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Paraprofessionals in Special Education: Training and Expectations

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Paraprofessionals in Special Education:
Training and Expectations
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Abstract

During the late 1980s the role of the Special Education paraprofessional expanded to encompass duties that until then had been the responsibility of the teacher. With a minimum of training the paraprofessional administers formal assessments, designs learning activities, and modifies materials. Fifty-four paraprofessionals in the state of Virginia were surveyed for information about their job tasks and training levels. The purpose of this study was to determine if the current level of training paraprofessionals receive adequately prepares them for the job tasks they are expected to complete. This study found that the current training levels the paraprofessionals receive do not support the job tasks they are expected to accomplish.

Paraprofessionals 3

Thank you to all the busy Special education paraprofessionals that took time out of busy schedules to help me reach my goal.

Special Heartfelt thanks to my loving family, your support was everything.

Thank you Longwood for six wonderful years!

Table of Contents

Title Page.....	1
Abstract.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Literature Review.....	7
Methods.....	14
Participants.....	14
Instruments.....	15
Procedure.....	16
Results.....	18
Discussion.....	26
References.....	33
Appendix A...Paraprofessional Descriptive Survey.....	37
Appendix B...Letter of Disclosure to Paraprofessional.....	41
Appendix C...Letter of Introduction to Special Education Directors.....	43
Appendix D...Paraprofessional Comments.....	46
Appendix E.....	47
Figure 1...A Model for Paraprofessional Placement.....	48
Table 1...Job Title Frequency.....	49
Table 2...Paraprofessional Age Break Down.....	50
Table 3...Percentage of Job Task Selection.....	51
Table 4...The Average Number of Hours Spent Training in Each of The Five Key Areas.....	53
Table 6...Competency Feelings.....	54

Introduction

Special Educators play a key role in the lives of many children with special needs. The demand for teachers with skills in special education has increased dramatically over the years. This increase in the need for special educators started the dramatic growth in the utilization of paraprofessionals in special education classrooms. It should be noted that this research uses the term paraprofessional while other authors may prefer other terms (eg. teachers aide, instructional support, aide); however the literature does not distinguish among these terms or the roles represented by each term. Utilization of paraprofessionals in educational settings began in the 1950s when, during a severe teacher shortage, school boards and local administrators saw paraprofessionals as one mechanism to continue to provide education to all students (Jones & Bender, 1993). The next surge in the use of paraprofessionals came in the 1970s when special education programs began and the governments initiated their "war on poverty" (Lindsey, 1983). In to the

Paraprofessionals 6

1980s and 1990s an ongoing general shortage of special educators continues to pressure for increases in the number of paraprofessionals in order to serve the growing number of children being identified.

With the dramatic increase of paraprofessionals in the classrooms, the role of the paraprofessional has also changed. When paraprofessionals were first used, the role was seen as merely clerical and administrative support for teachers. This freed the teacher to give more individual attention to their students. During the late 1980s and 1990s, the role and responsibilities of the paraprofessional became more extensive, including a number of duties that until now have been the responsibility of the teacher. Frith and Lindsey (1980) identified eight specific responsibilities, which included administration of formal assessments, design of learning activities, modification of materials, one-to-one instruction, and support of home-school instruction. However, no proponent of this expanded role has addressed the issues surrounding it. These issues will be explored in the following literature review. For example, is the current training of paraprofessionals in the

special education classroom adequately preparing them to be active members of the teaching team? Do they have the skills necessary to assist the special educator in a manner that is fair and productive to the students in those classrooms?

For paraprofessionals to continue to be valued members of the special education classroom it is necessary to resolve the unanswered questions regarding training and certification. Paraprofessionals generally enter the school setting without formal training that prepares them to work with students with disabilities. Because of this lack of training, paraprofessionals are often considered unskilled and of low status in the education profession (Pickett, 1986). For this reason, paraprofessionals are not being utilized effectively. A training process must be developed to match the overall goal of the special education program to paraprofessional abilities. Although training is recommended by many of the researchers and professionals in the field, the training models now in use are not based on empirical research (Jones & Bender, 1993). Much of the literature on paraprofessionals in special education

Paraprofessionals 8

relates to the training models (Jones & Bender, 1993). The models, while situation specific in most cases, can not be generalized because of the lack of a true job description for paraprofessionals.

The expanding role of paraprofessionals in the special education classroom has not yet been transformed into formal job descriptions (Frank et al., 1988). A training program of any type will need to look first at the type of exceptionalities the paraprofessional will be working with as well as the classroom type (e.g. self-contained, resource). The role of the paraprofessiona1 must also be clearly defined in order to create a working training model.

