

Let's Team Up: What Every Paraprofessional Needs for Student Success and Effective Teamwork

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This workshop is designed to provide you with information and skills that will enhance your role as a paraprofessional and member of the educational team, as well as familiarity with the current issues involved in this role.

Objectives: To better understand:

1. The value of paraprofessionals in educational programs.
2. The roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals as critical members of the educational team.
3. The roles and responsibilities of certificated/licensed staff and their responsibilities for program development, evaluation and for supervision of paraprofessionals.
4. The roles and responsibilities of all team members and utilization of teaming and effective communication.
5. Ways in which paraprofessionals can work most effectively with a wide variety of students and their unique learning needs.

Team Work: Key to Success for Teachers and Paraprofessionals

The interdependent working relationship of today's paraprofessionals, teachers, and principals is often like a jigsaw puzzle. Unfortunately, they don't have a picture on the front of a box to know what the puzzle is supposed to look like when it's finished. Sometimes they don't even have all the pieces. That's why, in today's education climate, the most successful schools operate as a team. School personnel understand the importance of a good working relationship and are focused on team goals. When paraprofessionals, teachers, and principals team up to connect the pieces of the puzzle, students are the ultimate beneficiaries.

The changing landscape of public education has had a significant impact on the roles of the personnel who serve in our schools. Teacher shortages, increasing numbers of English language learners and the rising enrollment of students with disabilities and other special needs are just some of the factors that make the need for a dynamic school team more necessary than ever. In this challenging environment, paraprofessionals play an increasingly critical role in improving student achievement.

A common thread across definitions of teams is that teamwork can be defined as a process among partners who share mutual goals and work together to achieve the goals. Teamwork allows people to discuss their work together and, as a result, to grow professionally. To be successful, the teacher and the paraprofessionals must view themselves as a team and partners in the educational process. Input from all team members needs to be solicited. Questions need to be asked and answered. Ideas need to be shared. Teamwork doesn't happen by accident. It requires effort and commitment, a willingness to accept the challenges of working together. Teachers and paraprofessionals need to form a "relationship" that is built on good communication and mutual respect.

Team effectiveness can be achieved by sharing expectations with one another, by allowing the paraprofessional to participate in the planning process, by appreciating each other's unique personality traits, by respecting diversity, and by demonstrating a positive attitude toward teamwork. Once a team works well together, the job is less stressful, more enjoyable, and more rewarding for all team members.

Trust in Teacher/Paraprofessional Teams is Essential for Team Success

Open communication, mutual respect, recognition, and above all, trust form the bond of a healthy team. Trust is built in teams by promoting open communications, providing fair leadership and supervising with sensitivity. (Pickett, A., Gerlach, K., 2003)

Building trust is essential and not always easy. Trust is necessary to have a productive working environment. It is essential for all team members to practice open, honest communication in order to increase awareness and build cooperation. This environment of trust promotes loyalty and commitment to achieve the goals and objectives of the team.

All team members need to develop listening skills so that they can obtain sufficient and accurate information necessary for an effective working relationship. Because many paraprofessionals have received limited training or orientation for their job, it is especially important that the teacher accurately and clearly describe the goals and needs of the learner being served. Team members must have effective listening techniques in order to promote the essential understanding required for successful intervention.

Definitions of a Paraprofessional

A paraprofessional is a school employee who assists and supports teacher-directed instruction (Gerlach, K., 2001)

Paraprofessionals are school/agency employees who work under the supervision of teachers or other professional practitioners. The certified professional is responsible for the design, implementation, and assessment of learner progress, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of learning programs. (Pickett, 1989)

The **paraprofessional** is an employee who, following appropriate training, performs tasks as prescribed and supervised by the licensed/certified professional/practitioner. Paraprofessionals perform specific duties as directed by the licensed/certified professional/practitioner. The licensed/certified professional/practitioner maintains responsibility for assessing the learner and family needs, and for planning, evaluating, and modifying programs. (IDEA Partnerships Paraprofessional Initiative Report to U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Programs [OSEP], December 2001.)

Paraprofessionals may provide services, under supervision, in the following programmatic areas:

- ... Educational programs, including behavior programs
- ... Occupational therapy
- ... Early intervention and pre-school programs
- ... Social work/case management
- ... Vocational training programs and job coaching
- ... Computer assistance
- ... One-to-one instruction (Interpreters, etc.)
- ... Physical therapy
- ... Speech and language therapy
- ... Recreation programs
- ... Parent training/child find programs
- ... Playground, lunchroom, library
- ... Health assistance

Can you think of others?

Other Terms Used by School Districts

- ... paraeducator
- ... parapro
- ... instructional aide
- ... instructional assistant
- ... educational aide (E.A.)
- ... educational assistant (E.A.)
- ... teachers aide (T.A.)
- ... teachers assistant (T.A.)
- ... helping assistant
- ... education technician
- ... teaching assistant
- ... inclusion assistant
- ... one to one assistant
- ... one to one aide
- ... support aide
- ... support assistant
- ... facilitator
- ... behavioral assistant
- ... classified
- ... para
- ... helper

Guiding Principles for Paraprofessional Employment, Roles, Preparation and Supervision

These guiding principles have four primary goals. The first addresses the policy and administrative issues that impact on paraprofessional roles, supervision, and preparation. The second provides a foundation that enables schools and other provider agencies to prepare and retain a skilled, committed paraprofessional workforce. The third enhances the status and recognition of paraprofessionals as key members of education and related service teams. The fourth assures that paraprofessionals are appropriately integrated into program implementation teams through effective supervision.

