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Investigating the Collaboration of Teachers of Students with Disabilities and Teaching Assistants in the Classroom

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty of
Montclair State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Montclair State University

Montclair, NJ

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Dissertation Chair: Dr. Monica Taylor

MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY
THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
DISSERTATION APPROVAL

We hereby approve the Dissertation

**Investigating the Collaboration of
Teachers of Students with Disabilities and Teaching Assistants in the Classroom**

of

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Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program:

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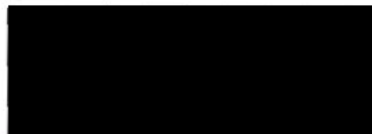


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Abstract

This qualitative dissertation study examined the complex dynamics and structures (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) that influence collaboration between teachers of students with disabilities (TOSD) and teaching assistants (TAs). Specifically, I wanted to learn: (1) What are the complex dynamics (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) that interact to influence collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants? (1a) What role does each participant stakeholder (i.e., teacher, teaching assistant, and principal) play in those complex dynamics? (1b) How do participants develop their understandings about the roles of TOSD and teaching assistants in the teaching and learning process? and (2) How do participants describe the differences, if any, in collaboration between in-school learning and remote learning? The method of data collection consisted of conducting two rounds of intensive interviews (Charmaz, 2014) with seven participants including three teachers of students with disabilities, three teaching assistants, and one school principal. Participant interview transcripts were analyzed through the theoretical lens of critical bifocality.

Four themes emerged from my analysis and findings revealed four complex dynamics that interacted to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration: school leaders, school culture, school structures, and the “hidden hierarchy.” These complex dynamics were interconnected and worked to shape the school conditions that teachers and teaching assistants worked within. The findings of this study had a number of important practical implications for school leaders and teacher education programs and implications for future research.

Keywords: collaboration, teaching assistant, teacher, paraeducator, paraprofessional, special education, self-contained, teamwork

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“Do not judge me by my successes, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again” -Nelson Mandela

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to four of the most important people in my life: my nana (Contrenia Clark), my pops (Baxter Clark, Sr.), my mother (Hannah Clark), and my aunt (Lana Clark). Because of them, I never went without in life. They provided me with an abundance of love and support and I am forever grateful. I know that my nana and pops are proudly looking down on me in awe of the fruits of their labor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historical Context of Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration

Teacher-teaching assistant collaboration came into existence after federal legislation ensured students with disabilities access to a free public-school education. Approximately seventy years ago, in the 1950s, paraeducators “were introduced into schools to provide teachers more time for planning for instruction” (Nevin et al., 2008, p. 4). Their responsibilities were primarily clerical in nature (e.g., photocopying materials) and involved managing student behavior outside of the classroom setting (e.g., playground, lunchroom) (Nevin et al., 2008). Twenty years later, in the 1970s, their roles evolved to be more instructional in nature due to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975. This legislation secured “a free and appropriate education for all students with disabilities” (Spaulding & Pratt, 2015, p. 102) and contributed to an “increased reliance on paraeducators to assist in differentiating instruction in the classroom” (Nevin et al., 2008, p. 5), dramatically changing paraeducators’ roles since their introduction to the classroom as teacher aides (Daniels & McBride, 2001). Before EAHCA’s passage, students with disabilities were largely excluded from being educated in public schools.

After another twenty years, the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 required students with disabilities to have access to the general education curriculum, thus requiring teaching assistants to accompany students into the general education classroom—increasing their classroom by 65% (Nevin et al., 2009). Four years later, with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001—which amended the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 1965—teachers acquired the additional responsibility of having to supervise teaching assistants in the classroom and school districts acquired the responsibility of

ensuring that teachers were highly qualified (Nevin et al., 2008). Highly qualified teachers must have “obtained full State certification as a teacher or passed the State teacher licensing examination and holds a license to teach in the State” (NASET, 2022, Highly Qualified Teachers, para. 1), have a bachelor’s degree, and have “demonstrated subject-matter competency in each of the academic subjects in which the teacher teaches . . .” (NASET, 2022, Highly Qualified Teachers, para. 1). Lastly, three years later in 2004, the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) required teaching assistants to also participate in professional development experiences (Nevin et al., 2008).

Interestingly, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, teacher assistants do not require “on-the-job training,” which they describe as “additional training needed (postemployment) to attain competency in the skills needed in this occupation” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). However, this assertion conflicts with the requirements of Sec. 300.156 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), which requires paraprofessionals to be “appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and skills to serve children with disabilities” (IDEIA, 2004, Sec. 300.156). Although some teacher assistants are not hired to work with students who are served by IDEIA, the fact that teacher assistants who *are* hired to work with them are also included in the Bureau of Labor Statistics’ assertion, is problematic. Further, it appears to be a systemic lack of understanding that teachers and teacher assistants do not have the pleasure of choosing which students they serve and can therefore, at any point of the school year, receive a student who is served by IDEIA, which exemplifies the importance for *all* teacher assistants to be required to receive on the job training.

Almost 50-years since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975, the teaching assistant's role is still evolving and the workforce is expanding with a projected average growth of 9% from the year 2020 to 2030 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021), yet the teacher-teaching assistant collaborative relationship is still an under-researched area. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will be using the job title teaching assistant to describe the role of teacher assistant. However, teaching assistants are also referred to as paraprofessionals, paraeducators, teacher assistants, educational assistants, instructional assistants, teacher aides, and instructional aides, therefore I use these titles interchangeably according to the author's usage.

Background

For the past 18 years, I have worked in a large urban school district serving students with severe disabilities in varying roles (e.g., self-contained special education teacher, dean and internal behavior coach, career development teacher, English teacher, social studies teacher, coordinator, inclusion teacher, resource support service provider, and assistant principal). I entered the field of teaching via an alternate route program. As a novice first-year teacher, I welcomed a self-contained class (i.e., specialized class that is typically separate from general education classes, is smaller in size, and the teacher of students with disabilities is responsible for teaching most subjects) of twelve students, aged 14 to 17-years old in the eighth grade, with emotional disabilities. My students were: repeating the eighth grade for at least the second time; academically functioning two to six years below grade level; and representing four different gangs from different neighborhoods across the most impoverished section of a large urban city.

What emotions and visualizations does my first-year teacher portrait invoke within *you* and what do *you* believe was my greatest challenge? Although I was not remotely prepared to

address the significant academic and social-emotional challenges that my students presented, my greatest challenge was navigating the teacher-teaching assistant relationship with two teaching assistants whom I met on the first day of school. I was the only new teacher hired that school year and since I was given the most challenging class within the school building, the principal assigned two teaching assistants to work with the class. Both teaching assistants were older than me, had seniority in their positions, and their personalities and belief systems were diametrically different from one another.

One of the teaching assistants and I shared the fundamental beliefs that our students were educable and worthy of being taught and loved. Contrastingly, the other teaching assistant believed that she knew what was best about everything, engaged in deficit thinking about our students, and did not believe that they were capable of moving beyond their current circumstances. Throughout the school day, I spent an inordinate amount of time combatting her undermining of my decisions and trying to maintain peace between her and the students and the other teaching assistant.

During the following several summers, I had the opportunity to work at different schools that served students with disabilities. During my first summer, I was given a self-contained 12:1+4 class (i.e., 12 students, 1 teacher, 4 teaching assistants) of students classified as having multiple disabilities. There were four mandated teaching assistants in the classroom, and there were also two additional teaching assistants who were mandated to provide one-to-one services for two students, resulting in the class having a total of six teaching assistants. With a total of nine months of experience “supervising” two teaching assistants, I was now responsible for “supervising” six teaching assistants. Interestingly, my experience working with those six teaching assistants was much more pleasurable and less stressful than my school year working

with the two teaching assistants at my school. My disparate experiences led me to start thinking about why that was the case. At the time, the one contextual factor that resonated with me was that my school environment was much more stressful than the school environment at which I worked during the summer, however, my curiosity stopped there and I did not engage in further meaning making.

Every year thereafter, I worked with teaching assistants whose dispositions ranged from those who preferred to tell me what to do to those who welcomed my intentions to collaborate. As time progressed, I started to notice that teaching assistants were not accustomed to being included in the teaching and learning process—they were shocked and sometimes uncomfortable when I asked them for their input with developing a lesson or discussing strategies to address a student’s behavioral issue. Consequently, as an assistant principal, my goal was to foster a school culture that was conducive to teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and to the dismantling of hierarchies within the classroom. During this time period, I was also becoming more familiar with the power of language and the implied messages sent through its usage. Therefore, my first initiative was to conduct a survey of teaching assistants to ascertain their preferred job title—paraprofessional or teaching assistant. Since their preference was teaching assistant, we began a school-wide initiative to only use that job title when referring to them. Subsequently, I embarked on a journey of creating school structures that fostered and sustained teacher-teaching assistant collaboration (e.g., collaborative common planning, collaborative learning walks, and collaborative professional learning communities). The positive results of these practices left me eager to learn more about how policies, practices, and behaviors outside of the classroom influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaboration inside the classroom.

Problem Statement

During my 18 years of experience primarily working in a self-contained setting, I noticed that teachers and teaching assistants had an entrenched hierarchical and non-collaborative relationship that permeated school cultures. I was intrigued by both the glaring status differential and lack of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and sought to learn the factors that influenced their relationship, however “despite the enduring challenge and importance of positive teacher-paraprofessional working relationships, very little attention has been focused on this topic . . . the voices of special education teachers and paraprofessionals are relatively scarce in the literature” (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 257).

Bedford et al. (2008) concluded that comments in the literature relating to the relationship between teachers and teaching assistants were “about teachers leading and managing the situation rather than focusing on the partnership aspects of adults working together in the learning environment” (p. 13), which could be an indicator of why teacher-teaching assistant collaboration is not better understood. Similarly, according to Giangreco et al. (2010), “though collaboration among all team members is essential . . . important issues pertaining to collaboration with paraprofessionals remain understudied and inadequately understood” (p. 42). Biggs et al. (2016) asserted that “sparse attention has been dedicated to understanding the nature and quality of working relationships between teachers and paraprofessionals” (p. 269).

Their non-collaborative and hierarchical relationship may be attributed to the quality of their preservice and inservice preparation. For instance, Jones et al. (2012) proclaimed, “although teachers seem to be more satisfied when working with paraeducators, there is limited evidence to support that teachers have the skills necessary to nurture positive professional relationships” (p. 20) and they “often lack the skills and/or confidence to work collaboratively with another adult in the classroom” (p. 22). Further, the guidelines of IDEA (2004) require teaching assistants to

“receive ongoing support, direction, training, and feedback from highly qualified, certified special education teachers. These requirements hinge on paraprofessionals having strong relationships with teachers” (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 257), however, “the teachers who supervise paraeducators are often unprepared or untrained to work with or provide paraeducators needed training once they begin their work in the school setting” (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012, p. 1).

The aim of this qualitative dissertation study was to investigate the complex dynamics and structures (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) that interact to influence collaboration between teachers of students with disabilities (TOSD) and teaching assistants (TAs). Byrne (1998) noted that “everything is contextually situated, everything is interconnected and everything changes everything else. So instead of trying to understand linear relationships we need to understand the complex dynamics of social systems” (p. 42). Therefore, I wanted to learn: (1) What are the complex dynamics of the teacher-teaching assistant relationship? (1a) What role does each participant stakeholder (i.e., teacher, teaching assistant, and principal) play in those complex dynamics? and (1b) How do participants develop their understandings about the roles of teachers of students with disabilities and teaching assistants in the teaching and learning process?

Research in this area can add to our overall understanding of the nature of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and the complex dynamics that interact to influence their relationship. Rueda and Monzó (2002) concluded that “we especially need a better understanding of the specific ways in which diverse ‘funds of knowledge’ may be de-legitimized and/or supported by school cultures” (p. 519) and Devecchi and Rouse (2010) asserted that “more research is needed to capture the complex dynamics of power, authority and status within the

relationship” (p. 96). This study is significant because it has implications for teacher education programs, K-12 schools, and future research.

Overview of the Dissertation

Following, I provide an overview of the organization of this dissertation with a summary of each chapter. Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework and literature review. It first details the tenets of critical bifocality, which is the theoretical framework that undergirded this study. Next, there is a review of the empirical literature on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. Included, is a summary of the gap in the literature, databases engaged with search descriptors used, criteria for study inclusion, a detailed review of the five categories that emerged from my analysis, and a discussion of an interesting phenomenon that I discovered regarding researchers’ language usage.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of this dissertation study. It first reviews the purpose of the study and its research questions and explains how this dissertation study adds to and extends the existing body of literature on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. The following sections follow: (1) rationale for qualitative research design; (2) sampling, participants, and context; (3) method of data collection; (4) data analysis and synthesis, including coding and analytic strategies; (5) ethical considerations employed due to this dissertation study involving human subjects; (6) bias and trustworthiness; (7) limitations to study, including a discussion on my three identified limitations; and (8) positionality—my world view about teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and its implications for this dissertation study.

Chapter 4 describes the findings of this dissertation study. It first reviews the research questions that guided this study and then provides a detailed discussion of the themes and subthemes that emerged from my analysis. The discussion includes a description of the

categories of The Continuum of Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration (TTAC). Lastly, it provides a summary of the themes and an introduction to Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 describes the conclusions of this dissertation study and their implications. It first reviews the purpose of the study and then provides a detailed summary of the findings discussed in Chapter 4. Next, it provides an introduction of the conclusions drawn from the findings and a discusses a subtheme that emerged, which is used to frame the conclusions. The subtheme includes an illustration of the interconnectedness of the complex dynamics that emerged from my analysis through the lens of critical bifocality. Then, it describes the four conclusions drawn from analysis. The next section discusses implications for teacher education programs, school and district leaders, and teachers of students with disabilities. The chapter concludes with a brief discussion on an area of concern that was not addressed in the study and my call-to-action proposal for teachers, school and district leaders.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Critical Bifocality

The aim of this qualitative study was to investigate how complex dynamics and structures (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) interact to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. According to Weis and Fine (2012), “We need research that can peer behind the drapes that hide the strategic coproduction of privilege and disadvantage, revealing the micro practices by which privilege and structural decay come to be produced, sustained, reproduced, embodied, and contested . . .” (p. 175). Therefore, I used critical bifocality as the theoretical framework to undergird this study.

Weis and Fine (2012) defined critical bifocality as:

a way to think about epistemology, design, and the politics of educational research, as a theory of method in which structural conditions are enacted in policy and reform institutions as well as the ways in which such conditions come to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals. (p. 174)

The authors introduced critical bifocality “to render visible the relations between groups to structures of power, to social policies, to history, and to large sociopolitical formations” (p. 173).

The *bi* in bifocality pertains to the interconnectedness of “structures” and “lives,” because Weis and Fine (2012) contended that lives cannot be separated from global and local structures. Their goal was to focus on the ways in which broad-based political and social structures set the stage for day-to-day actions and decisions among privileged and non-privileged persons (Weis & Fine, 2012). In this study, teachers are ascribed the status of privileged and teaching assistants are

ascribed the status of non-privileged, based on my analysis of the data collected. The intersection of power, privilege, and marginalization that resonated in the hierarchical teacher-teaching assistant relationships is what led me to choose critical bifocality as the theoretical framework to guide this study. Weis and Fine (2004) argued for both an analysis of lives in context (i.e. history, structure, and institutions) and also across the power lines of privilege and marginalization. I interpret critical bifocality as the critical examination of the interconnectedness between the lived school experiences of teachers and teaching assistants and the written and implicit policies of schools and how the conditions created by those policies contribute to the reproduction of a hierarchical relationship that is metabolized by individuals, thus becoming the norm.

Context is pivotal to critical bifocality. Weis and Fine (2012) asserted that a critical bifocal design “enables scholars to uncover and explore the relationships between structural constraints and the micro-moves of people on the ground as they both respond to and simultaneously help shape social culture” (p. 180). Using the critical bifocal lens, I examined how complex dynamics (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) influenced the day-to-day operations of teachers and teaching assistants in the classroom.

Weis and Fine (2012) wrote: “to paraphrase Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009), this is our scholarly debt to educational studies in times of swelling inequality gaps: to interrogate how deficit and privilege are made, sustained, justified, and reified over time and space and with a keen eye toward their unmaking” (p. 177). For the purposes of this study, inequality pertains to the culture of marginalization of teaching assistants and the complex dynamics that interact to reproduce and sustain that culture.

According to Weis and Fine (2012):

without such analytic and practical groundings, we critical scholars are weakened in our ability to contest the cumulative impact of sustained inequalities that produce marginalization and privilege. Consequently, we are left to advocate merely for sweet, quiet spots of refuge rather than for structural change. (p. 175)

Critical bifocality not only analyzes lives and structures, but it also calls for an action to be taken, which aligns with my intent for school and district leaders to create the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration to be realized.

Literature Review

Teacher-teaching assistant collaboration is shown to be an under-researched area. According to Rueda and Monzó (2002), “little is known about how teachers and paraeducators work together, whether this ideal is realized, nor what factors contribute to or impinge upon the development of a collaborative relationship from which both teachers and paraeducators as well as students can potentially benefit” (p. 504). Therefore, “pinpointing the different influences strengthening or challenging these relationships provides insights into what might prepare educators to be more successful working with one another” (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 269). Further, Cipriano et al. (2016) concluded that, “There is a lack of research investigating the quality of interactions between individuals in the self-contained classroom” (p. 4) and “the interactions between educators in the classroom” (p. 4).

With the well documented gap in the literature and my research questions in mind, I conducted a search of the empirical literature with an interest in locating studies that investigated the factors that influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, with a particular interest in locating studies that were conducted within self-contained classrooms. My rationale for this

particular focus was two-fold: (1) my 18-year career, I spent 17-years working in a self-contained setting—it is where I acquired my in-depth knowledge of teacher-teaching assistant relationships and where I conceptualized the topic of this study; and (2) the existing research failed to focus on the hierarchical nature of teacher-teaching assistant relationships in self-contained classrooms. This notion was supported in the literature by Cipriano et al. (2016) who stated:

Despite the theoretical and empirical support for the effectiveness of collaborative models in general and inclusive classrooms, there is scant information available specific to the relationships among educators in self-contained special education classrooms. The critical point of differentiation between these two classroom settings is the hierarchy of adults in the room. (p. 6)

Engaging the databases of ProQuest, EBSCOhost, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Education Complete as well as conducting traditional Google searches, I used a combination of the following search terms as descriptors: *teacher*, *paraeducator*, *paraprofessional*, *teacher assistant*, *educational assistant*, *teaching assistant*, *special education*, *collaboration*, *teamwork*, and *self-contained classroom*. After obtaining the subsequent search results, I narrowed the scope of results by combining single terms, such as *paraeducator* with *teacher* and with *collaboration*. Then, I determined which articles to include in this literature review by employing the following criteria: (1) central focus on the practice of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom in any educational setting; (2) central focus on the factors that influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration; and (3) appearance in a peer-reviewed journal. My search yielded nine empirical studies, including two dissertation studies, that met my criteria.

I reviewed each article to ascertain its purpose and context and then identified the most prevalent concepts and patterns using descriptive coding (Saldaña, 2013). Subsequently, the following categories emerged from my analysis regarding factors that impact teacher-teaching assistant collaboration: (1) teacher power status; (2) quality of professional development; (3) teacher qualities and skills needed to cultivate collaborative relationships; (4) teaching-assistant conceptualizations of the collaborative relationship; and (5) organization, school culture, and time.

Teacher Power Status

A review of the empirical literature revealed that there was an uneven power dynamic in the teacher-teaching assistant relationship, thus contributing to teaching assistant marginalization. For example, results from Nguyen (2015) indicated that “institution and school factors guided the [special education paraeducator] SEPs’ practice and left them as marginalized members of the community” (p. 188), because their input was not sought in myriad decisions that impacted them throughout the school day. Specifically, “the supervising teachers, both the special and general education teachers, instructed the paraeducator on what schedule to follow. This schedule was established by the teacher with no input from the SEP” (p. 190).

Further, the literature revealed teachers were viewed as role models, supervisors, and the only knowledge holders within the classroom (Biggs et al., 2016; Cipriano et al., 2016; Karge et al., 2011; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). These beliefs about teachers were held by both teachers and teaching assistants—but not by students, who did not ascribe power status to teachers until an adult intervened to reinforce it. For example, Rueda and Monzó (2002) noted one teacher’s comment about the importance of students distinguishing the teacher from the teaching assistant:

Sometimes a child might not relate to a teacher but might to a TA. That might become a problem if the child sees the TA as the teacher and the TA does not help the child understand that the teacher is the one in charge and that the major curriculum and behavior decisions are made by the teacher and not by the TA. (p. 516)

This sentiment was echoed by both teacher and teaching assistant participants in several studies. Notably, in Biggs et al. (2016), a teacher stated: “their job is not to teach, my job is” (p. 268), and a teaching assistant similarly stated: “[paraprofessionals] need to know their roles. You’re there to assist, not to run things. That’s why we’re assistants” (p. 268). Rueda and Monzó (2002) found, without prompting, the majority of paraeducators discussed a culture of inequitable treatment, whereas teachers asserted their power in the classroom and treated paraeducators with little respect. Coincidentally, Cipriano et al. (2016) found that respect was an element that had a positive impact on teacher-teaching assistant interactions, which is why it is not shocking that Rueda and Monzó (2002) concluded that “power differences negatively impact the collaborative relationship and thus it is essential to minimize differences in authority that exist in the classroom” (p. 519).

Findings from three studies resonated with me because of their interconnectedness to my theoretical framework. The first finding was from Rueda and Monzó (2002) who discovered that “while outside the classroom, teachers tended to address each other as well as paraeducators informally by their first names. Paraeducators, though, generally addressed teachers formally by their last names” (p. 517). I conceptualized this phenomenon through the lens of critical bifocality, whereas: “structural conditions are enacted in policy and reform institutions as well as the ways in which such conditions come to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals” (Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 174). In other words, paraeducators

metabolized the unequal distribution of power within their school and in turn, contributed to the reproduction of hierarchization by only addressing teachers formally in both formal and informal situations. The second finding was from Cipriano et al. (2016) who provided the following quote from a teaching assistant as an example of the element—*respect*:

I think the teacher has to be the role model and I think you have to set your expectations of what you expect of your staff and if there is an issue you need to come together respectfully and talk about that and come up with a solution. (p. 14)

I found the usage of possessive language, such as “your staff,” to also be a contributing factor to the reproduction of hierarchization.

Lastly, in Biggs et al. (2016), teacher and paraprofessional participants framed teacher proficiency and paraprofessional proficiency slightly differently. For example, with regard to paraprofessional proficiency, participants discussed “their skills and knowledge, willingness to learn, and professionalism” (p. 265). In contrast, when discussing teacher proficiency, participants discussed teachers’ “organization, skills and knowledge, and professionalism” (p. 263), but not a willingness to learn. Classifying “having a willingness to learn” as a teaching assistant proficiency and not also a teacher proficiency, implies that teachers are the only knowledge holders in the classroom and that knowledge could not also be acquired from teaching assistants.

My analysis of the literature uncovered an interesting phenomenon that I believe is worth a brief discussion, because it shows how entrenched the usage of possessive language is, even when conducting studies about collaborative relationships. Researchers used possessive language in their studies that investigated teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. For example, Karge et al. (2011) noted that “one of the most important partnerships in education is the working

relationship between the special education teachers and their *assigned* paraprofessionals” (p. 4). The word *assigned* implies that the teacher has possession of the teaching assistant. As a practitioner, I say that a teacher/teaching assistant was assigned to a particular class. Another example was uncovered in Biggs et al. (2016) who wrote: “her teacher, Janelle (T), appreciated her disposition” (p. 264); and “both Naomi and her paraprofessional, Danielle . . .” (p. 263). The phrases *her teacher* and *her paraprofessional* are possessive and ascribe a higher status to the teacher. Although the directionality of the word “her” differs in the two examples, I interpret them similarly. The teaching assistant is an adult and not a student, therefore calling Janelle “her teacher” subordinates the teaching assistant. Ironically, the language usage of the researchers who conducted the studies on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was analogous to the teacher attitudes that participants across studies identified as an impediment to collaboration.

Quality of Professional Development

The requirement for professional development that was directly related to teachers working collaboratively with paraprofessionals was an expressed desire from participants across six of the studies analyzed for this literature review (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Karge et al., 2011; Rivera, 2017; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). The sixth study focused on the need for classroom evaluation measures for the teacher-teaching assistant relationship (Cipriano et al., 2016). Findings from these six studies revealed that professional development was either non-existent, minimal in scope, brief and isolated, and/or not provided by supervisors at the school or district level, which rendered it inadequate to meet the specific contextual needs of classroom teacher-teaching assistant teams (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Karge et al., 2011; Rivera, 2017; Rueda & Monzó, 2002).

According to Karge et al. (2011), “teachers must understand their role as supervisors and take time to build a strong partnership that will ultimately enhance the education of the children with whom the teacher works” (p. 7). However, Biggs et al. (2016) found that very little attention has been paid to preparing teachers to supervise and lead paraprofessionals successfully. Similarly, teacher participants in Rivera’s (2017) study “reported a lack of training from both preservice and in-service programs” (p. 91) and “trial and error as how they learned to manage or direct paraeducators” (p. 93). Therefore, Biggs et al. (2016) suggested that school and district administrators provide intentional and individualized support to teachers and paraprofessionals and address problems swiftly and effectively.

Since finding that preservice teachers lacked requisite interpersonal and leadership skills, Biggs et al. (2016) recommended that teacher preparation programs teach and assess those skills intentionally. Several studies indicated four areas of deficiency in the teacher-teaching assistant collaborative relationship: (1) teacher training on how to work with and supervise teaching assistants; (2) building teacher confidence; (3) teacher interpersonal skills development; and (4) relevant pedagogical training for teaching assistants (Biggs et al., 2016; Biggs et al., 2019; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Drecktrah, 2008 Jones et al., 2012; Karge et al., 2011; Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Wallace et al., 2001).

In the following paragraph I provide examples from the literature that depict these areas of deficiency. After the first year of conducting their survey, Karge et al. (2011) found that only 28 of the 148 participants indicated they had any professional development in working with paraprofessionals, only 25 participants indicated that they had any discussion about how to work with paraprofessionals, and zero participants indicated that they received any training at the school district level. In the second year of conducting the study, only 56 of the 134 participants

indicated that they had received any specific professional development on how to work with paraprofessionals and only two of those 56 participants indicated that there was a brief reference to the topic made at a district sponsored training. Karge et al. (2011) concluded that “the survey results indicated a clear need for additional professional development working with and supervising paraprofessionals” (p. 6).

In a discussion about teacher confidence providing supervising, delegating, resolving conflicts, and collaborating with paraprofessionals, one paraprofessional stated, “You’re essentially the boss . . . you’ve got to learn how to be comfortable in that role” (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 262). One teacher who described herself as novice stated, “I was perpetually nervous. I was nervous because, one, I’m shy, and two, [the paraprofessionals] knew way more about the room than I did, but I was still the person who was like in charge” (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 262). The novice teacher’s sentiments aligned with Jones et al. (2012) who concluded that teachers “often lack the skills and/or confidence to work collaboratively with another adult in the classroom” (p. 22).

Rueda and Monzó (2002) found that “paraeducators often lacked knowledge of important instructional strategies that could easily be picked up, given some assistance from the teachers” (p. 514). This sentiment was expressed by one of the paraprofessional participants in Biggs et al. (2016) who stated, “Sometimes I feel like I need more, like more information on what to do, because I don’t know what to do. I didn’t go to school for that. That’s probably the hardest part, not knowing what to do” (p. 265). Karge et al. (2011) also highlighted the limited and inadequate professional development some participants received. For example, one participant described how a national expert in the field provided training only one time per year for three consecutive years. A second participant described how they attended an annual, university hosted conference,

where only one of the strands was related to paraprofessional teams, relationships, and trainings. Although special education paraeducator participants in Nguyen (2015) reported having access to formal and/or informal training, they shared that “there was not enough training or the training was not adequate to meet the demands of being a paraeducator” (p. 192).

Teacher Qualities and Skills Needed to Cultivate Collaborative Relationships

A review of the empirical literature indicated the qualities and skills teachers needed to possess in order to foster collaborative teacher-teaching assistant relationships and how those qualities and skills, or lack thereof, impacted the classroom’s culture. Specifically, teachers needed to: (1) be open-minded, proficient, and professional; (2) communicate clearly and explicitly; (3) cultivate paraprofessional strengths; (4) show paraprofessionals that they are appreciated and valued; (5) establish a culture of mutual respect; and (6) include paraeducators in decision-making (Biggs et al., 2016; Cipriano et al., 2016; Cole-Lade & Bailey, 2020, Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2015; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Respect was selected as an imperative quality for teacher and teaching assistants’ working relationship (Biggs et al., 2016; Cipriano et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Rueda & Monzó, 2002), with respect being defined as “educators positively acknowledging each other’s work in the classroom” (Cipriano et al., 2016, p. 15). Disrespect was found to be the quality that impeded collaboration the most (Cipriano et al., 2016).

