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Need, qualifications, training, responsibilities, and supervision of paraprofessionals in special education : a qualitative case study approach

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NEED, QUALIFICATIONS, TRAINING, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND SUPERVISION
OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A QUALITATIVE CASE
STUDY APPROACH

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Educational Specialist, School Psychology

Heather L. Marolf

University of Northern Iowa

July 2006

ABSTRACT

The increasing number of one-on-one paraprofessionals has intensified interest in issues regarding their appropriate employment. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine the perceptions of a paraprofessional assigned to provide one-on-one supports for a student with special needs regarding how the need for paraprofessional assistance was determined, who participated in the selection process, necessary qualifications for employment, assigned roles and responsibilities, training opportunities, and supervision practices. Data was collected through three semi-structured interviews with a one-on-one paraprofessional. Additional themes identified through data analysis included barriers to job performance, job satisfaction, negatives of being a one-on-one paraprofessional, and advice to staff and other paraprofessionals.

The data exposed some areas of concern regarding the appropriate utilization of the one-on-one paraprofessional. Data indicated the paraprofessional had primary responsibility for providing the student academic and behavioral supports. The paraprofessional engaged in these activities despite a lack of teaching credentials, limited training and minimal supervision. Similar practices have been questioned in previous research. Additionally, the working environment for the paraprofessional was less than ideal. It was reported that paraprofessionals were not respected by teachers or administrators and the paraprofessionals were shown little recognition for the work they did. Job satisfaction was derived from an enjoyment of working with children.

Recruitment of research subjects was difficult for this study. The negative school climate seemingly played a role in this as the participant reported other paraprofessionals

worried about a lack of confidentiality and repercussions in the workplace. Future researchers may need to factor in school climate when determining an appropriate recruitment method.

Although findings may be specific to the district in this study they are supported by previous research. Implications for practice include looking closely at appropriate roles and responsibilities for one-on-one paraprofessionals along with providing adequate training and supervision. This could involve providing training for those that will be supervising the paraprofessionals. Districts may wish to consider way to promote a stronger sense of staff cohesion and mutual respect.

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This Study by: Heather L. Marolf


Entitled: Need, Qualifications, Training, Responsibilities, and Supervision of Paraprofessionals in Special Education: A Qualitative Case Study Approach

has been approved as meeting the research paper requirement for the

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Introduction

Paraprofessionals have become an increasing presence in schools providing services to students with disabilities (Drecktrah, 2000; Giangreco, 2003). This increase has been tied to meeting student and teacher needs while striving to assure more students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in inclusive settings (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & MacFarland, 1997; Pickett, Likens & Wallace, 2003). Freschi (1999) suggested the growing practice of providing specific one-on-one paraprofessional support has also contributed to the rising number of paraprofessionals. As the numbers of paraprofessionals have increased, so have questions regarding the ways schools approach the determination for the need of paraprofessional support. Issues concerning necessary qualifications, appropriate roles and responsibilities, training, and the supervision of paraprofessionals have become prominent.

The actual number of paraprofessionals employed in schools is unknown. Surveys have provided varied and inconsistent results (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001; Pickett et al., 2003). Pickett et al. (2003) discussed the confusion surrounding the number of paraprofessionals employed and stated part of the confusion may be due to reporting practices and the varied titles used to describe paraprofessionals. Titles include teacher aide, associate, teacher assistant, clerical aide and paraeducator. The Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) of the U.S. Department of Education asks states for information regarding teacher aide numbers but does not request

the corresponding job assignment. A survey conducted from 1999-2001 by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals found that nationwide there are more than 525,000 paraprofessionals employed in full-time positions and of that number 290,000 work with students with special needs in a variety of settings. These researchers were particularly interested in the number of one-on-one paraprofessionals but they were unable to determine this information. They found there was a lack of information regarding specific job categories and full and part time positions. All numbers obtained during the survey could only be considered approximations as most states do not maintain central data bases regarding paraprofessionals. Pickett et al. (2003) found that some states only gathered data required by federal programs and others reported data that were not separated into job assignments.