Guiding Principle 1: Skilled paraprofessionals are employed to improve the quality of education and services in other provider systems and to help ensure supportive, inclusive, safe, and healthy learning environments for children, youth, and staff.

Guiding Principle 2: Administrators and teachers/providers create environments that recognize paraprofessionals as valued team members and effectively integrate them into teams.

Guiding Principle 3: Members of all program planning and implementation teams participate within clearly defined roles in changing, dynamic environments to provide learner-centered and individualized experiences and services for all children and youth and their families.

Guiding Principle 4: Paraprofessionals are respected and supported in their team roles by policymakers, administrators, teachers/providers, and families.

Guiding Principle 5: Standards for paraprofessional roles and professional development assure that they are assigned to positions for which they are qualified and have the skills required to assist teachers/providers to provide quality learning experiences and related services for all children and youth and their families.

Guiding Principle 6: Paraprofessionals receive pre- and in-service professional development provided by the district/agency and opportunities for continuing education or career advancement offered by institutions of higher education.

Guiding Principle 7: Teachers/providers responsible for supervising the work of paraprofessionals have the skills necessary to plan for, direct, provide on-the-job training for, monitor, and evaluate the performance of paraprofessionals.

Guiding Principle 8: Paraprofessionals have an occupational/professional identity and contribute to learner-centered activities that help to achieve the mission of the school/agency.

*These guiding principles are based on research activities conducted by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals and paraprofessional development efforts in Utah, Minnesota, Iowa, Washington, and Rhode Island.

Discussion Activity:

Discuss each guiding principle. Give examples of how these could be implemented. How could these goals and principles be achieved?

Discuss the changing roles of the paraprofessional. How and why do you think the role continues to change?

Discuss the changing role of teachers. How and why do you think the role of teachers continues to change?

List some current issues that are presently affecting the role of paraprofessionals and those who supervise them. (In your school district)

Discussion Activity: Expectations

What Supervisors Expect from Paraprofessionals

1. Have a “good attitude” toward the school and its personnel; like and respect children and have a desire to work with them.
2. Be dependable in promptness and attendance, reliable in job performance and discreet in confidential matters.
3. Be able to assist in the instructional process, and to share perceptions of student’s progress and needs.
4. Be able to perform non-instructional duties such as record keeping, classroom maintenance, preparation of bulletin boards and learning materials.
5. Be able to give help and assistance without being asked.
6. To use good judgment when unusual situations arise.
7. Be a liaison between school and community; interpret community values and concerns to the school and those of the school to the community.
8. Participate in training to develop skills and become a more effective paraprofessional.
9. Believe that the paraprofessional and teacher should be a working team.

What Paraprofessionals Expect from Supervisors

1. To accept the value of paraprofessionals in education for providing instructional assistance as well as community input.
2. Be sensitive to the feelings and needs of children.
3. Provide educational leadership; include me in the planning, give me meaningful assignments and clear directions.
4. Explain the rules for student behavior and provide support when I am working with students.
5. Give me honest feedback and evaluation of my performance in a confidential manner; praise me for what I do well and offer suggestions for improvement.
6. Respect my individuality; recognize and utilize my talents in classroom activities.
7. Accept me as a member of the school staff, both professionally and socially
8. Inform me of training opportunities and encourage me to participate.
9. Believe that the paraprofessional and teacher should be a working team.

Discussion Questions

What can you add to these expectations?

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY: Teacher/Paraprofessional Role Perception Activity

Directions: Discuss the following tasks. Whose role is this? Place an "X" under teacher or paraprofessional. If both perform this role, place an "X" in both boxes. After completing this exercise, circle the numbers of those that are "teacher only."

Task	Teacher	Paraprofessional
1. Planning daily and weekly schedules		
2. Recording and Charting Data		
3. Administering standardized tests		
4. Scoring standardized tests		
5. Grading tests, papers, and student work		
6. Analyzing and interpreting the results of various assessment activities		
7. Setting goals and objectives for the class and individual students		
8. Writing the lesson plan		
9. Carrying out lesson plans		
10. Introducing new skills/concepts		
11. Modifying/adapting instructional plans and curriculum		
12. Instructing individual or small groups of students		
13. Teaching lessons to entire class		
14. Developing behavior management programs		
15. Disciplining students		
16. Developing instructional materials		
17. Evaluating student performance and progress		
18. Recording attendance and maintaining other records		
19. Setting up and maintaining learning centers/adaptive equipment		
20. Inventorying and ordering supplies		
21. Participating in individualized program planning meetings, parent conferences, and other school-based meetings		
22. Meeting and conferring with parents and families		
23. Consulting with therapists and other professional staff about a student's program and behaviors		
24. Maintaining a clean, safe learning environment		
25. Participation in IEP meetings		

NOTE: Based on activities contained in *Handbook for Special Education Professionals*, By A.L. Pickett and J. Formanek, 1982, New York, NY, and in Gerlach, K., 1992, *Strengthening the Partnership: Issues, Roles and Responsibilities*, Olympic ESD, and in *Supervising Paraprofessionals in Educational Settings: A Team Approach*, 2nd Edition, Pickett and Gerlach, 2003, Pro*ed, Austin, TX.

REMINDER: The teacher has the ultimate responsibility for all instructional duties.