When teacher and paraprofessionals’ guiding beliefs were aligned, their relationship was discussed more positively (Biggs et al., 2016). This notion was evident in Cipriano et al.’s (2016) findings, which resulted in the creation of a framework for Teacher-Paraeducator Interactions. The framework, which described classroom educator interactions, consisted of four elements—

three that may promote quality teaching and learning (e.g., solidarity, delegation of staff, and respect) and one that may diminish quality teaching and learning (e.g., disrespect).

Cipriano et al. (2016) defined solidarity as “the consistent presentation of teamwork among the educators in the classroom” (p. 12). They found that when teachers and paraeducators were aligned in their beliefs about teaching and used “we” language, students benefited. Solidarity also comprised of teachers and teaching assistants working as a team and having a rapport and mutual respect for each other personally and professionally. For example, in referring to the teaching assistant, one teacher participant stated: “she understands exactly what I need and anticipates because I can’t be wasting my time” (p. 14); and another teacher participant explained: “he supports me in whatever it is that is needed. Whether it’s an issue, if he pulls a couple of kids out, that happens very often . . .” (p. 14).

Rueda & Monzó (2002) found that there were a few teachers who saw paraeducators as future teachers and in turn shared their materials with them and gave them autonomy in planning lessons noting, “These teachers expressed a belief that paraeducators, regardless of training, brought with them experiences and knowledge that would benefit students” (p. 512). In response, the paraeducator stated: “I really like it because the teacher and I have a really good relationship. She sees me as another teacher in the classroom” (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 512). Contrastingly, Cole-Lade and Bailey (2020) found that “in both Cases A and B, the paraeducators were expected to implement the activities teachers planned with minimal collaboration, guidance or inclusion in the decision-making process” (p. 153). Their findings further revealed that “teachers and school-based [speech language pathologist] SLPs relied on the paraeducators as the conduit to share daily information and be the primary source of communication with the child’s parents, while not viewing them as integral, valued team members” (p. 153). Similarly, some teacher

participants in Rueda and Monzó (2002) saw paraeducators as a source of support for students, but not as another resource in the classroom in addition to the teacher, although many of the paraeducators were on a career track to become teachers. Teachers chose not to discuss lessons they planned with paraeducators in advance, but they frequently requested paraeducators to perform translations from Spanish to English.

Although, time would be a logical factor as to why teachers did not solicit information from paraeducators for lesson planning purposes, the results of Rueda and Monzó (2002) indicated that time was not a factor in the teachers' decisions. For example, one teacher expressed how it was not the paraeducator's role to plan or assist in planning lessons stating, "I think that's not her role. Her role is to come in and follow up what I have" (p. 511). A paraprofessional participant from another study, responded to that type of teacher belief commenting:

Teachers need to know that even though they are the lead teacher, the main teacher, they shouldn't treat their educational assistant less, or kind of like degrade them, or be so negative to them because they are assistants. So if teachers know that, then I think the whole classroom will work out, I really do. We're all equal in so many ways. (Biggs et al., 2016, p. 262)

Paraeducators reported "that some teachers made it clear that they were the 'boss' in the classroom and had difficulty sharing control" (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 516) and that "there are some who treat us beneath them. I don't think they should humiliate us" (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 516). On one occasion, after a student asked the paraeducator for help, the teacher screamed "you are not the teacher. If he needs help he can come with me!" (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 516). These beliefs, attitudes, and actions were counterproductive to fostering a positive,

collaborative classroom culture and were examples of what Cipriano et al. (2016) regarded as disrespect— “interactions between teachers and paraeducators that are belittling, mocking, hostile, discriminatory, aggressive, or sarcastic” (p. 15).

Teaching-Assistants’ Conceptualizations of the Collaborative Relationship

My literature review also revealed that paraprofessionals believed: (1) there was a power difference in the classroom; (2) teachers did not see them as equals; and (3) teachers did not respect the expertise they brought to the classroom (Biggs et al., 2016; Rivera, 2017; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). For example, paraeducators commented that they believed some teachers felt they were not in a position to offer suggestions because they did not have a teaching certification. This belief led paraprofessionals to rarely offer suggestions or ideas in the classroom if they were not sought (Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Also, in Nguyen (2015) noted:

Mary discussed how she attempted to interact with teachers in order to give them information on how students were progressing. Mary initiated these interactions, but the teachers rarely did the same. The lack of reciprocity left Mary feeling like her contribution to the community of practice had very little meaning. (p. 191)

Out of fear of creating an uncomfortable work environment, paraeducators shared that they did what teachers said, even though they knew that it was not within their job duties, because they wanted to avoid conflict.

Interestingly, Biggs et al. (2016) used data centered around this same sentiment as examples of teachers and teaching assistants being cooperative, flexible, and understanding. For example, a paraprofessional-teacher team stated, respectively: “I just go with the flow, so I just do what is asked or what I see needs to be done” (p. 264); and “so I feel like I’m fortunate, because Jacqueline, I’ll tell her to do something one time, and she remembers it, like, she just

does it from then on out. . .” (p. 264). I conceptualized the paraprofessional’s actions to be centered around obedience and the teacher’s receipt of that obedience to be centered around the belief that the paraprofessional was there just to be told what to do, which I would not categorize as exemplar behaviors to depict teacher-teaching assistant cooperation and understanding.

Organization, School Culture, and Time

My review of the literature uncovered two important findings: (1) school administrators need to create conditions that allow/encourage teacher-teaching assistant collaboration; and (2) hierarchical school structures exacerbated the power disparity between teachers and teaching assistants in the classroom, both of which I discuss in detail below.

The research indicated that school administrators needed to ensure that teachers and teaching assistants had time built into their schedules to interact and collaboratively plan lessons, collaboratively attend professional developments that were aligned to their specific needs, and attend trainings that taught them the requisite skills for working with another adult in the classroom (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Rivera, 2017; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Further, school administrators needed to eliminate the power dynamics within the school culture (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Rueda & Monzó, 2002), define the roles and expectations for teachers and teaching assistants (Biggs et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2012), provide resources for the collaborative relationship to work (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Rivera, 2017), and consider personalities and capabilities when planning teacher-paraeducator teams (Biggs et al., 2016; River, 2017).

Lack of time was the factor that participants across studies found to be the greatest impediment to their ability to collaborate (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Rivera, 2017; Rueda & Monzó, 2002; Jones et al., 2012). For example, Rueda and Monzó (2002) found

that, “Opportunities for collaboration were not built into the school organization or the school culture” (p. 517). Specifically, common break times were not embedded within school schedules and teachers and teaching assistants were not scheduled to attend meetings and workshops together, although the topics were applicable to both of them (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). Teachers in Rivera’s study (2017) “shared how difficult it can be to truly collaborate and plan with paraeducators when they are not given any planning time” (p. 92).

Findings from Jones et al. (2012) revealed the contextual factors that contributed to successful teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. The authors found that there was more collaboration between teachers and paraeducators in the pre-kindergarten classes where teachers and paraeducators co-planned for all subject matter on a weekly basis. The contextual factors were: planning took place on Fridays when there were no students in school, the same paraeducator worked with the students during the entire day, and three of the paraeducators worked with the same teachers at the same grade level for more than three years, all of which resulted in the development of rapport and routines.

In contrast, teachers and paraeducators in the other grade levels had very few opportunities to interact or time to discuss instructional and/or student concerns, which rendered their collaborative relationship unsuccessful. However, two teachers found creative ways to meet with paraeducators. One teacher worked it out so that the paraeducator would come in early on Mondays, before the students arrived, to meet with the teacher and then leave early on Fridays. The second teacher planned for the following week with the paraeducator on a weekly basis, while the students watched a movie.

In terms of hierarchical school structures, Rueda and Monzó (2002) noted that the hierarchical structure of social relations within schools “support differences in power which

directly impact the way teachers and paraeducators relate to each other” (p. 518). One implication of the hierarchical structure of social relations was that:

Structural factors impacting the low status role of paraeducators legitimize the marginalization of minorities in the school setting, given that paraeducator positions are generally staffed by minorities (Latina/os) and contrast sharply with the central and dominant role played by teachers, generally staffed by White middle-class women.

(Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 519)

Devecchi and Rouse (2010) noted two examples of this notion. In one school, only students and teaching assistants used the two small rooms on the top floor of one of the oldest buildings. Also, teaching assistants had their breaks and lunch separately in the department and rarely joined the teachers in the staffroom. However, when teaching assistants did join teachers in the staffroom, they sat separately from them and rarely mixed with or talked to them. In this same school, teachers and teaching assistants “occupied different knowledge spaces with little opportunity for cross-fertilisation” (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010, p. 95). Devecchi and Rouse (2010) contended that it is important to not only knock down the physical boundaries, but also the knowledge boundaries, as their participants “stressed the importance of access, distribution and knowledge in fostering TAs’ participation and effective team collaboration” (p. 95).

In summary, the available literature revealed: (1) there is an uneven power dynamic in the teacher-teaching assistant relationship; (2) authors of the studies reviewed used the same types of possessive language towards teaching assistants as teacher participants; (3) there is a need for professional development that is directly related to teachers working collaboratively with teaching assistants, because professional development is either non-existent, minimal in scope, brief and isolated, and/or not provided by supervisors at the school or district level; (4)

there are specific interpersonal qualities that teachers and teaching assistants need to possess in order to foster a collaborative relationship, with the primary quality *respect*; (5) school administrators need to create the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration; and (6) hierarchical school structures exacerbate the power disparity between teachers and teaching assistants.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine the complex dynamics (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) and structures that influence collaboration between teachers of students with disabilities (TOSD) and teaching assistants (TAs). Byrne (1998) noted that “everything is contextually situated, everything is interconnected and everything changes everything else. So instead of trying to understand linear relationships we need to understand the complex dynamics of social systems” (p. 42). Therefore, I wanted to learn: (1) What are the complex dynamics (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) that interact to influence collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants? (1a) What role does each participant stakeholder (i.e., teacher, teaching assistant, and principal) play in those complex dynamics? and (1b) How do participants develop their understandings about the roles of TOSD and teaching assistants in the teaching and learning process?

My study adds to and extends the existing body of research because it takes a more macro-level view of the factors that influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration by examining the interconnectedness between the in-school lives of teachers and teaching assistants and school- and district-wide structures than previous studies. This qualitative dissertation study contributes to filling the gap in the research on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration as it is an under-researched area. This chapter details the research methodology of my study and is organized as follows: (1) rationale for qualitative research design; (2) sampling, participants, and context; (3) method of data collection; (4) data analysis and synthesis; (5) ethical considerations; (6) bias and trustworthiness; (7) limitations of study; and (8) positionality.

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

Since the purpose of this dissertation study was to discover the complex dynamics and structures that interact to influence collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants; understand the role the teacher, teaching assistant, and principal played in those complex dynamics; learn how participants developed their understandings about the roles of teachers of students with disabilities and teaching assistants; and learn how participants described the differences, if any, in collaboration between in-school learning and remote learning—I chose to employ a qualitative research design. I was interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 6). In contrast to a quantitative research design, which would have helped me answer “how often,” “how many,” or “how much,” questions, I sought to answer “why,” “what,” and “how” questions.

According to Patton (1985), qualitative research:

is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what’s going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. . . (p. 1)

Qualitative research is undergirded by the “belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 23). The research method is inductive, contextual, constructivist,

and “richly descriptive” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 17). According to Charmaz (2014), “gathering rich data will give you solid material for building a significant analysis” (p. 23), which is why I chose to conduct intensive interviews as my data collection method.

Sampling, Participants, and Context

Sampling

Participants were recruited for participation in this dissertation study via a recruitment flyer posted on the social media platform Facebook and via a distribution email sent out by my doctoral program at Montclair State University. The purposeful sampling procedure used to select this study’s sample was maximum variation. According to Patton (2002), “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 234). The selection criteria for participants were as follows: (1) teacher of students with disabilities who works with a teaching assistant in the classroom; (2) teaching assistant for students with disabilities; and (3) principal, assistant principal, and/or school/program director at a school for students with disabilities. The research sample included seven participants who I describe below.

Participants

Maximum variation purposeful sampling resulted in the inclusion of seven out of twelve potential participants, who differed in title, age, and years of experience. Participants included three teaching assistants, three teachers of students with disabilities, and one school principal. Below, I provide demographic information for each participant using pseudonyms, including the following information: (1) name, (2) age, (3) gender identification, (4) years of experience in current title, (5) type of class (e.g., self-contained, inclusion), and (6) any applicable past experiences in the field.

Stacey: Teaching Assistant Participant. Stacey was 36-years old and identified as female. She had almost two years of experience working as a teaching assistant at the time of the study and worked in a 12:1+1 (i.e., 12 students, 1 teacher, and 1 teaching assistant) self-contained class.

Tricia: Teaching Assistant Participant. Tricia was 63-years old and identified as female. She had three years of experience working as a teaching assistant at the time of the study and worked in a 12:1+1 self-contained class. Tricia had past experience working in three other schools for a short period of time within the same school district.

Gloria: Teaching Assistant Participant. Gloria was 58-years old and identified as female. She had 21 years of experience working as a teaching assistant at the time of the study and worked in a 7:1+1 (i.e., 7 students, 1 teacher, and 1 teaching assistant) self-contained class. She has worked in three or four other schools, but has worked at her current school the longest. Before becoming a teaching assistant, Gloria had experience as a school aide for two years, within the same school district.

Deidre: Teacher Participant. Deidre was 64-years old and identified as female. She had 18 years of experience working as a teaching of students with disabilities at the time of the study and had a 12:1+1 self-contained class. Deidre had past experience working in other schools within her state and current school district, plus one other school district.

Annette: Teacher Participant. Annette was 31-years old and identified as female. She had eight years of experience working as a teacher of students with disabilities at the time of the study and had a 12:1+3 (i.e., 12 students, 1 teacher, and 3 teaching assistants) self-contained class. Annette had past experience working as a teaching assistant for eight months and she has previously worked in four schools as a teacher of students with disabilities.

Jacqueline: Teacher Participant. Jacqueline was 44-years old and identified as female. She had 15 years of experience working as a teacher of students with disabilities at the time of the study and worked in an inclusion program providing “push-in” services (i.e., special education academic and social-emotional support services delivered in the general education classroom) to students with disabilities inside the general education classroom. She provided services to six to eight students out of a class of approximately 28 students. One teaching assistant provided push-in services with her. Jacqueline had past experience working in two other schools as a teacher of students with disabilities.

Mark: Principal Participant. Mark was 41-years old and identified as male. He had four years of experience working as a school principal of a school for students with disabilities at the time of the study. Mark had past experiences working as a teaching assistant, teacher, and an assistant principal in school districts other than the one where he was principal.

Context

All participants’ schools were located in large urban cities. Deidre was the only participant who worked in a different city. Most participants worked for traditional public schools, except for Annette who worked for a public charter school. Tricia, Gloria, Stacey and Mark worked in the same urban school district. Jacqueline was the only participant who worked in an inclusion program in a general education setting. All interviews were conducted via Zoom videoconferencing due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

Method of Data Collection

The intensive interview (Charmaz, 2014) was selected as the method of data collection for this dissertation study. Intensive interviewing, which is usually associated with grounded theory, “typically means a gently-guided, one-sided conversation that explores research

participants' perspective with the research topic" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56). This interviewing strategy not only aims for accurate details, but also aims for "uncovering hidden actions and intentions or exposing policies and practices and their implications" (p. 57). I selected it to help me discover the explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures that influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration.

Intensive interviewing afforded me the opportunity to gather rich data for analysis. Charmaz (2014) defined rich data as data that are focused, full, and detailed and "reveal participants' views, feelings, intentions, and actions as well as the contexts and structures of their lives" (p. 23). According to Charmaz (2014), the key characteristics of intensive interviewing are as follows: (1) research participants who have first-hand experience with the research topic; (2) "in-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations" (p. 56); (3) dependence on open-ended questions; (4) goal of obtaining detailed responses; (5) "emphasis on understanding the research participant's perspective, meanings, and experience" (p. 56); and (6) "practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints and implicit views and accounts of actions" (p. 56).

Data Analysis and Synthesis

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), data analysis "refers to both the concept and the thought processes that go behind assigning meaning to data. Analysis is exploratory and gives consideration to different possible meanings in data" (p. 58). Further, "when doing analysis, researchers are interacting with data. They are examining it, making comparisons, asking questions, coming up with concepts to stand for meaning, and suggesting possible relationships between concepts" (p. 107). My initial step in the process of making sense out of the rich data I collected was coding my interview transcripts. As Saldaña (2016) explained, "In qualitative data

analysis, a code . . . attributes interpreted meaning to each individual datum for later purposes of pattern detection, categorization, assertion or proposition development, theory building, and other analytic processes” (p. 4). I used the exploratory coding method—holistic coding, to assign my codes. Holistic coding “applies a single code to each large unit of data in the corpus to capture a sense of the overall contents and the possible categories that may develop” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 165).

After applying holistic codes to my data, I organized them in a coding table. The table aligned codes with supporting data and with the memos of my thinking at the time. The table was categorized by research question for each of the seven participants and included the following headings: participant, supporting data, categories, themes, and memos. As Corbin and Strauss (2015) wrote, “When researchers write memos, they are doing analysis. They are dialoguing with the data and moving the analysis further” (p. 106). Subsequently, the second cycle coding method I used was pattern coding. Saldaña (2016) define pattern codes as, “Explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (p. 236). The second cycle of coding was an iterative process that eventually resulted in the development of the major themes and subthemes described in Chapter 4.

Throughout the research process, I employed the following analytic strategies, which are usually used for developing grounded theory: (a) questioning; (b) making comparisons; and (c) looking at language. Analytic directions arise from *how* researchers interact with and interpret their comparisons and emerging analyses rather than *from* external prescriptions or from inherent meanings of data (Charmaz, 2014). The specific types of questioning strategies I used were *sensitizing* and *guiding*. Sensitizing questions “tune the researcher in to the possible meaning of

data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 92). For example, they might look like this: “What is going on here—that is, what are the issues, problems, concerns? Who are the actors involved? How do they define the situation? Or what is the meaning to them?” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 92).

Guiding questions “are the questions that guide our interviews, observations, document gathering, and analyses. . .” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 93). I chose these two types of questioning strategies to help me elicit rich data and make meaning of them during my analysis.

The specific *making comparisons* analytic strategy that I employed was constant comparison. In making constant comparisons, I took two pieces of datum and examined them against each other “both within and between documents in order to determine if the two data points are conceptually the same or different. Data that appear to be conceptually similar are group together under a conceptual label” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 93–94). Lastly, I used the analytic strategy *looking at language* to examine how participants used language and the role that language usage played in the teacher-teaching assistant relationship.

Ethical Considerations

Since this dissertation study involved the participation of human subjects, I obtained approval from Montclair State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) through expedited review. I adhered to the principles of ethical research of human subjects. All study participants were adults who voluntarily consented to participate in this study and were informed of their option to withdraw from this study at any time without the fear of repercussions. The written consent form was approved by the IRB. To ensure participant anonymity across all participants, pseudonyms were used for names, places, and specific curricula information.

Bias and Trustworthiness

Although I was an outside researcher with 18 years of experience working in the field of special education and with a longtime interest in the topic of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, I acknowledged and sought to address the biases that I may have brought to my study. According to Mehra (2002), “a researcher’s personal beliefs and values are reflected not only in the choice of methodology and interpretation of findings, but also in the choice of research topic. In other words, what we believe in determines what we want to study” (p. 6). Further, in discussing how researchers can keep themselves out of their study when researching a personally significant topic, Mehra (2002) asserted:

Qualitative research paradigm believes that researcher is an important part of the process. The researcher can’t separate himself from the topic/people he or she is studying, it is in the interaction between the researcher and researcher that the knowledge is created. So the researcher bias enters into the picture even if the researcher tries to stay out of it. (p. 9)

With these understandings, I employed several strategies to maintain my objectivity and increase the trustworthiness of my findings.

I employed triangulation, which “refers to the use of multiple methods of data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545). Specifically, I used data source triangulation, which “involves the collection of data from different types of people, including individuals, groups, families, and communities, to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data” (Carter et al., 2014, p. 545). For my study, I gathered data from teachers, teaching assistants, and a school principal in order to glean multiple perspectives on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. When necessary, I conducted member checks with participants to ensure that my interpretations of responses were accurate.

Specifically, I checked in with members when I could not make meaning of a particular answer, when I wanted to ensure that my interpretation was accurate, and/or most importantly when I initially interpreted an answer in a manner that may have aligned with my positionality. I asked follow-up clarifying questions and/or for concrete examples to solidify my understanding.

According to Maxwell (2005), conducting member checks:

is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on as well as being an important way of identifying your own bias and misunderstanding of what you observed. (p. 111)

I used the second round of interviews to conduct member checks for my interpretations of the first-round interviews. After the second round of interviews, I contacted members on an as needed basis via email, text, and phone.

Lastly, the most important strategy I employed to maintain my objectivity and increase the trustworthiness for this study was having my dissertation committee review my findings and conclusions to identify gaps in my argument, any possible arguments that I missed, and/or problematize alternative ways of thinking about an identified phenomenon. An example of this process was when my dissertation chair pushed back on my usage of a binary choice when discussing collaboration. After self-reflecting and broadening my lens, I developed the TTAC, which depicts collaboration as a continuum.

Limitations of Study

As with the majority of studies, the design of this dissertation study is subject to limitations. The first limitation concerns the sample profile. My goal was to achieve maximum variation; however, I was unable to recruit a novice teacher. Kim and Roth (2011) defined novice

teachers as having five years or less teaching experience. Therefore, my study only included varying degrees of experienced teachers. The second limitation concerns the data collection methods. Some participants' answers may have been biased due to their attempts to give expected responses. The last limitation concerns data collection. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was unable to conduct direct observations of participants' practices in their classrooms. Therefore, I was not afforded the opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of participants espoused practice of collaboration to their actual practice of collaboration. These limitations could be addressed in future research.

Positionality

The term positionality in qualitative research “both describes an individual’s world view and the position they adopt about a research task and its social and political context” (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). Over the course of my 18-year career working in the field of special education, the more I developed my capacity as an academic and as a practitioner, the clearer I saw the hierarchical nature of the teacher-teaching assistant relationship and the conditions that contributed to its reproduction. As a classroom teacher, I was hyper-focused on creating the conditions for collaboration with teaching assistants in the classroom. I would often pushback on the usage of possessive language, such as “your classroom” and ensure that whomever I was working with at the time understood that it was “our” classroom. Whenever I entered a new teacher-teaching assistant relationship, I stated my positionality upfront. I shared how I was against hierarchies and that we would engage in shared decision-making and consensus building in the classroom. My goal was always to ensure that my practices reflected my statements. The immediate reactions to my words and gestures were usually either an open mouth with a surprised look while nodding and saying, “Now that’s what I’m talking about!” or a shocked

look followed by, “Wow, okay” and then an immediate running off a litany of ideas as if they have been waiting for someone to just once ask them, “So, what do you think?”

My experience as an assistant principal broadened my positionality and I came to understand the interconnectedness between my role as a school leader, the culture of the school, and the interactions in the classrooms of the teachers and teaching assistants that I supported. It was during that time that my practitioner self, met my researcher self, resulting in my positionality influencing what I chose to investigate (Holmes, 2020).

Chapter 4: Findings

This dissertation study was guided by the following research questions: (1) What are the complex dynamics (i.e., people and/or explicit/implicit classroom-, school-, and district-wide behaviors and practices and school-wide structures) that interact to influence collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants? (1a) What role does each participant stakeholder (i.e., teacher, teaching assistant, and principal) play in those complex dynamics? and (1b) How do participants develop their understandings about the roles of TOSD and teaching assistants in the teaching and learning process?

Interestingly, I began recruiting participants for this study at the same time the unprecedented 2020 COVID-19 pandemic began to ravage the United States, forcing K–12 schools to adopt a new approach to schooling—remote learning. Needless to say, the pandemic precipitated the need for me to make crucial modifications to my study and one of those modifications was adding an additional research question to address the new, complex dynamic that participants were facing. Since the teaching and learning process as we knew it was abruptly upended, I wanted to learn if there was a difference from in-school learning to remote learning between teachers of students with disabilities and teaching assistants, which resulted in the addition of research question two: (2) How do participants describe the differences, if any, in collaboration between in-school learning and remote learning? The purpose of this question was to ascertain the impact that an environmental change has on TOSD-TA collaboration.

The first theme to emerge from my analysis of the data was about collaboration. Understanding participants' conceptualization and practice of collaboration was essential to my investigation of TOSD-teaching assistant collaboration. This theme was crucial to providing context for how participants interacted with the teaching assistant or teacher with whom they

worked in the classroom and where their practice of collaboration fell on the Continuum of Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration (TTAC) that I developed. The TTAC was developed with the understanding that the teacher-teaching assistant relationship is “semi”-hierarchical and not “non”-hierarchical, because the teacher is held to a higher standard of accountability than the teaching assistant; therefore, there is inherently some level of hierarchy, which I contend also falls along a continuum.

I sought to learn the following: how study participants defined collaboration in their own words, where their practice of collaboration fell on the TTAC, and whether their definitions of collaboration aligned with their practice—resulting in the following subthemes respectively, Definitions of Collaboration, Collaboration: A Continuum of Understanding, and Contradictions Between Conceptions of Collaboration and How They Collaborate. As my analysis continued, I uncovered myriad narratives of tension between teaching assistants and teachers, which resulted in the emergence of the following subthemes: Shared Responsibility, Teachers Teach and Teaching Assistants Manage Behavior; and Distrustful Relationships. The last subtheme, In-School Learning vs. Remote Learning, emerged because my data collection occurred during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic when learning shifted from in-school to online. My goal was to understand whether a change in environment influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. In the following section I provide an overview of each participants’ conceptualization of collaboration. Then I provide an explanation of collaboration as described and defined in the literature and last, I share a brief narrative account of how each subtheme emerged during my analysis.

Collaboration

Throughout the literature, there has been no agreement on an operational definition of collaboration, but rather a “welter of definitions, each having something to offer and none being entirely satisfactory by itself” (Wood & Gray, 1991, p. 143). Defining collaboration has “suffered from a lack of conceptual clarity” (Slater, 2004, p. 4) and was usually “conceptually amorphous” (Little, 1990, p. 509). For example, Wood and Gray (1991) conducted a theoretical analysis of nine research-based articles and two overviews. Their findings uncovered at least seven different definitions of collaboration: four borrowed from Gray’s (1989) two seminal definitions; two did not define and/or describe collaboration specifically; and one defined a specific type of collaboration, but not collaboration itself.

Due to the “plethora of terminology and definitions for collaboration” (Slater, 2004, p. 5), researchers have settled on identifying key components that describe its essential nature (Wood & Gray, 1991) that serve “to develop a common language and understanding of the term” (p. 6). Those key components are parity (Cole & Knowles, 1993; Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995), voluntary participation (Cook & Friend, 1991; Hargreaves, 1994), joint work or interdependence (Gray, 1989; Little, 1990; Welch & Sheridan, 1995), and sharing common goals (Cook & Friend, 1991; Welch & Sheridan, 1995).

Encapsulating all of the above-mentioned key components and aligning with my interpretation of the concept, I chose the following definition of collaboration to undergird my analysis:

The principals in a true collaboration represent complementary domains of expertise. As collaborators, they not only plan, decide, and act jointly, they also think together, combining independent conceptual schemes to create original frameworks. Also, in a true collaboration, there is a commitment to shared resources, power, and talent: no

individual's point of view dominates, authority for decisions and actions resides in the group, and work products reflect a blending of all participants' contributions. (John-Steiner et al., 1998, p. 776)

A true collaboration is a shared effort where collaborators co-construct, share decision-making and resources, and produce work products that equitably reflect all collaborators input.

According to Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012), “effective collaboration is based on involving all key members in the decision-making process” (p. 3). With this understanding of collaboration, I sought to learn the following: how study participants defined collaboration in their own words; where their practice of collaboration fell on the TTAC; and whether their definitions of collaboration aligned with their practice—resulting in the following subthemes respectively: Definitions of Collaboration; Collaboration: A Continuum of Understanding; and Contradictions Between Conceptions of Collaboration and How They Collaborate.