A student's educational needs should be the primary focus when determining the need for a paraprofessional, not teacher expectations or parental wishes (Marks, Schrader & Levine, 1999; Werts, Harris, Tillery & Roark, 2004). Research has shown, however, that schools frequently focus on student characteristics and disability labels when approaching the decision of providing paraprofessional support (Giangreco, Broer & Edelman, 1999). Few researched models are available to assist schools through the process of selecting paraprofessionals. Many studies have addressed the advantages and disadvantages of providing one-on-one paraprofessional supports (Giangreco et al., 1999; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Werts, Zigmund & Leeper, 2001; Young, Simpson, Myles & Kamps, 1997). Although there has been acknowledgement of the importance of paraprofessionals, professional literature stresses the need to analyze each case before

assigning a paraprofessional in order to minimize any negative effects (Freschi, 1999; Giangreco et al., 1997; Marks et al., 1999) as well as examine other alternative supports that may be available (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999; Giangreco et al., 1999).

Employment of personnel typically falls under the domain of administrative functions and teachers have frequently reported they have no involvement in the selection process (French, 2001). Some researchers suggest it may be wise to include those who will work closest with the paraprofessional to help ensure good communication and effective services (Chopra & French, 2004; Trautman, 2004). Qualifications for employment vary among states, even between districts, with the only common requirement being a high school diploma or GED (Pickett et al., 2003). This has led to paraprofessionals being assigned duties for which they are not qualified (Downing, Ryndak & Clark, 2000; Millsap, Moss & Gamse, 1993). Paraprofessionals reported receiving poor job descriptions and little to no preservice training (Riggs, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Trautman, 2004). Giangreco et al. (1999) questioned having students without disabilities taught by qualified teachers while those with disabilities were taught by paraprofessionals.

A paraprofessional's role is to support a student's educational progress under the supervision of a qualified teacher (French, 1999; Marks et al., 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Their responsibilities have evolved from primarily routine tasks, such as clerical duties and monitoring of non-academic situations, to providing direct services to special education students, including instruction (Pickett et al., 2003). Many general educators welcome the presence of a paraprofessional and view their support as critical to the

success of students with disabilities in the general education setting (Marks et al., 1999). As roles have changed paraprofessionals have consistently requested training in many areas to help them meet these new demands (Goessling, 1998; Pickett et al., 2003; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

Teachers have reported they have had insufficient training to prepare them to properly supervise paraprofessionals (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001). They have had to define the supervisory relationship on the job which is often difficult due to time constraints (Carroll, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Teachers and paraprofessionals have reported being uncomfortable with this situation (Giangreco et al., 2001; Riggs, 2001; Trautman, 2004). French (2001) conducted a survey of teachers regarding supervision practices and concluded they were not adequate and could be limiting to a student's academic welfare.

Problem Statement

The increasing number of paraprofessionals has intensified interest in issues regarding their appropriate employment. Researchers express concern with how districts determine the need for paraprofessional supports. Paraprofessionals frequently request clarification in areas such as roles and responsibilities, supervisory chain of command and appeal for training. Teachers report a need for training to improve supervisory skills. As paraprofessional roles have changed and numbers increased so has the importance of addressing these issues.

Information collected about paraprofessional needs and concerns have primarily been general surveys with no distinction between those providing general classroom

assistance or one-on-one support. There is a paucity of qualitative information concerning those employed in one-on-one positions. One-on-one paraprofessionals may have different needs than those providing more general supports. Gaining the perspective of one-on-one paraprofessionals could help focus attention on their unique needs and concerns.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the perceptions of paraprofessionals assigned one-on-one to students with special needs regarding several salient issues.

Specifically the research questions addressed:

1. How is the need for paraprofessional assistance determined?
2. Who participates in the selection process and what qualifications for employment are required?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional?
4. What training was provided to the paraprofessional and who provides supervision?
5. What is the nature of supervision practices for one-on-one paraprofessionals and who is responsible for the supervision?

Significance of the Study

The data gleaned from interviews during this study has added to existing research literature by providing the perspective of a one-on-one paraprofessional. This information has provided deeper insight into their needs and concerns. The results may allow for

further understanding of the determination of need, selection, qualifications, roles and responsibilities, training, and supervisory practices for one-on-one paraprofessionals.

Definition of Terms

Paraprofessional – A person employed by a school district to provide supplemental assistance to students with special needs as prescribed, directed, and supervised by a qualified professional.

Supervisor – This may be a teacher, principal, school nurse or other credentialed staff member responsible for the direct supervision of a paraprofessional.

Administration – Those school employees in a leadership position. This would consist of principals, superintendents and school board members.

Credentials/qualifications – These terms refer to any specific requirements needed for employment. They could range from a high school diploma or equivalent to required specialized training.