Note: There is NO answer key for this activity. Experience, training, etc. will affect your perception of whether it is a teacher only or shared role.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY: Role Description Exercise

Comparison of Teacher and Paraprofessional Roles

Read the role description of the supervising teacher, and then write the job description for the paraprofessional.

	Role performed by the supervising teacher	Role performed by the paraprofessional
Classroom Organization	Plans weekly schedule Plans lessons/activities for entire class, individual children and paraprofessional. Plans room arrangement and learning centers	
Assessment	Assesses individual children Administers tests to entire class	
Setting Objectives	Determines appropriate objectives for class and for individual children	
Teaching	Teaches lessons for the entire class, small groups, and individual children	
Behavior Management	Plans behavior management strategies for entire class and for individual children	
Working with Parents	Meets with parents Initiates conferences with parents concerning child's progress	
Lesson Planning	Plans lessons for students Plans for the paraprofessional	
Building Classroom Partnership	Arranges schedule for conferences, shares goals & philosophy with paraprofessional, organizes job duties for paraprofessional	

Adapted from Gerlach, Kent, Ed.D. and Pickett, A.L., (1992) *Strengthening the Partnership: Issues, Roles and Responsibilities*

Inappropriate Roles for Paraprofessionals

Although paraprofessionals have a more expansive and flexible role than ever before, some activities are considered inappropriate for them. There is considerable agreement that the following roles are not appropriate for a paraprofessional. Some states and professional groups determined that paraprofessionals should not perform the following activities:

1. Assign final grades, fills in report cards
2. Make retention and promotion decisions
3. Administer, score and interpret an assessment instrument that requires subjective judgment (example: essay tests, diagnostic assessments)
4. Assume full responsibility of class for indefinite period of time
5. Make major decisions as to the subject matter to be taught
6. Has the primary responsibility for writing IEP's
7. Teaches academic subject matter to an entire class, without teacher present
8. Substitute for certificated teacher, unless paraprofessional is recognized as an official substitute by the state
9. Plan individual daily lessons unless specially trained or program is pre-planned
10. Consult with other therapists or professionals about a student without supervisor's approval
11. Report to parents concerning a child's progress without supervisor's approval
12. Supervise student teachers
13. Attends IEP meeting in place of the teacher
14. Works without supervision
15. Makes programmable decisions without supervisor approval

Discussion:

Paraprofessional Roles

The following is cited in ESEA as appropriate roles for paraprofessionals –

- Providing one-on-one tutoring for eligible students;
- Assisting with classroom management (such as organizing instructional and other materials);
- Providing assistance in a computer laboratory;
- Conducting parental involvement activities;
- Providing support in a library or media center;
- Acting as a translator; and
- Providing, under the direct supervision of a teacher, instructional services.

Some studies have found that paraprofessionals report being “responsible” for the instructional program of a student when that is the responsibility of the teacher (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997; Marks, Schneider, & Leving, 1999; Wallace, Stahl, & MacMillan, 2000).

Paraprofessionals reported a high level of responsibility in their jobs, such as: decisions regarding adaptations, behavioral support, and interacting with team members including parents (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000).

Guide for Working with Paraprofessionals

Special Education Teacher	General Education Teacher	Paraprofessional
Case manager Collaborator Consultant Resource teacher	Content specialist Instructional leader	Student supporter Teacher supporter Data collector
<i>This person has:</i> Information about the student's specific needs. Information about the IEP (modifications and instructionally relevant information)	<i>This person has:</i> Information about own teaching styles Information about the class Information about the curriculum	<i>This person has:</i> (the general education teacher must ask the paraprofessional)
<i>This person needs:</i> Information about teacher/styles Information about the class Information about the curriculum Communicate student needs Allocate resources Support students Support paraprofessionals Monitor student programs Provide strategies and interventions Prepare paraprofessional	<i>This person needs:</i> Information about the student's specific needs Information from the IEP (modifications and instructionally relevant information) Prepare lessons Plan instructional activities Teach students Develop awareness of special student needs Consult with special service staff Evaluate student progress Support paraprofessional	<i>This person needs:</i> (the general education teacher must ask the paraprofessional) (must be defined and written depending on student needs)

Before paraprofessional classroom duties can actually be defined, paraprofessionals must be given information from both the general classroom teacher and the special program teacher. One way to use this chart is to determine what information has already been shared about the students and about the classroom or subject area. Then it will be easier to determine what information still needs to be shared to properly support the students.

The Paraprofessional's Role

What Are Your Major Responsibilities?

The work performed by paraprofessionals will vary depending upon teachers' expectations, paraprofessional's skills and experience, and job assignment. Paraprofessionals are primarily responsible for assisting and supporting teachers, principals, and other certified or licensed staff with:

- Team-based assignments.
- Building and maintaining effective communication and relationships.
- Maintaining student-centered, supportive environments.
- Organizing learning experiences for students.
- Implementing lessons initiated by the teacher or related-services personnel.
- Assessing student needs and progress under teacher direction.
- Maintaining a safe learning environment.
- Exercising good judgment, flexibility, creativity, and sensitivity in response to changing situations and needs.
- Assist in the instructional process and communicating with the teacher their perceptions of student progress and needs.
- Participate in training to develop the knowledge and skills to become a more effective paraprofessional.
- Following the school philosophies, guidelines and procedures.
- Knowing and practicing good professional ethics.
- Use good judgment when unusual situations arise.

Can you think of others?