Definitions of Collaboration

In contrast to the plethora of unclear definitions of collaboration uncovered in the literature, my data analysis revealed consensus and clarity on its meaning across study participants. Following is a narrative description of their definitions.

Several participants saw collaboration as working together to co-construct knowledge. For example, school principal Mark defined collaboration as follows:

It's not just working *with* each other, but it's working *together*; I think that that's the big difference . . . I feel that that's what collaboration is, when there's an opportunity not just to work physically together, but really to work together where the elements of the work are being created, being modified, being discussed together, where people are talking and listening, in an equal type of way, you know it's not 90%-55%, it's not just people

physically doing things together, but in spirit as well, they're really doing it together.

(Interview 2, p. 16)

To Mark, teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was the co-construction of knowledge and the sharing of instructional planning and decision-making in the classroom. His definition centered on a sense of togetherness, which was similar to teaching assistant participant Stacey's definition.

Teaching assistant Stacey defined collaboration as, "working together with somebody to make something; it's cooperation and compromise between you and the person or people you are trying to create something with" (Email, 5-13-21). To Stacey, collaboration was the co-construction of knowledge, the building of consensus when decision-making, and what John-Steiner et al. (1998) referred to as "combining independent conceptual themes to create original frameworks" (p. 776). Stacey's definition was centered around a sense of togetherness, with the added practice of compromising.

Teaching assistant Gloria defined collaboration as, "working together; giving new ideas; being open to new things; applying different methods that will work for the teacher, for the para, for the students" (Interview 2, p. 8). In addition to the notion of togetherness, for Gloria, collaboration was also being open to differences of thought and to applying differentiated techniques that meet the needs of all stakeholders within the classroom.

Teaching assistant Tricia's definition of collaboration also centered around a sense of openness. Tricia, who is 63 years old with three years' experience working with students with disabilities in grades 9-12, defined collaboration as:

Talking it over, let me know what's going on; do you have any ideas to share? and then I can share with you what I may think of a lesson plan or something that may help to

support a particular lesson that you're giving; so I think conversation, just conversation.

(Interview 2, p. 7)

To Tricia, collaboration was sharing instructional decision-making through the exchange of information and ideas. Her definition not only centered on openness, but also on engaging in ongoing dialogue about instruction.

Similarly, teacher participant Deidre, a 64-year-old third grade TOSD with 18 years' experience, defined collaboration as: "coming together to discuss a plan and brainstorm ideas and strategies to achieve a goal" (Text message, 4/15/21). To Deidre, collaboration was engaging in instructional dialogue and decision-making to achieve a common goal.

Teacher participant Jacqueline also noted working towards a goal in her definition. She defined collaboration as: "a partnership where we recognize each other's strengths and weaknesses, share responsibilities, and support each other towards a mutual goal. Collaboration requires respect and time to build trust and learn from each other" (Email, 7/28/20). Her definition went further than other participants in that it not only centered on sharing responsibility, but also on building trust, learning from each other, and being reflective.

The last participant Annette, who is a 31-year-old fourth and fifth grade TOSD with eight years' experience, defined collaboration as:

When the people collaborating come with the same power dynamic—they have the same level of agency and power, but may have different responsibilities; everyone coming into a collaboration has the same amount of decision making and input to make things change.

(Interview 2, p. 14)

Similar to Jacqueline, Annette's definition had a slight difference from other participants. To her, collaboration was teaching assistants and teachers having shared decision-making power and

agency in the classroom, but with the caveat that they still might have different responsibilities. None of the other participants noted a separation of teacher-teaching assistant responsibilities in their definitions of collaboration. This distinction is important, because the noted separation aligns with Annette's in-school and remote learning practices, which are discussed throughout this chapter.

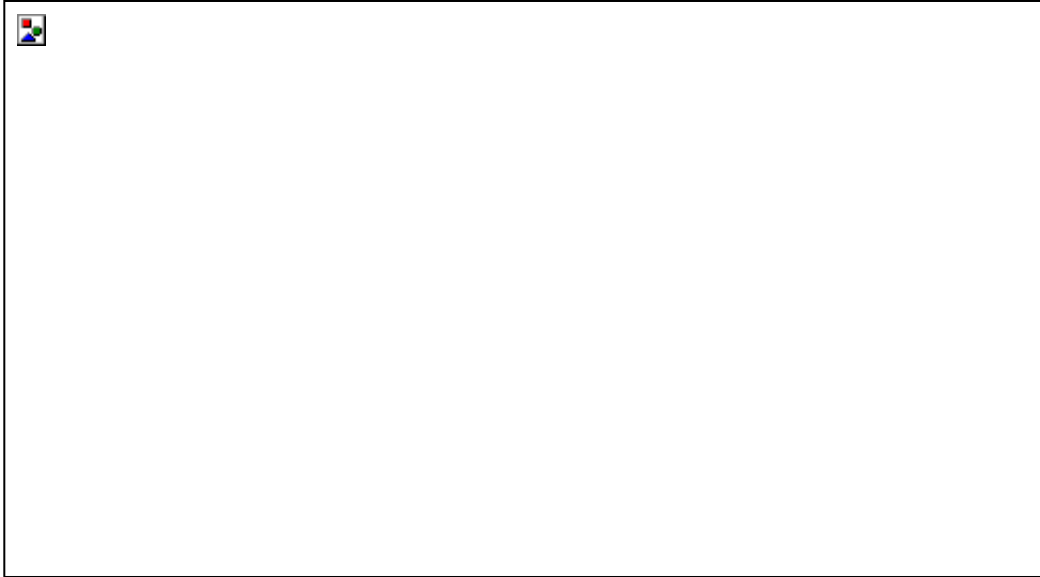
All of the participants' definitions of collaboration shared many of the same tenets of John-Steiner et al.'s (1998) definition: togetherness, co-construction, shared decision-making, and shared power. Following, I analyze participants' understanding and practice of collaboration through the lens of the TTAC.

Collaboration: A Continuum of Understanding

This subtheme emerged when it became evident that my interview questions elicited narratives that fell along a continuum, rather than between a binary choice. For example, first I asked participants to "imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?" and later, I asked them to "describe the best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration you ever had or witnessed." Initially, I interpreted their descriptions as fitting into the binary choice of *communication vs. assistance*. However, after further analysis, it resonated with me that my usage of the term "fully" elicited responses that spanned a continuum and that I was limiting the scope of meaning making of participants' narratives by analyzing through a binary lens. Therefore, I developed the Continuum of Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration (TTAC), which illustrates the range of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, and I changed the subtheme from *Communication vs. Assistance* to *Collaboration: A Continuum of Understanding*, see Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Continuum of Teacher-Teaching Assistant (TA) Collaboration (TTAC)



The TTAC depicts a shift to the right from imperfect (1): *Excluding* to ideal (5): *Integrated Collaboration*, with a corresponding increase in levels of confidence and collaboration and a corresponding decrease in teacher-teaching assistant hierarchy. The shift from *Imperfect* to *Ideal* represents the gradual sharing of responsibility and decision-making by the teacher, resulting in the ideal teacher-teaching assistant relationship of *Integrated Collaboration*.

The TTAC has the following five categories with aligned characteristics: (1) *Excluding*: Teachers making classroom-wide decisions without input from or exchange with Teaching Assistants (TAs). Characteristics include: no confidence, hierarchical, and no collaboration; (2) *Communicating/Assisting*: Teachers *informing* (communicating) TAs about classroom-wide decisions after they were already conceptualized and without TA input or an exchange of ideas, asking TAs for input after the decision was already made, and/or TAs *helping* (assisting) teachers with a task without an exchange of ideas. Characteristics include: low confidence, hierarchical, and low-level collaboration; (3) *Coordinating*: Teachers and TAs exchanging information and ideas; making alterations to practice, lessons, and/or routines; and sharing

resources and decision-making; or Teaching Assistants working autonomously to complete a task that the teacher conceptualized. Characteristics include medium-high confidence, semi-hierarchical, and moderate-level collaboration; (4) *Collaborating*: Teachers and Teaching Assistants co-constructing lessons and routines; sharing resources, decision-making, risks, and power; using consensus in shared decision-making; communicating fluidly; and learning from each other. Characteristics include: very high confidence, non-hierarchical, and high-level collaboration; and (5) *Integrated Collaborating*: All of *Collaborating*, plus, teachers and teaching assistants are integrated and not discernable. Characteristics include: very high confidence, semi-hierarchical, and high-level collaboration.

I used the TTAC to make meaning of participants' understanding and practice of collaboration. Following, I illustrate the essence of each category of the continuum—from *Excluding* to *Integrated Collaborating*—using participant narratives.

Excluding. I asked principal participant Mark: “how did you derive at the belief that teachers are the pilot of the classroom?” He explained that his understanding was based on his experience of being both a teaching assistant and a teacher:

I just remember that with one of the first teachers that I worked with, I literally felt like a nothing in the class, almost like a—not a slave, but like oh “get me this, get me this, get me that” and I felt like my talents weren't utilized . . . and then when I began teaching, I had some better assistants and I had some assistants that weren't as good and I really saw the difference—the challenges I faced and also the successes that we'll have in class depended on my ability to communicate with the paraprofessionals, but also the ability of the paraprofessionals to be able to execute the vision and the expectations that I had.

(Interview 1, p. 4)

Mark's response to my inquiry revealed that as a teaching assistant, he felt marginalized and under-valued in the classroom. Interestingly, as a teacher he reproduced that practice by expecting teaching assistants to have the ability to execute *his* vision and expectations. In both scenarios, decision-making was not shared—there was no input or exchange of ideas between the teaching assistant and teacher, which is *Excluding* on the TTAC. When asked how he derived at his understanding of the teaching assistant role, Mark referenced his past experiences as a teacher and teaching assistant and his current observations as a principal.

Communicating/Assisting. The data revealed that teacher participant Annette's practices aligned mostly with the left side of the continuum. To her, collaboration involved explaining instructional decisions to the teaching assistant:

I always try to let them know what's going on and why I'm doing something pedagogically, because I need them to understand where I'm at with it and for them to be with me so we can work together as a team. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Annette's practice of collaboration aligned with *Communicating/Assisting* on the TTAC. She informed teaching assistants of pedagogical decisions *after* she made them, without their input or an exchange of ideas. Teacher participant Deidre revealed a similar understanding of collaboration in her answer to my inquiry about why she placed *principal* in the powerful column rather than the powerless column: "she makes decisions for our school and to her credit she is collaborative and usually does have discussions about her decisions and why she might make them" (Interview 2, p. 2). To Deidre, like Annette, collaboration was discussing a unilateral decision that you already made and then communicating your rationale for making that decision.

Coordinating. For Gloria, teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was the teacher giving the teaching assistant a project and allowing her to complete it autonomously. Following, is the narrative of her best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

She used to tell me “this is what I want, work it the best way you can, if you need me let me know, but I want you to build your environment the way it works for you and the students—not for me, because I’m not there at the moment” and she was so precise and so good with that. I grew a lot with Ms. XX, I grew a lot, she taught me a lot. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Gloria felt a sense of autonomy working with the referenced teacher, which made her feel like a valued partner in the classroom. The teacher, in turn, showed that she valued Gloria’s expertise by leaving her to “work it the best way you can.” On the TTAC, Gloria’s understanding of collaboration aligned with *Coordinating*. She autonomously executed the ideas that the teacher unilaterally developed, which indicated a semi-hierarchical relationship, rather than a hierarchical one. Also, the teacher showed a moderate to high level of confidence in Gloria by telling her to “build your environment the way it works for you and the students, not for me.”

Collaborating. Teaching assistant participant Tricia also experienced autonomy in the classroom, but her narrative reflected a higher category on the TTAC. Tricia explained that:

I would write something like a lesson plan—not a full thing, but a framework and we collaborated on it verbally and he actually used my plan or whatever the suggestion was with the students, and I think when we were at XX, our collaboration was the best.

(Interview 1, p. 2)

In Tricia’s classroom—she not only had the autonomy to construct a lesson plan—she also co-constructed them with the teacher, who in turn implemented those plans with their students,

indicating very high confidence and a semi-hierarchical relationship. Further, decision-making was shared and communication was fluid, thus aligning with *Collaborating* on the TTAC.

Teaching assistant participant Stacey also provided an example of co-construction in her description of her best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

We came together and we put on an awesome event . . . we organized a competition with the whole school with our bulletin boards with a Christmas theme and we made awesome projects . . . the teacher was the brains and I was the builder—I was the one who actually executed . . . it was really good, so that was one of the best things; we also did a culminating event that the teacher coordinated where a whole bunch of classrooms collaborated. (Interview 1, p. 2)

This was the first time that Stacey used the words “we” and “our” throughout her narrative—indicating that she felt ownership over the activities and fully included in the processes. Stacey and the teacher co-constructed the competitive events and she had the autonomy to build and execute the final product.

Integrated Collaboration. Teacher participant Jacqueline was the only participant whose understanding and practice of collaboration aligned with *Integrated Collaborating*. She worked with students in grades K-2 in an inclusion class—a class where students classified as having a disability, attended classes with students who were not classified as having a disability—within a general education school. This dynamic was different from the other six participants whose students were in self-contained classes—classes where students classified as having a disability stay in the same class with each other all day.

Jacqueline provided the following example of her best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

The teaching aide and I shared a room together, so that facilitated a lot of conversation. We both had mostly provided push-in services, but depending on the day we also had small groups inside of our room. It was great when either the TA or I would have a small group, because not only was it a chance to have another set of eyes on a student, but it was also a chance for me to learn something about the way that (TA's name) manages students and teaches students and vice versa, so I think the fact that we had shared space together made the collaborating a lot easier. (Interview 1, pp. 3–4)

During my analysis, I immediately honed in on the consistent difference in language usage between Jacqueline and the other participants. She often used words like “we” and “our” when discussing the teacher-teaching assistant relationship, whereas other participants primarily used possessive language like “my” and “I.” Her inclusive language usage was evidenced in the above referenced narrative. To Jacqueline, teacher-teaching assistant collaboration involved ongoing communication; instruction and behavior management facilitated by both the teaching assistant and the teacher; and both stakeholders learning from one another. The collaboration described by Jacqueline, indicated a classroom where the teacher and teaching assistant were not discernible and the relationship was semi-hierarchical with very high confidence, thus aligning with *Integrated Collaborating*.

The TTAC afforded me the opportunity to see the nuances in participants' conceptions and practices of collaboration, especially since I initially conducted my analysis looking through a binary lens. Having a clearer picture of their understandings and practice, helped to uncover contradictions between their what they discussed and what they enacted, which resulted in the formulation of the next subtheme, contradictions between conceptions of collaboration and how they collaborate.

Contradictions Between Conceptions of Collaboration and How They Collaborate

The narratives elicited from certain questions helped to reveal an unvarnished picture of contradictions between how participants practiced and what they espoused about collaboration. Specifically, they defined collaboration one way and envisioned full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration similarly, but their practice and conception of the teacher and teaching assistant's role in the classroom, contradicted their definition and/or vision.

For example, principal participant Mark's definition of collaboration was similar to his vision of a school with full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

If an observer would come into the room you wouldn't necessarily know who the teacher is and who the assistants are; there would be a lot of dialogue back-and-forth; you would see different voice and different perspectives being taken into account as it relates to the planning of the instruction and then giving over of the instruction; you'll see opportunities for paraprofessionals to take a lead based on areas of interest or skill; and you would also see less disconnects of things not being understood in terms of the type of supports that should be given, because things would be done in a more proactive way as opposed to someone being told to do something. (Interview 1, pp. 15–16)

For Mark, in a classroom with full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, the teaching assistant and teacher would not be discernable, power would be balanced, communication would be fluid, there would be mutual respect for expertise, and there would be an openness to diverse perspectives. To him, this sense of shared responsibility could better address the needs of students and alleviate any disconnects. Mark's vision indicated that he viewed teaching assistants as equal partners with teachers in the classroom.

Although his afore-mentioned definition of collaboration and his vision of full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration centered on equality, togetherness, and shared responsibility, they were contrary to his understandings of the teacher and teaching assistant's role in the classroom. For instance, Mark asserted that the role of the teacher was to "utilize the ancillary staff in a manner that caters to their strengths, so that they too can be part of the support for the students . . ." (Interview 1, p. 4). A teacher catering to a teaching assistant's strengths in the classroom is an ideal action that creates the conditions for teaching assistant productivity to be maximized and teacher-teaching assistant collaboration to be realized. However, the word ancillary immediately raised a red flag for me, because it refers to someone who is subordinate, secondary, or subsidiary. Describing teaching assistants as ancillary is antithetical to the notion that power is balanced in the classroom and teachers and teaching assistants share responsibility.

Teacher participant Annette similarly described collaboration as teachers and teaching assistants having shared power and agency in the classroom. However, her definition was contrary to her conception of the teacher and teaching assistant's role. For instance, Annette stated that the role of the teaching assistant was to "follow the teacher's directive, but also collaborate with the teacher to create the best plan for students possible" (Interview 2, p. 6). I interpreted tension within her description. On the one hand, she described a hierarchical relationship, where decision-making was not shared and teaching assistants lacked autonomy; and on the other hand, she described an openness to collaborating in the best interest of students.

Teacher participant Deidre's definition of collaboration centered on teaching assistants and teachers brainstorming ideas and strategies to achieve a goal. However, in practice, she explained that "it was always important to me to have a collaboration and it not be me just saying this is what we're doing, but give a rationale and reason and ask for their input . . ." (Interview 1,

pp. 7–8). Deidre’s informing teaching assistants of the rationale for her unilateral decisions and then asking them for their input afterwards was contrary to brainstorming ideas.

Interestingly, the three teaching assistant participants exhibited similar contradictions to each other. Their definitions of collaboration and visions of full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration ranged from (3) *Coordinating* to (5) *Integrated Collaborating* on the TTAC, whereas they centered on shared responsibility and decision-making, balanced power, fluid communication, co-construction of lessons, and/or the teacher and teaching assistant not being discernable in the classroom. However, collectively, implicit within their descriptions of the teaching assistant’s role was a hierarchical relationship.

For example, to Stacey, the role of the teaching assistant was to “assist the teacher in any way that they may need to better help the children learn . . .” (Interview 2, p. 4); to Tricia, their role was to do “anything to help the teacher facilitate the lesson in whatever capacity the teacher needs you to do it” (Interview 2, p. 5); and to Gloria, they were “the backbone of the teacher; she’s there to assist you in anything and everything that you need to accomplish in your classroom” (Interview 2, p. 5). All teaching assistant participants’ conceptions of the teaching assistant’s role aligned with (2) *Communicating/Assisting* on the TTAC, which was contrary to where their definitions and visions were located on the continuum.

Consensus amongst teaching assistants about their conceptions of the teaching assistant’s role in the classroom indicated their similar lived school experiences and depicted their commitment to the teaching and learning process. All teaching assistant participants expressed their willingness to do whatever was necessary to support the teacher and to meet the needs of their students. This particular set of data showed that teaching assistants entered their classrooms with the mindset to share responsibility with the teacher; however, my analysis revealed that

responsibility was not often shared within classrooms—a topic which I address in the next subtheme.

Shared Responsibility

The notion of shared responsibility was a recurring theme throughout participants' visions of full teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, but it was not always a reality in their classrooms. For example, in a description of her worst collaboration, teaching assistant participant Tricia shared how the teacher held onto her responsibilities more than other teachers that she worked with and did not

give you any kind of leeway, it's pretty much—I need you to do this, that's it, nothing else; the other teachers gave me more leeway to collaborate with them on whatever, from the bulletin board to a class lesson. (Interview 1, p. 3)

In that referenced classroom, the teacher excluded Tricia from decision-making processes and did not foster a collaborative culture. She chose to take on all responsibility, rather than share it. Tricia speculated as to why some teachers at her school chose not to share responsibility with teaching assistants:

I think administration is a big issue; that many teachers are like functioning in fear—too many of them, so they're afraid to relinquish any kind of big task responsibility; I can't think of the right word, but just for fear that they need to be able to CYA (cover your ass) and I think that impacts what they are willing to allow their paras to help with or how much they allow us to contribute, because their concern is just that they have to report to administration and they're the ones who are ultimately held responsible. (Interview 1, p. 2)

Tricia's speculation offered keen insight into why some teachers at her school might have been reluctant to share responsibility with teaching assistants. She described an atmosphere of fear and apprehension, which resulted in non-collaborative classroom practices. The behaviors and values of school leaders at Tricia's school were associated with the school's culture (Maslowski, 2001). School cultures emit implicit and explicit messages about their values every day and according to Tricia, the implicit message emitted from her school was for teachers to essentially micromanage teaching assistants, and not share responsibility in order to maintain control over classroom outcomes and decrease the likelihood of getting in trouble.

Micromanagement was also a practice at principal participant Mark's school, albeit for different reasons. He shared that "there are a couple of classes where—and we're trying to work on this—the teachers micromanage and expect that people understand that there's a hierarchy" (Interview 2, p. 11). At Mark's school, some teachers preferred not to share responsibility in order to maintain their status in the classroom hierarchy—a phenomenon that Mark stated school leadership was trying to address.

Teaching assistant participant Gloria described her conception of why teachers did not share responsibility in the classroom: "sometimes teachers don't give responsibility to the paras, because they think they're not capable of doing it and sometimes they bump heads" (Interview 1, p. 2). Gloria's narrative was succinct, but deep. She believed that teachers did not "give responsibility" to teaching assistants, because of perceived incompetence, which led to conflict. I wondered if teachers' perceptions were influenced by teaching assistants lack of access to formal knowledge at Gloria's school, teachers past experiences with teaching assistants, and/or if it was their innate belief about teaching assistants' capabilities.

The unwillingness of teachers to share responsibility in the classroom was one practice that was counterproductive to fostering teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. Another practice that hindered collaboration, was school leaders' exclusion of teaching assistants from the dissemination of pedagogical information. For instance, teaching assistant Tricia shared how school leaders would:

Give information to the teachers, but the teaching assistants get it as it trickles down—if a teacher shares with you; so then what's being shared is inconsistent, it's like pick and choose; this one may get it, but that one won't; depending on who they happen to be paired with and like I said, some teachers for whatever reason hold their cards close to their chest. (Interview 2, p. 6)

At Tricia's school, only teachers were afforded access to formal knowledge, hence resulting in teaching assistants having to depend on them for pertinent information to effectively support students in the classroom. Unfortunately, dissemination of that pertinent information was inconsistent across classrooms, because the onus was on individual teachers to share. Ironically, although teaching assistants across participants' schools, not just Tricia's school, were excluded from access to formal knowledge, they were still responsible for a range of instructional and social-emotional duties in the classroom—a conundrum that I discuss in the next subtheme.

Teachers Teach and Teaching Assistants Manage Behavior

Participants were asked: “What do you believe the role of the teacher/teaching assistant is in the classroom?” and their responses revealed, for the most part, teachers teach and teaching assistants primarily manage student behavior along with a range of other responsibilities. For example, principal participant Mark's response uncovered an unequal distribution of teacher-teaching assistant responsibilities:

I mean in a nutshell, the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom is to support the teacher, the students, the functioning of the class, and the overall positive environment for everyone . . . I think that as we look at specifics, you're looking to support the social-emotional and academic development of students; you're looking at being able to support individual student needs as it relates to the access to academics in the classroom; there's an expectation for the teacher assistant to work with the teacher as it relates to facilitating small groups; and building relationships is another thing. (Interview 1, p. 6)

According to Mark, teaching assistants are responsible for supporting the teacher; supporting the students with academics and social-emotional learning; in small groups and during one-to-one instruction; building relationships; and “supporting the overall positive environment for everyone” (Interview 1, p. 6). In contrast, he explained that teachers are responsible for preparing and delivering lessons and giving teaching assistants directives and information.

The aforementioned tasks seemed like a significant amount of responsibility for an “ancillary” staff member, especially since some of the tasks required specialized knowledge and skills (e.g., one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, social-emotional learning, and relationship building). Based on the data collected, teaching assistants at Mark’s school were not afforded access to the formal knowledge that teachers received during professional development experiences and common planning time due to their exclusion from those activities. Therefore, it was unclear how they would acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to facilitate the described responsibilities effectively.

Similar to Mark, Annette provided the following list of social-emotional and academic related responsibilities that she contended teaching assistants were responsible for: “paperwork specific for that student” if they were one-to-one paraprofessionals; “if they’re a classroom

paraprofessional, to provide assistance to all students whether it's small group work or individual work"; and "help students stay confident and motivated and meet their social emotional as-well-as their academic needs"—"but their job is not to instruct" (Interview 2, p. 6). Annette was explicit that teaching assistants were not responsible for instruction, only teachers were—specifically, she explained that "the role of the teacher is to instruct and assess students; to help them progress; and to be self-reflective with the goal of doing what is best for students to learn" (Interview 2, p. 6). She further explained that, in her mind, the teaching assistant's job was "to go over and review concepts that I have already taught and to help facilitate social emotional growth and benefits for students" (Interview 2, p. 8).

To Annette, the teacher's role was to instruct and assess students to meet their academic needs and the teaching assistant's role is to meet students' academic and social-emotional needs. Annette's assertion that teaching assistants are to only play a non-instructional role in the classroom, conflicted with both her description of their responsibilities (i.e., to provide individual, small group, and/or whole group academic assistance) and her assertion that she wanted "to foster an environment where the students trust the paraprofessionals as another teacher in the classroom, so if a kid needs review of a concept or doesn't know what to do, they can contact any paraprofessional in the classroom" (Interview 2, p. 7).

Annette's understandings and practices revealed a misconception of instruction and pedagogy. According to Hyun (2006), instruction is the "passing of (pre)existing knowledge on to learners" (pp. 141–142), which is exactly what takes place when teaching assistants review work with students and/or assist them with assignments; and pedagogy "denotes the principles and methods of instruction or the activities of educating or teaching learners" (p. 137), which is more in line with the role Annette understood teachers to play in the classroom. Contrastingly,

teaching assistant participant Tricia understood the role of the teaching assistant as an instructional role. She asserted that “it still says teacher—teaching assistant maybe, but it's still teacher, therefore that's the adult in the room who is still here to help instruct you and teach you something” (Interview 2, p. 6).

Teaching assistant participant Stacey also described the teaching assistant role as having instructional elements. To Stacey, the teaching assistant's role was:

A lot of one-on-one interaction with the kids; a lot of small groups; and maybe doing paperwork; checking classwork, homework, doing bulletin boards— anything to make the school day and the learning process easier for the kids, that's the teaching assistant's job. (Interview 2, p. 4)

Stacey named a diverse set of responsibilities for the teaching assistant—including one-to-one instruction and small group instruction, which are instructional tasks—but for the role of the teacher, she only stated that they were responsible for teaching: “the role of the teacher is to teach the children; try to teach them and educate them on what they are supposed to know in order to survive in the world and to succeed in life” (Interview 2, p. 3).

Across participants, there was an understanding that teaching assistants were responsible for students' social-emotional needs, more so than teachers, although they were never explicitly taught about the role of the teaching assistant in their formal studies or during professional development experiences. However, there was a dichotomy in understanding of the teaching assistant's role in terms of instruction. Teaching assistant participants saw their role as instructional, but teacher and principal participants did not, even though the roles and responsibilities they described were instructional in nature. Teaching assistants were aware of the unequal distribution of responsibilities along with the lack of access to formal knowledge to

support their roles in the classroom. That awareness impacted their relationships with teachers and school leaders. Having unclear roles and responsibilities was one factor that led to the development of distrustful relationships, which I discuss in the next subtheme.

Distrustful Relationships

The data revealed that a lack of fostering of collaborative relationships and having inadequate school structures and unclear roles and responsibilities, resulted in the development of distrustful relationships. For example, teaching assistant participant Stacey explained that the relationships in her school were only “surface level and superficial” and oftentimes teachers and teaching assistants who worked together did not actually like one another, resulting in them “undermining each other in the classroom and that’s something that also goes on in the school.” She surmised that “people think since they’ve been in the building longer than others, they’re above certain rules” (Interview 1, p. 3). Stacey’s explanation also illustrated the impact that inadequate school structures had on collaboration. In her school, teachers and teaching assistants who have an adversarial relationship are placed in the same classroom to work together and senior staff members have leeway to flout the existing rules.

Teacher participant Annette stated that she has “heard from a lot of paraprofessionals who felt like they’ve been burned in the past for trying to collaborate with the teacher;” they would tell the teacher that they were there to help with whatever they wanted—whether it was beautification of bulletin boards, fixing the library, setting up classroom “systems for students to make your life easier”—but “the teacher sees it as an overstep of the paraprofessional and then becomes more distrustful and anxious and almost angry at the paraprofessional for offering to help” (Interview 2, pp. 11–12). Instead of the teacher seeing the teaching assistant as an insider who was there to be a partner, she saw her as an outsider and a threat to her authority. The

teacher's refusal to share responsibility in the classroom resulted in the development of a distrustful relationship.