Certified – An employee is certified if they have met the requirements put forth by the State Department of Education regarding the specific position and received an official certificate.

Assistive Technology – Any item or piece of equipment which is used to maintain, increase or improve the functional capabilities of an individual.

IEP – Individual Education Program; an agreement intended to guide and document specialized instruction designed for a student with a disability based on his or her unique academic, social and behavioral needs.

IEP Team – These are individuals involved in writing a child's IEP. This could include

parents, general and special education teachers, principal, school psychologist, educational consultant, the student and others deemed necessary to the process.

Area Education Agency – This is an intermediate education agency created by the Iowa legislature. Staff provides support to local school districts in many areas including special education, speech/language services and curriculum development.

Discrete Trial Training (DTT) – DTT is a direct teaching methodology used for children with autism based on the principals of applied behavior analysis.

LOVASS – An applied behavioral approach for working with children with autism.

Several well-trained therapist, including parents, work with the individual child in home, school and community environments an average of forty hours a week for three or more years. Its conceptual basis is operant conditioning and behavioral modification using DTT.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study methodology was used for this research project. This approach is a method of choice when seeking to explain or describe particular phenomena and to allow researchers to obtain an emic or insiders perspective (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach & Richardson, 2005; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2005). The central purpose of this study was to probe and describe the perceptions of paraprofessionals assigned to one-on-one positions in regards to the determination of student need along with the selection, qualifications, roles and responsibilities, and training of one-on-one paraprofessionals. Additionally, this study wanted to explore supervisory practices of one-on-one paraprofessionals. These initial topics were identified through professional literature (Ashbaker & Morgan, 1999; Carroll, 2001; French, 2001; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). The researcher had previously been employed as a special education paraprofessional. Work related experiences generated interest in this topic and guided the development of the research questions.

Qualitative research is uniquely designed to explore attitudes, opinions and beliefs of individuals (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Use of a case study, involving one-on-one paraprofessionals from one school district, was intended as a way to gain deeper understanding of policies and practices that may affect one-on-one paraprofessionals. Interviewing provided an avenue to collect descriptive data to the questions about what the paraprofessionals believed is occurring and why or how it is occurring. Information collected through interviews can lead to a better understanding of the individuals' involved and how they function within a system (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Although the intention was to interview multiple participants, only one of the sixteen one-on-one paraprofessionals employed by the school district volunteered to participate in the study. The researcher conducted a total of three interviews with the participant, two in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and one semi-structured telephone interview. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The data was analyzed and organized by identified themes.

Participants

Participants of this study were recruited through purposeful sampling methods involving criterion and convenience strategies (Berg, 2001; Brantlinger et al., 2005). Permission was granted by the administration of a small rural school district, student population 1,539 Pre-Kindergarten – 12, to recruit one-on-one paraprofessionals to participate in the study. There was no personal contact between the paraprofessionals and the researcher during the recruitment phase. Several attempts to inform the paraprofessionals about the project were made prior to successful recruitment. Sixteen individuals were employed as one-on-one paraprofessionals thereby meeting the criteria necessary to participate. Flyers were placed in each person's school mailbox detailing the projected study, explaining confidentiality precautions and including the researcher's contact information. Two weeks later, after no response, the researcher provided a scripted e-mail to the superintendent's secretary which she sent to each of the sixteen paraprofessionals as a reminder. Two weeks following that, new flyers were given to building secretaries to personally hand out to the one-on-one paraprofessionals. The secretaries were also provided a scripted message to read when handing out the flyers.

Finally, two weeks later, new flyers were placed in the paraprofessional's mailboxes along with self-addressed, stamped envelopes which interested persons could return directly to the researcher. This resulted in one response. The researcher contacted the paraprofessional, gave a deeper explanation of the study, and obtained written informed consent which is required to work with human participants (Berg, 2001; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). The paraprofessional was encouraged by the researcher to discuss the study with any other one-to-one paraprofessionals at her school that may have expressed interest to her about the study. Regardless of her efforts no other person joined the study. Feedback from the one willing participant indicated the other paraprofessionals were very concerned about confidentiality regardless of the safeguards explained in the flyers. These safeguards included use of pseudonyms for all participants and the school district, all interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher, interviews were held outside of school hours and away from the school buildings, and all notes and transcripts were destroyed upon conclusion of the study (Berg, 2001).

