own strengths and needs	Awareness of Strengths and Needs
Consistent communication, flexible, encouraging, patient, collaboration, instructional practices	Growing awareness of their co-teacher's strengths and needs	
Allocating time to plan together	Co-planning	Positive Co-Planning
Discussed ideas, roles, responsibilities for upcoming lessons		
Interviews		
Similar Personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Compatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship
Similar Professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	

Roles within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Equity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Differentiation, Classroom & Behavioral Management, Instructional delivery, Co-Planning	Equal Division of Shared Responsibilities	
Working as a team, communicating, and sharing concerns effectively, had similar expectations	Perceived co-teaching relationship positively and efficient	Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Attributed an overall purpose to co-teaching, co-teachers, and/or relationship		
Working as a team, communicating, and sharing concerns effectively, had similar expectations	Perceived co-teaching relationship positively and efficient	Perceived Efficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Suggestions from supervisors, promotes motivation, increased guidance, discussion with supervisor	Commitment to support teachers	Positive Administrative Support

More guidance, and feedback requested	Limited/lack of support from supervisors	Limited or Lack of Administrative Support
Contributed with ideas, equal amount of feedback and support, support with modeling or expanding on thoughts during instruction	Technical Support	Comfort from Peer Support
Sharing similar personal experiences	Emotional Support	
Differences in personality traits, Personal Opinions, Personal Perspective	Personal Characteristics	Incompatibility in Co-Teaching Relationship
Differences in professional traits, Professional Opinions/Perspective, Teaching & Management Styles	Professional Characteristics	
Difficulties in the roles taken within co-teaching models and relationship	Agreed Shared Roles	Inequity in Shared Teacher Roles and Responsibilities
Difficulties in equal contributions in differentiation, Classroom &	Unequal Division of Shared Responsibilities	

Behavioral Management, Instructional delivery, Co- Planning		
Unwilling to work as a team, uncommunicative and unwilling to share concerns, dissimilar expectations	Perceiving co-teaching relationship as negative and inefficient	Perceived Inefficiency of the Co-Teaching Partnership
Questioning co-teaching, co- teachers, and/or relationship		
Promoting personal and professional growth	Self-Reflection	Self-Reflection
Bringing specific educational experiences and abilities into the partnership	Reflecting on their partnership	
Communication with parents, better communication, organized, building rapport with students, bring open and accepting suggestions	Growing awareness of their own strengths and needs	Awareness of Strengths and Needs
Consistent communication, flexible, encouraging, patient,	Growing awareness of their co-teacher's strengths and needs	

collaboration, instructional practices		
Allocating time to plan together	Co-planning	Positive Co-Planning
Discussed ideas, roles, responsibilities for upcoming lessons		
Actively applying strategies acquired to real world classrooms	Transferability of acquired skill sets	Generalization of Skill Sets Learned
Disclosing commitment/work required	Expectations vs reality	Mental Preparation Beforehand

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