At teaching assistant Tricia's school, distrust and fear were so entrenched that when I asked her what advice she would give to new teachers and teaching assistants, she responded:

It would be the same advice: carry a notebook, take a lot of notes 'cause you're not going to remember everything and six months down the line when they ask you what happened to so-and-so, on this date, you're going to be glad you had that notebook writing things down. (Interview 1, p. 6)

In an effort to make meaning out of Tricia's response, I followed up by asking: "When you say keep your notebook, is that related to earlier in the interview when you spoke about CYA (cover your ass)? To which Tricia replied "yes, yes" (Interview 1, p. 6). Tricia's description provided some insight into her school's culture and climate in that her advice to new employees was to protect themselves above everything else. Record keeping was important to Tricia, because there was distrust of colleagues to not back one another up and there was distrust of school leaders to possibly accuse them of something that they could not prove without having that notebook.

Teaching assistant participant Gloria also shared a narrative about distrusting colleagues through the telling of a personal experience:

I got hurt at the job and everybody that was standing there pretended they didn't see it, "I didn't see anything"; and when it was time to write a report "oh I didn't see it, I didn't see it". I think that was pretty bad, like people that were standing there told me "oh I didn't see it, I can't write anything". (Interview 1, p. 6)

For Gloria, her colleagues' reaction to her accident was the ultimate form of betrayal and it led to her distrusting them moving forward.

Gossiping was another action that led participants to distrust their colleagues. Teaching assistant participant Stacey shared her experience with a teacher she worked with as a brand-new teaching assistant:

Later I found out that the same teacher said that I wasn't a good worker and that I didn't work, but I didn't know what to do, and you didn't tell me what you wanted me to do—just tell me what you want me to do and I will try to do it the best way I can

(Interview 1, p. 3)

As a new teaching assistant, who just met the teacher whom she was working with on the first day of school, Stacey was not aware of the classroom or school processes. She learned of the teacher's comments from another colleague, which led Stacey to fear that the negative and false comments about her had spread throughout the school building.

Teaching assistant Gloria provided an example of what happens when gossip spreads about you across a school building. In response to my follow-up question inquiring about why she believed teachers thought teaching assistants were incapable of being given responsibilities, Gloria responded: “if you have a teacher and the teacher doesn't like you—don't like the way that you are, and she tells the next teacher, usually the next teacher doesn't give you a chance, they already put up a wall” (Interview 1, p. 2). Her explanation indicated that some teachers in her school believe the narrative of other teachers about teaching assistants before getting to know the teaching assistants for themselves first, which further negatively impacts the teacher-teaching assistant relationship. These distrustful relationships were reproduced in the school building year after year.

However, all of that changed after the COVID-19 pandemic caused the shutdown of the largest public school district in the United States, forcing schools to go “remote” for the first

time in history. Participants acquired three months of remote learning experience before I started my data collection and the data revealed that the environmental change positively influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaborative practices, resulting in the formulation of the next subtheme.

In-School Learning vs. Remote Learning

The COVID-19 pandemic required schools to reimagine schooling and the teaching and learning process. In less than 24-hours, schooling went from inside of the school building to inside of the home. This seismic shift from in-school learning to remote learning had an intriguing effect on the teacher-teaching assistant relationship for most participants in this study. There was an increase in collaboration, specifically with teachers sharing responsibility with teaching assistants and trusting their capabilities. The shift to remote learning revealed how classroom relationships inside the school building interacted with school structures.

For example, teaching assistant participant Gloria explained how she and the teacher developed a closer relationship during remote learning and became co-learners: “now we have to be on the phone and we have to have a one-on-one meeting before a lesson and she texts me and she emails me” (Interview 1, p. 5)—communicative practices that did not take place throughout in-school learning. Gloria added that the teacher “always asks me to give her input and what I think and all that stuff, because now it's a different new world for her, it's a new window for her completely” (Interview 1, p. 5). Her assertion led me to ask if the teacher sought input from her often when they were in the school building and she replied: “um, less.” During remote learning, teacher-teaching assistant collaboration increased to *Collaborating* on the TTAC for Gloria and the teacher, where there was shared decision-making, co-construction of lessons, and fluid communication. The removal of the school building structure, along with all of the internal

complex dynamics, plus the addition of the remote learning unknown variable—facilitated an increase in the teacher’s willingness to share responsibility and collaborate with Gloria. I hypothesize that teachers experience of being “experts”, was dislodged due to the shift from the known variable of in-school learning to the unknown variable of remote learning.

Teaching assistant participant Tricia had a similar remote learning experience to Gloria, except her fluid communication with the teacher was a continuation of their in-school practice. Tricia explained that during remote learning, the teacher and she:

. . . may have a phone call to which we’ll discuss the strategies for dealing with our students given that some of them have signed on or some of them are more difficult to reach. We’ll speak about—“okay, I’ll be calling so and so today” or we have even done things where we will do the Google Meet and then I call the students and he listens to hear exactly what’s going on with that parent or student in general. (Interview 1, p. 4)

The only difference between their in-school and remote learning communicative practices was that they were communicating more via email, telephone, and text message. On the TTAC, Tricia and the teacher’s remote learning practices aligned with *Collaborating*, because there was fluid communication and decision-making, power, and risk taking were shared.

My analysis revealed a juxtaposition between the student outreach process of Tricia’s classroom team and teacher participant Annette’s classroom team. According to Annette, her remote learning experience was “completely different” from her in-school experience, because most of the time it was easier for her to:

check in directly with the students rather than call a paraprofessional to check in on students, so in that way I had to be more working by myself; in a classroom situation I

could ask the paraprofessional to chime in, but that might take twice the amount of time than me just doing it myself during remote learning time. (Interview 1, p. 8)

In Annette's classroom, a shared student outreach process was not developed like in Tricia's classroom, resulting in her feeling as if she was working alone. Annette explained how she "had to text and call my paraprofessionals always" and how she did not "have time to explain to my paraprofessionals the reasoning behind why I'm doing certain things" (Interview 1, p. 8). In contrast to Gloria and Tricia, where communicating via text message and telephone were a part of the planning and preparation process with the teacher, for Annette, those practices were an additional obstacle. On the TTAC, Annette's remote learning and in-school learning practices were synonymous, whereas both aligned with *Excluding*. Her having to explain the reasoning behind her decisions indicated that unilateral decisions were made without input from or an exchange of ideas with teaching assistants.

One barrier to fluid communication for Annette was getting teaching assistants "on at a time that makes sense for them too, because some of them are parents" (Interview 1, p. 8). Another barrier was the lack of a school structure for teachers and teaching assistants to meet virtually every morning like Gloria's school administration implemented and also like principal participant Mark implemented. Specifically, Mark scheduled asynchronous time (students worked independently offline without the teacher/teaching assistant) for students from 8:00am to 9:00am every day, to afford teachers and teaching assistants time to engage in collaborative planning. Mark noted that the embedded collaborative time resulted in an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration during synchronous (live teaching during remote learning) periods. He added that there was more collaboration during the first few weeks of summer school "than the first 16 weeks that we were remote, because of that built in time" (Interview 2, p. 12).

The increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration left Mark feeling pleasantly surprised. He explained that there were:

some partnerships that were not as strong as they could have been when we were physically in the building, that for some reason—because of either the lack of skill or the advancements of skill of given people—some of those relationships or those challenges that we were seeing with the partnerships in school, was like a total 180-degree difference, and that's a good thing. . . . (Interview 1, p. 14)

Similar to Gloria's experience, the removal of the school building structure from the relationship along with the addition of common planning time embedded within schedules—contributed to an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. Additionally, remote learning appeared to have created a greater need for teacher-teaching assistant interdependency, which also contributed to an increase in collaboration.

This interesting phenomenon was further revealed in a description by Mark:

certain people really needed to maintain a certain level of, we'll put in quotes "control" of the environment physically, knowing at all times what everybody is doing and now that it's remote . . . there's a certain level of control that the teacher either can't or isn't able to have and in some of the situations that lack of control or lack of micromanaging has helped out and given opportunities for paras to shine and also to not feel, well—"disrespected." (Interview 1, p. 14)

Teachers who tended to exert control in the physical classroom shared responsibility during remote learning due to the unique challenges they faced; hence, creating the conditions for teaching assistants to demonstrate their range of capabilities.

In contrast, the teacher with whom teaching assistant participant Stacey worked exerted more control during remote learning than in-school learning, whereas their collaborative relationship “changed completely.” Stacey shared how during remote learning:

The teacher is really the main administrator; they’re the main one who puts up lessons and decides what they’re gonna do and what the kids are going to learn; the paras can check work and can sit in on lessons . . . but for the most part it’s not really any collaboration, it’s just the teachers doing everything and scheduling it and as a para, you’re supposed to attend and that’s basically it. (Interview 1, p. 4)

On the TTAC, the teacher’s remote learning practice aligned with *Excluding*, because she unilaterally made all decisions without an exchange of ideas or input from Stacey. At Stacey’s school, school leaders did not implement school-wide structures—such as common planning time embedded within remote learning schedules, to afford classroom teams the time to collaborate. However, it is important to note that the classroom team also did not take it upon themselves to establish means of communication at any point during the remote school day like Tricia and Gloria’s classroom team did.

In terms of school-wide structures, teacher participant Deidre provided a narrative about her school’s remote learning experience that left me perplexed. Deidre explained:

Our district did continue to employ the assistants, but they never told the teachers you need to utilize them; I think our head of special ed gave them videos to watch, like a million videos; because I had a great relationship with my assistant and we did have this class community, she did log on to our zoom meetings to do read-alouds and discussions and those kinds of things, so she was still very visibly part of our class, which I think really helped them. (Interview 1, p. 6)

I was so alarmed by Deidre's narrative that I asked her this follow-up question for clarification: *"So, for clarification, there was no expectation for teaching assistants to support students during remote learning?"* to which Deidre responded: "An expectation was never communicated to the teachers; when I spoke to the assistants, they said they were given a series of videos to watch" (Interview 1, p. 6).

Deidre's narrative was remarkable to me for several reasons. First, the school district continued to employ teacher assistants, but did not use their talents to support remote learning; second, school building leaders did not communicate their expectations for teaching assistant responsibilities during remote learning to teachers or teaching assistants; and third, the head of the students with disabilities department assigned teaching assistants videos to watch rather than have them continue to support children who needed their services even more during remote learning.

Deidre and the teaching assistant's collaborative in-school relationship carried over to remote learning, which positively impacted their students. However, if it was not for their individual proactiveness, their students would not have benefited from the sense of normalcy that they provided them. Across participants, there were wide disparities in how collaboration shifted during the pandemic—some took it as an opportunity to deepen collaboration and others further shifted to less collaboration. Deidre's narrative was an example of the importance of relationship building and how inadequate school structures were a complex dynamic that influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaboration—a topic that I discuss in the following theme.

Inadequate School Structures

Several participants' narratives shared under the previous theme revealed the impact that school structures have on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. The findings from my analysis

coincided with the findings from Devecchi and Rouse (2010) who concluded “that classroom collaboration was closely informed by whole school systems of staff support, participation, training and induction” (p. 95). Hence, the level of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration within the classroom was closely dependent on the conditions created for collaboration by school leaders who work outside of the classroom. Within schools, classrooms are microsystems that function within two macrosystems—the school building and the school district—all of which are interdependent upon one another. Subsequently, when adequate school structures are not in place at the macro-level it impacts what takes place at the micro-level.

My analysis revealed that there were inadequate school structures in place to cultivate teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in all but one participant’s school, resulting in the emergence of the following subthemes: Leadership is a Big Issue; Inconsistent Continuity; Unclear Roles and Responsibilities; The Fostering of Collaboration is up to Teachers; Collaborative Time Not Embedded Within Schedules; and Lack of Preparation and Orientation.

Leadership is a Big Issue

School leadership was a contextual factor that not only influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, but also school culture (Freiberg 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2001). Ultimately, the school principal shapes “the culture and climate of the school” (MacNeil et al., 2009, p. 76) and “a collaborative culture cannot exist within a school unless the principal understands what a collaborative culture is and why it is important (i.e., knowledge regarding collaborative cultures) and then actively supports the development and maintenance of such a culture” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 67). The data from my study did not reveal evidence of a fostering of collaborative culture across participants’ schools. However, it did uncover a

continuum of school leadership practices that ranged from not fostering collaboration at all to a contradictory understanding of fostering collaboration. For the purposes of this dissertation, a school leader is a school level administrator (e.g., assistant/vice principal, principal, program director) and a district leader is a district level administrator (e.g., assistant superintendent, superintendent).

For example, in teaching assistant Stacey's response to my question inquiring about how teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was fostered at her school, she immediately responded: "I don't really think they create much of a climate for us to collaborate" (Interview 2, p. 5) and earlier in the interview, she explained:

Administration and guidelines that they set definitely have an impact on the collaboration between teachers and paras, as-well-as just tradition; a lot of times certain things have been going on in buildings for a long time, so it's just accepted; and their personalities and levels of respect. (Interview 1, p. 1)

To Stacey, school leaders did not create the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration at her school, and further their personalities, the manners in which they interacted with staff, the explicit school-wide policies and procedures they enacted, and the implicit procedures that they allowed staff to follow adversely impacted teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom. According to Stacey, certain behaviors have been reproduced over the years, because of "tradition" and therefore they were "accepted" by school leadership.

One accepted behavior in particular was teaching assistants with more seniority were allowed to dictate interactions in the classroom. For example, "if there were one or two paras in the classroom, the para with the most seniority chooses and kind of like dictates how the classroom goes, like: who does whatever, and who goes to lunch first, things like that"

(Interview 1, p. 2). This was an implicit practice, not an explicit school policy and it adversely impacted inter-teaching assistant relationships and the culture of the classroom.

Looking through the bifocal lens of structures and lives—the tenets of critical bifocality— “structural conditions are enacted in policy and reform institutions as well as the ways in which such conditions come to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals” (Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 174). Stacey’s narratives reflected how the explicit structural conditions enacted and the implicit structural conditions accepted at her school became a part of the school’s culture, resulting in the reproduction of non-collaborative interactions and distrustful relationships.

Teacher participant Annette also described a scenario where school leaders did not create the conditions for collaboration or collegiality. She explained that the relationships in her school building were “very cliquy, unfortunately our staff is very divided; I think our administration has allowed cliques to happen where there are groups of people who won't even acknowledge each other or talk to one another” (Interview 1, p. 8). To Annette, school leaders played an integral role in fostering and sustaining collegial and collaborative relationships, which was why she held them accountable for allowing cliquish behaviors to be reproduced at her school.

Another behavior that was reproduced at Annette’s school was teacher-teaching assistant self-segregation during professional development that both stakeholders attended. According to Annette, there was a school culture of teachers and teaching assistants sitting separately from each other during professional development experiences and no school structures have been put in place to change that culture. She explained how “those dynamics of separation of teachers and teaching assistants have been in existence since I started at the school four years ago, so I think it’s an institutional self-selective thing” (Interview 2, p. 4). Based on my analysis of Annette’s

interview transcripts, teachers and teaching assistants at her school were socialized to be apart at PDs, because teaching assistants were usually excluded from them altogether.

The aforementioned examples of TOSD and teaching assistants' reproduction of behaviors highlight the ways in which broad-based political and social structures set the stage for day-to-day actions and decisions among privileged and non-privileged persons (Weis & Fine, 2012). More specifically, TOSD and TAs work within the context of a school's culture and structures, therefore the culture shaped by school leaders and the school structures they put into place set the stage for teacher-teaching assistant day-to-day interactions.

Teaching assistant Gloria described a school structure that negatively impacted the day-to-day lives of classroom teams. She explained that at her school, continuity of classroom team assignments was not taken into consideration in relation to professional development. For example, teachers and teaching assistants learned a new curriculum together, but then were separated when it was time for implementation. Specifically, according to Gloria:

If they have a new curriculum they want you to learn, they do that, and then they take the para and put her someplace else; they don't even keep her with the teacher, how about that? They put you to work with the teacher, so you could learn and get familiar with that curriculum and then when it's time to go apply the curriculum they put you someplace else and then you're not working with the teacher. (Interview 2, p. 4)

At Gloria's school, school leaders have teachers and teaching assistants learn the curriculum collaboratively and then separate them when it is time for implementation. Moving them around without regard for continuity of pedagogical and interpersonal relationships, adversely impacted collaboration and the efficacy of lessons. Further, having teachers and teaching assistants collaboratively attend professional development experiences was an effective practice; however,

separating them when it was time for implementation was an inadequate school structure. The teacher and teaching assistant already built consensus around their understandings of the curriculum, within the context of their students, so to move the teaching assistant to another classroom forced the new classroom team to start the process over and individuals to feel resentment towards school leaders.

Through the bifocal lens of structures and lives, I also uncovered a participant's contradictory understanding of the role that school leaders played in fostering teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. Principal participant Mark shared that he thought:

It starts with us, if we kind of create those opportunities and set that tone in our building for collaboration—sans title; I think that that changes mindset, and the changing of mindset is the most critical piece to making sure that like a reflex, teachers and paras are collaborating with each other as opposed to maybe it feeling forced or happening once in a while when we can do it, but it becomes more standard practice. (Interview 1, p. 17)

According to Waldron and McLeskey (2010), “the principal is a key participant in ensuring the development of a collaborative culture” (p. 65) and Mark illustrated his understanding of this notion by stating that creating opportunities and setting the tone for collaboration started with school principals. He further noted that changing the mindset of TOSD and teaching assistants would establish collaborative practice as the standard practice at his school.

Contradictorily, when explaining his rationale for placing teaching assistants in the “powerless” column, Mark stated:

You can have the greatest positive mindset, you could want to support in the most creative wonderful ways, but if your teacher and your administration don't support that—if they don't want that—then you're at their whim, because the reality is that even though

everybody can support in very meaningful ways, there still is a hierarchy within our district, so I see here it's the hierarchy within our school. (Interview 2, p. 1)

Previously, Mark asserted that changing the mindset of teaching assistants and teachers would result in an increase and standardization of collaborative practice; however, the above referenced quote indicated that even with a change in mindset—teaching assistants at his school would still be marginalized in the classroom. Mark alluded to the hierarchical classroom structures and practices in his school building being a reproduction of the hierarchical structures and practices of the school district, which indicated to me that he felt there was nothing he could do about it. However, that understanding is contradictory to his assertion that principals “create those opportunities and set that tone in our building for collaboration.”

It was evident that school district level practices had an impact on school building level interactions and culture, a phenomenon that was also revealed in other parts of the data. For instance, I asked participants what they would say to school district leaders if they had the opportunity to speak with them and they all shared a response related to wanting school district leaders to allow school building staff to make decisions for their respective school buildings.

Specifically, teacher participant Jacqueline stated that “there needs to be more opportunities for teacher voice in how districts make decisions and manage their resources” (Interview 1, p. 7). Principal participant Mark stated that he would tell them that they “should ask the individual principals and members of the school community specific things about the school community, and about the needs of the school community before making overarching decisions that directly impact us” (Interview 1, p. 13). Finally, teaching assistant participant Stacey shared that she would tell them that TOSD and teaching assistants need to have input in “the choosing of curriculum that will actually work for our kids and not just going along with

some blueprint of what they expect” (Interview 1, p. 4). Participants’ narratives illustrated their desire to have more autonomy over the structural decisions that impact their daily lives within the school building and within the classroom, and they yearned for school district leaders to be more informed about the unique needs of individual schools rather than taking a one-size-fits-all approach to decision-making. However, teacher participant Annette shared her concerns that “oftentimes when teachers speak up and out against those issues, they can be retaliated against or targeted by administrators” (Interview 2, p. 1), resulting in the cycle of inadequate decision-making being reproduced with impunity.

This subtheme illustrated the role that school building and district leaders played in creating and hindering the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and depicted how implicit and explicit school practices were interpreted and reproduced. The subthemes that follow describe specific school structures at participants’ schools that influenced the level of teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom.

Inconsistent Continuity

Findings from Jones et al. (2012) revealed several contextual factors that contributed to an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. One factor was continuity—the same paraeducator working with the same students during the entire school day, and more importantly, three of the paraeducators working with the same teachers at the same grade level for more than three years. The authors found that this school structure resulted in the development of rapport and routines. The findings from their study were analogous to my findings from principal participant Mark, who saw an increase in collaboration after keeping the same teacher-teaching assistant team together for three consecutive years.

In his narrative of the best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration he ever witnessed, Mark noted that: “this is already year three of their relationship.” I was intrigued by that statement, so I followed up by asking: “what role do you believe having the same teacher and teaching assistants work together, over a three-year period of time, played in their level of collaboration?” He responded by providing an example of the nature of their interactions:

I mean, the simple answer is it had a tremendous impact. Some people say that when there's a relationship with friends or with spouses that people can finish their sentences, they don't even need to express their thoughts—a look lets the other person know exactly what they're saying and feeling. (Interview 1, p. 9)

What Mark explained was team members who were well attuned with one another could anticipate each other's thoughts and actions. They spent the first year building their relationship and working through minor conflicts. During that year, their practice “wasn't an execution like a reflex” (Interview 1, p. 9), but by the second year, “they hit the ground running where things were seamless, where to be honest, it was almost like five co-teachers that were in the class as opposed to a teacher and four paraprofessionals” (Interview 1, p. 9). During the second year, since the classroom team already established routines and built a rapport, they were able to “hit the ground running” and collaborate as five pedagogues. By the third year:

The teacher doesn't even need to say something, and the paras know what needs to be done; the paras can just hear a response in the student or a response in the teacher and know what their next step needs to be; it really is such a well-oiled machine. It was legitimately that if you as an observer, who I didn't tell who the para was and who the teacher was in the classroom, you wouldn't even know. (Interview 1, pp. 9–10)

Mark learned that affording the teacher and teaching assistants time to build meaningful relationships, increased their ability to effectively collaborate, which ultimately benefited the students in their classroom. They were able to cultivate an ideal collaborative relationship whereas the teacher and teaching assistants were not discernable by an observer, which was an illustration of *Integrated Collaboration* on the TTAC.

Teaching assistant participant Tricia and teacher participant Deidre also had the opportunity to work with the same teacher/teaching assistants over a number of years. Tricia shared that the time span afforded her the opportunity to get “used to that teacher and the way he works” (Interview 2, p. 5). Their relationship benefited them immensely during remote learning, where they effortlessly shared responsibilities for communicating with parents and students and for planning instruction. For Deidre, working with the same teaching assistants for several years resulted in them being able to effectively communicate non-verbally using facial expressions and them building a relationship that extended outside of the classroom. Deidre explained that over the last four years, she has been:

Super close with my teaching assistants. We are very good friends, so we do lots of things outside of the classroom, so I think we've really gotten to know each other really well; we've had a nurse in the classroom who feels we can communicate just by our facial expressions without even saying anything, which was frustrating to her, because she felt a little left out at times. (Interview 1, pp. 1–2)

Teaching assistant participant Gloria had a contrasting experience. I inquired about the ways that teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was fostered at her school, and she responded by sharing the following:

Well, usually when it works, they break it apart; I've seen it, when a teacher and a para work in a unit and it works, usually for some type of reason they don't see that as a good thing, so they usually separate the teacher and the para and then they put somebody new, it's been done for years. (Interview 2, p. 6)

At Gloria's school, leaders did not perceive teacher-teaching assistant continuity as positively contributing to the school community, so they did not keep classroom teams together for more than one year at a time. However, she did state that sometimes "when teachers and paras work really well together and the teacher would not let go of the assistant, sometimes the administration will listen" (Interview 2, p. 6). In some instances when classroom teachers advocate to continue a specific teacher-teaching assistant relationship, school leaders at Gloria's school oblige.

Gloria provided two speculative narratives for the rationale behind the school leaders' decisions. In her first narrative, she explained:

The way I see it, I think it's because they have a fear that the teacher and the assistant will get comfortable. I think there's a fear of them getting too friendly, you know—laid back, which usually doesn't happen when people are working. (Interview 2, p. 6)

Gloria believed that school leaders feared teachers and teaching assistants would become too comfortable with each other, resulting in them becoming lax in their job performance. However, Gloria contended that comfortability did not negatively impact the way they performed their job duties. In her second narrative, she asserted that school leaders separated teacher-teaching assistant teams year after year, "because they cannot manage certain people, so they give him/her to the teacher, so she could manage certain individuals" (Interview 2, p. 6). Gloria believed that school leaders separated certain teacher-teaching assistant teams if the teacher was someone who

could “manage” a teaching assistant who was perceived as difficult, thus sacrificing relationship building, abdicating leadership responsibility, and adding additional responsibility for the teacher.

Continuity of teacher-teaching assistant assignments was a school structure that positively influenced collaboration, but it was not a systemic practice at participants’ schools. Notably, the reason why the classroom principal participant Mark referenced stood out to him, was because he saw the positive impact of keeping the same teacher-teaching assistant team together for three years, which was not a widespread practice at his school. One result of continuity that became evident was, as time progressed, the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants became more meaningful, fluid, clear, and less discernable from the teacher. Following is a discussion on the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teaching assistants being unclear across participants’ schools.

Unclear Roles and Responsibilities

The effectiveness of collaboration is dependent upon school leaders clearly defining roles and responsibilities for teachers and teaching assistants (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012)—an assertion that was evident in the data uncovered from my study. Teacher and teaching assistant participants shared narratives about not receiving explicit guidance about their respective roles and responsibilities in the classroom and being unclear about how to navigate the teacher-teaching assistant relationship. For instance, teacher participant Jacqueline stated that she thought:

There needs to be guidelines as far as who's responsible for what; both of our jobs are so immense, that there needs to be some parameters about who is responsible for different

parts of a student's learning; and also, if those things aren't happening then what are the next steps to kind of help move the team into a better situation? (Interview 1, p. 2)

The desire to have clear guidelines, as well as clear and consistent follow through from school leadership, has been a continuous theme for Jacqueline. As the only participant who worked in an inclusion program, clear guidelines would have helped balance the job responsibilities between the teaching assistant, TOSD, and the general education teacher. To Jacqueline, having to also collaborate with the general education teacher without the delineation of clear roles and responsibilities—complicated the collaborative process.

Here is an example of a complexity she encountered in the classroom:

There have been situations where aides are asked to grade things that they shouldn't be grading or to work with students that are not on their caseloads and don't quite match what else is going on with the students that we're working with, and I think in those situations it's really kind of like figuring out what are the best battles to fight with this general education teacher. . . so it takes some negotiating on the aides' part and also my role, I guess in those situations. (Interview 1, p. 5)

At Jacqueline's school, there seemed to be a disconnect between what the general education teacher wanted the teaching assistant to do and what the teaching assistant was "allowed" to do, further exemplifying the lack of clear roles and responsibilities for their relationship and the continued need for follow through from school leadership. Jacqueline explained that she was unclear of her role when trying to navigate the situation between the teaching assistant and the general education teacher and she felt uncomfortable being put in the middle.

In Jacqueline's inclusion program, the TOSD and teaching assistant were aware of what the teaching assistant was not allowed to do, but the general education teacher was not,

indicating a lack of cohesion and communication between the general education and TOSD programs. Fragmented communication also existed at teacher participant Annette's school. She discussed how teachers were only informed about the roles and responsibilities of teaching assistants when they were told about what the teaching assistants were *not* allowed to do: "we have been explicitly told by the assistant principals that paraprofessionals are not to do clerical work, so that is the only explicit thing I've been told about paraprofessionals" (Interview 2, p. 9).

However, after further elaboration, Annette realized that the only other time she received explicit guidance regarding working with teaching assistants was when "there was an issue with that paraprofessional or with me interacting with that paraprofessional" (Interview 2, p. 9). At Annette's school, teachers were only given guidance regarding working with teaching assistants after a negative interaction occurred or when being informed about what teaching assistants were *not* allowed to do. Annette stated that she still has not received guidance on how to work collaboratively with teaching assistants. Teaching assistant participant Tricia also discussed how she did not receive clear guidance on her role and responsibilities in the classroom. Specifically, Tricia shared that she learned of her job duties from the bulleted list on the job posting when she applied for the position; however, she has never engaged in a conversation about her duties with school leadership.