The one-on-one paraprofessional in this study, Lisa, has been employed by the district for six years. Initially she was hired as a special education paraprofessional but was not assigned one-on-one duties. Following her first year she was reassigned to work specifically with one student and has remained in that position for the past five years. She has moved with the same student as he has progressed through pre-kindergarten to third grade. She falls in the age range of 25 – 35 years and holds a high school diploma.

Interviews took place during the early afternoon in Lisa's living room. The atmosphere was relaxed and open. The sessions were never rushed. She was very willing

to answer all questions, gave each question serious thought and freely elaborated her responses. The interview sessions were punctuated with laughter. She stated that she appreciated the opportunity to explain what it was like to be a one-on-one paraprofessional. It was obvious that Lisa enjoyed her job and the student she worked with.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two face-to-face semi-structured interviews and one semi-structured follow-up interview by telephone. The semi-structured format permitted the interviews to be more flexible to allow immediate exploration of ideas and opinions expressed by the research participant (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Audiotaping, transcribing and confidentiality procedures were explained to the participant prior to beginning the interviews. The interview protocol found in Appendix A was used to guide the first interview. Each of the questions on the protocol was followed up with additional questions to encourage the participant to elaborate and provide more descriptive responses.

Trustworthiness and credibility of the obtained data was assessed by employing a member check strategy during the second interview (Brantlinger et al., 2005). The participant was asked to verbally verify the accuracy and completeness of the data collected at the previous interview. The paraprofessional was reminded of what she said and asked to verify or correct the information. This was done for each theme throughout the progression of the interview. Additional questions had been designed to probe deeper into the various themes identified from the first interview. These questions included

asking for more specific information regarding various trainings she had attended and further explanation of supervisory practices. Other areas explored involved barriers that interfered with job duties, negatives about being a one-on-one paraprofessional, and job satisfaction.

Following data analysis of the second interview several areas were identified as warranting additional follow-up questions. The effect of a one-on-one paraprofessional was identified as a new category and needed more exploration. Other areas needing further clarification included teacher expectations of paraprofessionals and advice for teachers, administrators and other paraprofessionals. The participant gave her permission for this interview to be conducted and audiotaped using a speaker telephone. The validation process used during the second interview was repeated here.

Interviews lasted between thirty and ninety minutes. At the conclusion of each interview the researcher thanked the participant for taking the time to provide insights about being a one-on-one paraprofessional. All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Tapes and transcripts were kept in a locked file drawer during the research project and destroyed following completion of the project.

The combination of employing member checks to validate data along with conducting three interviews with the same person contributed to the credibility of the data. Triangulation is often used in qualitative research to look for convergence of or consistency among data from multiple sources (Brantlinger et al., 2005). Since there was only one research participant it was important to interview her multiple times in order to provide ample data to allow for that triangulation.

Data Analysis

According to Brantlinger et al. (2005) data in qualitative research needs to be reviewed, sorted and coded in a systematic and meaningful way. This study employed interpretive content analysis using a three tiered approach adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990). Content analysis involves close inspection of the interview transcripts to understand and identify themes or perspectives of the research participant (Brantlinger et al., 2005). During the first tier, data from the first-round interview transcripts was carefully and systematically reviewed. An open coding process was used to break down and segment data using the initial categories of determination of need, selection, qualifications, training, roles and responsibilities, and supervision. Additional themes that emerged were barriers to job performance, job satisfaction, negatives, and advice to other staff.

The second-tier coding involved organizing the data into categories by selective coding. The data was analyzed by content analysis to look for pattern matching and organized into a table (see Appendix B). Additional questions for the second-round interview were developed at this time.

Following the second-round interview, the data was subjected to the third-tier analysis. The researcher analyzed the audiotape transcriptions. This iterative process involved assigning data to existing categories. One additional theme, effects of a one-on-one paraprofessional, emerged during the data analysis. Through the process of axial coding, data was analyzed with reference to the initial research questions and the themes that emerged throughout the analysis.

A third round of follow-up questions was developed following analysis of the second interview data. Several areas were identified as needing further clarification. This data was analyzed according to the identified procedure and assigned to the appropriate categories. No additional themes were identified.