Morsink, Thomas and Correa (1991) define this role as supplemental instructional support to the special needs students under the supervision of the teacher. Supplemental support activities includes such as activities as tutoring, providing students with drill work and review material, conducting non-instructional activities, correcting homework and workbook assignments, arranging learning centers, demonstrations, preparing bulletin boards, and assisting with functional skill training (i.e.

Paraprofessionals 9

dressings, eating, going to the rest room). Supporting the teacher's efforts to organize and coordinate the instructional program should be the paraprofessionals guiding purpose (Boomer, 1982). Boomer in his 1982 article stated that " The paraprofessional's active involvement in the instructional process can help make a good program better" (p.194). Active involvement means proactive training.

Many authors have indicated that training should not only be initiated before the paraprofessional is placed but also should be continued for both the teacher and the paraprofessional after placement (Boomer, 1982; Jones & Bender, 1993; Mckenzie & Houk, 1986). Teacher training becomes an issue when the paraprofessional is not being utilized to his/her full potential. Teachers need to be made aware that the paraprofessional is not there to just watch the students during free time but to interact in all areas for which the teacher may need assistance. The paraprofessional is a valuable tool in the special educator's classroom. Several authors encourage a team approach to training and have suggested training paraprofessionals and teachers together

(Frith & Mims, 1985; Miramontes, 1990).

In most states, paraprofessionals can be employed with little or no training in education (Frith & Lindsey, 1982). The majority of training, if any, was done on the job by the supervising professional. This less than adequate training not only makes it difficult for the paraprofessional to operate but also makes it hard for the integration of the paraprofessional into the classroom structure (Frith & Mims, 1985).

Most of the literature regarding training and certification for paraprofessionals indicated a wide spread need for both training and certification research, but had little to impart about the topic. Frith and Lindsey (1982) surveyed the nation's state education agencies for an accounting of the certification, funding, and training patterns of paraprofessionals in the special education classroom. These authors found that fifty-eight percent of the states surveyed left the training of paraprofessionals to the local state agencies. Eighty-seven percent of this training was conducted through in-services. The authors

reported that 2-year college experience is the next most common type of paraprofessional training. However, 75% of this two-year college training was of a preservice nature (Frith & Lindsey, 1982). Over four-fifths of the states thought that local state agencies and two-year colleges were best suited for training special education paraprofessionals. In-service was considered to be the preferred training process by 55%, while 45% advocated preservice. The majority indicated that a combination of the two was necessary (Frith & Lindsey, 1982).

To what should the paraprofessional be exposed during training? Almost all (97%) of the agencies surveyed by Frith and Lindsey (1982) recommended that hands-on experience with handicapped children be included in the training of special education paraprofessionals. Eighty-six percent indicated that this interaction should include exposure to all areas of exceptionality.

The second area of training to be discussed is behavior modification. The paraprofessional is an authority figure in the classroom and should have a

clear understanding of the principles of behavior modification (McKenzie & Houk, 1986). The paraprofessional will be expected to utilize the programs being implemented in the classrooms in which they are placed.

The bibliography of paraprofessional training materials and resources developed through the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education includes information on the above topics as well as information regarding paraprofessional matching (i.e. matching teacher and paraprofessional) and is indicative of the effort to enhance the skills and job satisfaction of the paraprofessionals. Even though this resource exists, the manual is not being utilized and states are not implementing the needed programs. Paraprofessional matching is also not as widely used as it should be and often paraprofessionals are shifted from classroom to classroom because of personality conflicts rather than need (McKenzie & Houk, 1986).

There continues to be concern for the manner in which paraprofessionals are trained and used despite the greater recognition of their role in the classroom. Pickett and Humm (1980) have referred to paraprofes-

sionals as "the fastest growing, yet least prepared group in the system of service delivery in special education" (pg. 3). The fact remains that even ten years after Pickett and Humn's research there has been no concrete advancement in paraprofessional training. The review of literature done by Jones and Bender in 1993 asks the same questions that were asked in the early 1980s. If paraprofessionals are utilized to conduct formal assessment, should those persons be required to take assessment courses? Are paraprofessionals adequately prepared to function as extensions of the teachers for whom they work?

The purpose of this study is to determine if current training levels prepare paraprofessionals for job demands. Research has indicated a disparity in training and job demands. In the years since the last comprehensive study there should have been a significant increase in the quality and quantity of paraprofessional preparation.

METHODS

Participants

Those classrooms with paraprofessionals in the field of special education were identified through the Directors of Special Education in each county, as listed by the Department of Education in Richmond. The counties were selected for study as representatives of the various areas of Virginia (i.e. urban, suburban, and rural).