Contrastingly, although the messaging was vague, school leadership at teaching assistant Gloria's school did give her guidance on her role in the classroom. They informed her that she "was to assist the teacher with anything that she was doing, but that was it" (Interview 2, p. 5). Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of that vague expectation was Gloria experiencing what she described as her worst teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

The worst one is when the teacher thinks that you are the maid, not her assistant; they expect you to clean and wipe, and clean the floor, and heat up the coffee, and go and get the kids lunch and heat it up—I don't think that's my job, I'm sorry, but I don't think so; I had that, I had that experience, and it was ugly. (Interview 1, p. 3)

The teacher asked Gloria to complete tasks that were domestic in nature (e.g., sweeping, cleaning, wiping tables down, and heating things up) and not related to student learning, which led her to feel marginalized and undervalued. Gloria's experience amplified the need for school leaders to foster teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and to set clear expectations for their roles and responsibilities in the classroom; however, my analysis of the data revealed that the onus for fostering collaboration was on teachers.

The Fostering of Collaboration is Up to Teachers

This subtheme emerged when I discovered that participants unanimously felt that classroom-based decisions and the fostering of collaboration were unilaterally left up to teachers, with no school-wide systems or structures in place to cultivate the practice. For example, when asked: "How is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school?" teaching assistant participant Tricia responded:

That's the answer that comes to my head, I wanna say it isn't. We were lucky when individual teachers, the way that they conducted the collaboration with the para—they pull you in, they encourage you to take that further step; I think that's the only way that it's fostered, on a one-to-one basis based on the teachers, not as an institution. (Interview 2, p. 6)

At Tricia's school, collaboration was fostered by individual teachers in their respective classrooms, but not cultivated building-wide by school leaders. Her assertion that teaching

assistants were “lucky when individual teachers” collaborated with them, could be interpreted as teaching assistants having a positive outlook towards the practice and/or the practice was not common across all classrooms.

Two other participants had responses similar to Tricia’s narrative. Teacher participant Annette proclaimed: “I think systemwide there is not an emphasis on teacher and paraprofessional collaboration at all and it’s really the teacher’s onus to make that collaboration happen” (Interview 2, p. 11). Annette’s narrative not only broadened the lens from the school building to the entire local educational system by asserting that it is not a *system-wide* practice to foster teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, but it also further emphasized the practice of TOSD being responsible for cultivating collaboration in the classroom.

Annette’s narrative correlated to teaching assistant Stacey’s beliefs about how collaboration is fostered at her school: “I guess they leave it up to the teachers if they want to take any teaching assistant help and some teachers do and some teachers don’t, so” (Interview 2, p. 5). At Stacey’s school, it was at the teacher’s discretion to collaborate with teaching assistants and there were no school-wide structures to foster collaborative practices. At principal participant Mark’s school, collaboration was fostered by only engaging teachers in discussion about teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. During classroom observation debriefs, he discussed the importance of collaborating with teaching assistants and how it impacted their teacher observation ratings. Across participants’ schools, there were inadequate school structures to foster collaboration. However, there was consensus amongst all participants that embedding collaborative time within schedules would be an effective solution to that problem, which I discuss in the next subtheme.

Collaborative Time not Embedded Within Schedules

Jones et al. (2012) found that co-planning was an effective approach to increase teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. The authors found that there was more collaboration between teachers and paraeducators in the pre-kindergarten classes than the kindergarten classes, because teachers and paraeducators in those classes co-planned for all subject matter —every Friday— when there were no students in school. Their finding supported what I discovered from my study where participants perceived common planning time as an important approach to increasing teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and therefore desired to have it embedded within their schedules. Further, Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012) noted that “building this meeting time into the school schedule facilitates communication among school teams and protects a time for a sit-down, consequently demonstrating that the whole team is valued” (p. 12). However, participants unanimously described how teaching assistants were excluded from common planning time at their schools.

The following two interview questions elicited similar, interconnected responses from all seven participants: “How is collaboration hindered at your school?” and “If you could implement one school-wide practice regarding teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, what would it be?” All participants declared *time/scheduling* as the major hindrance to collaboration and *common planning/debriefing time* as the one school-wide practice they would implement. Specifically, principal participant Mark shared: “I think it's hindered a little bit based on time, that we don't have enough time to really meaningfully do that” (Interview 2, p. 13); and teacher participant Deidre explained how:

Scheduling would be number one; they are scheduled all the time and so the only time you have contact with them is when students are in the room and you need to be working and not having conversations during that time . . . we have even asked just to have a

lunch time together, so that we could have some conversations during that time, but because of scheduling that wasn't always possible. (Interview 2, p. 5)

In Deidre's self-contained class, the teaching assistants were scheduled to be with students the entire day, except during their own lunch period. Subsequently, the teaching assistants and Deidre usually stayed late after school to "rehash different things that happened during the day and how we could better handle the situation; and when somebody was feeling particularly frustrated, the other person could shed a new light on it" (Interview 1, p. 4). They used their personal time to debrief about the school day because collaborative time was not embedded within their schedules.

Principal participant Mark similarly shared a narrative about a new teacher in his school who "made a point of finding time to meet with the paraprofessionals in the beginning and at the end of the day" and "always asked for feedback." He elaborated that "she made a point of meeting with them to not only tell them about the lessons that she was creating, but also to bring them as a part of the process of creating the lessons," discovering where they could "best support" the learning (Interview 1, p. 8). Mark highlighted her practice as an exemplar and used her classroom as a model for school-wide classroom visits by colleagues.

Teacher participant Annette created time during the school day to engage in collaborative conversation:

I try to find that time unfortunately in my school day, like literally if the kids are in the middle of a test, I might just pull the three of my paraprofessionals together and do a little powwow for like a few minutes, like "hey is everything going okay? Is X student doing well? is there anything I need to help with? Is there anything any of the paraprofessionals can help with?" (Interview 2, p. 13)

For Deidre and Annette, it appeared that having time to debrief with teaching assistants about what transpired during the school day and how to make things better, was essential to having an effective collaborative relationship, which was responsive to student needs.

Teachers and teaching assistants were not the only participants who found ways to have collaborative time. At principal participant Mark's school, he embedded 15-minutes of common planning time within teacher and teaching assistants' schedules. He explained that he:

strategically made a period zero in my school that specifically allows the teachers and paraprofessionals to have fifteen minutes to engage with each other—when the clusters, school aides, out of classroom people, and administration support a portion of breakfast before the kids go upstairs. (Interview 2, p. 12)

To Mark, being innovative with scheduling was important, because it afforded teachers and teaching assistants the time “to communicate as a staff” and it also gave teachers the opportunity to give “materials to the paraprofessionals/teacher assistants in advance”.

However, according to Irwin and Farr (2004), it is crucial for leaders to ensure that their school has the infrastructure for collaborative work to be realized, which entails restructuring schedules and making *adequate* time for collaboration to occur. Although Mark found a way to make time for collaboration to happen, as suggested by Khorsheed (2007), he conceded that 15-minutes was not adequate time for meaningful collaboration, and he wished “that we would be able to figure out more consistent time” (Interview 1, p. 3). This practice was implemented pre-COVID-19 when schooling took place within the school building. As aforementioned, during remote learning Mark was able to schedule one-hour of common planning time every morning, which resulted in a significant increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration.

School leaders at teacher participant Jacqueline's school were able to figure out consistent time for teachers and teaching assistants to meet within the school building. Jacqueline stated that the TOSD, general education teacher, and teacher aide had weekly planning times embedded within their schedules, in addition to weekly departmental meetings. She added that:

A lot of times in a grade band, an aide and a teacher will share the same classroom space, which I feel like really helps with fostering that relationship and just having easier lines of communication and that benefits our working relationship and our understanding of the students better. (Interview 2, p. 10)

At Jacqueline's school, collaboration was fostered by having teachers and teaching assistants share a classroom, engage in common planning, and attend departmental meetings together. Including teaching assistants in departmental meetings afforded them access to formal knowledge, which made Jacqueline's experience an outlier for this study. Teaching assistants were excluded from departmental meetings and common planning time at the other participants' schools. The main difference between Jacqueline's school and the other participants' schools was that she worked in an inclusion program and they worked in self-contained programs. In self-contained programs, classrooms have 1:1 teaching assistants (one TA to one student who is federally mandated to have a crisis/translation/health TA) and/or a classroom teaching assistant. Some classrooms have multiple teaching assistants (i.e., classroom and one or more 1:1's) and some only have one classroom teaching assistant. This dynamic complicates school leaders' ability to include teaching assistants in professional development experiences and common planning time.

Teaching assistant participant Tricia elaborated on the specific school-wide practice she would implement to foster teacher-teaching assistant collaboration:

It would definitely be setting aside maybe a period or sometime where the teachers and the teaching assistants could sit down and go over curriculum, lesson plans, and what the ‘Aim’ is, so that when we're in the classroom presenting the lesson, we're better able to chime in in places that may support the lesson's delivery. (Interview 2, p. 7)

To Tricia, implementing this practice would better prepare her as a teaching assistant to meet the shared pedagogical demands of the lesson. Principal participant Mark's response also centered around lesson planning. He stated that it would be “wonderful if it could be done collaboratively,” because he believed “paraprofessionals—in the capacity that they work in—have a perspective that most teachers when planning a lesson are not putting at the forefront of the creation of the lesson” (Interview 2, p. 15). For Mark, collaborative time to lesson plan would widen the lens of the lesson's focus by including the perspectives of teaching assistants who have a unique insight. Similarly, teaching assistant participant Gloria referenced taking different perspectives into consideration. In particular, she explained how common planning time could be used to discuss “a new approach” or “a new idea” regarding a lesson, the class, and/or a student.

Lastly, teacher participant Deidre's response centered around student goal setting. She explained that common planning time could be used to “review student data, determine specific goals for students, and plan and schedule lessons/activities to achieve those goals” (Text, 4/26/21). For Deidre, as a TOSD, collaboratively analyzing student data and using that data to set goals and plan lessons was key. The data revealed several meaningful ways that participants would use common planning time and how they believed that time would ultimately benefit students and their collaborative relationship.

Intriguingly, the data also exposed an interesting phenomenon, which spoke to the importance of context and school leader follow through. As aforementioned, teacher participant

Jacqueline's school had weekly common planning and departmental meetings, which were attended by the TOSD, teaching assistant, and general education teacher. Jacqueline explained that the best meetings she had were "when the general education teacher is planned and ready and has shared the upcoming lessons with the team and I would say that hardly, hardly happens" (Interview 2, p. 12). In Jacqueline's inclusion program, the general education teacher was responsible for planning the lesson and the TOSD was responsible for modifying it to meet the diverse learning needs of students. However, Jacqueline noted that:

No one's keeping track to see if that's happening and, so I leave meetings a lot of times feeling like I don't know what I'm supposed to be developing . . . I'm going to just have to sit in the room and observe my students really carefully and luckily have a bag of tricks, but it's not going to be as well prepared of a lesson as I'd like it to be. (Interview 2, p. 12)

From the outside, Jacqueline's school could be seen as a model—teachers and teaching assistants had weekly common planning time and departmental meetings with general education teachers embedded within their schedules. However, on the inside, common planning was not actually taking place. Jacqueline suggested that school leader follow-up would have helped ensure that collaboration was happening.

The benefits of having common planning time were not maximized, which resulted in an ideal practice being burdensome. Its successfulness was contingent upon the level of preparedness of the general education teacher, therefore when the general education teacher was not prepared, the collaborative time was unsuccessful. Jacqueline's narrative highlighted the importance of having clear expectations and school leader follow through. All participants' narratives highlighted the collective desire to have common planning time and the benefits of having that time be embedded within their schedules. Although common planning time was an

ideal practice that participants believed would increase teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, the data revealed that they rarely learned “how” to collaborate with each other—neither in their coursework nor during PDs. For example, Karge et al. (2011) found that after the first year of conducting their survey, only 28 of the 148 participants indicated they had any professional development in working with paraprofessionals and only 25 participants indicated that they had any discussion about how to work with paraprofessionals, while zero participants indicated that they received any training at the school district level.

Lack of Preparation and Orientation

During the data collection phase, I asked all participants if they ever received coursework or professional development on how to work collaboratively with a teacher/teaching assistant and all seven participants said “no” and/or “never.” Teacher participant Deidre, who had 18-years’ experience at the time of data collection, put the magnitude of the lack of preparation into perspective. Deidre stated that she has “been in many conversations with young teachers, just out of school, and they have had no conversations on how to handle teaching assistants at all” (Interview 2, p. 4). Her example exemplified the trajectory of the reproduction of teachers who are unprepared to work collaboratively with teaching assistants. It also showed the implicit messages that our language usage sends. Deidre stated that novice teachers have not had conversations on how to “handle” teaching assistants—she did not say they have not had conversations on how to “work with” teaching assistants. The former implied a hierarchical and maternalistic relationship and the latter would have implied a collaborative relationship.

Teacher participant Annette provided an example that added credence to Deidre’s anecdote and to my observation about language usage. She explained that several teaching assistants shared with her “how they don't actually know their responsibilities in a classroom or

that they're just sitting in the classroom not doing anything; because the teachers aren't trained to actually use paraprofessionals well" (Interview 1, p. 3). Annette's example indicated that teachers and teaching assistants had not received professional development on how to work with each other or clear messaging on their respective roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Further, I note again the implications of language usage. Annette stated that teachers were not trained to actually "use" paraprofessionals well. The term "use" indicated a reference to a *thing* rather than a *being*.

An outcome of a lack of preparation and unclear messaging could be what principal participant Mark witnessed during a classroom observation:

There were four paraprofessionals and a teacher; one paraprofessional was cleaning desks and walls in the room, and three paraprofessionals were legitimately sleeping . . . the teacher was trying to create a lesson; trying to manage twelve kids' behaviors; trying to create groups and going back and forth between the groups, but with no support it was unsuccessful . . . I've never seen usage of paraprofessionals or lack of usage of paraprofessionals and just blatant disregard for how a class should be structured and supported than in this class. (Interview 1, p. 11)

I interpreted what Mark observed as either the teacher and teaching assistants did not have a clear understanding of their respective roles and responsibilities in the classroom; they did not cultivate the requisite relationships for collaboration; there were power dynamics' issues; and/or they simply did not know how to work collaboratively, because they were never socialized to that behavior. One teaching assistant stayed busy by cleaning and the other three just slept, all while the teacher attempted to navigate the teaching and learning process by herself and did not attempt to interact with the teaching assistants. These actions took place in front of the principal

who was observing the lesson, which implied that this was their daily practice. From my experience, classroom teams usually put on their best performance during teacher observations.

My analysis of the data not only revealed a lack of teacher-teaching assistant preparation for collaborative work, but also a lack of orientation to the teacher-teaching assistant relationship. For instance, Annette shared how “paraprofessionals are given their assignment the day before school starts, so they don't even have time to collaborate with their teacher to figure out what's happening” (Interview 1, p. 5); and Gloria shared when she “first started working, they just threw me in there to hang like a vine from this one to this one” (Interview 2, p. 4). Last minute classroom team assignments were a barrier to relationship building and left teachers and teaching assistants feeling vulnerable and confounded. Further, they resulted in the unintended consequence of teachers seeing teaching assistants as a burden rather than a partner.

An example of this phenomenon was provided by teacher participant Annette who asserted: “when a school kind of throws paraprofessionals on teachers like that, teachers often times see paraprofessionals as just another body in the room to take care of” (Interview 2, p. 11). To Annette, the last-minute classroom placement of teaching assistants was seen as them being “thrown” on the teacher rather than them being “thrown” in the classroom, which could have implications for how the teaching assistant is received.

Teaching assistant Stacey shared a narrative about her worst collaboration, and it related to Annette’s notion of teaching assistants being thrown on teachers and teachers seeing them “as just another body in the room to take care of.” Stacey explained, in part, that “it was my first day [in the classroom] and I really didn’t have much knowledge about the population of the children that I was going to be dealing with, so going into the classroom—just the whole dynamic was new to me” (Interview 1, p. 3). Not only was Stacey not given an orientation to the school to

learn about the students, policies, and procedures, —she also was not introduced to the students or the teacher whom she would be working with in the classroom. This practice aligns with the literature on teaching assistant training. Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012) noted that “many paraeducators are not provided training or an orientation to the educational setting prior to beginning their new position” (p. 4).

An unintended consequence of that inadequate school structure of “throwing” teaching assistants into the classroom, without scheduling time for them to meet with the teacher beforehand, was that “the teacher wasn't very welcoming” (Interview 1, p. 3) to Stacey and she did not offer her any guidance. For example, Stacey shared how the teacher:

didn't really try to teach me—and I'm not saying that she was supposed to teach me, but she didn't give me much guidance, or let me know what she wanted me to do or what she expected me to do, she just wasn't happy when I wasn't doing what she expected me to do—as if I was supposed to know, when I had only been in the DOE (Department of Education) working like two days. (Interview 1, p. 3)

Stacey's scenario depicted how, as a teaching assistant, she did not receive guidance on her roles and responsibilities in the classroom and therefore was dependent upon the teacher to fill the gap. She was perplexed about the teacher's feelings of unhappiness with her performance, which led her to ask: “well, do I even know what to do?” (Interview 1, p. 5). She explained that she was “new to the school and the whole culture of how things are done there, so I didn't know, I felt out of place” (Interview 1, p. 5).

Her experience exemplified another unintended consequence of being thrown into the classroom—she felt like an outsider within the classroom and within the school. A collaborative relationship was not cultivated between Stacey and the first teacher with whom she ever worked,

because “you can’t dump somebody in, whether it’s a new administrator, a teacher, or whoever and expect collaboration to just happen. You have to build those relationships first” (Slater, 2004, p. 9).

The data from my study indicated that orientation and preparation could be effective practices to foster teacher-teaching assistant collaboration—practices that could help avoid the unintended consequences of teaching assistants feeling like outsiders and teachers feeling like they have to take care of another body in the classroom. Teaching assistants feeling like outsiders in the classroom and within their school buildings was a result of school-wide cultures of teaching assistant marginalization, which I discuss in the next theme.

Culture of Teaching Assistant Marginalization

Undervaluing teaching assistant expertise and experiences, denying them access to formal knowledge, and repressing their voices within the classroom and school building, were indicators of a school’s culture of teaching assistant marginalization. I used the following two definitions to undergird this theme: “marginalization occurs when people are systematically excluded from meaningful participation in economic, social, political, cultural and other forms of human activity in their communities and thus are denied the opportunity to fulfil themselves as human beings” (Jenson, 2000, p. 1) and marginalization is a “complex and disputatious process by means of which certain people and ideas are privileged over others at any given time” (Ferguson & Tucker, 1990, p. 7). Teaching assistant participants were systematically excluded from meaningful participation in the teaching and learning process in the classroom, common planning time, professional development experiences, and social events in their school communities and they were undervalued within the classroom and school building.

For instance, teacher participant Annette proclaimed that "oftentimes teachers treat paraprofessionals as just another body in the room" (Interview 1, p. 3). Her assertion was alarming, because it implied that teachers at her school saw teaching assistants almost as another student sitting in the classroom and/or an inconsequential adult who had nothing to offer the teaching and learning process. Principal participant Mark had an analogous scenario to Annette. He shared that during classroom observation debriefs with teachers, he noticed "they weren't even viewing the paraprofessional as an equal or viewing the paraprofessional as someone who could even meaningfully support" (Interview 1, p. 5). Teachers at Mark's school undervalued the cultural wealth and formal knowledge that teaching assistants brought into the classroom and since this was their regular routine, it illustrated their socialization to the practices of hierarchization and marginalization.

Similarly, implicit within teaching assistant Stacey's narrative regarding advice she would give to a new teaching assistant, was the notion of teaching assistants' knowledge and experiences being undervalued at her school:

My advice to new teacher assistants is—don't take it too hard, just take it easy and you'll learn as you go, nobody's perfect and whatever knowledge you think you may have about children and teaching, it's good, and maybe in time you'll be able to show and actually get better at whatever it is the teacher needs you to do, because really it's whatever the teacher needs you to do. (Interview 1, p. 7)

Stacey's narrative was multi-layered. First, it revealed teaching assistants lack of access to professional development and orientation at her school. Her advice to "don't take it too hard, just take it easy and you'll learn as you go," implied new teaching assistants did not learn how to perform their job duties in PDs or from orientation, therefore they should be prepared to not

know what they are doing in the classroom when they first start working; second, she reassured them that their knowledge was valuable and maybe one day they would have an opportunity to illustrate it; and third, she reiterated the hierarchical classroom relationship.

Teaching assistant participant Tricia discussed the value that teaching assistants could add to the classroom if they were afforded the opportunity:

I think paras are undervalued, being given more leeway and more opportunity for input would be a good thing, because a lot of the paras have experiences and knowledge that would be beneficial to just running things in general; just previous experiences and knowledge that they bring to the table; it would be good to find some way to give them the opportunity to contribute more. (Interview 1, pp. 3–4)

To Tricia, schools would benefit if they valued teaching assistants past experiences and afforded them the opportunity and autonomy to demonstrate their knowledge and skills in the classroom and within the school. She ultimately wanted teaching assistants to be more integrated and included at her school. Teaching assistants not always being included was a subtheme uncovered in my analysis, which I discuss next.

They're Not Always Included

It was clearly unanimous that teaching assistants across participants' schools were not always included in many aspects of school life, rendering them marginalized and voiceless. In particular, they were not always included in common planning time and professional development experiences—which will be discussed under the next theme—but also, school-wide discussions, decision-making, and the dissemination of information. Teaching assistants not always being included was a school practice that both teacher and teaching assistant participants conceived as problematic.

For example, teacher participant Deidre described how teaching assistants “are not included in many discussions, maybe even many discussions regarding part of their job” (Interview 2, p. 1). At Deidre’s school, they were marginalized by being excluded from a significant portion of school-wide discussions, including ones that impacted their job function. At teaching assistant participant Tricia’s school, teaching assistants were similarly excluded from the dissemination of information that impacted the work they were expected to do within the classroom.

Specifically, Tricia shared that the “*teacher* [emphasis added] gets the curriculum and the *teacher* [emphasis added] is given the guidelines that the lessons are supposed to follow, so that’s the person with the knowledge of what our focus should be” (Interview 2, p. 5). Tricia added emphasis to the word “teacher,” to emphasize the hierarchization and marginalization that was revealed in school leaders’ decision to only disseminate curriculum related information to teachers—even though teaching assistants were also responsible for implementing the content with students. At Tricia’s school, only teachers had access to firsthand formal knowledge and teaching assistants had to wait for teachers to hopefully share it with them.

At teaching assistants’ Gloria and Stacey’s schools, the marginalization was more centered on teaching assistants not having a voice in the classroom. For instance, Gloria asserted that “teachers decide the lesson, how they’re going to set up the classroom, and what is allowed to be in the room; they make the major decisions in the classroom setting” (Interview 2, p. 1); and Stacey realized, after I clarified what I meant by collaboration—“it’s not really collaboration then, because teaching assistants—we don’t really decide anything; the teachers decide everything that goes on in the classroom and we just go along with it” (Interview 2, p. 5). In both scenarios, teaching assistants were outsiders within their classrooms with no invitation to share

their voice or to share responsibility with the teacher, indicating a non-collaborative school culture.

At teacher participant Deidre's school, teaching assistants were not only excluded from the dissemination of curriculum-related information—they were also excluded from announcements about social events that took place after school. She shared the following:

I think sometimes the teaching assistants feel left out, because they are often left out of emails or important announcements . . . sometimes some of the social showers, even some events are held after school and some of the teaching assistants are not always able to attend those; they work a second job after school or they don't feel included, because they weren't invited initially. (Interview 1, p. 5)

At Deidre's school, teaching assistants were not included in emails regarding event invitations or announcements, which sent an implicit message that they were not welcome to attend. Although some of them may not have been able to attend after school events, due to having a second job, others chose not to attend since they were initially excluded from the invite. Deidre added that one of the assistants with whom she previously worked:

had never been invited to go to Back-to-School Night and she'd been working in the district for a while and she was so honored when I invited her to go to our Back-to-School Night, which surprised me, because she had good relationships with those teachers, but had never felt included in that. (Interview 1, p. 5)

Deidre's scenario not only had implications for the culture of her school building, but also the culture of her school district. Back-to-School Night was an event for staff, students, and families to celebrate the beginning of the school year; however, an entire constituency—teaching assistants—were excluded. The teaching assistant's surprise and honor at being invited to the

event by Deidre was indicative of her feeling like an outsider within the school. Interestingly, although the teaching assistant had good relationships with previous teachers whom she worked with, Deidre was the only one to invite her to Back-to-School Night. Teaching assistants were systematically excluded from meaningful participation in their classrooms, school buildings, and school districts, which resulted in them feeling undervalued, voiceless, and like outsiders.

I suggest two reasons for why a culture of collaboration and inclusion were not fostered: (1) personnel at all levels of schooling were not socialized to collaborating; and (2) schools tend to reproduce status quo power relations (Apple, 1979, 1982a, 1982b; Bourdieu, 1973; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; McLaren, 2006). Both reasons are possibilities, because my data revealed participants never received formal preparation—such as coursework and/or professional development experiences—in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration.

Professional Development Experiences for Teachers of Students with Disabilities

Professional development was an inevitable theme to emerge from my analysis, because it was a necessary school structure that directly influenced teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom. A search of the literature on professional development in schools revealed that it was either non-existent, minimal in scope, brief and isolated, and/or not provided by supervisors at the school or district level, which rendered it inadequate to meet the specific contextual needs of classroom teacher-teaching assistant teams (Biggs et al., 2016; Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Karge et al., 2011; Rueda & Monzó, 2002). “In effect, both teacher and paraeducator are learning together, on the job, without guidance” (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012, p. 3). The analysis of my data uncovered alignment with those findings. Across participants’ schools, professional development followed a traditional approach and were non-collaborative (i.e., teachers and teaching assistants not working

together), fragmented (i.e., disjointed and lacked coherence), and segregated (i.e., teachers and teaching assistants separated during professional development), whereas “strong professional learning is extended over time, provides teachers with collaborative opportunities for active learning, and is relevant to classroom practice” (Riordan et al., 2019, p. 328). Further, an analysis of the extant literature conducted by Desimone (2011), revealed there was consensus that active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation were four of the five main features of effective professional development.

Traditional Approach

There was consensus among the participants’ in the literature and across my participants about experiences being primarily traditional, non-collaborative, and overall “very lacking” (Jacqueline, Interview 1, p. 3). Research in comprehensive school reform and the education of students with disabilities has found that a significant number of schools and districts facilitate—the mostly ineffective—traditional forms of professional development (Gersten et al., 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lang & Fox, 2003; Richardson, 2003; Richardson & Placier, 2001).

During these professional development experiences, teachers were “viewed as passive recipients of research-based classroom practices, which are typically presented to large groups of teachers (i.e., 20 or more) in short-term professional development workshops” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 63) with a focus “on transmitting information rather than promoting inquiry and problem solving” (Lang & Fox, 2003, p. 19). According to Lang and Fox (2003), the typical PD format involved “disseminating information according to prescribed agendas that may or may not relate to the particular context of students, and provide little or no follow-up” (p. 19). Lieberman (1995) referred to this model as a “transferable package of knowledge to be distributed to teachers in bite-sized pieces” (p. 592). Similarly, and Klein and Riordan (2011)

asserted that traditional staff development “has often resulted in one-shot workshops on topics unrelated to issues of curriculum and instruction” (p. 37).

Findings from the above-mentioned research aligned with the findings from a synthesis of the literature conducted by Richardson (2003), who concluded that:

Most of the staff development that is conducted with K-12 teachers derives from the short-term transmission model; pays no attention to what is already going on in a particular classroom, school, or district; offers little opportunity for participants to become involved in the conversation; and provides no follow-up. (p. 401)

The data from my study corroborated those findings. Professional development experiences were “typically presented to large groups of teachers” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 63) either in the auditorium, library, or cafeteria. For example, teacher participant Jacqueline shared: “we don't usually break out into different groups that often and we're all seated in the cafeteria” (Interview 2, p. 5). At Jacqueline's school, information was usually disseminated linearly to professional development participants as one large group, which was counter to one of the six characteristics of effective professional development outlined by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011). The authors noted that professional development “must be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven” (p. 82), and engage teachers in “concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection” (p. 82).

My analysis uncovered professional development experiences across participants' schools that were inconsistent with these characteristics. For instance, at teacher participant Annette's school “oftentimes those professional developments might just be to introduce curriculum to teachers and staff, new initiatives as a whole in the school, or to discuss different procedures that are happening at the school” (Interview 1, p. 3). At Annette's school,

professional development experiences were used as staff *meeting* time rather than staff *development* time, with the foci being on introducing and revisiting agenda items rather than engaging participants in concrete tasks directly related to the teaching and learning process. This approach to professional development was experienced by all participants in the study.