Learning School Policies and Procedures

1. Make sure you know who your direct supervisor is. Supervisors may change when assignments change. You may be working with several supervisors.
2. Make sure you know the state and local requirements for paraprofessionals who assist with instruction.
3. Know school policies, guidelines, and procedures – ask for them if they haven't been given to you.
4. Obtain a copy of your job description.
5. Make sure you understand the goals of your team and program, along with your role in helping to achieve those goals.
6. Request the building and district mission statement. If appropriate, request the mission statement for specific programs (Title I, special education, etc.).
7. Make sure you understand the "chain of command" in the district.
8. Ask about any unions or affiliations you will be expected to join.
9. Obtain information on fringe benefits, insurance, etc.
10. Request a map of the school building. Ask for a tour if you're not familiar with the building.
11. Request a staff directory. Exchange phone numbers with the people with who you will be directly working.
12. Request copies of any parent or student handbooks.
13. Request a school calendar and a schedule of special events.
14. Request a copy of the district's discipline procedures and playground policies.
15. Request a copy of the district's professional development calendar or in-service offerings for the year.
16. Ask about district and community college course offerings and other professional development opportunities.

Questions That Need to Be Answered

What Paraprofessionals Need to Know in Working with Teachers and Other Supervisors

1. Recognize the role of the principal as the building leader.
2. Recognize that your supervising teacher has the ultimate responsibility for instructional planning and classroom management.
3. Follow the directions and plans given to you by your principal and/or your supervising teacher.
4. Ask clarifying questions whenever you feel the directions are not clear.
5. Understand the distinctions between the roles of paraprofessionals and teachers.
6. Ask if there is a time set aside for meeting with your supervisor on a regular basis.
7. Work under supervision within a framework of standard policies and procedures.

Ask What the Assigned Tasks Are

Ask About Your Role in Supporting Curriculum and Instruction

Ask About Your Role in Dealing with Student Behavior

Ask About Your Role in Assisting Students with Special Needs

Ask About Your Role in Obtaining Training and Professional Development

Ask About Your Role in Maintaining Ethical Conduct and Professionalism

We've learned ...

Communication between the Teacher
and the Paraprofessional
doesn't always flow.
Sometimes it leaks, spurts, and dribbles.

Planning and Working Together

Basic Strategies for Clear Communication Between Teacher and Paraprofessional

There are a number of elements that must be present in any situation to insure clear channels of communication. Some are commonplace and generally well known. Others are things we take for granted and, if the members of the team are not careful and do not pay attention; positive communication can be inhibited. For example:

- ... The attitude and feelings of both the teacher and paraprofessional need to be known, respected, and understood. Teachers and paraprofessionals need to deal openly with their attitudes and feelings toward their roles and duties, their attitudes toward the students they work with, their attitudes toward instructional styles and management and their attitudes toward the value of the other person's contributions. When feelings are not shared and openly communicated the nature of the relationship will not grow and the team will not be effective.
- ... An understanding of the similarities and differences between the people involved in the team must be recognized and understood ranging from different points of view about educational strategies to different values, different cultural and religious heritage, different levels of education and experience and other factors that affect the working relationship.
- ... The teacher and paraprofessional should actively seek to develop and share a common vocabulary and system of non-verbal cues.
- ... The teacher must make sure that directions and expectations are clearly understood and that the paraprofessional is able to perform the assigned task prior to implementing the activity in the classroom.
- ... The paraprofessional must be willing to ask for clarification or assistance if the assignment is not understood.
- ... The teacher should determine what special interests, strengths, and training the paraprofessional has that will complement and enhance his/her own skills and improve the delivery of instructional programs to students.
- ... The team must actively work to create a climate of cooperation, trust, respect, and loyalty by meeting regularly to discuss procedures and techniques that will establish and maintain open channels of communication.

A Sample Checklist: Paraprofessionals and Instruction

Task Completed:

- _____ Have I met with my supervisor?
- _____ Have I reviewed the lesson plan?
- _____ Are the directions clear?
- _____ Do I feel adequately prepared for the instruction? Are the teacher's objectives clear?
- _____ Do I know how to begin the lesson?
- _____ Do I know what to do when the student responds appropriately?
- _____ Do I know how to handle inappropriate responses?
- _____ Am I prepared for off-task student behavior?
- _____ Do I have the materials ready?
- _____ Do I feel prepared to use the materials?
- _____ Do I have the teaching area arranged efficiently?
- _____ Is the teaching area comfortable for the student and me?
- _____ Do I know how to conclude the lesson?

After the Lesson:

- _____ Have I recorded behavioral observations about the student?
- _____ Have I completed the record of the student's performance or a summary?
- _____ Am I ready to evaluate the session with my supervisor?
- _____ How will I communicate the results of the lesson with my supervisor?