Paraprofessionals were identified as those persons who work in special education classrooms (i.e. self-contained or resource) and who are full-time, paid employees of the school district. The paraprofessional was not the primary educator and did not have teaching credentials in the special education field. Elementary and secondary programs were both surveyed.

Instrumentation

A survey was designed to obtain the following information from paraprofessionals in special education: (a) demographic data, (b) check-list of 30 statements concerning tasks that are completed by paraprofessionals, (see Appendix A) (c) questions concerning the degree of training obtained and when it was obtained, and (d) comments from the paraprofessional regarding feelings of adequacy in one's ability to perform expected tasks. The 30 statements were based on the work done by McKenzie and Houk (1986), which was directed to teachers who have paraprofessionals in their classrooms. This survey questioned the utilization of paraprofessionals in the classroom. The check list used in the current study, contained thirty statements directed to paraprofessionals, not teachers, but which asked the question, "What are the paraprofessionals doing in the classroom?" The validity of the survey used in the current study was increased by using the check-list developed by McKenzie and Houk.

The questions concerning the degree of training obtained and when it was obtained (Section C) was also adapted from Mckenzie and Houk's work. The 30 statements had been divided into five areas: Instructional Support, Behavior Modification, Diagnostic Support, Classroom Organization, and Clerical Support. These five areas provide the basis for the questions in Section C on training. The questions of how many years of training the paraprofessional received and what kind of training (i.e. in-service, Associates degree, ect.) were asked. The paraprofessionals were then asked to estimate the amount of training received in each of the five areas (using a Likert Scale). The last question asked the paraprofessionals (section D) what their area of expertise is and what area they have the least experience with.

Procedure

The Director of Special Education for each county was sent an introductory letter asking for permission to survey the paraprofessionals in that area (see Appendix C). The letter contained a brief statement

about the purpose of the study as well as reassurances that survey was totally voluntary and confidential and that none of the information would be used to link the respondent to his/her school district or answers. After written/oral permission was obtained from the district a packet containing enough cover letters, surveys and self addressed stamped envelopes were sent to the Director for distribution. This process further protected the respondent. The cover letter explained the research project to the paraprofessional, stated that it was voluntary and that the information was totally anonymous (see Appendix B).

As surveys were received they were randomly numbered for identification purposes in the study. From the demographic section A and the check list in part B frequency data was collected and percentages calculated. Part C also converted to percentage data and measures of central tendency were calculated for each of the five paraprofessional job tasks. The relationship between training and job tasks was evaluated by comparing the total percentage of time spent training in each of the five areas of interest to the total percentage of training time spent in the five task areas.

RESULTS

Sixty letters of introduction were sent to Counties around the state of Virginia. Thirty-one directors of special education responded to the inquiry, fourteen agreed to distribute the survey and 17 declined. Each director requested enough surveys for their county. A total of eighty-seven surveys were distributed to the fourteen counties that agreed to participate. Of the eighty-seven surveys distributed through the Directors in each of the counties fifty-four were completed and returned, for a return rate of 62% (n=54).

Using the information in part one of the survey, a paraprofessional profile developed. It was found that fifty-one, or 94.4%, of the paraprofessionals surveyed were female and 3, or 5.6%, were male. At 96% full time and 3% part time, the paraprofessionals were fixtures in the schools. The average age of the paraprofessionals was thirty-three with a range of nineteen to sixty-nine (Table 2). The number of paraprofessionals who have at least a high school

diploma was 92%, 7% have earned Associate Degrees, 16% received Bachelors Degrees, 1% were actively working towards a Graduate degree and 7% left high school with an Equivalent diploma. Teaching certificates were obtained by 7% with certification in English and Elementary Education.

The job title of the paraprofessional varied from subject to subject. Eighteen different titles were given. The title of Special Education Paraprofessional was reported by 22% of the people surveyed. Paraprofessional was next with 18%, followed by Teacher's Aide at 14%, and Instructional Aide with 9%. The remainder of the list worked out to 5% or less per title (Table 3).

Part B was divided into five sections. Section one: Instructional Support (1-10) was marked by 100% of the paraprofessionals surveyed. Number one was marked by 100%, reinforcing concepts already presented by the teacher. Seventy-seven percent of the paraprofessionals indicated that they listen to students read (item 2). Reading to students was a job that 90% of the paraprofessionals performed (item 3). One-hundred percent of the paraprofessionals supervise

independent or small group work (item 4). The time consuming task of modifying written materials is completed by 61% of the aides in the Special Education classroom (item 5). Helping students work on projects or assignments is a task that 94% of the paraprofessionals perform (item 6). Fifty-nine percent of the paraprofessionals indicated that they assist physically disabled students in their classroom. Helping students explore careers and helping non-English speaking students practice vocabulary were marked by 61% and 16 respectively (Table 3).