Summary of Analysis

The data collected from the three interviews was analyzed by an interpretive content analysis using a three tiered approach. During the first tier, the data from the first interview was broken down using the initial categories of determination of need, selection, qualifications, training, roles and responsibilities, and supervision. The data was subjected to further analysis which identified the additional themes of barriers to job performance, job satisfaction, negatives, and advice for teachers, administrators and other paraprofessionals. All data was organized into a table and used to develop additional questions for the second interview. Another theme, effects of one-on-one paraprofessionals was identified following the second interview bringing the total to eleven identified themes. The third interview was used to verify information from the second interview and clarify certain comments by the paraprofessional. No other themes were identified when analyzing the data from the third interview. Data was verified using member checks during interviews and triangulation of the data from the three interviews.

Limitations

An obvious limitation is the small sample size. The results of this study are based on the opinions of a single one-on-one paraprofessional and may not be representative of all the one-on-one paraprofessionals in her school district. Recruitment was more difficult than expected. The participant indicated other paraprofessionals were concerned about confidentiality and the possibility of negative repercussions in the workplace if their opinions were known. The assurances of confidentiality in the flyers were not enough to overcome their concerns. Perhaps a face-to-face meeting between the researcher and the one-on-one paraprofessionals would have allowed the researcher to further explain the precautions taken to assure confidentiality and more people would have volunteered to participate. Another possible recruitment method could have involved offering an incentive to those who participate.

Other ways to collect data that could have served as a means of triangulation would include observing the paraprofessional at work and analyzing written job descriptions and evaluations. However, this would have compromised confidentiality and would probably not have been acceptable to the one-on-one paraprofessionals at this district.

Although the findings are supported by professional literature, they are still very specific to this school district and may not generalize well. This study represents a starting point for future research regarding the employment of one-on-one paraprofessionals and their activities. It could be a comparison point for studies involving other schools or this district could be revisited to look for changes in current practice and attitudes.

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

The results from the analysis of the data are arranged first by the initial six categories addressed by the research question; determination of need, selection, qualifications, roles and responsibilities, training, and supervision. These are followed by the additional five themes identified during analysis; barriers to job performance, job satisfaction, negatives of the job, advice for other paraprofessionals, teachers or administrators, and the effects of a one-on-one paraprofessional.

Determining the Need: Make sure students are “in” the class

Paraprofessionals are sought by schools when an IEP team makes the decision that a student’s needs are great enough to warrant close adult assistance. Individuals hired are told of the need but may not be aware of the determination process as was the case in this study. The paraprofessional, Lisa, did not know of any procedure or protocol used to identify a student’s need for a one-on-one paraprofessional. She suggested administrators were not very involved in the process either. She felt, “my bosses need to know what we’re doing and why they have to hire so many associates now.” Lisa did offer her opinion regarding areas that should be considered, “Most of it is the behaviors ...Mentally, they’ll have to take a look at... how they’re learning.” She identified specific academic and behavioral reasons a student may require one-on-one assistance:

[if student needs] somebody that can do hand over hand...if they need to remove them from the classroom...do DTT [Discrete Trial Training] or anything like that....I mean there’s behavioral issues... it could be anywhere from an outburst to lying and kicking on the floor. I don’t normally have to do it [remove student] that often. [We stay out] just a couple of minutes – he calms down and we go back in

Lisa reported that the determination of need for one-on-one support was to facilitate inclusion: “Just to make sure that the [students] are *in* the class, not just bodily,

mentally. They [staff] think that having a person there or a body there can help them [students] be more in the class.”

In summary, the paraprofessional determined the need for her position based on student characteristics and the duties she was required to do. She was unaware if school personnel used any type of systematic process to determine a student’s need for one-on-one paraprofessional support.

Selection: Administrative decision to “hire this one and let’s go with it”

Hiring new paraprofessionals or reassigning them to different positions is the responsibility of the principal. When first employed by the school district as a classroom paraprofessional Lisa said, “I worked with the principal at the elementary school. She interviewed me.” The move to her current one-on-one position was also decided by the building principal but included input from the special needs teacher. She explained, “The principal made the final call. She [special needs teacher] observed...how I meshed with the child.”

Lisa also discussed the pros and cons of parental input during the selection process. She felt it would be a good idea to have parental involvement but no parents were involved when she was hired or reassigned to her current position. Her primary motivation for including parents was to promote parental involvement in the classroom, “I think maybe [parents] would feel more comfortable and maybe come into the class and observe.” She had some concerns that parents may not understand what they were seeing during observations which could lead to conflict, “The only reason I would say no is because some might not like the way behaviors are handled.” She liked the idea of

parents observing so they could see and take pride in their child's successes and have a better understanding of what went on at school.