Discussion Exercise: Effective Teams, an Assessment (Part A)

Circle yes, no, needs improvement to the following questions:

- 1. We are all in agreement about what we are to do here. Our mission is clear. Goals are established. Yes
No Needs Improvement

- 2. The team shares a clear vision of what needs to be done to accomplish the goals.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 3. Roles and responsibilities of each team member are clearly established.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 4. The team leadership role is clear. **Yes No Needs Improvement**

- 5. Team expectations are communicated in a climate of trust and openness.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 6. The team knows each person’s role in any decisions that have to be made.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 7. The team is clear about what we expect from each other in order to get the job done.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 8. Team members keep one another informed of issues affecting the team.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 9. The team listens to each other’s ideas. Input is solicited from all team members.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 10. Team members recognized and appreciated for the work we do.
Yes No Needs Improvement

- 11. The team has a set meeting time. **Yes No Needs Improvement**

- 12. The meeting time is effective and productive. **Yes No Needs Improvement**

- 13. The team is productive and proud of our accomplishments (team spirit).
Yes No Needs Improvement

From Pickett, A. L., Gerlach, K. (2003) *Supervising Paraprofessionals in Educational Settings*. Austin, TX, Pro*ed

Effective teams should be able to answer yes to all of the above questions. Based on this assessment, our team can improve in the following areas:

Professional and Ethical Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals must:

- maintain confidentiality
- respect the legal and human rights of children and youths and their families
- follow school-district policies for protecting the health, safety, and well-being of students
- demonstrate an understanding of distinctions in roles of various educational personnel
- follow the directions of teachers and other supervisors
- follow the chain of command for various administrative procedures
- demonstrate dependability, integrity, respect for individual differences, and other standards of ethical conduct
- participate in staff development activities to improve performance

--National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals

Confidentiality

According to IDEA, school employees must follow guidelines to preserve the privacy rights of students and parents.

Confidential information refers to all information about a student including the following:

- personal and family information
- social, behavioral, and psychological actions and data
- academic performance and progress
- program goals and objectives

Paraprofessionals must comply with strict guidelines as to how and with whom information is shared. Consider the following:

- information should be shared only with staff working directly with the student
- parents requests for information should be referred to the supervising teacher
- paraprofessionals should never discuss confidential information in the teacher's lounge
- confidential information should never be shared in any setting other than the school and never in community social situations.

“A profession is formed when members of an occupation agree that they have a knowledge base, that what they know relates directly to effective practice, that being prepared is essential to being a responsible practitioner, and that unprepared people will not be permitted to practice. Until members of the profession band together to articulate and enforce standards, the debate will continue.”

Darling-Hammond, L., 1990, *Teachers and Teaching: Signs of a Changing Profession*. In W. R. Houston, M. Haberman, & Sikula, J. (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Teacher Education*, (pp 267-290). New York: MacMillan Publishing Company.

Paraprofessional Code of Ethics

1. Practice the standards of professional and ethical conduct approved by the school/district agency.
2. Recognize and respect the roles of teachers as supervisors and team leaders.
3. Recognize and respect the differences in the roles of teachers, other professional practitioners, and paraprofessionals.
4. Recognize the teacher's responsibilities for planning learner programs, modifying curriculum and instruction, assessing learner progress, and developing behavior management programs.
5. Perform tasks that are within an identified scope of responsibility for paraprofessionals in different position levels.
6. Share information with parents about their child's performance as directed by the supervising teacher.
7. Refer concerns expressed by learners or others to the supervising teacher or other professional practitioner.
8. Share appropriate information about learner's performance, behavior, progress, and/or educational program only with the supervising teacher in the appropriate setting.
9. Discuss confidential issues and school problems only with the supervising teacher or designated personnel.
10. Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all learner's, families, and staff members.
11. Refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices based on a learner's disability, race, sex, cultural background or religion.
12. Follow the guidelines established by the district agency to protect the health, safety, and well being of all learners and staff.
13. Represent the school district or agency in a positive manner.
14. Follow the chain of command established by the district to address policy questions, system issues, and personnel practices.
15. When problems cannot be resolved, utilize the agency's grievance procedure.
16. Participate with administrators and other stakeholders in creating and implementing comprehensive systems of professional development for paraprofessionals.
17. Participate in continuing staff development.
18. Know school policies and procedures.

Supervising Paraprofessionals in Educational Settings: A Team Approach, 2nd Edition, Pickett and Gerlach, 2003, Pro*ed, Austin, TX.

Helping or Hovering?

Effects of Instructional Assistant Proximity on Students with Disabilities

June 1997, Giangreco, Michael F., Edelman, Susan, Luiselli, and T.E., MacFarland

Abstract: This study presents data on the effects of the proximity of instructional assistants on students with multiple disabilities who are placed in general education classrooms. Based on extensive observations and interviews, analyses of the data highlighted eight major findings of educational significance, all related to proximity of instructional assistants. Categories of findings and discussion include (a) interference with ownership and responsibility by general educators, (b) separation from classmates, (c) dependence on adults, (d) impact on peer interactions, (e) limitations on receiving competent instruction, (f) loss of personal control, (g) loss of gender identity, and (h) interference with instruction of other students. The article concludes with implications for practice related to policy development, training, classroom practices, and research.

Study Conclusions and Implications for Practice:

The findings of this study demonstrate that there are a number of areas of concern regarding the roles of instructional assistants who support the education of students with disabilities in general education settings. The following is a list of considerations for future policy development, school-based practices, training, and research.