Behavior Management Support (11-15) was marked by 100% of the paraprofessionals surveyed. Eighty-three percent of the paraprofessionals reported that they provide and/or supervise earned reinforcement (item 11). Supervise time out was indicated by 90.7% of the paraprofessionals, the largest percentage in this group. Sixty-six percent of the paraprofessionals act as a resource for students experiencing stress (item 13). Monitoring progress on contracts was indicated by 42.5% of the paraprofessionals and providing positive feedback was reported by 87% (Table 3).

Section three, Diagnostic Support (16-20) was

marked by 100% of the paraprofessionals surveyed.

Seventy-five percent of the paraprofessionals correct and grade assigned activities (item 16). Observing and recording academic and social behavior was reported by an average of 62% of the respondents (items 17,18).

Fifty-three percent of the paraprofessionals administer informal assessments and twenty-five percent administer formal assessments (Table 3).

Section four, Classroom Organization (21-26) was marked by 100% of the paraprofessionals surveyed.

Fifty-nine percent of the paraprofessionals indicated that they make instructional games for their classrooms. Developing and managing learning centers was reported by 50% of the respondents. Eighty-one percent of the paraprofessionals prepared displays in the classroom. "Assisting in daily planning" was a job task of 74% of the paraprofessionals and making bulletin boards was a task of 83% (Table 3).

Section five, Clerical Support (27-30) was marked by 100% of the paraprofessionals surveyed. Thirty-eight percent of the paraprofessionals indicated that they type in their classrooms. Duplicating material was a job task of 96% of the respondents. Recording

grades was a task of forty-four percent of the paraprofessionals (Table 3).

In each of the sections of the survey there was a question asking for "Other, please describe." The following are the duties which that question generated. Under Instructional Support the additional job tasks listed were: Sign language assistance; I teach the kindergarten half of the class while my teacher takes care of the first-graders; Follow through with occupational, speech, physical therapist goals; Instruct classes while the teacher is out; Teach new concepts and Teach math class. The additional job tasks listed under Behavior Management support included the following: Support students who are experiencing home problems and reinforce correct behavior in a positive manner. The Diagnostic Support Section generated two additional tasks: Build skills in order to score higher on tests and assist in giving year end diagnostic tests. Classroom Organization and Clerical Support did not generate any other job tasks.

Part three of the survey was used to determine the degree of training a paraprofessional received. An

astounding 68.5% of the paraprofessionals surveyed received zero training hours. In terms of pre-placement training, only 16.6% received training, 18.5% received post-placement training, and 24% received any formal on the job training. The average number of pre-placement training hours was ten hours, with a range from one hour to thirty hours (Table 4). Post-placement training averaged 22 hours and on-the-job training averaged 6 hours, with two paraprofessionals stating that their training was continuous.

Section two of part three breaks down the amount of training that the paraprofessionals received in each of the five areas of interest. Of the paraprofessionals that received training (n=17) 32% reported that the majority of their training was in Instructional Support. Twenty-nine percent of the paraprofessionals reported that zero to 20% of their training time was in the area of Behavior Management. Forty-seven percent of the paraprofessionals indicated that training in diagnostic support was in the zero to twenty percent range. Training time spent in classroom organization was reported by 29.4% in both the zero to 20% and 20% to 40% areas. In the last section,

Clerical support, 17.6% reported that zero to 20% of training time was spent in this area (Table 4).

The last question in this part asked in which areas the paraprofessional felt most competent and least competent. Thirty-four of the paraprofessionals answered this question. The higher percentage of paraprofessionals felt most competent in the area of instructional support, while the higher percentage of paraprofessionals felt least competent in the clerical support duties area (Table 5). It was in this section that the paraprofessionals gave unsolicited remarks concerning their job and training. These remarks, found in Appendix D, range from a desire for better training to the wish that their teachers would use them more efficiently in the classroom. A very real concern for the lack of behavior management training was expressed.

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if the average special education paraprofessional was being adequately trained to perform the job tasks that they were being asked to do. The secondary question involved the issue of fair and productive assistance to the students in the special education classrooms. Is

it fair or appropriate for an untrained staff member to administer informal and formal assessments to students? Is it productive to have a paraprofessional in the classroom who does not or is not able to function as part of the instructional team? The results of the study indicate that the Virginia special education paraprofessionals surveyed are not adequately prepared.