However, even in the rare occasions when professional development topics were specific to teaching and learning (e.g., differentiated instruction, running records, vocabulary development, and teaching strategies), participants did not engage in experiential tasks that were participant driven. They were passive recipients of information, which was typically disseminated by consultants from outside of the school district, a teacher/school/district leader, teacher specialist (e.g., Reading Specialist and Basic Skills Teacher) or a school/district coach. This practice was contradictory to the findings from Riordan et al. (2019), who discovered that “teachers need opportunities not only to run professional development, but also to pose and solve problems that are deeply connected to their work and lives” (p. 339).

An intriguing phenomenon uncovered by my analysis was, in 5 of the 7 participant’s schools, teaching assistants never facilitated a professional development experience; in two of the schools, although teaching assistants had facilitated once—they either only facilitated to other teaching assistants (i.e., Gloria’s school) or co-facilitated with a teacher (i.e., Mark’s school).

The traditional approach to professional development was customary practice at participants’ schools. Participants were not afforded opportunities to engage in hands-on activities based on problems of practice, inquiry, reflection, or assessments, although research on non-traditional forms of professional development (e.g., collaborative forms) show that they are more effective at shifting teacher practices (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Collaborative forms

of professional development follow a constructivist approach whereas teachers actively participate, “including the determination of the topics that will be addressed and delivering the professional development” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 63). Further, teacher-teaching assistant collaboration was almost non-existent during these traditional professional developments, which I discuss in the next subtheme.

Non-Collaborative

One of the barriers to facilitating collaborative professional development was that schools lacked a collaborative school culture (Richardson, 2003). School culture “refers to the way teachers and other staff members work together and the set of beliefs, values, and assumptions they share . . .” (Epitropoulos, 2019, September). According to Schein (1985), culture is one of the most powerful, stable, and invisible social forces operating within an organization.

At participants’ schools, teachers and teaching assistants sat together during professional development, but they did not work together. As previously discussed, school leaders did not create the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom and that culture of non-collaboration was also evident in their professional development experiences. For example, teacher participant Annette shared:

It’s funny, because the library is too small to hold all our staff, so oftentimes the grade level teams will sit together, but not the paraprofessionals; paraprofessionals oftentimes sit in the back, so we cannot physically interact with them even though they are in the same room and in the same PD session—unfortunately that’s the way it works at my school, so in that case it’s not collaborative even though we have the PD. (Interview 2, p. 4)

Annette's narrative was multi-layered. First, she noted that teaching assistants self-segregate during professional development. However, another way to interpret the seating choices is that teachers chose to sit together in the front of the library. Both interpretations could be true and they both had implications for the school's non-collaborative culture. Second, Annette initially described the professional development as collaborative, because both teaching assistants and teachers were in the same space, but as she continued speaking, she realized that it was not an example of collaborative professional development at all, due to them never interacting with each other.

Other participants had a similar contradictory understanding of collaborative professional development. For instance, teaching assistants Tricia and Stacey shared examples of what they understood as collaborative professional development experiences, although they never worked together with the respective teachers. Specifically, Tricia shared an example of the teacher and her attending a professional development about how to read IEPs, although they only watched a presentation together; and Stacey described how the teacher and she watched a video on scaffolding instruction together in the auditorium, although school leaders separated them before the activities portion—so they never actually worked *together*. Both teaching assistant participants conceptualized attending a professional development with the teacher as collaboration.

Ironically, later in our interview, teaching assistant participant Stacey shared an example of a collaborative professional development experience that aligned with the definition of collaboration, which undergirds my study, and with constructivist teaching. Stacey explained how she and the teacher co-constructed knowledge to create differentiated instructional/anchor charts to meet the diverse academic needs of their students. Her partial experiential professional

development experience (i.e., it did not include a reflection on the professional development experience) aligned with two of the six characteristics of effective professional development outlined by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011), because it was “collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators . . .” and it was “connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students” (p. 82). Principal participant Mark shared a similar collaborative professional development experience where teachers and teaching assistants created different Thinking Maps based on a given topic, to support instruction.

Although there is little research on how to use experiential methods in teacher education (Klein & Riordan, 2011), “in experiential professional development, experience is the cornerstone in developing constructivist teachers” (Klein & Riordan, 2011, p. 38). Stacey’s collaborative, experiential professional development experience allowed her to be actively involved in making meaning of how best to design instructional/anchor charts that facilitate student understanding.

In contrast, teacher participant Deidre shared how in her 18 years as a teacher of students with disabilities, she never participated in a professional development collaboratively with a teaching assistant and “in fact, last year we even put in for the same workshop and she was denied, because I was already going and I could just tell her about it” (Interview 2, p. 3). At Deidre’s school, teaching assistants received second-hand information about professional development experiences from the teacher, which assumed that professional development was linear “with information moving from an outside expert to a teacher to the teacher’s classroom (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 63)—an assumption that undergirds the traditional professional development approach.

One last manner in which school leaders did not create the conditions for collaborative professional development, was that they—rather than classroom staff—selected topics for professional development experiences almost exclusively. All teacher-teaching assistant participants stated that professional development topics were determined by school leaders, teacher leaders, and/or school district leaders, not by or in conjunction with classroom teachers and teaching assistants. Only principal participant Mark stated that at the beginning of the last school year, he disseminated a professional development survey to teachers and teaching assistants soliciting suggested topics. In schools that have a collaborative professional development culture “decisions are not made by a single individual; rather decisions emerge from collaborative dialogues between many individuals, engaged in mutually dependent activities” (Scribner et al., 2007, p. 70). The framework for collaborative forms of professional development was designed with a constructivist approach to adult learning “and assume[s] that teachers actively participate in all aspects of professional development, including the determination of the topics that will be addressed and delivering the professional development” (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 63).

A specific example of a non-constructivist approach to professional development was provided by teacher participant Deidre in her response to my question “Who selects PD topics at your school?”:

The Superintendent, I think. I think there is some input from the principals, but I’m not sure, because they want it to be similar districtwide, so I’m not sure; we are supposed to have some input, but you know I don’t think we always feel that that input is listened to. (Interview 2, p. 3)

At Deidre's school, district and school building leaders made decisions in isolation about professional development topics that *should* have been "connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011, p. 82). According to Klein (2007), "traditional professional development has often ignored the particular needs of teachers or sought their input in their own professional growth" (p. 184). This practice of school/district leaders making professional development topics' choices, resulted in professional development experiences being incoherent (i.e., fragmented), lacking focus on the "concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011, p. 82), and being without regard for the context of respective classrooms, a phenomenon that I discuss in the next subtheme.

Fragmented

Collaborative professional development is "coherent and focused (i.e., not fragmented)" (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010, p. 64) and effective professional development is "sustained, ongoing, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011, p. 82). In response to my inquiry regarding how often professional development was held at respective schools, participants primarily described their schools' professional development plans as fragmented and not sustained. They were fragmented, because they lacked coherence, seemingly shifting from topic to topic without interconnectivity and they lacked consistency.

For example, teaching assistant participant Gloria stated: "if we have it, it's once a month, but it's not consistent" (Interview 1, p. 3). Teacher participant Annette shared: "I would say that we have some sort of real professional development where we're not just creating curriculum or changing lesson plans, maybe four times a year in my school" (Interview 2, p. 3).

Finally, teacher participant Deidre explained that her “district pays for one workshop/seminar per year school wide. They have three or four full-day professional developments and four during afterschool meetings throughout the school year” (Interview 2, p. 2). In all three scenarios, professional development was fragmented and not sustained. Additionally, at Annette’s school, tasks that were usually associated with department or grade team meetings were considered professional development activities.

At several participants’ schools, professional development was sustained, but fragmented—every experience had a different topic and was disconnected from the previous topic. In terms of consistency, at teacher participant Jacqueline’s school, professional development was once a month and it varied from 45 minutes to a couple of hours. She explained that the school was trying to do more professional development, so once a quarter, they would have a 3-hour to as much as one full day of professional development. At teaching assistant Tricia’s school, professional development was every Monday and at principal participant Mark’s school, professional development was once or twice a month as a whole school and once a week in small groups.

Only one participant mentioned the notion of modeling (explicit illustration of expected strategy or work product), however it was not in relation to the effective professional development practice of a coach or school leader modeling to teachers and teaching assistants that was posited by Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011). Instead, it was in relation to her being expected to model strategies learned at a professional development for the teaching assistant with whom she worked. Specifically, Deidre shared that she thought “a lot of administration also feels that the assistants will pick up by the teacher modeling, which this assistant absolutely did, but a lot of the other assistants were not able to do” (Interview 1, p. 2).

Expecting the teacher to model for the teaching assistant implied three things: (1) that professional development was linear; (2) that the teacher had the capacity to accurately model what was learned; and (3) that modeling and coaching were professional development follow-up practices that were not implemented at participants' schools. Further, although professional development experiences were offered at all participants' schools, they were separate and unequal for teaching assistants, which I discuss in the next subtheme.

Segregated

As previously discussed, teaching assistants were marginalized in the classroom by the classroom teacher and by school leaders, but the data also revealed that they were marginalized in relation to professional development. Teaching assistants were often segregated from teachers during professional development experiences and required to engage in non-academic related content and/or they were excluded from professional development all together. According to Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012), "most paraeducators come to the job with little or no education beyond a high school diploma, underqualified and unprepared for the responsibilities of working with students with exceptionalities" (p. 2). Therefore "in the absence of preservice training, paraeducators need inservice training to ensure a knowledge base to develop skills that assist teachers and support students with academic needs and challenging behaviors" (Douglas & Uitto, 2021, p. 5).

At teacher participant Deidre's school, teaching assistants "overall were always separate" (Interview 2, p. 3) during professional development and they "weren't required to do as many days of professional development either, but theirs was always separate even at times we would ask if they could be included" (Interview. 2, p. 3). Deidre and her colleagues wanted to engage in collaborative professional development with teaching assistants, but school leaders at her school

did not oblige. Teaching assistant participant Tricia agreed with Deidre that teaching assistants should be included, because she believed that collaborative professional development was “beneficial for us to get a better understanding of what is expected of the teachers, to then assist them in getting it done” (Interview 2, p, 4), but teaching assistants at her school were excluded from professional development that focused on instruction. These data align with a study conducted by Rueda and Monzó (2002) who found: “opportunities for collaboration were not built into the school organization or the school culture. At both schools paraeducators and teachers attended separate meetings and workshops, even when topics affected them both” (p. 517).

Similarly, at teacher participant Annette’s school, teaching assistants were included in whole school professional development, which at her school were more like staff meetings, but they were excluded from grade level professional development where academic content related directly to classroom instruction was covered. Specifically, Annette explained:

I think a lot of the time my paraprofessionals aren't in the know in what's happening, they're included in larger whole school professional development, but they're not necessarily involved on like grade level professional development and because they're not included, they're not able to pedagogically be on the same frame as the teachers—and that's not their fault—it's because schoolwide, they're not always included. (Interview 1, p. 3)

At Annette’s school, teaching assistants’ exclusion from professional development not only had implications for the school’s culture, but also had implications for the classroom. Teaching assistants did not have the capacity to support instruction or the diverse academic needs of students, because they were excluded from grade level professional development—where

instructional strategies and expectations that were directly related to their job function was covered.

Participants shared specific examples of the implications that this exclusionary practice had in their classrooms. Teacher participant Deidre noted that she thinks:

A lot of the teaching assistants mean well, but some of them don't have the same grasp for understanding how to meet some of the students' needs, for example: ignoring inappropriate behavior. That was a big strategy that we used in our class; some of the assistants, even though they were told previous times, had a difficult time following through. . . . (Interview 1, p. 2)

Planned ignoring (e.g., intentionally not giving the sought attention to a student, while continuing with the lesson, in order to not reinforce the disruptive behavior) was a behavioral strategy taught during professional development, but since teaching assistants at Deidre's school were always segregated and did not receive the same content as teachers, some teaching assistants could not comprehend how to use the strategy.

Understanding the purpose of and how to use a diverse set of strategies is key to addressing the unique social-emotional and academic needs of students with disabilities. Teaching assistant Gloria shared a scenario that I also have witnessed first-hand for the past 18-years working in school buildings in the field of special education. She began her narrative by explicating the recommended practice within her school district—teachers should work with students who have the greatest need and teaching assistants should work with students who have the least need, however, at her school “usually it's backwards, the teacher gets the one that works the most and the para gets the kids that needs the most help” (Interview 2, p. 5). For Gloria, this was a practice that school leaders allowed teachers to reproduce while they simultaneously

excluded teaching assistants from accessing formal knowledge at professional development, so they could adequately address students' needs.

At teacher participant Annette's school "there was a paraprofessional who was asked on standardized test day to scribe and she'd never been given scribe training before and she refused" (Interview 1, p. 5). Scribe training is specific to the standardized test proctoring instructions and test administrators receive their training at the school level. This was another example of how marginalizing teaching assistants during professional development or trainings had direct implications for their role and responsibilities in the classroom.

School leaders play a pertinent role in ensuring that all classroom staff receive the professional development they need to meet the diverse and unique needs of their students; principal participant Mark came to that revelation as the interviewing process progressed. Initially, Mark explained his rationale for separating teachers and teaching assistants during assessment related professional development:

There are some times that there is stuff that are really only specific for the teachers—like there might be professional development on some form of assessment that only the teachers are doing; there are other times that there are certain assessments for things that we would want the teacher and the assistants to be there at the same time. (Interview 2, p.

7)

From my experience working in the same urban school district, although state assessments could only be administered by a licensed teacher, teaching assistants assisted with the gathering of materials for implementation and with providing academic support during lessons in preparation for exams. Further, as evident from Annette's aforementioned scenario regarding scribing,

teaching assistants played an integral role in the facilitation of students' testing accommodations, which are mandated on their IEPs (e.g., scribing and reading questions and directions aloud).

Later in our interview, I asked Mark to reflect on what he could do systemically to create the conditions for *Integrated Collaborating*—as outlined on the TTAC—to be the norm at his school. He thoughtfully explained:

Even the professional development that we give in all honesty—very often it separates the teachers and the paraprofessionals. I think that in reflecting, if we do a better job of really modeling having the paras/the assistants and the teachers together for professional developments and meetings—sometimes we do have them together, but we need to do it more consistently—I think that there will then be a mindset shift with all the adults that we really value the paras and the teachers as a collaborative team as opposed to two separate entities based on title. We've been doing a better job at that in the past like year, year and a half, but it's still something that we need to do a much better job at. (Interview 1, pp. 16–17)

Mark acknowledged the role that he needs to play as a school leader to foster collaborative classroom culture at his school. He noted the impact that having teaching assistants and teachers together at professional development and meetings could have in shifting mindset and showing that collaboration is valued at the school.

Professional development experiences for teachers of students with disabilities followed an ineffective traditional approach, did not engage teachers and teaching assistants in collaborative experiential activities, were disjointed, and segregated teaching assistants and teachers. This complex dynamic was illustrative of how schools did not create the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration.

Several themes emerged from my data analysis, which collectively illustrated the complex dynamics and structures that interacted to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration: Collaboration, Inadequate School Structures, Culture of Teaching Assistant Marginalization, and Professional Development Experiences for Teachers of Students with Disabilities. In the following chapter, I discuss the conclusions drawn from these findings and their implications for K–12 schools and teacher education programs for TOSD. I also discuss implications for research and my personal experiences working in the field of special education, in various capacities, within a large urban school district for the past 18-years.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to learn about the complex dynamics and structures that interact to influence collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants, the role the teacher, teaching assistant, and principal played in those complex dynamics, how participants developed their understandings about the roles of teachers of students with disabilities and teaching assistants, and how participants described the differences, if any, in collaboration between in-school learning and remote learning. This study was undergirded by Byrne's (1998) notion that "everything is contextually situated, everything is interconnected, and everything changes everything else. So instead of trying to understand linear relationships we need to understand the complex *dynamics* of social systems" (p. 42).

In this chapter, I summarize the themes discussed in Chapter 4 and explain the complex dynamics that emerged. Next, I discuss the three conclusions that follow from the data. Then, I discuss implications that may contribute to the reimagining of how teachers and teaching assistants work together within schools for students with disabilities. I follow with a discussion of implications for future research and the chapter concludes with some final thoughts.

Summary of Findings

The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic triggered the need for me to create multiple iterations of my research design, which resulted in the initial blending of grounded theory and narrative inquiry. I used these methods to develop structured and semi-structured interview questions, which culminated in the gathering of rich data and the emergence of complex themes. According to Charmaz (2014), "gathering rich data will give you solid material for building a significant analysis" (p. 23). My goal was to design interview questions that garnered vivid storytelling and depicted how "narratives interact with contexts" (Daiute, 2014, p. 33). Storytelling was key for

the success of my study, because “embedded in each story is a process that helps us to understand the complex interrelations between things. Stories hold an emotional content that cannot easily be accessed through official accounts” (Burns, 2007, p. 104). Further, an “emergent understanding will be strongly supported if space is created for stories to be told” (p. 104). I created space for participants to feel comfortable telling their stories by building rapport and not putting time constraints on their story telling. My interviewing strategy aimed for accurate, in-depth details and “uncovering hidden actions and intentions or exposing policies and practices and their implications” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 57). My analysis of the intensive interview data resulted in the emergence of the following themes discussed in Chapter 4: Collaboration; Inadequate school structures; Culture of teaching assistant marginalization; and Professional development experiences for teachers of students with disabilities. Each theme told a story that was interrelated to the next.

The theme of *Collaboration* revealed the contradictions between how participants defined and practiced collaboration and where their practice fell along the TTAC. Specifically, participants’ definition and vision of collaboration aligned with Collaborating and Integrated Collaboration, but their practices primarily aligned with Excluding and Communicating/Assisting. This theme also illustrated how participants conceptualized the roles of the teacher and teaching assistant; specifically, the teacher was designated to teach and the teaching assistant was designated to manage behavior along with myriad other responsibilities. I learned that teaching assistant participants understood their role to include teaching/instruction and although teacher and principal participants provided examples of them performing “teaching” or “instructional” tasks, they did not label them as such. Teacher and principal participants had a misconception of the difference between instruction and pedagogy. Instruction

is the “passing of (pre)existing knowledge on to learners” (Hyun, 2006, pp. 141–142), which was exactly what teaching assistants were responsible for doing in the classroom. Pedagogy “denotes the principles and methods of instruction or the activities of educating or teaching learners” (Hyun, 2006, p. 137), which is what teachers were doing in addition to instructing. I pondered whether teacher and principal participants conceptualized teaching assistants’ roles as non-instructional, because conceptualizing them otherwise would create tension between their understandings and their maintenance of the classroom hierarchy.

Unclear roles and responsibilities complicated the teacher-teaching assistant relationship and contributed to feelings of distrust. Similar to what Dr. Marilyn Likins, the executive director of the National Resource Center for Paraeducators at Utah State University noted, successful teacher-teaching assistant teams are “built on a strong foundation of understanding their roles and responsibilities within the team. Problems can arise when roles are unclear or assumptions are made about who is supposed to do what regarding lessons, students, and parents” (Rosales, 2017, p. 4).

My findings revealed that participants were frustrated with school leaders’ fragmented and vague communication regarding their roles and responsibilities. Teaching assistants in particular voiced concerns about the lack of clarity, because one of the unintended consequences was some teachers’ assumptions that the teaching assistant’s role was domestic (e.g., sweeping, cleaning, wiping tables down, and heating things up) in nature and not related to student learning. The results of a survey conducted by Jones et al. (2012) indicated that “neither teachers nor paraeducators were confident in their knowledge of paraeducators’ roles and responsibilities” (p. 22) and “in order for teachers to develop the skills they need to effectively work with

paraeducators, they must first have clear knowledge of the paraeducator’s job requirements. . . .” (pp. 22–23).

Teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and the school’s culture were influenced by *Inadequate School Structures*. The data revealed that school and district leaders did not create the conditions for collaboration, rather, they created conditions that hindered it—specifically: (1) there was a lack of continuity in teacher-teaching assistant team assignments; (2) the teacher and teaching assistants had unclear roles and responsibilities; (3) the fostering of collaboration was left solely up to teachers; (4) there was not collaborative time embedded within daily schedules; and (5) teachers and teaching assistants were not prepared to engage in collaborative relationships. These findings echoed the reporting in a *neaToday* article, where the author noted that “teamwork is learned ‘mostly on the job’ (Rosales, 2017, p. 7), and there is an emphasis on “the importance of schools and districts establishing a time period for teachers and paraeducators to meet in private to identify problems, draw out lessons, and set goals” (Rosales, 2017, p. 7). Rosales (2017) noted that the establishment of time for teachers and teaching assistants to meet was “one area of critical need that is frequently reported by teacher-paraeducator teams but remains problematic at a national level” (p. 7).

These inadequate school structures worked to sustain a *Culture of Teaching Assistant Marginalization*. Teaching assistants felt like outsiders within the classroom and school building, because their voices were repressed, their expertise and past experiences were undervalued, and they were denied access to formal knowledge by not being included in professional development experiences or common planning time. These findings exemplified what Riggs (2004) wrote about how paraeducators perceive their relationships with teachers: “. . . staff relationships are not characterized by mutual respect, and they are not asked for their opinions on student issues”

(p. 11). My findings also resembled a recent empirical study conducted by Wilbanks (2021), who found that paraprofessionals “rarely received any professional development and were often required to cover the room when their supervising teachers participated in professional development opportunities” (p. 86). Teaching assistant participants in my study similarly had to stay with the students or engage in clerical tasks when teachers participated in professional development. This notion of teaching assistant marginalization was further supported by participants of my study unanimously responding to an interview question that they perceived teaching assistants as being powerless in schools rather than powerful.

Although teacher participants were afforded access to formal knowledge, the *Professional Development Experiences for Teachers of Students with Disabilities* followed an ineffective, traditional approach to professional development, undergirded by the assumption that professional development is linear. Participants’ professional development experiences were non-collaborative (e.g., teachers and teaching assistants did not work together), fragmented (e.g., topics lacked interconnectivity and the frequency of PD experiences was inconsistent), and segregated (e.g., teaching assistants attended separately from teachers and/or both stakeholders sat separately from each other). Further, the approach to professional development, in which stakeholders were included, and topics addressed were decided by school and district leaders, had little to no input from teaching assistants or teachers. This finding aligns with the research on comprehensive school reform and the education of students with disabilities, which found that a significant number of schools and districts facilitate—the mostly ineffective—traditional forms of professional development (Fuch et al., 1996; Gersten et al., 1997; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lang & Fox, 2003; Richardson, 2003; Richardson & Placier, 2001) and is further supported by the conclusion drawn from Wilbanks (2021) that “professional development and training

opportunities need to be provided to both teachers and paraprofessionals that cover best practices in regards to collaboration and teaching strategies to serve their students with disabilities” (p. 121).

Interestingly, the shift to remote learning due to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the dismantling of a significant inadequate school structure. During remote learning, school leaders afforded teacher-teaching assistant teams common planning time before live instruction, which resulted in an increase in collaboration. Another interesting finding was that teachers’ difficulty adapting to remote learning led to their increased dependence on teaching assistant input, knowledge, and support.

I interpret my findings as follows: the concept of collaboration was not fully conceptualized by participants, because they were never socialized to the practice of collaboration due to the school culture shaped by school leaders and the school structures that they created. Further, there was a “covert pattern of socialization” (Giroux & Penna, 1979, p. 21) lurking in the background that also functioned to shape the school’s culture and further influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, and that covert pattern was the hidden hierarchy. These findings laid the groundwork for me to show the complex dynamics that interacted to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, which are school leaders, school culture, school structures, and the hidden hierarchy.

Based on the analysis of my findings, I drew the following four conclusions: (1) the hidden hierarchy of schools socializes teaching assistants and teachers to where they stand in the power hierarchy and contributes to the reproduction of hierarchization and marginalization; (2) language usage reinforces hierarchization and marginalization; (3) teachers and teaching assistants are not socialized to the practice of collaboration; and (4) teachers’ difficulty adapting

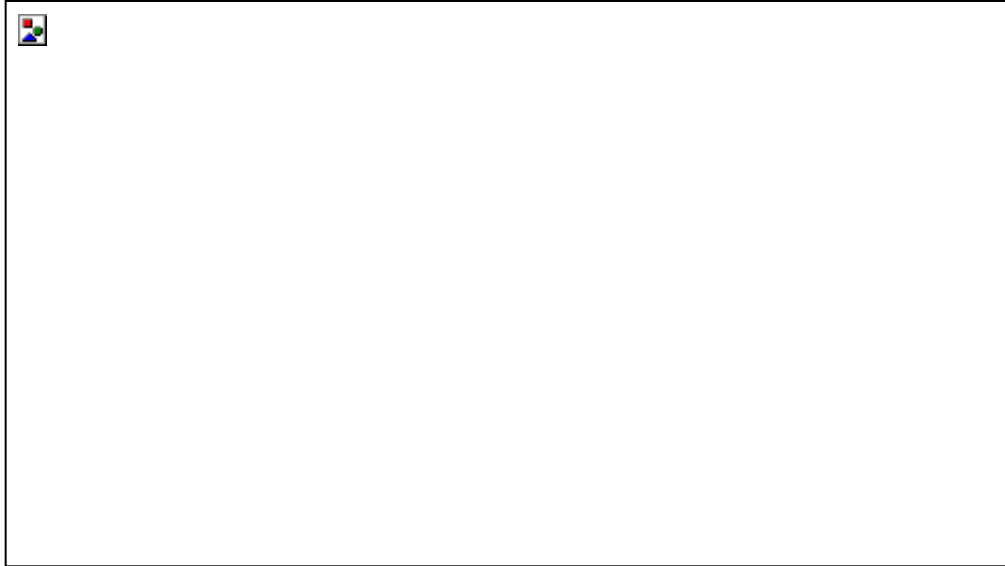
to a newly structured environment during remote learning contributed to an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and confidence in teaching assistant capabilities. Collectively, these conclusions illustrate the interconnectedness of lives and structures and how complex dynamics interact to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. In the following sub-theme, I discuss the complex dynamics that interact to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration to help frame my conclusions.

A Bi-Focal Cycle of Complex Dynamics Interact to Influence Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration in Classrooms of Students with Disabilities

The interaction of the four complex dynamics is a cyclical, interconnected relationship that came into clearer view while looking through the theoretical lens of critical bifocality. Weis and Fine (2012) introduced critical bifocality “to render visible the relations between groups to structures of power . . .” (p. 173), whereas the *bi* in bifocality pertains to the interconnectedness of “structures” and “lives.” Figure 2 below illustrates the bi-focal cycle of complex dynamics. I initially planned to create an illustration to help visualize the three dynamics identified; however, after several iterations, the process actually helped me further understand how the complex dynamics interacted to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, resulting in the uncovering of a fourth dynamic—the hidden hierarchy.

Figure 2

Bi-Focal Cycle of Complex Dynamics That Interact to Influence Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration in Classrooms of Students with Disabilities



I interpreted the bi-focal cycle as follows: *school leaders* shape the *school's culture*, and teachers and teaching assistants work within the context of that *school's culture*; and *school leaders* also create the *school structures* that influence the day-to-day operations of teachers and teaching assistants, which are still within the context of the *school's culture*. The hidden hierarchy is all encompassing, it is the “unspoken and implied lessons” (Crossman, 2020, para. 1) teachers, teaching assistants, and school leaders are taught from explicit messages, possessive and subordinate language usage, and actions. It invisibly lurks in the background, but has considerable influence on the school's culture, even more so than the school leader. All four complex dynamics interact to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. Further, school culture, school structures, and the hidden hierarchy also interact to influence the behaviors of school leaders. My findings revealed that those school structures were inadequate, primarily hindering collaboration, excluding teaching assistants, and lacking specificity in terms of setting clear expectations for teacher and teaching assistant roles.

Clearly delineating the complex dynamics helped to render visible the relations between teachers and teaching assistants to structures of power (Weis & Fine, 2012) and how those

dynamics functioned as structures of power by mediating teacher-teaching assistant interactions. In the following section, I discuss the conclusions drawn from my findings, beginning with the conclusion that encompasses the overarching complex dynamic—the hidden hierarchy.

Conclusions

The Hidden Hierarchy Determines the Power of Teaching Assistants and Teachers and Contributes to The Reproduction of Hierarchization and Marginalization

The hidden hierarchy is an implicit complex dynamic that is not only dictated by the school's leader, but by all stakeholders who interact within the school building. School culture is created in *how* teachers, teaching assistants, school leaders and other school staff act and I suggest that maintaining the hidden hierarchy is an indicator of *why* they act that way. I began conceptualizing this conclusion after I learned that study participants did not receive formal preparation to develop the teacher-teaching assistant relationship in their teacher educator programs or during professional development experiences, yet they all understood the relationship similarly. One reason for this collective understanding could be that teachers and teaching assistants acquire assumptions from their existing environments (Schein, 1985). As I analyzed my findings and pondered the notion of staff acculturation from their existing environments, the concept of the hidden hierarchy emerged. However, it was not until after I worked through the process of creating and making meaning out of Figure 2, that I conceptualized the hidden hierarchy as an underlying complex dynamic.