- School districts need to rethink their policies on hiring instructional assistants for individual students. They suggest that alternatives be explored that include hiring assistants for the classroom rather than an individual student. This would allow general and special education teachers to distribute instructional assistants' time and job responsibilities more equitably to benefit a variety of students, both with and without disabilities.
- School staff and families need to reach agreement on when students need the close proximity of an adult, when that proximity can be appropriately provided through natural supports such as classmates, and when to appropriately withdraw supports that require close proximity.
- School staff and community members (e.g., classroom teachers, special educators, parents) need awareness training on the effects and potential harm to children caused by excessive adult proximity, such as described in this study (e.g., loss of personal control, loss of gender identity, interference with peer interactions, dependence on adults).
- School teams need to explicitly clarify the role of the classroom teacher as the instructional leader in the classroom including their roles and responsibilities as the teacher for their students with disabilities. It is the classroom teacher's role to direct the activities of instructional assistants in their charge.
- School staff (e.g., classroom teachers, instructional assistants) should be afforded training in basic instructional procedures that facilitate learning by students with special educational needs in the context of typical classroom activities. Additionally, training should specifically include approaches related to decreasing dependence and fading prompts often associated with excessive and prolonged proximity of adults.
- Students with disabilities need to be physically, programmatically, and interactionally included in classroom activities that have been planned by a qualified teacher in conjunction with support staff as needed (e.g., special educators, related services providers). Such changes in practice should decrease problems associated with students with disabilities being isolated within the classroom.
- The teacher should provide instructional assistants with competency-based training that includes ongoing, classroom-based supervision.
- Instructional assistants should have opportunities for input into instructional planning based on their knowledge of the student, but the ultimate accountability for planning, implementing, monitoring, and adjusting instruction should rest with the professional staff, just as it does for all other students without disabilities.

- Use of instructional assistants in general education classrooms must increasingly be done in ways that consider the unique educational needs of all students in the class, rather than just those with disabilities.
- Research on the aforementioned items should be ongoing in order to explore efficacious ways of supporting students in our schools.

This study suggests that assigning an instructional assistant to a student with special educational needs in a general education class, though intended to be helpful, and may sometimes result in problems associated with excessive, prolonged adult proximity. In questioning the current use of instructional assistants not be used or that the field revert to historically ineffective ways of educating students with disabilities (e.g., special education classes, special education schools). We are suggesting that our future policy development, training, and research focus on different configurations of service delivery that provide needed supports in general education classrooms, yet avoid the inherent problems associated with our current practices. Undoubtedly, these service provision variations will necessarily need to be individualized and flexible to account for the diverse variations in students, teachers, schools, and communities across our country. We hope that by raising the issues presented in this study, we can extend the national discussion on practices to support students with varying characteristics in general education classrooms and take corresponding actions that will be educationally credible, financially responsible—helping, not hovering!

Giangreco, Michael F., Edelman, Susan, Luiselli, and T.E., MacFarland, (1997), *Exceptional Children*, Vol. 64, No. 1, pp. 7-18, Council for Exceptional Children

Ethical Issue – One-on-One Paraprofessionals: Is this the most effective service delivery system?

There is no question that paraprofessionals play an increasingly prominent role in educating students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Their role in the classroom has expanded, based on the belief that they are a key support mechanism to operationalize inclusive education efforts particularly for students with severe disabilities (Giangreco, Broer and Edelman, 2001).

Giangreco voices the concern that paraprofessionals in some instances have replaced the use of the most qualified teachers for students with the most intensive needs. In addition, his research has documented that students with disabilities who were placed in a general education setting with a one-on-one paraprofessional had less general education teacher engagement than when the paraprofessional was program- or classroom-based (Giangreco, 2001).

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY: What are some of the ethical considerations when a paraprofessional works one-to-one with a student?

Effects of Paraprofessional Proximity

Challenge	Example of the challenge	Example of how the challenge can be addressed
Interference with ownership and responsibility by general education teachers	When asked why a classroom teacher did not list the names of the student with disabilities in his grade book, his response is, "Someone else is responsible for that student's assessment. I am responsible for the other 26 students in my class."	The general educator can include the names of all of the students in the classroom grade book. The paraprofessional can solicit the information from the appropriate team members and enter it in the grade book.
Separation from classmates	The paraprofessional sits with the student at the back of the room near the door. The special educator pulls the student out of the classroom for instruction.	The student can sit next to a peer in the middle of the room. The special educator can provide instruction in the classroom during reading time.
Students dependence on adults	The paraprofessional gathers and carries all of the student's materials to every class.	The paraprofessional can teach the student to use a picture schedule list (with materials) for each class. Peers can help the student gather and carry the materials.
Reduced student interaction with peers	The paraprofessional sits with students at lunch.	The paraprofessional can supervise many students in the cafeteria without sitting at the student's table.
Limited instruction from licensed teachers	The paraprofessional designs and implements the majority of the instruction for the student with disabilities.	The team can implement collaborative teaching.
Loss of student's personal control	The paraprofessional makes all of the decisions (e.g., who the student works with, what color marker the student uses, when the student comes and goes in the classroom) for the student.	The student is taught how to make choices, and the adults respond to those choices.
Interference with the instruction of other students	The paraprofessional is providing parallel instruction to the student with disabilities. When she is speaking to the student, classmates focus on her instead of the instruction being provided by the general educator.	The team can adapt the instruction (i.e., content and process) to facilitate the inclusion of the student with disabilities. The team can structure small-group work in which both adults are supervising and the learning outcomes for all students are clear.

Source: Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, and MacFarland (1997).

Sample Meeting Topics for the Beginning of the School Year

Time:

When will the paraprofessional assist the teacher with instruction?
Where will the paraprofessional deliver the instruction?
What is the time frame for the lesson/activity?

Roles:

What students will the paraprofessional work with?
What will be the format of the teacher-designed lesson plans?
Who will prepare materials?
What is the role of the teacher?
What is the role of the paraprofessional?

Management:

When will the paraprofessional and teacher plan together?
How will training in the instructional approach be provided?
How and when will feedback be provided?
What other responsibilities will the paraprofessional have and is there time to complete them?