DISCUSSION

Selection, training and placement of paraprofessionals has generally been accomplished by an informal and unstructured process (Frith & Lindsey, 1980). Paraprofessionals skills are often insufficiently identified and/or developed prior to placement and they may be asked to perform tasks that reflect neither their level of competence nor their ability to play a meaningful role in the special education programs (McKenzie & Houk, 1986). In part three of the survey, it was found that 68.5% of the paraprofessionals received absolutely no training prior to, after, or during placement. That is well over half of the subjects in this study. Insufficient training not only hampers job performance but also tends to discourage paraprofessionals from being active members of the educational team (Frith & Mims, 1985). This lack of training may also cause misconceptions about the roles of the paraprofessional, teacher and other classroom personnel. Misconceptions about what others are supposed to do often leads to communication problems and misunderstandings (Frith & Mims, 1985). A

paraprofessional can not be a productive member of the classroom when the lines of communication between teacher and paraprofessional, paraprofessional and teacher are being blocked by misunderstandings of the individual role each plays in the classroom. Jones and Bender (1993) stated that a team in which rules were clearly defined for each person, including the paraprofessional, maximizes resources and more effectively serve students.

When comparing the job tasks an average paraprofessional may perform in part two of the survey and the amount of training the paraprofessional received in each of the key areas in part three of the survey major discrepancies are seen. In section one, Instructional Support, three tasks stand out as training intensive: number five, modify written materials - rewrite to a lower level; number eight, assist physically disabled students; and number nine, help students explore career and special interests. Each of these was marked as a job task by at least 33% of the paraprofessionals. Even though these tasks stand out as more involved and dependent of training, only 32% of the paraprofessionals surveyed reported any

significant training in Instructional support (part three section two).

In section two of part two, Behavior Management Support the following tasks that revolve around reinforcement and stress management: provide and/or supervise earned reinforcement; be a resource for students who are experiencing stress; enhance students' self-concept by providing positive feedback require at least nine credit hours of training for special Education teachers. However, paraprofessionals performing these tasks reported minimal training in this area, the zero to 20% range.

Diagnostic Support received the least amount of training across the board. However, 66.6% of the paraprofessionals reported that one of their job tasks was to observe and record academic and social behaviors. The paraprofessionals indicated that 61% of them administer informal assessment and 25.9% administer formal assessments. Formal assessments should, by law, be given by qualified, trained personnel. Most formal assessments demand a working knowledge of the test to administer it. Without training costly mistakes could occur. Section four, Classroom

Organization and section five, Clerical Support, also received little training although they were marked on average by 80% of the paraprofessionals as common job tasks.

The pressure exerted upon special educators to extend their services in a cost effective manner has resulted in a greater awareness of the importance of making the best possible use of paraprofessionals. Given the nature of the expanded role of paraprofessionals, many issues regarding training and some type of certification are unresolved (Jones & Bender, 1993). Paraprofessionals generally enter the school system without any kind of formal job training. It is because of this lack of training that many paraprofessionals report that "I never know what to do." Or, "I don't feel like I'm really needed." (Boomer, 1982).

Paraprofessionals need to be better prepared for the classroom. Several training programs have been proposed, but no one program stands out. A training program that incorporates both the teacher and the paraprofessional would be the most beneficial. McKenzie and Houk (1986) seem to be the closest at this point to this type of team building program.

McKenzie and Houk (1986) developed a training model based on a teacher - paraprofessional match. In this model a teacher requests support services. The school responds by initiating an application and interview process. The teacher then establishes a list of the job tasks for which a paraprofessional in his or her classroom would be responsible. A hiring decision is made by the school system and pre-service training (pre-placement training) takes place. The paraprofessionals then prepare an inventory of their skills, abilities, interests and hobbies. The teacher's list and the paraprofessionals' skills and interests are then compared. A paraprofessional is chosen for that teacher and additional training is implemented (post-placement training). The teacher and paraprofessional then come together to create an individualized job description and are involved in team training from day one (McKenzie & Houk 1986). Figure 1 illustrates the process.

The purpose of this study was to determine if current training levels of paraprofessionals prepare them for job demands. The results of the study show, however, that this is not a current practice.

Paraprofessional responsibilities have increased but the level of training they receive has not.

Paraprofessionals are still being asked to perform tasks for which they have no training. The Institute on Community Integration in Minneapolis is now researching training programs for paraprofessionals in special education (Johnson, 1994). The Director, David R. Johnson, hopes to be able to balance tasks and training. It is important with the move toward integration that paraprofessionals be able to self motivate and think on their feet. Hopefully, Dr. Johnson and the Institute are on the right track.

