Rules of Engagement with Paraprosessionals: 
Tools for Teachers and Families

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Learning Outcomes

This workshop offers research-based knowledge/skills and tips:

- For teachers to help them in:
  - structuring, directing, managing the work of the paraeducators
  - providing ongoing coaching and feedback, and support.

- For families with regards to appropriate and effective interactions with paraeducators
Paraprofessionals: Most commonly used titles

Para… means “along side of”

- Paraeducator
- Para
- Instructional Assistant
- Educational Assistant
- Teaching Assistant
- Instructional Aide
- Aide
- Educational Support Professionals
- Early Intervention Assistants
- Developmental Intervention Assistants (in Colorado)

Definitions

Para… means “along side of”

A paraprofessional provides instructional services to students and works under the supervision or direction of a certified or licensed professional who is ultimately responsible for the students and the program.
Paraeducators: who are they?

- Over 800,000 instructional and non-instructional paraprofessionals in US
- Mainly (95%) female
- 80% live in the community
- Mainly (62%) employed working with children in their early formative years: preschool, KG, Elementary levels
- Special education is their largest employer (71%)
- Generally have no formal training for their role – some have college education (BA, MA and even Ph.D.)
- Salaries and Benefits????
- Working conditions - may work without a job description. Those who have a job description
  - it doesn't describe what they do
  - often asked to perform duties that are beyond their job descriptions

PRINCIPALS KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT SOMETHING

TEACHERS KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT EVERYTHING

BUT PARA-EDUCATORS ARE EXPECTED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT EVERYTHING WITHOUT ANY TRAINING.

JUST WHO ARE THESE REMARKABLE PEOPLE?

- Kent Gerlach
Reasons for Hiring Paraeducators

What contributions paraeducators make in schools?

Reasons To Employ Paraprofessionals

1. Increasing complex student / young children (and families) population
2. Need for instructional support and equitable access to curriculum
3. Instructional effectiveness
4. Cost effectiveness
5. Community connections
6. Individualized supports (personal care included) for students (and children/families) with disabilities
7. Related services support for students/children
8. Improved teacher-student (or child/family) ratio
9. Shortages of fully-qualified professionals
10. Legislation allows/requires/acknowledges use of paraprofessionals
2004 Re-authorization of IDEA:
Requirements for Paraprofessionals

- The State educational agency establishes and maintains standards to ensure that paraprofessionals and assistants are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised.
- SEC 635 The State has a comprehensive system of personnel development, including the training of paraprofessionals … 612(a)(14
- SEC. 653. The State improvement plan shall address the identified needs for in-service and pre-service preparation for all personnel (professional and paraprofessional … (ii) prepare professionals and paraprofessionals ………with the content knowledge and collaborative skills; (iii) to participate in pre-service and in-service training
- Develop career opportunities for paraprofessionals to receive training as special education teachers, related services personnel, and early intervention personnel


CEC Special Education Professional Practice Standards

5.0 Special Education Professionals:
- 5.1. Ensure that special education paraeducators have appropriate training for the tasks they are assigned.
- 5.2. Assign only tasks for which paraeducators have been appropriately prepared.
- 5.3. Provide ongoing information to paraeducators regarding their performance of assigned tasks.
- 5.4. Provide timely, supportive, and collegial communications to paraeducators regarding tasks and expectations
- 5.5. Intervene professionally when a paraeducator’s behavior is illegal, unethical, or detrimental to individuals with exceptionalities

Research: Lessons Learned from Use of Paraprofessionals in Schools:

Special Education Services are not possible without Paraprofessional support

- Paraprofessionals play important roles:
  - Connector
  - Instructional Support
  - Team member
  - Caregiver

Challenges with the Use of Paraeducators:

Research

- Inappropriate roles
- Relinquished teacher responsibility
- Lack of Qualifications – a social justice issue
- Lack of Training and the "Training Trap"
- Insufficient Supervision
- Inadvertent Detrimental Effects
  - Unnecessary dependence
  - Interference with peer interactions
  - Interference with teacher engagement/ decreased access to competent instruction
  - Unhelpful relationships with parents of students that interfere with constructive parent/teacher interactions,
  - Stigmatization and risk of teasing and bullying
Essential Teacher Functions for Effective Paraprofessional Utilization

1. Understanding Teacher and Paraprofessionals
2. Providing Orientation to the Paraprofessionals
3. Creating Instructional Plans for Paraprofessionals
4. Monitoring and Enhancing the Performance of Paraprofessionals
5. On the Job Training and Coaching for Paraprofessionals

# 1: Understanding Roles

Teacher Role: 

Teacher Assistant Role:
## Teacher/Professional Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall program Planning</th>
<th>Paraeducator Roles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(overseeing, IEP goals and objectives, addressing standards, lesson planning, prescribing, managing the instructional environment)</td>
<td>Implement instruction in various environments, based on lesson plans provided by the teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instruction</td>
<td>Reinforce learning with individuals or small groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>(based on unit plans, lesson plans, IEPs, remedial literacy plans, 504 plans, other individualized plans)</td>
<td>Assist individual students- personal care, mobility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Assist with observations/data recording/charting</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Collecting, coordinating, and interpreting information about the student including current levels of functioning, determination of disability, reporting student progress)</td>
<td>Assist with ongoing behavior management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating</td>
<td>Participate in building level duties as assigned by building administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(consulting with other professional personnel, meeting coordinating, communication)</td>
<td>Score tests/papers &amp; assist in data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraeducator Supervision</td>
<td>Perform clerical tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(seven components – which are the focus of this course)</td>
<td>Prepare, produce &amp; maintain instructional materials</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Maintain and operate instructional equipment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Help develop schedules</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Team participation</td>
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## #2: Providing Orientation to Paraprofessionals

Welcome and introducing paraprofessionals

Provide written school policies and procedures

Clarify roles to set the stage for a constructive supervisory relationship.