Curriculum and Instruction:

How is the lesson to be taught?
What is the instructional style?
What skills and knowledge are necessary to teach it that way?
What is the behavior management strategy to be followed?
What is to be used to provide reinforcement and feedback to the students?
What curriculum materials are to be used?
What data will be collected on student progress and what procedures will be used?

Can you think of other discussion topics?

Adapted from: Gerlach, K. "Let's Team Up," 2011, NEA Professional Library

Paraprofessional Orientation Assignment

Each section below is presented as a series of questions. Review each of the questions and circle the numbers of those questions that you feel are appropriate questions for the orientation of paraprofessionals. Review these circled items to make sure that you have identified all the important ones. Review your school documents and fill in the information in the spaces provided next to those questions that you have circled. Are you able to answer the following?

District and School Structure

1. What are the names of central office administrators? _____
2. Who is the principal of the school? _____
The office staff? The custodian? _____
3. As a paraprofessional, who evaluates me? _____
How often am I evaluated? _____
4. How often am I paid? What fringe benefits do I receive? _____
5. Who do I ask for time off for personal appointments? Who do I call when I'm ill? _____
6. What is the district policy on discipline? Detention? Calls to parents? Expulsion? _____
7. Is there an organization union or job affiliation for paraprofessionals? _____
8. If I'm absent, is there a substitute for me? _____

School rules and Regulations

1. Is there a procedure for me to check in and out of school? _____
2. Exactly what time do I arrive at school? Go home? _____
3. When do the children arrive? When do they go home? _____
4. What time are the children's recess and lunch breaks? What is the bell schedule? _____
5. What are the fire or earthquake drill procedures? What am I to do during a fire or earthquake drill? _____
6. What are the playground rules for children? What equipment is on the playground and what are the rules for that equipment? What other playground toys, balls, bats, etc. are allowed? Are there special rules for such equipment? _____
7. What are the school rules for conduct in the library, the halls, the restrooms, and the cafeteria? _____
8. What is the procedure for using the telephone at school? For me? For the children? _____
9. Where are the audio-visual materials stored at school? How do I check out materials to use in the classroom? _____
10. Where are classroom supplies stored? What is the procedure for obtaining supplies for the classroom? _____
11. Are there special school forms that I will be using? Tardy slips? Materials requisition slips? Library or audio-visual checkout slips? Attendance records? _____

Discipline

1. How much authority do I have with children in the school that are not assigned to our classroom or program? _____
2. What do I do if I see children misbehaving and there is no teacher around? In the hall? On the playground? In the library? _____
3. May I send children out of the room to the office if they misbehave? Into the hallway? To another place? _____
4. Other discipline questions? _____

General Questions

1. What do I do if the teacher is absent? How can I assist the substitute teacher? Will my role change in any way with a substitute? _____
2. How could I be reached at school in an emergency? _____
3. How am I paid? District funds? Special state or government funds? Special grant? Title funds? Special Education? _____
4. When do I take a break? _____
5. Am I expected to go to staff meetings? _____
6. Am I expected to participate in staff development activities? _____

Ethics and Confidentiality

The following questions have no right or wrong answers. Answers will differ according to the special circumstances that apply to each situation. These questions are included as examples of situations to consider as a paraprofessional.

1. May I read information on a child's cumulative folder? _____
2. May I read a child's IEP? _____
3. What if a child shares a family event that I know is confidential? _____
4. What do I do if one of the staff loses control and yells _____
5. or swears or threatens the children? _____
6. What do I do if I expect a child is being abused? _____

Adapted from Shepard, Linder, (1979), Classroom Aide Helper, Volk Publishing, Palo Alto, CA

Can you think of other questions?

Paraprofessional's Needs Training Assessment			
Areas in Which Training is Needed	Now	In the Future	Never
Team Roles			
Team communication			
Roles and responsibilities			
Ethical and legal responsibilities			
Adult communication			
Effective working relationships			
Conflict management			
Problem-solving steps and processes			
Stress management			
Time management			
Instruction			
Following lesson plans			
Implementing curricular adaptations			
Levels of support for students			
Getting the attention of students			
Maintaining active student participation			
Basic mathematical concepts			
Math computation skills			
Using public transportation systems with groups of students			
Math standards			
Creating instructional materials			
Techniques for reading to and with students			
Reading standards at the state and district level			
Written language skills			
Developmental process of written language			
Engaging students in organizing and producing written language			
Written language standards at the state and district level			
Instructional Technology			
Operate audio-visual equipment, copy machines, fax machines, computers			
Augmentative communication systems			
Create low-tech communication devices			
Behavior			
Principles of behavior modification			
Functions of behavior			
Teaching rules, procedures, and routines			
Data recording and reporting			
Principles of communication with students			
Management strategies for minor behavior problems			
Facilitating friendships among students			
Define behavior in terms that students can understand			
Direct instructional methods to teach behavior			
Contingency reinforcement			
Areas in Which Training is Needed	Now	In the Future	Never