The parameters of this study did not allow for the nature of the training (e.g. lecture, workshop, class) the paraprofessional received. Valuable information could be gained from knowing how a paraprofessional was trained. Research needs to be done on how best to prepare a paraprofessional for the special education classroom. The matching of paraprofessional and teacher is also an area that needs to be addressed. Confusion in the classroom caused by personality conflicts make the hard job of educating a special

student even harder.

The importance of paraprofessionals in the Special Education field today has increased the need for better training models. It is only through thorough training of both teacher and paraprofessional that the utilization of the paraprofessional will improve.

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Appendix A

Paraprofessional
Descriptive Survey

SECTION A

OFFICIAL JOB TITLE: _____
GENDER: M -- F AGE: _____ FULL TIME: YES -- NO

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED:

____ HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY
____ HIGH SCHOOL DEGREE
____ ASSOCIATES DEGREE: SUBJECT _____
____ BACHELORS DEGREE: SUBJECT _____
____ GRADUATE WORK: SUBJECT _____
____ GRADUATE DEGREE: SUBJECT _____

DO YOU HAVE A TEACHING CERTIFICATE?: YES NO
IN WHAT AREA? _____

SECTION B

DIRECTIONS: Listed below are a number of tasks which a paraprofessional may perform. Please check those activities that you perform on a regular basis (i.e. daily, weekly or biweekly).

Instructional Support

1. _____ Reinforce concepts already presented by the teacher, by assisting students in reading, math, spelling, vocabulary development, signing, mobility, and/or self-care.
2. _____ Listen to students read.
3. _____ Read to students.
4. _____ Supervise independent or small group work.
5. _____ Modify written materials, e.g. tape record stories, rewrite to lower level.
6. _____ Help students work on projects or assignments.
7. _____ Help students select library books.
8. _____ Assist physically disabled students, e.g. feeding, positioning.

- 9. Help students explore careers and special interests.
- 10. Practice vocabulary with non-English speaking students.
- Other. Please describe.

Behavior Management Support

- 11. Provide and/or supervise earned reinforcement.
- 12. Supervise time out.
- 13. Be a resource for students who are experiencing stress.
- 14. Monitor progress on contracts.
- 15. Enhance students' self-concept by providing positive feedback.
- Other. Please describe.

Diagnostic Support

- 16. Correct and grade assigned activities.
- 17. Observe and record academic behavior and progress, e.g. math facts learned, vocabulary growth, reading rate.
- 18. Observe and record social behavior.
- 19. Administer informal assessments, e.g. unit tests and criterion referenced measures.
- 20. Administer formal assessments
- Other. Please describe.

Classroom Organization

- 21. Make instructional games.
- 22. Develop and manage learning centers.
- 23. Prepare displays.
- 24. Locate instructional materials.
- 25. Assist in daily planning.
- 26. Make bulletin boards.
- Other. Please describe.

Clerical Support

- 27. Type
- 28. Duplicate materials.

- 29. Take attendance.
- 30. Record grades.
- Other. Please describe.

Section C

DIRECTIONS: Please indicate the type of training you have received in preparation for you placement in the special education classroom.

Pre-placement in-service training
NUMBER OF HOURS: _____

Post-placement in-service training
NUMBER OF HOURS: _____

On the job training
NUMBER OF HOURS: _____

DIRECTIONS: Using the check list in section C as a definitional guide; How much of your time in training was spent in the following areas?

1 - zero to 20% 2 - 20% to 40% 3 - 40% to 60%
4 - 60% TO 80% 5 - 80% to 100%

1. Instructional Support	*****	1	2	3	4	5
2. Behavior Management	*****	1	2	3	4	5
3. Diagnostic Support	*****	1	2	3	4	5
4. Classroom Organization	*****	1	2	3	4	5
5. Clerical Support	*****	1	2	3	4	5

In which of the above area are you most competent?
Least?

Appendix B

Lourrie Duddridge
Longwood College
Box 334
Farmville, VA. 23909
(804) 395-3030

Special Education Paraprofessional

Thank you for taking the time to complete my survey. Your input is very important to my research and without your support I would not be able to continue.

As the field of Special education grows paraprofessionals are being used more and more often. It is important that the job of the special education paraprofessional is explored so better training programs can be developed. It is through better training that the job of the paraprofessional will become more stable and the position more refined. My primary research questions are: What kinds of tasks are you completing in the classroom? What kind and how much training have you received?