Lisa was somewhat critical of the principal's role in selecting or hiring paraprofessionals. She described a situation in which principals seemingly make blind decisions, "they [administrators] have no idea of what we're doing or how it's working out or whatever. They just say ok, hire this one and let's go with it."

The selection of one-on-one paraprofessionals at this school district remained the sole responsibility of the administration. Occasionally the administrator would seek some teacher input. Typically no attempt was made to match a person's skills with the requirements of the position. Parental input was suggested as being beneficial when selecting a paraprofessional but is not done at this time.

Qualifications: "Some sort of background"

Paraprofessionals assigned to one-on-one positions typically have students with very specific needs requiring specific skills. However, Lisa stated there were only minimal requirements when she was hired for her position, "They want you to have a diploma...when I was hired that was pretty much all. They asked about typing... if we do typing... it's nothing on the level of the Secretary."

Lisa referred to an optional certification process during the interviews. She explained the school district has considered adding paraprofessional certification as a prerequisite to hire and perhaps tying it to better benefits:

They are trying to make it [getting hired as a paraprofessional] a little bit harder. They're trying to get certified ones in there. It's not a requirement right now. They [administration] talked about...a tiered system. If you are certified...you'd get higher pay, higher perks, more insurance or something like that.

Considering the specific needs of students attending her school district, Lisa felt a high school diploma may not be enough. Her concern was directed towards students and paraprofessionals:

I think it would probably be a better idea if they [paraprofessionals] had...some sort of background about what they're working with...it makes it easier on the para and on the child if they [paras] know what they are doing.

The major qualification for a good paraprofessional in her opinion was, "Patience – number one, lots and lots and lots of patience."

These data reveal the only requirement to become a one-on-one paraprofessional is possession of a high school diploma. Lisa's experiences led her to suggest having child specific training before working directly with a student. This would benefit both the paraprofessional and the student.

Roles and Responsibilities: "A constant thing"

Lisa was responsible for a variety of activities throughout her day. She worked with a student who has autism and described her main role as support, "he's low functioning. He can't do a whole lot by himself without some means of an adult there to kind of interpret what he wants to do. I'm with him all day." This support involved both academic and behavioral assistance.

Academic Support

A large part of Lisa's day was providing academic support through direct teaching and modifying assignments. She stated her student was fully included in the general education classroom. Even though the certified teacher was present Lisa said, "In my case I am pretty much John's teacher. All the teacher in the room does is give me the

instructions pretty much and say what the assignment is and I have to find a way to teach him.” An example of the level of academic support provided by Lisa involved a math assignment on rounding. The teacher handed Lisa the assignment:

Today we were doing rounding and things like that so I was trying to figure out how I could do it so he would learn it and he got it which was cool but I’m like ...oh my gosh, I just taught him how to round.

A specific part of the student’s programming included in his IEP involved Discrete Trial Training (DTT). DTT is a direct teaching methodology used for children with autism based on the principals of applied behavior analysis. A discrete trial is a single cycle of a behaviorally-based instruction routine. A particular trial may be repeated several times in succession, several times a day, over several days (or even longer) until the skill is mastered. Lisa said she was primarily responsible for planning and implementing the DTT:

we’re in the classroom the whole time except when we do DTT for an hour a day. DTT is lot of repetition...based on his IEP. We do math, time, anything that’s on his IEP, that’s basically what the DTT is for. The special needs teacher comes once in awhile to do DTT with him just so she can get an idea of where he’s at but most of the time it’s just me and John. I’ll tell them [teachers] if I’ve changed any of the programs in the DTT book.

These data indicate the student receives the majority of his academic support from the one-on-one paraprofessional. This support includes direct instruction in academic concepts. Teacher involvement appears minimal.

Behavioral Support

Although Lisa is deeply involved with providing academic supports, when asked directly about what teachers and administrators expect of her she said, “I think mostly it’s just to keep the child under control.” She stated part of the job was dealing with “bad days.” Behaviors she would see ranged from verbal “outbursts” to “lying and kicking on the floor.” When behaviors like this occurred she would work to calm him without removing him from the general education classroom but has had to take him to the room used for DTT training on occasion. She does not seek or expect help from other staff members. As she explained:

Do they step in? No. Sometimes they’ll want to but...I’ve looked at their faces a few times when he’s had some outs and there’s fear on their faces so I’d rather that they weren’t anywhere near cause that would just accelerate the problem.