Teach rules, routines, and procedures for small or large groups of students			
Behavior management techniques			
Antecedents, behaviors, and consequences			
Logical and natural consequences that are positive and nonaversive			
Redirect, reframe, and reinforce behaviors			
Purposes for data collection			
Use data recording forms			
Duration and frequency data			
Special Education			
Special education laws			
Legal rights of students with disabilities			
How students qualify for special education services and 504 plans			
Steps and processes of special education services			
Values and rationale for inclusion of students with disabilities			
Disability categories			
Needs of students with disabilities			
Assessing information about disabilities, syndromes, and medical conditions on the Internet			
Human Growth and Development			
Concepts of human learning			
Students at risk			
Typical language development			
Health and Safety			
Health, safety, and emergency procedures and practices			
Maintaining physical health and safety of students			
Reporting child abuse, or other illegal or dangerous behavior			
Health-related care in school settings			
Medically fragile children			
Role of the school nurse			
Delegation of health-related procedures and the paraprofessional role			
Cultural Diversity			
Identifying culturally based habits and patterns			
Communication characteristics of English speakers and non-English speakers			
Diversity in cultural heritages, life styles, and value systems			
Student Supervision			
Lunchroom safety precautions and first aid specific to choking and aspiration			
Signals for getting students' attention in the lunchroom and playgrounds			
Eating procedures for students with special eating needs			
Natural supports for students with special needs			
Areas in Which Training is Needed	Now	In the Future	Never
Teaching prosocial lunchroom behavior			

Rules and instructional methods for typical playground games			
Safety precautions for children using playground equipment			
Teaching prosocial playground skills			
Principles of playground supervision			
Establish rules, routines, and procedures for bus riding			
Maintain order on the bus			
Emergency safety procedures			
Bus operation procedures			
Mediate conflicts among students on the playground			
Playground peer mediation programs			
Instruction Technology			
Development of communication			
Assertive technology			
Adaptive equipment			
Computer use for instruction			
Transition Programs			
Transitioning students to vocational or career training			
Employment or career-training options and vocational programs			
Career planning			
Marketing and job development			
Job site analysis			
Self-determination for students			
English Language Learners			
Laws and court rules regarding English language learners			
Education services for English language learners			
Working with students who are learning English as a second language			
Programs for English language learners			
Understand how cultural differences affect teaching and learning			
Helping newcomers adjust			
Second language acquisition			
Factors that influence language acquisition in schools			
Instructional methods used in bilingual classes			
When to use the first language and when to use the second language			
Strategies and techniques used in sheltered English instruction			

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ACTIVITY: Workshop Post Test

1. Define paraprofessional.
2. What are the benefits in utilizing paraprofessionals within education programs? For students? For teachers?
3. Why is the supervision of paraprofessionals essential?
4. What are the teacher's responsibilities in planning for the paraprofessional?
5. What should be included in a paraprofessional's job description?
6. What should be included in the orientation provided to a paraprofessional?
7. Why is a team approach important?
8. Explain the importance of setting aside a regular conference time for the teacher and paraprofessional. What are appropriate topics for the conference?
9. In preparing the paraprofessional to assist in and supporting instruction, what steps should the teacher take?

Words of Wisdom

Help each other be right, not wrong.

Look for ways to make new ideas work, not for reasons they won't.

If in doubt, check it out. Don't make negative assumptions about each other.

Help each other be successful, and take pride in each other's success.

Speak positively about each other and about your school and educational programs at every opportunity.

Maintain a positive mental attitude no matter what the circumstances.

Act with initiative and courage, as if it all depends on you.

If you need assistance ... ASK ... mentor one another.

Do everything with enthusiasm: it's contagious!

Don't lose Faith.
Enjoy what you do!
HAVE FUN!

-- Kent Gerlach, Ed.D.



Kent Gerlach, Ed.D., Biography

Kent Gerlach has been recognized nationally for his contributions, research, and publications on paraprofessional issues (employment, training and supervision), collaboration, team-building, special education law and issues of child abuse. Kent has presented numerous professional development workshops for teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators throughout the United States and Canada. In addition, he has served as a Keynote presenter at many educational conferences for local school districts and state educational agencies. Kent has authored several articles, book chapters, and professional development materials that deal with the roles of paraprofessionals and their supervisors. These include effective communication and team building strategies, supervision, and the legal and ethical issues concerning paraprofessional roles in instruction. He also has presented workshops on child abuse and neglect as serves as a trainer for mandatory reporters in the State of Washington and California. He co-authored the texts “Supervising Paraprofessionals in Educational Settings” and “Paraprofessionals in the Schools,” both published by Pro-ed, Austin, Texas and “Let’s Team Up,” a Checklist for Teachers, Paraprofessionals and Principals, published by NPR, Inc.(National Professional Resources, Inc.), Naples, Florida and a distributed by the Council for Exceptional Children. Kent is a Professor Emeritus in the School of Education and Kinesiology at Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington and has held faculty appointments at the University of Washington (Seattle), University of Texas (Austin), University of Hawaii, and Augustana University (Sioux Falls). Kent currently serves as a consultant with Pacific Training Associates (Seattle,) Comprehensive School Solution (CSS.NPRinc.Com Naples Florida) and Scenario Learning, (Cincinnati, Ohio). Kent is the recipient of several teaching awards including the PLU Faculty Achievement Award and the PLU Teaching Excellence Award. Kent currently serves as a research consultant to the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Washington State Professional Educators Standards Board. In addition, Kent has served as consultant to several national organizations including the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the National Education Association (NEA), American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA), the IDEA Partnerships (Washington DC., the U.S. Department of Education (OSEP), Recruiting Teachers, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts, and the National Directors of Special Education (NASDE). Currently he serves on the Editorial Boards of the Council for Exceptional Children (Division of Autism and Developmental Disabilities (DADD), and the CEC/Teacher Education Division (TED), Kent continues to be an advocate for educational policy and standards concerning paraprofessionals and their supervision and for safe school initiatives and policy.

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