The attached survey is three parts the first is demographic, the second is a check list of possible job tasks, and the third part is about the type of training you received. This survey is totally voluntary and confidential. The information you provide me will not be linked in any way to you or your district. Once the survey is returned it will be randomly numbered for identification purposes and it's origin will not be known.

Thank you again for your time and attention. I hope you do chose to help me with my research and mail the survey back in the envelope provided as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Lourrie Duddridge,
Longwood College

Appendix C

Lourrie Duddridge
Longwood College
Box 334
Farmville, VA 23909
(804) 395-3030

xxxxxx
Director of Special Education
xxxxxx
xxxxxx

(name)

Paraprofessionals in special education are fast becoming the most important resource that teachers have in the classroom. In the last ten years the number of paraprofessionals employed by the state of Virginia has more than tripled. However, we know very little about the average paraprofessional. In each classroom the job tasks are different and in every area the paraprofessionals are trained in using varying techniques. I am now in the process of conducting research to answer the following questions: What is the average paraprofessionals job tasks? How is the average paraprofessional being trained. In order to continue with my research I need your permission to survey paraprofessionals in your area and your help to distribute the surveys to the appropriate people.

This survey will be totally voluntary, confidential and in no way will the information I collect be traceable to any county or individual. To further insure this confidentiality, if you agree to allow me to survey the paraprofessionals in your area I would ask that you contact me at the above address or phone number as soon as possible.

I will ask you to provide me with the number of paraprofessionals in your area so that I may send the survey packet to you to distribute. The packets will include a cover letter, the survey, and a self-addressed stamped envelope for each paraprofessional.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the cover letter and survey for your information. If you need more information to make you decision please contact me and I will be happy to send a copy of my proposal to you. Thank you for your time and attention. I hope to hear from you very soon.

Sincerely,

Lourrie Duddridge,
Longwood College

Paraprofessionals 45

Appendix D

Paraprofessional Comments

1. Not enough training is given for behavior management and not enough training for assisting and understanding children with various disabilities.
2. The only training I've received was for a student in the class, to help with his medical needs. My teacher however, is a wonderful model.
3. This county does not give any formal training. I would take it if it was offered, I want to learn more about the kids.
4. I feel with the low wages that we sometimes lose some terrific personnel. Our jobs demand much of us and sometimes as much as instructors with the exception of diagnostic support and planning time.
5. Where this job is concerned, you have to be a strict teacher; comforter; a caring person! You have to have a "love" for kids whether "special Ed" or not. In other words you have to be a "mother" or a strict parent - you love and are concerned about what happens to the children/young adults you deal with every day.
6. I don't feel adequately qualified to answer the last section of questions. The things I have learned by being placed in the position are invaluable and I have learned quite a bit about the EMH program.
7. I believe no one should be put in an aides job unless they have had training and know what they will be dealing with.
8. My child is in a special education class. She was my training!
9. It is very hard to handle these children with out training in behavior management. The teacher tries to explain the process but she does not have the time to go in to detail for me.