I asked myself: “*Why* do teachers and other staff members in a school share certain beliefs, values, and assumptions? *What* causes them to think and act similarly?” My conclusion was that teachers and teaching assistants were unknowingly adopting the hidden hierarchy and all stakeholders played a role in facilitating its adoption. My findings revealed countless implicit

messages that were given to and by teachers and teaching assistants throughout the school day— messages that indicated their power status within the classroom, school building, and school district, thus functioning to reproduce hierarchization (e.g., the ranking of teachers above teaching assistants in terms of title importance) and marginalization (e.g., the systematic exclusion of teaching assistants from professional development experiences, common planning time, and school related social events and the privileging of teachers and their ideas over teaching assistants and their ideas).

Looking through a bi-focal lens, the structural conditions of the hidden hierarchy came “to be woven into community relationships and metabolized by individuals” (Weis & Fine, 2012, p. 174), resulting in implicit messages permeating the school’s culture. Some of these implicit messages were communicated through the exclusion of teaching assistants from school handbooks, the facilitation of professional development experiences by outside “experts,” and the making of school level decisions by school district leaders rather than school building leaders. Following, I share how I adapted the hidden hierarchy from the concept of the hidden curriculum and then I provide three examples for the above-mentioned implicit messages.

The hidden curriculum is defined as:

the unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, procedures, and norms that exist in the educational setting. While such expectations are not explicitly written, hidden curriculum is the unstated promotion and enforcement of certain behavioral patterns, professional standards, and social beliefs while navigating a learning environment. (Alsubaie, 2015, p. 125)

The extant literature on the hidden curriculum primarily examines the impact the hidden curriculum has on *students* within schools (Apple, 1971; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Jerald, 2006;

Walton, 2005; Wren, 1999) with a focus on the teacher-student relationship within K–12 schools and higher education institutions. However, for the purposes of this dissertation, I borrow the term “hidden” from the curriculum and add it to hierarchy to create the term hidden hierarchy, which refers to how teachers and teaching assistants are socialized and positioned within K–12 schools by the implicit lessons that are taught through explicit messages, actions, and possessive and subordinate language usage.

The hidden hierarchy is often communicated through written policies, such as manuals or handbooks, during staff meetings or professional development experiences, or through decision-making patterns. For example, during my document analysis of teacher participant Deidre’s school “Handbook & Code of Conduct,” I honed in on the fact that teaching assistants were absent from the document’s 47 pages. The handbook detailed the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders (i.e. director of special services, parents, students, teachers, school administrators, supervisor of basic skills and instruction, and guidance counselors) responsible for the application of the school’s discipline policy. Although “special education programs” was listed as an educational offering and Deidre taught a self-contained class, indicating that teaching assistants were members of the school community—according to the handbook, teaching assistants did not have a role in applying the school’s discipline policy or any responsibility for communicating with parents and students. This finding aligns with the school district’s remote learning practice of paying teaching assistants to watch videos, instead of having them work with their classes during remote instruction. The erasure of teaching assistants from the school’s handbook gives them the message that they are not valued members of the school’s educational team and exclusion from remote learning *gives them the message* that their capabilities are undervalued, thus reinforcing their marginalization.

A second example of how the hidden hierarchy was messaged at participants' schools was that professional development experiences were usually facilitated by "experts" outside of the school building, which implied that expert knowledge did not exist within the school building. Seeking outside expertise is not always an indicator of the devaluing of teacher-teaching assistant expertise within the school building, because they may be the only knowledge holders of a specific strategy or tool. However, at participants' schools, teachers and even more rarely—teaching assistants—were usually not tapped to facilitate professional development experiences. This decision *implied that* teachers and teaching assistants were not considered to have expertise in their field.

Lastly, the hidden hierarchy was also conveyed through decision-making patterns. When I asked participants what they would say to school district leaders if they had the opportunity to speak with them, they unanimously shared a response related to wanting school district leaders to allow school building staff to make decisions for their respective schools. The implied message behind district leaders making decisions for school building staff was that school district leaders, not school building leaders or school staff, knew what was best for their respective schools, further supporting the conclusion that expertise is considered to exist *outside* of the school building and *giving* school leaders *the message* that they have a lesser power status within their school building than district leaders.

This conclusion breaks ground in illuminating how the hidden hierarchy covertly socializes and positions teachers and teaching assistants within K–12 schools. My findings are useful in conveying to teacher education programs and school/district leaders the impact the hidden hierarchy has on the teacher-teaching assistant relationship. Specifically, the hidden hierarchy determines the power status of adults within the classroom and school building and

contributes to the reproduction of hierarchization and marginalization, thus hindering teacher-teaching assistant socialization to collaboration.

Language Usage Reinforces Hierarchization and Marginalization

Several years ago, in one of my doctoral courses, the professor gave us an assignment entitled “noticing the language we speak.” It was my first time analyzing spoken language and critically interacting with my own words. Since that assignment, not only have I been intentional about my language usage, but I have also been hyper-cognizant of the fact that language has meaning, which is why I instantly honed in on participants’ usage of possessive and subordinate language.

The hidden hierarchy not only “taught” school staff their power status through actions and explicit messages, but power statuses were also “transmitted and practiced through discourse” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). According to Fairclough (2010), “the complex realities of power relations are ‘condensed’ and simplified in discourses” (p. 4). This concept was evident in my findings, where participants’ possessive and subordinate language usage contributed to the reproduction of marginalization and hierarchization (Townley, 1993).

Possessive language usage, such as: “*my* paraprofessionals,” “the teacher *would not let go of* the assistant,” “*my* teachers,” “*your* teachers,” and “*their* paras,” implies ownership and further *instructs* teaching assistants that they are of a lesser status than teachers. The hidden hierarchy of possessive language usage contributes to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships (Bourdieu, 1973) by perpetuating “relations of domination” (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 298). Besides the usage of “their paras” being possessive, Mark’s referring to teaching assistants as “paras” resonated with me, because it further taught teaching assistants that they were undervalued. According to Riggs & Riggs (2002), school leaders should ensure:

. . . that all staff members refer to paraeducators by their appropriate name and title. The paraeducator who is referred to only as ‘John’s helper’ or ‘the aide,’ is not presented to the children or to staff members as a valued educator. (p. 13)

Even Jacqueline, who was the only participant who did not use possessive language, at times referred to teaching aides, as they were called at her school, as “the aides.” When I was an assistant principal, it was my goal to disrupt the traditional approach to the teacher-teaching assistant relationship, which is how the topic of my study was conceptualized. One of the first systemic changes I cultivated was facilitating the shift from saying “paraprofessional” to saying, “teaching assistant.” I found that staff would use the phrases “the paras” and “my paras” so often, that teaching assistants lost their sense of identity—it was as if they were nameless. With their unanimous support, we worked on reculturing our school by starting with “showing” rather than just “saying” that we valued all stakeholders.

I share one more example of possessive language usage because it effortlessly embodies this conclusion. I asked Mark to provide me with an example of the questions that were asked to both teachers and teaching assistants when he separated them during a PD experience. Mark stated that he asked teachers about their feelings regarding teaching assistants supporting and executing *their* vision and he inquired about the content of the conversations that they had with “*their* paras.” Contrastingly, he asked teaching assistants “do you feel that *your* teachers” are communicating classroom expectations and supports. Mark was accurate in his belief that his two questions to both groups were similar in nature, but he was not aware that the implied message within his questions was that teachers have ownership of teaching assistants. Those two questions taught teachers that they had a higher power status than teaching assistants and taught teaching assistants that they had a lower power status, thus contributing to the hierarchization

and marginalization in the classroom. Further, looking through the lens of the TTAC, the two questions socialized staff members to the two lowest levels of collaboration: (1) Excluding, and (2) Communicating/Assisting, out of five levels. Behaviors and practices that “reproduce and continue to socially transmit” (Jaime-Diaz & Méndez-Negrete, 2021, p. 1) hierarchization and marginalization, devalue teaching assistants’ capabilities, thus hindering teacher-teaching assistant collaboration.

Although as Barnes et al. (2021) wrote, “The use of ‘we’ language in developing a united front among adults in a classroom is an important but often over-looked strategy to promote solidarity” (p. 109), the use of “we” language was sorely missing throughout my findings. In fact, only Jacqueline used “we” language consistently when speaking about a teaching assistant and her relationship. She was also the only participant whose practice aligned with the highest level on the TTAC—Integrated Collaboration. According to Johnson and Hedeman (1994), cultivating authentic collaboration requires all stakeholder’s willingness to engage in activities that use a language of inclusion; however, that practice was not evident in my data.

Deidre, Stacey, Gloria, Mark, Annette, and Tricia frequently used possessive language to describe teaching assistants, which indicated to me that possessive language usage was embedded within their schools’ culture and an example of how “power relations are ‘condensed’ and simplified in discourses” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 4). While six of the seven participants used possessive language throughout their interviews, I found it intriguing that only the principal and teacher participants used subordinate language. I surmise that subordinate language was only used by them because they conceptualized themselves as being in positions of power. This supposition aligns with the fact that participants unanimously classified teaching assistants as powerless.

There is one example of subordinate language that I want to problematize, because it illustrates the “structural nature of statements” (Riggins, 1997, p. 2) and the importance of context. If afforded the opportunity to give advice to new teachers and new teaching assistants, Deidre stated that new teachers should be open to “getting suggestions” and new teaching assistants should be open to “listening to advice or some positive critiques.” I was intrigued by her language choices. The words “suggestions” and “advice” may seem similar, but they are inherently different: to be open to a suggestion is to be open to an opinion, but to be open to advice is to be open to counseling or problem solving. Anyone can offer a suggestion, but you need to have a level of knowledge and experience to offer advice, which implies that the person needing advice is not the knowledge holder.

Further, Deidre stated that the teaching assistant needs to be open to positive critiques, but she did not state the same for the teacher. I immediately thought about Freire’s (2000) concept of *unfinishedness*. The implied message was that teachers do not require critique, but teaching assistants do. I wondered about the idea of teachers as *finished*. Do they not require critique? Or is the teacher the only knowledge holder in the classroom and therefore the only stakeholder capable of providing critique? According to Riggins (1997), Foucault “emphasized the structural nature of statements, including ones that are spontaneous, and the way in which all statements are *intertextual* because they are interpreted against a backdrop of other statements” (p. 2). As always, context matters and according to Foucault, all statements are interrelated. Therefore, as an isolated narrative, these nuances in language may have been overlooked, but within the context of other narratives provided, I began to see that there are latent beliefs, which may be revealed in language and/or actions.

The interaction of the four complex dynamics identified in this paper (i.e., school leaders, school culture, school structures, and the hidden hierarchy) determined the properties of discourse within participants' school buildings and those properties contributed to the reproduction of hierarchization and marginalization. Fairclough (2010) asserted, “. . . social structures determine properties of discourse” (p. 30) and “discourse in turn determines social structures. . .” (p. 30) and my findings revealed that those social structures did not socialize teachers and teaching assistants for collaboration.

Teachers and Teaching Assistants are not Socialized to the Practice of Collaboration

Teachers and teaching assistants are not socialized to the practice of collaboration. This conclusion emerged after I realized participants' narratives indicated that school leaders and teacher education programs have not created the conditions for teachers and teaching assistants to be socialized for collaboration. I asked myself: “How are participants supposed to know what they do not know?” I wondered how teachers and teaching assistants are supposed to know *how* to collaborate, if they have never been *shown* how to collaborate and if they are rarely placed in circumstances *to* collaborate. According to Barnes et al. (2021), “it is important to prepare teachers and paraprofessionals with knowledge of collaborative skills and practices and the training and support they need to promote effective collaboration in the classroom” (p. 108).

Principal participant Mark spoke to this notion in his response when I asked him to reflect on his practice and conceptualize a systemic change that he could implement to socialize teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration. He thoughtfully shared that he would “do a better job of really modeling having the paras/the assistants and the teachers together for professional developments and meetings,” because he believed “that there will then be a mindset shift with all the adults that we really value the paras and the teachers as a collaborative team as

opposed to two separate entities based on title.” Interestingly, although an aspect of Mark’s intentions was to illustrate the valuing of teaching assistants, his usage of the term “paras” actually suggested that teaching assistants are undervalued at his school, which further illustrates how the hidden hierarchy permeates a school’s culture.

The findings of several empirical studies indicated that there was an expressed need for professional development that was directly related to teachers working collaboratively with paraprofessionals (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Karge et al., 2011; Rueda & Monzó, 2002) and the findings from my study indicated that teachers and teaching assistants are still not receiving professional development directly related to collaboration. As Rueda and Monzó (2002) wrote, “collaboration is not likely to take place in an environment that does not value such activity” (p. 517).

My findings revealed several ways that conditions were not created for teachers and teaching assistants to be socialized to collaboration within the classroom. For instance, the principal and teacher participants unanimously reported that they did not receive instruction on the teacher-teaching assistant relationship in their preservice teacher education programs. This finding aligns with Riggs (2004) who noted that “teacher education has largely neglected to prepare new teachers to work with paraeducators” (p. 9). Further, teachers and teaching assistants have also not received professional development on how to develop their relationship or on fostering collaboration. Participants shared that professional development topics primarily focused on behavior management, instructional strategies, and the school- or district-wide curriculum. Additionally, professional development experiences were either segregated (i.e. teaching assistants attended separately from teachers and/or both stakeholders sat separately from each other) or teaching assistants were excluded from participation all together. Similarly,

teaching assistants were also excluded from participation in common planning time in all participants' schools except Jacqueline's and Mark's schools. At Jacqueline's school, teachers of students with disabilities and teaching assistants attended common planning time and departmental meetings together on a weekly basis. At Mark's school, he provided classroom teams with 15 minutes of common planning time in the morning while the students had breakfast, which he acknowledged was inadequate for meaningful collaboration. However, during remote learning, he was able to schedule one hour of common planning time in the morning before live instruction began, which resulted in an increase in collaboration and an increase in teacher confidence in teaching assistant capabilities.

My findings also uncovered that the fostering of collaboration was left up to individual teachers, which according to McLaughlin (2001) is not indicative of a thriving teacher community. Specifically, McLaughlin asserted that:

leaders of schools and departments where teacher community thrives make conditions for teachers' work a top priority. They do not assume that teacher collaboration and invention are self-sustaining or that they can rely on isolated initiative of individual teachers. (p. 121)

Lastly, the data revealed a continuum of school leadership practices that ranged from not fostering collaboration at all to having a contradictory understanding of fostering collaboration, which implies that school leaders also have not been socialized to collaboration. Collectively, these findings support my conclusion that teachers and teaching assistants were not socialized to collaboration, and "opportunities for collaboration were not built into the school organization or the school culture" (Rueda & Monzó, 2002, p. 517).

My findings confirm the existing body of literature (Biggs et al., 2016; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012; Rueda & Monzó, 2002), and provide the necessary resources for the collaborative relationship to work (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Jones et al., 2012) on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. School administrators need to ensure that teachers and teaching assistants have time built into their schedules to interact and collaboratively plan lessons, collaboratively attend professional developments that are aligned to their specific needs, attend trainings that teach them the requisite skills for working with another adult.

The findings from my study also help to fill a gap in the literature on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, because according to Biggs (2016), “despite the enduring challenge and importance of positive teacher-paraprofessional working relationships, very little attention has been focused on this topic” (p. 257), resulting in the relative scarcity of their voices in the literature. The following conclusion covers a relatively new context for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, with a focus on collaboration during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. This conclusion will further fill the gap in the literature and will break ground on illuminating how collaboration increased during remote learning.

Teachers’ Difficulty Adapting to a Newly Structured Environment During Remote Learning Contributed to an Increase in Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration and Confidence in Teaching Assistant Capabilities

During in-school learning, teachers tended not to share responsibility with teaching assistants, whereas teachers were the primary decision-makers and knowledge holders within the classroom. Teaching assistant participants shared how teachers chose to take on all responsibility and not “give you any kind of leeway.” My findings revealed the only time there was evidence of near unanimous (i.e., six of seven participants) teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and

evidence that collaboration was moving toward Collaborating or Integrated Collaboration on the TTAC, was during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic when schools across the United States went from in-school learning to remote learning. During that time, teachers actively sought and needed teaching assistant input and support, they maintained fluid communication, decision-making was shared, and they co-constructed lessons for live instruction.

Principal participant Mark explained how he believed some teachers micromanaged in the physical classroom in order to maintain their power status in the classroom hierarchy, therefore he was pleasantly surprised to witness an increase in collaboration during remote learning. He shared how some classroom “partnerships that were not as strong as they could have been when we were physically in the building . . . was like a total 180-degree difference” (Interview 1, p. 14) during remote learning “and that's a good thing.” He attributed that 180-degree difference to teaching assistants’ capabilities compensating for the “lack of skill” that some teachers had with the technology usage requirement for remote instruction. Based on the findings from my study, it appears that the shift from in-school instruction to remote instruction began to uncover the interconnection between teacher vulnerabilities and teaching assistant capabilities, which resulted in contributing to the start of a dismantling of power dynamics in the “classroom.”

Remote learning helped to further blur the already unclear lines of teacher-teaching assistant roles and responsibilities. The abrupt shift to remote instruction, with little time for adequate technology-related training, along with the removal of the physical school building structure and its complex dynamics, were contributing contextual factors to the increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and confidence in teaching assistant capabilities. All

participants, except teacher participant Annette, reported an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration during remote learning.

Principal participant Mark described how some teachers needed to exert “control” over the physical environment, but the move to remote learning did not afford them that opportunity, instead resulting in “providing opportunities for paras to shine and also to not feel, well—'disrespected.’” This increased collaboration correlates with the recent literature that materialized from the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Elaine Fournier, author and principal of a rural school in Canada that serves students with disabilities, described how she afforded a teaching assistant the opportunity to “take on a greater teacher-leadership role in Lawson’s education in order to alleviate the stress on the teacher” (Fournier et al., 2020, p. 21). Since the teacher was struggling and “feeling overwhelmed at the task of setting up the Emergency Remote Teaching” (p. 21), Ms. Carberry (teaching assistant), in collaboration with the principal and team, designed tasks that were aligned to Lawson’s individualized education plan (IEP). Ms. Carberry’s capabilities might have continued to lay dormant if the power dynamic did not shift in the classroom, due to the teacher struggling with the transition to remote learning.

Teaching assistant participant Gloria had a similar experience to Ms. Carberry, whereas she was afforded the opportunity to show her full range of capabilities during remote learning, an opportunity that was not afforded to her during in-school learning. Gloria shared how the frequency, modes, and content of communication changed between the teacher and her. Specifically, the teacher called, texted, and emailed her daily, “always” asking her for input about lessons and the students, and they held daily one-on-one common planning meetings before live instruction, all of which were in contrast to their practice during in-school learning. Gloria concluded that the teacher’s behavior changed, because “now it's a different new world

for her, it's a new window for her completely” (Interview 1, p. 5). Similar to Mark’s example, Gloria experienced an increase in collaboration and teacher confidence in her capabilities, due to the teachers’ vulnerability and challenges adapting to a new method of schooling.

I contend that teachers’ vulnerabilities compelled them to disrupt the classroom hierarchy. Also, the removal of the school building structure from the equation, eliminated many of the stressors with which teachers and teaching assistants interacted throughout the school day, mainly, school leadership and the hidden hierarchy. The removal of those stressors helped teachers feel more comfortable collaborating with teaching assistants in more meaningful ways. Further, the embedding of common planning time within schedules, afforded classroom teams the opportunity to meet and plan before live instruction with students—an opportunity that they did not have during in-school instruction.

I conclude that teachers had a difficult time shifting from in-school learning to remote learning, because they were socialized to structured daily routines; therefore, when an event occurred that required a specific skill set, flexibility, and comfortability with a newly structured environment, they became overwhelmed and insecure. That vulnerability led them to seek input from teaching assistants and conceptualize their roles through a new lens. Teachers’ difficulty adapting to a newly structured environment resulted in remote learning contributing to an increase in teacher-teaching assistant collaboration and confidence in teaching assistant capabilities.

This conclusion is supported by a recent study conducted during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic that found “the lack of preparation, training, and support the participants had for designing quality instruction with technology created additional stressors and barriers to teaching and learning remotely in times of need” (Trust & Whalen, 2020, p. 193). Therefore, Trust and

Whalen (2020) offered the following recommendation for inservice teacher training and support: create “unstructured professional development (e.g., mentoring or online forums) and socially connected, learner-centered activities that allow educators to develop knowledge and skills to help them teach with technology in any format or situation, including online, remote, or blended settings” (p. 193). This recommendation aligns with a professional development recommendation that I offer to K-12 schools and teacher education programs in the following section.

Implications

The conclusions that I have drawn from this study suggest that context matters—happenings in the foreground are mediated by unseen happenings in the background. More specifically, irrespective of school-wide traditions and rituals, written policies, or school and district leaders espoused beliefs, the language used by participants, school structures implemented, and school culture shaped by school leaders socialize teachers and teaching assistants to non-collaboration, which ultimately reinforces hierarchization and marginalization.

I strongly believe that school and district leaders, teacher educators, and teachers who are interested in creating the conditions for teacher-teaching assistant collaboration have something to gain from this study. My findings revealed that there are four complex dynamics that interact to influence teacher-teaching assistant collaboration: school leaders, school culture, school structures, and the hidden hierarchy. These complex dynamics are interconnected and work to shape the conditions that teachers and teaching assistants work within.

The findings of this study have a number of important practical implications for school leaders and teacher education programs. Specifically, these implications include re-culturing schools for students with disabilities; explicit attention to fostering teacher-teaching assistant

collaboration in teacher education; explicit attention to fostering teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in K–12 schools, and socializing teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration through professional learning experiences. Lastly, I offer implications for future research on teacher and teaching assistant collaboration and concluding thoughts. The empirical results reported herein should be considered in the light of the aforementioned limitations in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

Reculture Schools for Students with Disabilities

Participants' schools lacked adequate school structures to socialize teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration and they also lacked a school culture that was conducive to it; therefore I propose a reculturing of schools for students with disabilities rather than a restructuring. According to Fullan (1993), “. . . *to restructure is not to reculture . . .* changing formal structures is not the same as changing norms, habits, skills, and beliefs” (p. 49). I contend that reculturing schools is important, because it will render visible the school's hidden hierarchy, thus affording leaders the opportunity to systemically address its existence. Wyncott-Kyle and Bogotch (2000) asserted that “new and different preparation and training are needed so that administrators, teachers, and others involved in the change process learn how to work collaboratively and how to question and reflect upon underlying assumptions and beliefs” (p. 133). Further, according to Jones et al. (2012), as instructional leaders in the classroom, it is imperative that teachers “develop the interpersonal skills necessary for building respectful, reciprocal relationships” (p. 23).

My findings indicated that there is a message in the language we speak, which impacts a school's culture. Using possessive and subordinate language towards teaching assistants marginalizes them and contributes to hierarchization. Ultimately, the hidden hierarchy lurks in

the background and reveals itself in everything we say, do, and write. Therefore, one concrete way to reculture schools and socialize teachers, teaching assistants, and school leaders to using “we” and “us” language is to conduct critical discourse analyses of conversations. Critical discourse analysis can be used to show how power relations in schools for students with disabilities are maintained through language usage. It was developed to better capture the interrelationship between language, power, and ideology and “. . . especially to draw out and describe the practices and conventions in and behind texts that reveal political and ideological investment” (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 4). According to Riggins (1997), “critical discourse analysis places a lot of emphasis on the implied messages that underlie communication” (p. 11).

Specifically, teachers and teaching assistants can notice the language people speak by taking notes and paying close attention to the usage of possessive, subordinate, ableist, or other marginalizing language. They can do this as a whole group during professional learning experiences or staff/department meetings, where participants notice the language the facilitator uses and then engage in a reflection where participants discuss and make meaning of their findings and then suggest possible alternatives. Another way to address language in the classroom is where teachers and teaching assistants take notes throughout the school day for a specified period of time and then discuss and make meaning of their findings in small groups. After all of the data are collected, they could be analyzed in an inquiry group to identify patterns across departments, grades, age, seniority, and class size and they can brainstorm implications and suggest possible changes.

Teacher education programs can also introduce critical discourse analysis tools. Preservice teachers could notice the language their peers and the professor speak over the course of a specified period of time, analyze their findings, identify patterns, and discuss implications

and possible remedies. Teacher educators could also make this an assignment that preservice teachers complete at their clinical sites, whereas they notice the language that their cooperating teacher, inservice teachers, and school leaders use and analyze their notes or if possible, their transcripts, to identify patterns and make meaning in preparation for a whole class discussion. I believe that conducting critical discourse analyses in K–12 and teacher education programs, would benefit all school stakeholders, preservice teachers, and teacher educators, because they would be able to “see” their language usage and problematize its implied message.

Explicit Attention to Fostering Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration in Teacher Education

My data indicated that teacher education programs need to have an explicit focus on socializing preservice teachers to nurture the teacher-teaching assistant relationship and collaboration before they enter the classroom. The principal and all teacher participants revealed that they never received coursework on collaboration or the teacher-teaching assistant relationship. Therefore, I propose that preservice teachers receive explicit coursework on “how to” collaborate and “how to” cultivate meaningful teacher-teaching assistant relationships. Specifically, teacher educators could have preservice teachers engage in role play activities using different scenarios that include conflict and a synopsis of the school’s culture, and have the audience assess the antecedent to the conflict, the role that each person played in the conflict, the influence the school’s culture possibly had on the interaction, and how the conflict could have been handled differently.

Preservice teachers can also role play collaboratively developing a lesson plan that meets the diverse learning needs of their students and then facilitating the lesson to their peers, who will have different assigned student profiles to role play. One preservice teacher will be the

teaching assistant and one will be the teacher. They will have to engage in shared decision-making and share responsibility for all aspects of the assignment. Their peers and the teacher educator will assess how well they work together as a team, their individual roles in the team, how they collaboratively work to address student behaviors that may arise, and monitor the language they use in their respective roles. Each role player will also self-assess using the same measurements. The class will use the TTAC to assess each role-playing team's level of collaboration.

Explicit Attention to Fostering Teacher-Teaching Assistant Collaboration in K–12 Schools

An analysis of the data also revealed the need for K–12 schools to have an explicit focus on socializing teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration and fostering a collaborative relationship. Participants unanimously stated they have never received professional development on this topic. According to Jones et al. (2012), “teachers and paraeducators must also have specific targeted professional development, including training teachers on how to work with paraeducators” (p. 23). Further, Klein and Riordan (2011) found that “teachers may not be internalizing the ‘behind the scenes’ what-it-takes-to-do-this understanding” (p. 50) and shared one researcher’s suggestion to be more explicit about “*how* or *what* was occurring at each step” (p. 50).

Providing teachers and teaching assistants “with a regularly scheduled time to meet, discuss, and plan is the first step in supporting their efforts to create a collaborative team. It is important that these teams be viewed by all involved as critical components to the daily/weekly schedule and be faithfully implemented” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 22). According to Barnes et al. (2021), “common barriers teachers and paraprofessionals face include challenges related to a lack of time to communicate, train, and work effectively” (p. 108). In order to socialize them to

collaboration, sufficient time is needed for teaching assistants and teachers to develop collaborative relationships (Jones et al., 2012; Warren & Muth, 1995).

School leaders should institute collaborative common planning and debriefing time. “Joint planning and effective communication were seen as essential pre-requisites for effective partnership and mutual support of assistants and teachers” (Logan, 2001, p. 33). However, before teachers and teaching assistants engage in collaborative work, school leaders must first cultivate their collaborative relationships. Therefore, I suggest they socialize teachers and teaching assistants to shared decision-making. Specifically, school leaders can devise scheduling committees, where teachers and teaching assistants engage in the shared decision-making work of restructuring the school-wide scheduling to accommodate common planning and debriefing time. This monumental task will not only afford teachers and teaching assistants the opportunity to be fully involved in a meaningful shared decision-making activity, but it will also contribute to them having a vested interest in the implementation of the new school practice of common planning and debriefing. Further, teachers and teaching assistants will experience first-hand the amount of time it takes and the vast considerations that have to be made when devising a master schedule for all classroom and cluster teachers, which might decrease the number of scheduling related questions and complaints, like “why does my class have Art class before lunch? I prefer for them to have a cluster class after lunch.”