Provide relevant information about the students they will be serving

Highlight the importance of maintaining dignity, privacy, and confidentiality

Provide a job description - specific task expectations
Teacher is responsible for planning instruction and providing instructional plans to Paraprofessional so that the latter can be effective in their role.

Paraprofessional implements the plan and provides feedback for future planning.

**Important:** It is NOT the paraprofessional's ethical responsibility to plan or design modifications or adaptations – only to carry them out! Paraprofessionals are not teachers.
The Importance of Written Plans

- The most effective teachers plan (sped and gen ed)
  - Know what outcomes they expect from students
  - Know what methods they’ll use to achieve those outcomes
- Some teachers try to “wing it”
  - Experience matters
  - Carry ideas in their heads, make it through a day without written plans
- Paraeducators are not teachers
  - Should not be forced into taking on teaching responsibilities
  - Legally/ethically don’t make decisions about curriculum or pedagogy
  - Cannot ‘read’ teachers’ minds who should be making the decisions

Lack of Direction? Delegation?

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Adapting Curriculum & Instruction

- Required by law (IDEA & 504) for persons with disabilities
- Illegal and unethical for paraeducators to determine adaptations
- Adaptation plan has multiple purposes
  - Serves as communication tool
    - Special ed – General ed teachers
    - Teachers and paraeducators
    - Teachers and volunteers or peer assistants
    - Related services providers, families
  - To provide written data about student progress

PLANNING TOGETHER - A SHARING RESPONSIBILITY
Components of Plans

- Purpose of task, lesson or adaptation
- Long term student goals, short term objectives
- Specific student needs / strengths

Materials / Resources
Sequence of actions, use of cues or prompts, permissible adaptations
Data structure for documenting student performance

Think

- Who plans or provides other supervisory functions for the paraeducator(s).
  - If no written plans are currently provided, think about where you need to begin to make changes.

- Who keeps track of the needs of students, where they are during the day and who holds responsibility for their education or individualized plans (e.g. IEPs).
Do you need more copies of worksheets?

- Download worksheets/plans from The PAR²A Center website:
  - https://paracenter.org/library/k-12-paraprofessional-supervision-resources
  - Adapt/Adopt/ Make all the copies you need

# 4 Monitoring and Enhancing the Performance of Paraprofessionals.

- Conduct thoughtful Observations
- Include Consideration of Multiple Variables such as:
  - Personal style components
  - voice, gestures, delivery
  - Content of lesson,
  - Interactions with children / families
  - Organization of lesson or materials
  - Time use
  - Use of behavior management techniques
Ongoing Feedback

Five guiding principles:

- **Performance**
  - rather than personal characteristics
- **Specificity**
  - rather than generalities
- **Frequency**
  - the more the better
- **Consistency**
  - versus playing professionals against one another
- **Honesty**
  - rather than pretense, but cushioned with tact
# 5 On the Job Training and Coaching for Paraprofessionals

- Identify training needs of Paraprofessionals
- Generic topics of training
  - Classroom and instructional expectations
  - Managing challenging student behaviors - training on intervention strategies, a crisis plan
  - Fostering independence - prompting and fading support strategies
  - Tools and strategies that foster peer interactions and relationships.
- Specific instructional strategies and supports that students may need based on their needs

NOTE: one-shot, sporadic training is not a solution!

Parent-Paraeducator Roles/Interactions

What do we know Parents' Role in Education

- Parents are often viewed as the key factor in the student success.
- Parents of students with disabilities have been the primary driving force behind the passage of major laws pertaining to inclusive education for their children
- “Exceptional” parents are now recognized as:
  - the best advocates for their children
  - initiators of reform
  - partners and collaborators with the school in the care, treatment, and education of their children

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**Parent-Paraeducator Relationships?**

- Paraeducator live in the same community as their students and their families.
- Paraeducators often share linguistic and cultural similarities with parents of their students.
- Parents rightfully demand inclusion and paraeducator support.
- Parents value, respect, & appreciate paraeducators.
- Paraeducators communicate with parents more than school professionals do on a daily basis.
- Parents and paraeducators sometimes share close relationships.

**What do we know about Parent-Paraeducator Relationships?**

- Close parent-paraprofessional relationships are not always beneficial for the child’s education.
- Strained parent-paraprofessional relationships are not beneficial either!!
- Parents & students become overly dependent on paraeducators.
- Parents and paraeducators may leave the teacher out of the loop.
What parents must recognize and demand ....

- Teacher has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and management of the learning environment.
- Paraeducator works under the direction of the teacher – know the boundaries of your role
- Teacher needs to be primary contact person for the parents with regards to questions about child’s behavior, program planning
- Paraeducator should not make independent decisions about what the family or the child needs:
  - Consult with the teacher
  - Pass on families’ questions and requests to the teacher

Healthy Professional Relationship between Parents and Paraprofessionals

Both parties:

- Be aware of the thin line between the Personal vs. Professional relationship
- Must know that friendship:
  - Needs to be maintained outside the school.
  - May be personally fulfilling but not always effective for the child’s program
- Be an advocate for each other but don’t step on other peoples’ toes.
- Keep teachers in the loop!!
Be an advocate for Paraprofessional Supervision and Training!

Helpful Resources on Paraeducator Training and Supervision

- http://www.paracenter.org
- https://paracenter.org/library/k-12-paraprofessional-supervision-resources
- http://www.paracenter.org/researchers/bibliography/
- ParaCenter Train the Trainer Model
Contact information

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