Appendix E

Figure 1
A Model for Paraprofessional
Placement

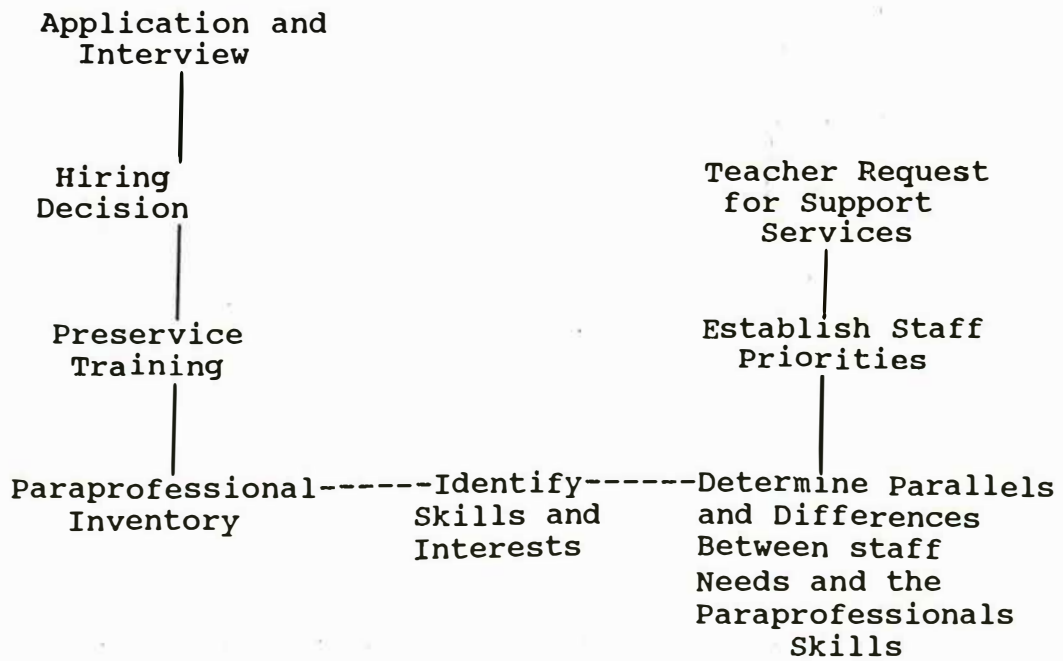


Table 1
Job Title Frequency

<u>Job Title</u>	<u>Frequency of Use</u>
Special Education Paraprofessional	12
Paraprofessional	10
LD Paraprofessional	3
MOMR Paraprofessional	2
Part-Time Paraprofessional	1
Inclusionary Paraprofessional	1
Teachers Assistant	4
Teachers Aide	8
Special Education Assistant	2
Early Childhood Special Education Paraprofessional	3
Nursery Assistance and Paraprofessional	4
Instructional Aide	5
Aide	2
Special Education Aide	4
Assistant	1
LD Self Contained Aide	1
Early Childhood Special Education Aide	1
Preschool - Early Learning Teachers Aide	1

Table 2
Paraprofessional Age Break Down

<u>AGE</u>	<u>Frequency</u>
?-----	8
19-----	1
23-----	1
24-----	2
25-----	1
27-----	1
28-----	2
31-----	1
32-----	1
33-----	2
34-----	1
35-----	4
37-----	2
38-----	3
39-----	2
41-----	3
43-----	1
45-----	3
46-----	1
47-----	2
48-----	1
49-----	1
50-----	1
53-----	2
56-----	1
60-----	1
62-----	1
69-----	1

Table 3
Percentage of Paraprofessionals
Selecting Job Tasks

<u>Area and Task</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Instructional Support		
1. Reinforce concepts	54	100%
2. Listen to Students		
Read	42	77.7%
3. Read to Students	50	92%
4. Supervise Work	54	100%
5. Modify Written		
Materials	33	61%
6. Help with Projects	51	94%
7. Select Library Books	37	61%
8. Assist Disabled		
Students	32	59%
9. Career Exploration	33	61%
10. ESL assistant	9	16%
Behavior Management		
11. Provide earned		
Reinforcement	45	83%
12. Supervise Time Out	49	90.7%
13. Resource for students		
Experiencing Stress	36	66.6%
14. Monitor Progress on		
Contracts	23	42.5%
15. Provide Positive		
Feedback	47	87%
Diagnostic Support		
16. Correct/Grade		
Assigned Work	41	75.9%
17. Observe/Record		
Academic Behavior	36	66.6%

Paraprofessionals 51

<u>Area and Task</u>	<u>Frequency</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
18. Observe/Record Social Behavior	37	61%
19. Administer Informal Assessments	29	53.7%
20. Administer Formal Assessments	14	25.9%
Classroom Organization		
21. Make Instructional Games	32	59%
22. Develop and Manage Learning Centers	27	50%
23. Prepare Displays	44	81.4%
24. Locate Instructional Materials	45	83%
25. Assist in Daily Planning	40	74%
26. Make Bulletin Boards	45	83%
Clerical Support		
27. Type	21	38.8%
28. Duplicate Materials	52	96%
29. Take Attendance	34	62.9%
30. Record Grades	24	44%

Table 4
The Average Number of Hours Spent Training
in Each of the Five Key Areas

<u>Key Areas</u>	<u>Average Number of Training Hours</u>				
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
Instructional Support	3	1	3	4	6
Behavior Management	5	3	3	4	2
Diagnostic Support	8	4	2	0	2
Classroom Support	5	5	2	3	2
Clerical Support	11	2	0	2	2

KEY

- 1 - zero to 20%
- 2 - 20% to 40%
- 3 - 40% to 60%
- 4 - 60% to 80%
- 5 - 80% to 100%

**Number in bold on chart is the average.

Table 5
Competency Areas

<u>Key Area</u>	<u>Least Competent</u>	<u>Most Competent</u>
Instructional Support	2.9%	82.3%
Behavior Management	26%	11.7%
Diagnostic Support	41.1%	0
Classroom Organization	2.9%	0
Clerical Support	24.4%	2.9%