This activity should be completed in small scheduling committees, the school term prior to the term of implementation, in order to provide ample time for the decision-making, cross-referencing and finalization process to be completed. Each committee of 6-8 teachers and teaching assistants will devise their own method of creating the schedules and complete their

own cross-referencing. Final schedules should be shared during culminating professional learning experiences and consensus will be made on which scheduling model the school will use.

After building a collaborative relationship through long-term shared decision-making, teachers and teaching assistants will engage in collaborative common planning and debriefing during the following school term. I provide an example of how affording them common planning and debriefing time could be done based on my experience as an assistant principal. Since I valued collaborative common planning as a practice, I ensured its implementation by restructuring scheduling and partnering with related service providers, out of classroom teachers (i.e., teachers who had non-classroom assignments), and cluster teachers (i.e., subject area teachers). I afforded teachers and classroom teaching assistants the opportunity to engage in common planning during the first period every day. While they were planning, students had breakfast in the cafeteria under the watchful eye of cluster teachers, related service providers, out of classroom teachers, and school leaders. After breakfast, students went to several locations: the gymnasium to engage in targeted fitness activities; related service provider rooms for group services; designated sensory rooms for students who had difficulty being in large crowds around loud noises; or the auditorium to engage in theatre arts' activities.

Along with common planning time, my study uncovered that teacher participants also sought time to debrief with teaching assistants. They shared how they had to find time during the school day or after school hours on their personal time to debrief with them. Debriefing is a “post-experience analytic process” (Gardner, 2013, p. 166) that “provides opportunities for exploring and making sense of what happened during an event or experience, discussing what went well and identifying what could be done to change, improve and do better next time” (Gardner, 2013, p. 166).

Teacher participant Deidre and the teaching assistant would debrief on their own time during their duty-free lunch period or after school hours, which is similar to teacher participant Jacqueline who noted that her and the teaching assistant would often debrief during lunch, in the morning before the school day, or while they were preparing for dismissal. Teacher participant Annette shared that she tried to find any time during the day to debrief with teaching assistants, even while the kids were in the middle of taking a test. She stated that during their debriefs, she asks questions like: “Hey, is everything going OK? Is X student doing well? Is there anything I need to help with? Is there anything any of the paraprofessionals can help with?”

Therefore, I propose embedding 15 minutes of debriefing time at the end of each school day, right before dismissal. While classroom teams are meeting, students could have choice time (i.e., they engage in a motivating activity of choice); sensory time (i.e., they engage with sensory items, such as water beads, a stress ball, or slinky); complete a self-reflection slip; or complete an exit slip (i.e., an assessment of learning). Affording teaching assistants and teachers the opportunity to plan collaboratively in the morning and then debrief at the end of the school day not only creates the conditions for collaboration to take place, but it also fosters a collaborative and trusting relationship, thus cultivating a school culture “where respectful, reciprocal relationships flourish, and adults are valued. . .” (Jones et al., 2012, p. 22).

Socialize Teachers and Teaching Assistants to Collaboration Through Professional Learning Experiences

Logan (2001) wrote, “Research would indicate that in-school joint training of teachers and assistants is the most effective means to develop a cooperative collaborative relationship” (p. 40). My findings revealed that school leaders did not create the conditions for teachers and teaching assistants to be socialized to collaboration through their professional development

experiences, because teaching assistants were usually segregated or excluded from them all together. These findings align with the findings of Brown and Stanton-Chapman (2014), who found that 58% of paraprofessional participants reported that they did not receive training regularly and 53% reported not having received “any training in the past year” (p. 28). My findings also uncovered that teacher participants were not socialized to experiencing effective professional development. Specifically, they received ineffective, fragmented, non-collaborative, and transmission based professional development experiences, while sitting in an auditorium or cafeteria listening to a guest facilitator. According to Klein and Riordan (2011), “transmission based professional development may not sufficiently provide learning experiences powerful enough to encourage changes in practice” (p. 51). Lastly, the findings from participants’ experiences during remote learning suggest that professional learning experiences need to be unstructured and technology rich (Trust & Whalen, 2020), so that teachers can more easily adapt to changing school environments.

This implication is undergirded by Klein and Riordan’s (2011) definition of experiential education: “a philosophy and methodology in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills and clarify values” (p. 38). With an understanding of experiential learning and based on the findings from my study, I propose K–12 schools socialize teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration by instituting collaborative, relevant, and unstructured experiential professional learning experiences with school leader/mentor/coach follow-up and teacher and teaching assistant reflections.

The following is a concrete example of this implication. On a consistent basis, teachers and teaching assistants could engage in experiential activities that are directly related to the work

they do with their students in the classroom (e.g., curriculum-based, assessment-based, instructional strategies, problems of practice). These professional learning experiences could be held in different classrooms, to provide context, or using an online forum to break up the monotony. The experiences could be held in small groups, but if that is not feasible, I propose they be held in the cafeteria or the library to create the conditions for collaboration, as the auditorium serves as a barrier. Teachers and teaching assistants could engage in role-playing, case-study analysis, and classroom gallery walks, where they walk around to one another's classroom, similar to walking in an art gallery, engage in discussion, and take notes on pre-determined items.

The professional learning experiences could be facilitated by different classroom teams who serve as exemplars on a specific topic. This will show teachers and teaching assistants that their expertise is valued. Each professional learning experience could have a targeted focus and a time period afterward for meaningful application and follow-up to take place. This might mean that professional learning experiences have to be every two weeks rather than every week in order to create the conditions for meaningful classroom application of practice and follow-up. Afterwards, each participant will reflect on their two-week experience, identify areas of growth and challenge, share lingering questions, and brainstorm next steps. These reflections should be discussed in small groups and shared with respective mentors/coaches for follow-up support.

I want to bring attention to the shift in terminology usage from “professional development experiences” to “professional learning experiences.” The term professional development was used throughout this dissertation, because that is what participants “received” at their schools. However, I am proposing for teachers and teaching assistants to engage in professional learning experiences. Professional development “evokes images of what someone

does to someone else: develop them” (Easton, 2008, p. 1) and “the implicit assumptions underlying many PD programs and research is that knowledge can be transferred to practitioners’ minds to be then enacted in practices and that learning can be mandated, if not through attendance, then certainly through engagement in PD programs” (Webster-Wright, 2009, p. 724). Moving from professional development to professional learning is a shift from participants’ receipt of “passive and intermittent PD” (Stewart, 2014, p. 28) to professional learning experiences that are “active, consistent” (p. 28) and “based in the teaching environment” (p. 28). Further, according to Easton (2008), “professional development often begins at the top” (p. 4), but “professional learning starts at the bottom within schools, with educators identifying what students need and so what they themselves need to learn” (p. 4).

Implications for Future Research

The findings from my study help to fill a gap in the literature on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration. According to Biggs (2016), “despite the enduring challenge and importance of positive teacher-paraprofessional working relationships, very little attention has been focused on this topic” (p. 257), resulting in the relative scarcity of their voices in the literature (Biggs, 2016). However, there is still so much that we need to learn. Future research should concentrate on: (1) the impact that collaborative professional learning experiences have on teacher-teaching assistant collaboration in the classroom; (2) investigating whether teachers, teaching assistants, and school leaders’ espoused practice of collaboration align with their actual practice of collaboration through direct classroom observation; and (3) the impact that socializing teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration has on the larger school community. I believe these areas for future research would help deepen our understandings of how the teacher-teaching assistant collaborative relationship.

Concluding Thoughts

One area of concern that this study did not address was the pay disparity between teachers and teaching assistants, but I do want to briefly address it here, in order to clarify any misconceptions about the intentions of this study. Interestingly, pay disparity was only mentioned by the three teacher participants (Annette, Jacqueline, and Deidre) and principal participant (Mark), but not the teaching assistant participants (Stacey, Gloria, and Tricia). For example, Jacqueline noted that she could not understand why the “teacher aides” at her school made “considerably, considerably” less pay than teachers “because except for writing the IEPs and keeping track of communication with families—we’re doing the same work from 8:00 to 3:30.” Contrastingly, Mark noted that “some paras don’t want to be bothered in collaborating and they would even say overtly if not subtlety: ‘uh that’s why the teachers getting paid this and I get this; my job is not to do that.’”

In Jacqueline’s case, the pay disparity is another way that school districts show teaching assistants that they are undervalued members of the school community. In Mark’s case, I want to problematize the teaching assistant’s comment, because it speaks to the heart of the intentions of this study. If teaching assistants and teachers were socialized to collaborate and it was embedded in their schools’ culture, then I contend that it would not be viewed as an *additional* task on top of all of the other things that they have to do throughout the school day.

What I am proposing is that schools reculture, so that teachers and teaching assistants become socialized to using “we” and “us” language; have a clear understanding of one another’s role in the classroom; consult with one another before proceeding with students; actively listen to one another; and effectively work together to meet students’ needs and manage the classroom. As Barnes et al. (2021) wrote, “When educator collaboration is done well, it benefits teachers,

paraprofessionals and their students” (p. 108). The literature shows that “both teachers and paraprofessionals tend to view collaborative relationships as professionally beneficial because they can result in self-efficacy, professional support, and opportunities for professional growth” (Barnes et al., 2021, p. 108). Taylor et al. (2014) shared how their experience in a third-space teacher education program pushed them “to blur the borders that distinguish the traditional roles of resident, mentor, and teacher educator. In our third space, hierarchical arrangements of responsibilities, knowledge, and relationships were reconsidered and eventually identified as meaningless to our work” (p. 16). Similarly, I am recommending the blurring of the hierarchical and marginalizing boundaries that distinguish the traditional roles of teachers and teaching assistants in the classroom.

Ultimately, I am proposing for teachers, school, and district leaders to do as the late, fellow Brooklynite the Notorious B.I.G. suggested—“spread love it’s the Brooklyn Way”. *Teachers*, share responsibility in the classroom with teaching assistants; *school leaders*, create the conditions for teachers to feel comfortable and safe sharing responsibility in the classroom; *school district leaders*, create the conditions for school leaders to make meaningful decisions for their respective schools, without direct or indirect interference; and *teacher educators*, create the conditions for pre-service teachers to engage in real-world collaborative experiences, such as shared decision-making, and socialize them to using “we” and “us” language before they enter schools. These are small steps that could be taken towards cultivating collaborative school cultures. In the words of ancient Chinese philosopher and writer, Lao Tzu “the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” and I believe the journey of a thousand miles to socialize teachers and teaching assistants to collaboration is worth the trip.

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Appendix #1.1, Interview 1: Mark

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Principal Mark

Date and time: July 17, 2020 at 12:00 pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: Have you been a school leader under any other title before?

SC: How old are you?

SC: How do you identify in terms of gender?

SC: How would teachers at your school describe you?

SC: How would teaching assistants at your school describe you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at this belief?

SC: How did you derive at the belief that teachers are the pilot or the master or the leader of the classroom?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at this belief?

SC: Did you go through a traditional teacher education preparation program or did you go through an alternate route like Teaching Fellows or Teach for America?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you ever witnessed at your and why do you consider it your best?

SC: What role do you believe having the same teacher and teaching assistants work together over a three-year period of time, played in their level of collaboration?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you ever witnessed and why do you consider it your worst?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you could tell district leadership anything you wanted to about how their actions and/or decisions impact your school, what would it be?

SC: How has teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed in your school from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: So now I want you to be reflective. For you as a principal, I want you to think of one concrete thing you can do, systemically for your school building, that will facilitate what you just said.

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Given your experience as a school leader thus far, if you could give advice to a new school leader, what would it be?

Appendix #1.2, Interview 2: Mark

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Principal Mark

Date and time: July 24, 2020 at 3:30pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: How many assistant principals work at your school?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often are professional developments held at your school?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: So based upon reflection, on you as a principal, a decision was made to hold a professional development for teaching assistants regarding what they believe their roles and responsibilities were, can you explain why teachers did not also have a professional development on what they believe the role of the teaching assistant is?

SC: I have one clarifying question: did both the teachers and the teaching assistants in their separate PD's, did they have the same exact questions?

SC: Can you give an example of one that was different?

SC: Have teachers and teaching assistants collaborated together in the professional development? If so, give me an example of what the PD topic was.

SC: What are the PD topics?

SC: Who selects the PD topics?

SC: Which staff members specifically, in terms of job titles, received the survey regarding PD topics?

SC: Did students receive a survey regarding PD topics?

SC: Who does the talking at PDs?

SC: I just wanna make sure I'm clear, so the last part you said was: "paraprofessionals, they've always been co-facilitators never sole facilitators", that's for all professional development that they facilitated?

SC: Do students in your school treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? If so, in what ways?

SC: Do you believe that teachers and teaching assistants should be treated differently? If so, why? And if not, why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school?

SC: You said the teachers, do you mean the teachers and teaching assistants or just the teachers?

SC: Do you have common planning time at your school and what I mean by that is, there's a set period where only lesson planning and/or unit or curriculum planning is done?

SC: How often per week do they have common planning?

SC: Do teaching assistants participate in common planning?

SC: What are the barriers to having teaching assistants participate in common planning time with teachers?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teaching assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

SC: How do you define collaboration?

Appendix #2.1, Interview 1: Annette

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Annette

Date and time: July 13, 2020 at 12:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class.

SC: How old are you?

SC: What is your gender identification?

SC: How would the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: Why do you think that they would describe you as talking too much or sharing your viewpoints?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: What does the larger whole school professional development usually consist of, like what topics?

SC: So would you say that the whole school professional development is more like a staff meeting and then when you guys get together as small groups of teachers those are more of the professional developments?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: What do you mean by “overstepping her boundaries” as a paraprofessional?

SC: When you started as a paraprofessional did you receive a roles and responsibilities booklet and or/did school administration sit with you and discuss what your role would be?

SC: Do you know if the paraprofessionals in your school building receive a roles and responsibility booklet or if administration has spoken with them about what the expectations of them are within the classroom?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Given your experience as a teacher thus far, if you could give advice to a new teacher what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant, what would it be?

Appendix #2.2, Interview 2: Annette

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Annette

Date and time: July 21, 2020 at 1:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often do you as a teacher participate in professional developments?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: Have you ever participated collaboratively in a professional development with the teaching assistant(s) who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: The first PD that you spoke about. . . (*participant interrupted*)

SC: That was going to be my question, it sounded as if it was self-selection as opposed to being fostered.

SC: Who selects the PD topics?

SC: Who does the talking at PDs?

SC: Has a teaching assistant at your school ever facilitated a professional development? If so, what was it?

SC: What preparation route did you take to become a teacher: traditional or alternate route?

SC: Did your preparation include coursework on how to work with a teaching assistant? If so, please describe.

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teacher in the classroom?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at the belief that it is not the paraprofessional's role to instruct?

SC: I guess I'm trying to understand, was it the culture of your building? Like, if you didn't have coursework in grad school about how to interact with a paraprofessional, how did you learn that that's the role of the paraprofessional? Was it the culture of the building? You have to get there somehow.

SC: And where did you read the job description at?

SC: And when you came to New York City, were you given something like that?

SC: I'm trying to get an understanding of systems, because if you were given something in XX, but not here, it says a lot about our systems.

SC: But, I also have paraprofessional participants who I'm asking the same questions and they were not given anything, only the substitutes were.

SC: Yeah, remember this is about the complex dynamics that happen outside of the classroom that impacts what happens inside the classroom, so I'm really trying to get a read on the systems at play.

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? In what ways?

SC: Do you believe that you should be treated differently? Why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school, if any?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school, if any?

(This question was already answered above)

SC: Let me ask about scheduling, is scheduling set up in a way where you as the teacher and teaching assistant have time to meet with each other?

SC: No, I meant, you know what, when we get to the next question, I think that it would be answered.

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

SC: How do you define collaboration?

Appendix #3.1, Interview 1: Deidre

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Deidre

Date and time: July 7, 2020 at 1:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class.

SC: How old are you?

SC: What is your gender identification?

SC: How would the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) who you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: How would you compare the last four years to the years before that of working with teaching assistants?

SC: What do you think the differences are with the teaching assistants who you have been working with these last four years in comparison to the others? What was it about them or did something change in the school? Why do you think that the teaching assistant whom you have been working with these last four years is so totally different from the previous teaching assistants?

SC: What would you like your school administration to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: At the end of the day when you guys rehashed what transpired during the day was that on your time or was that on school's time?

SC: At what point in the school year did you two establish that type of climate?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: Why do you think that it was so? Did they work in your school previously and that's something that they've always done? or were they new and that's who they were? what do you think was the reason why they acted like that in the classroom?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: Who do you believe feels left out?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: So, for clarification there was no expectation for teaching assistants to support students during distance learning?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Did he ask to speak with any teaching assistants?

SC: How do you know that she felt that way about you?

SC: Given your experience as a teacher thus far, if you could give advice to a new teacher what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant, what would it be?

Appendix #3.2, Interview 2: Deidre

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Deidre

Date and time: July 20, 2020 at 12:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often do you as a teacher participate in professional developments?

SC: What about the professional developments that are held within your school building, how often do you participate in those, if any?

SC: How often would you say that those professional developments took place?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: Have you ever participated collaboratively in a professional development with the teaching assistant(s) who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: What are the topics of the PD?

SC: Who selects the PD topics?

SC: Who selects the topics for your school building professional development?

SC: Who does the talking at the PDs?

SC: And at the district PDs, who does the talking?

SC: What preparation route did you take to become a teacher: traditional or alternate route?

SC: Did your preparation include coursework on how to work with a teaching assistant? If so, please describe.

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief about the role of the teacher in the classroom?

SC: So, you were never taught that that is the role of the teacher, it was just an innate feeling for you?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief about the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom?

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? If so, in what ways?

SC: Do you believe that you should be treated differently? Why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school?

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: And what job titles participate?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

Appendix #4.1, Interview 1: Jacqueline

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Jacqueline

Date and time: July 6, 2020 at 1:30pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What other titles have you worked under?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class.

SC: How old are you?

SC: How do you identify in terms of gender?

SC: How would the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) who you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: What would you like your school administration to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: Can you give me an example of how teaching assistants are “used” at your school?

SC: Do you both receive the same professional development and training to support the kids during push in?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: What is the relationship between the general education teacher, you as a special education teacher, and the teaching aide?

SC: Do you as a special education teacher the general education teacher and the teaching aide have an opportunity to plan together or is it that you as the special education teacher and or the general education teacher tells the aide what to do during each class?

SC: Just to be clear, all 3 of you are there right?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Given your experience as a teacher thus far, if you could give advice to a new teacher what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant, what would it be?

Appendix #4.2, Interview 2: Jacqueline

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teacher Jacqueline

Date and time: July 20, 2020 at 2:30pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: If they are not listened to by whom?

SC: Stakeholders?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often do you as a teacher participate in professional developments?

SC: I just want to make sure I understand...so for the school, you said “once a month, probably a couple of hours broken up” ...but you never finished—broken up over what: over a day over a week?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: Have you ever participated collaboratively in a professional development with the teaching assistant(s) who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: What are the PD topics?

SC: Who selects the PD topics?

SC: Who does the talking at PDs?

SC: Has a teaching assistant ever facilitated a professional development at your school? and if so, what was the topic?

SC: What preparation route did you take to become a teacher: traditional or alternate route?

SC: What does that mean?

SC: Did your preparation include coursework on how to work with a teaching assistant? If so, please describe.

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teacher in the classroom?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom?

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? If so, in what ways?

SC: Does the teaching assistant travel with you or with the students?

SC: So, a confusion point for me is - you said when “we” push in, were you just using the term “we” or...”

SC: Do you believe that teachers and teaching assistants should be treated differently? Why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school, if any?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school, if any?

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: Do teaching assistants have the opportunity within their schedule to attend the common planning meetings?

SC: So, the expectation and on everyone's schedule, it is the expectation that the special education teacher, the general education teacher, the subject teacher, and the teaching assistant, is expected to be in common planning?

SC: And that's the school by policy?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

Appendix #5.1, Interview 1: Stacey

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Stacey

Date and time: July 8, 2020 at 2:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class?

SC: How old are you?

SC: What is your gender identification?

SC: How would the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: What would you like your school administration to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: You said administration and guidelines impact—what do you mean by that? Can you give me an example?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: What do you think it will look like though? What will the teacher and teaching assistant be doing? How would that class look?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: How did that make you feel?

SC: Given your experience as a teaching assistant thus far, if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teacher, what would it be?

SC: If a new teacher is new, do they know what their ducks are?

Appendix #5.2, Interview 2: Stacey

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Stacey

Date and time: July 16, 2020 at 1:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: What are the topics?

SC: Who selects the topics?

SC: Who does the talking?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate?

SC: For what type of professional developments do they separate you?

SC: What was the video about?

SC: How often do you as a teaching assistant participate in professional developments?

SC: Have you ever participated in professional development with the teacher who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: Was it an ongoing PD or just one time?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at this belief?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at this belief?

SC: You have been a teaching assistant for two years now, when you first started did you receive training on what the role of a teaching assistant is?

SC: Who's they, the school or someone else?

SC: The DOE and not the school you work at?

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? In what ways?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school? When I say collaboration, I mean you and the teacher making decisions together, not the teacher making decisions and telling you.

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide policy about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why? Do you think that you would benefit from having common planning time where teachers and teaching assistants plan lessons together?

SC: Do you think that teachers and teaching assistants should attend professional developments together?

SC: Do you think that teaching assistants should have embedded time in their schedules to work with teachers without the kids?

Appendix #6.1, Interview 1: Gloria

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Gloria

Date and time: July 10, 2020 at 1:30pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class.

SC: Is it one teacher and one teaching assistant?

SC: How old are you?

SC: What is your gender identification?

SC: How would the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s)/teaching assistant(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: Why would you want her to know that?

SC: What do you mean by “she likes to keep her hands on?”

SC: So, when you say hands-on, does she micromanage or does she give you enough leeway to do what you feel needs to be done right?

SC: What would you like your school administration to know about you?

SC: So, what would you like for them to know? You feel they see you as a strong character, what would you like for them to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: What are some of the reasons you think that teachers act that way? Could it be because that's just who they are as people and/or school administration plays a role in their actions, what do you think?

SC: What is an example of the best teacher-teaching assistant collaboration you ever had and why?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: When you said because of "that", you pointed to your skin, what do you mean by "that"?

SC: When you pointed to your arm, were you referring to ethnicity?

SC: And what is your ethnicity?

SC: Can you give me an example of why you believe it was because you are Hispanic?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: Give me an example of something they can provide?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: What changed between the way you worked with the kids in school to the way you worked with them during remote learning?

SC: And how has your working with the teacher changed from in school learning to remote learning?

SC: Do you find now you're working closer during remote learning than you did when you were in school?

SC: When you were in school did she ask you for your input as often?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Given your experience as a teaching assistant thus far, if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teacher, what would it be?

Appendix #6.2, Interview 2: Gloria

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Gloria

Date and time: July 27, 2020 at 1:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: And when you say: “unless she’s considering other ways”, you mean unless she’s open to your ideas?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often do you as a teaching assistant participate in professional developments?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: When you are divided, do you know what the teachers are doing that's different from what you're doing?

SC: Have you ever participated collaboratively in a professional development with the teacher who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: Who does the talking at PDs, who facilitates?

SC: Have you ever participated or seen a professional development that was facilitated by a teaching assistant?

SC: What were the topics?

SC: Did the teaching assistants facilitate to only teaching assistants or to teachers and teaching assistants?

SC: What preparation did you receive to become a teaching assistant, if any?

SC: Did you receive a roles and responsibilities manual when you started as a teaching assistant?

If so, what did it include?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teacher in the classroom?

SC: So, to make sure I understand correctly, you're saying that you derived at that belief of the role of the teacher in the classroom based off your experience?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom?

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? If so, in what ways?

SC: Do you believe that the teacher and teaching assistant should be treated differently? Why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school, if any?

SC: The next question was going to be “in what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school? So what I gather is, it’s hindered by when they see that a teacher-teaching assistant team is working they break it apart, so therefore teacher-teaching assistant collaboration is not fostered at your school.

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: Why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

SC: But, this is about collaboration, because again, if you give the teacher guidance on what they want from the teaching assistant then that's not collaboration—that's the teacher being in charge; think about any type of practice you would put in place: common planning? would you have schedules modified? like what would you do, so that teachers and teaching assistants could collaborate; what practice do you think will help that?

SC: How do you define collaboration?

SC: Has participating in this study caused you or led you to think differently about anything? like maybe you thought about something that you never thought about before; did it cause you to reflect? can you give me a little bit of insight on if there were any changes that took place in your thinking from participating in this study?

Appendix #7.1, Interview 1: Tricia

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Tricia

Date and time: July 7, 2020 at 3:15pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: What is your job title?

Paraprofessional

SC: How long have you been working in this title?

SC: Is your current school the only school that you worked in? If not, how many other schools have you worked in?

SC: What is the type and ratio of your classroom? For example: a self-contained 12:1:1 class.

SC: How old are you?

SC: What is your gender identification?

SC: How would the teacher(s) you work with describe you?

SC: How would school administrators describe you?

SC: What would you like the teacher(s) with whom you work to know about you?

SC: What would you like your school administration to know about you?

SC: What do you believe are the factors that impact teacher and teaching assistant collaboration within your school building?

SC: When you say they're afraid to relinquish any kind of big task responsibility, are you saying that they are afraid to relinquish power?

SC: What is an example of the best collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: You said when you were at the VA, so is that an offsite location?

SC: When you were at the offsite, was school administration there or were they at the main site?

SC: Do you believe that that level of autonomy helped with the way you and the teacher collaborated?

SC: Why?

SC: How would you describe that energy? Would it be a positive energy or a negative energy you were referring to?

SC: What is an example of the worst collaboration you have ever had and why?

SC: How would you describe the nature of the relationships in your school building amongst all staff members?

SC: If you had the opportunity to speak with school district leaders, what would you say to them?

SC: How has your teacher-teaching assistant collaboration changed from in-school learning to remote learning?

SC: Are you and the teacher that you work with working more together collaboratively or less collaboratively?

SC: Can you give me one example of how you guys collaborate?

SC: Imagine a school where teachers and teaching assistants fully collaborated, how do you think that would look and sound?

SC: Now you are informed about the curriculum, who informs you?

SC: Tell me about the best experience you had at work and the worst experience you had at work. *Include: others involved, time period, what was said/done, and how you felt.*

SC: Given your experience as a teaching assistant thus far, if you could give advice to a new teaching assistant what would it be? And if you could give advice to a new teacher, what would it be?

SC: When you say keep your notebook is that related to earlier in the interview when you spoke about CYA?

Appendix #7.2, Interview 2: Tricia

Interviewer: Sa-Qwona Clark (SC)

Interviewee: Teaching Assistant Tricia

Date and time: July 21, 2020 at 3:00pm

Location: Zoom Videoconferencing

SC: If you had a chart with two columns labeled: powerful and powerless, where would you place: teachers, teaching assistants, secretaries, school aides, assistant principal, principal, related service providers, and school director and why? In what ways do they have power? In what ways are they powerless?

SC: So, do you believe that the assistant principal and/or the principal have absolutely no control over what takes place within the school building?

SC: You said ultimate power, which implies that there is a level of power that they have, because within the parameters that you said, they're still able to make decisions—decisions that school aides, teaching assistants, teachers, and secretaries are not allowed or don't have the ability to make, so at some point are you saying they do have some levels of power, because they're in control of a school, but ultimately they do report to someone else also?

SC: Tell me about a typical professional development experience, not a staff meeting, at your school: How often do you as a teaching assistant participate in professional developments?

SC: Are teachers and teaching assistants together or separate during PDs?

SC: Have you ever participated collaboratively in a professional development with the teacher who you work with? If so, what was the PD about?

SC: What are the usual PD topics?

SC: Who selects the PD topics?

SC: Who does the talking at PDs, who facilitates?

SC: What preparation did you receive to become a teaching assistant?

SC: Did you receive a roles and responsibilities manual when you started as a teaching assistant?

If so, what did it include?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teacher is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teacher in the classroom?

SC: What do you believe the role of the teaching assistant is in the classroom?

SC: How did you derive at your belief of the role of the teaching assistant in the classroom?

SC: Do students in your classroom treat the teacher and teaching assistant differently? If so, in what ways?

SC: Do you believe that you should be treated differently? Why?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration fostered at your school, if any?

SC: Is it fostered?

SC: In what ways is teacher-teaching assistant collaboration hindered at your school, if any?

SC: Who participates in common planning time at your school?

SC: Would you make any changes to attendees? If so, who else would you have attend and why?

SC: If you could implement one school-wide practice about teacher-teacher assistant collaboration, what would it be and why?

SC: How do you define collaboration?