The one-on-one paraprofessional retains sole responsibility for managing any problematic or disruptive behaviors the student may exhibit in the classroom. Other staff members consider this her primary function. They do not intervene or assist her if the student is acting out. They sometimes appear afraid of the student and do not know how to help.

Assisting the Special Education Teacher

Occasionally Lisa reported being assigned to other duties when her student was absent, such as working with other students receiving special education services, “When my child was sick I subbed in another room...he was very high functioning.” Lisa would also cover the special needs teacher’s room in the event that teacher provided the DTT for John that day, “She’s tried lately to do DTT. When that happens then I go to her classroom and do her reading program for her.”

She hesitated before stating, “another one of my responsibilities is helping to write the IEP. She [special needs teacher] just brings that to me and says here – what should we do with these?” This was due to a lack of interaction between the special education teacher and the student, “We sit and talk about [the IEP] but she hadn’t had a lot of interaction with him. I’m actually very disappointed in the special ed teacher this year. She never comes into the gen ed teacher’s room.”

Lisa had minimal contact with the special education teacher and rarely had to cover the teacher’s classroom. She provided input for the student’s IEP primarily due to the limited nature of the teacher’s involvement with the student.

General Duties

Lisa had a specific one-on-one assignment yet said her written job description was very general. The same list of possible duties was given to all paraprofessionals. She said the written description does not really mesh with today’s expectations:

I remember my Mom used to be a paraprofessional and a lot of what they used to do are just duties like the lunchroom duty and recess duty. You never really spent time with the kids and now I think you are more with the kids than with just the duties.

She added all the paraprofessionals she knows are assigned at least one general duty. Lisa has one recess duty which she shares with another paraprofessional, “I always keep an eye on him [John] but I’m looking over the whole playground. There’s another para out there so there’s two of us. She keeps an eye on him too.”

Lisa has spent several years with the same student and said different teachers held different expectations as to what role she should have in the classroom. Some appear to

view her as extra help, especially with classroom behavior. She said it could be confusing at times:

when you first go into a new room and not know.... what they expect you to do, if they want you to help out with the kids. The teacher this year wants to be the behavioral one. Last year it went both ways whereas this year if I see something I don't get involved, I let her take care of it.

All the paraprofessionals at this school district are assigned at least one general duty along with other responsibilities. These data show general education teachers vary in their expectations of one-on-one paraprofessionals and will sometimes expect them to help with general classroom management.

The primary role of the one-on-one paraprofessional was to provide academic and behavioral support for her student in an inclusive general education classroom. This included direct teaching and behavior management in the event the student was disruptive. She made many decisions without guidance from the general or special education teacher. Other duties included helping the general education teacher when asked and supervising a recess.

Training: After the fact and "on my own"

In order to provide quality support for her student Lisa accessed available workshops and trainings conducted by a variety of entities, "Some have been [through the school]. Most have been through the AEA and there were a few that I just did on my own."

Lisa's training has addressed a wide range of topics. She was included in some trainings on general topics of interest for paraprofessionals but was unable to name any specific program. The school district provided training for all the paraprofessionals. Six

modules on different topics were presented, including one on behavior management. This training has not been repeated for any newly hired paraprofessionals. The majority of Lisa's training has been specific for autism:

The one I did with the AEA was a weeklong class. That one was with area people from schools, like teachers that were going to have an autistic child. I think I was probably one of the first paraprofessionals that had actually gone. A lot of it was about DTT and behavior.

Once placed with a student with autism Lisa was interested to learn about it, "I've taken quite a few classes on autism to learn more about autism and different [things] like DTT trials...how to do the books and things like that." Additional training was arranged by the parent of a child with autism and conducted in the parents' home with Area Education Agency representatives present. The paraprofessional described the training as, "It was sort of along the lines of LOVASS... they had a lot of hands on training but also different manipulative training and things like that. That was DTT also." The LOVASS method is an intense, comprehensive intervention conceptually based on operant conditioning and behavior modification using DTT. It is implemented by specially trained therapists, including parents, who work with a student an average of forty hours a week for three years in home, school and community environments (Bartlett, Weisenstein & Etscheidt, 2002).

Lisa had strong feelings about the importance of her training. She talked about what it was like when she first started and why she began seeking training even though she had to do it on her own. She knew she was not equipped to handle all that was expected of her, "there were a lot of things I wasn't sure of ...that's why I went in and got the different training...because I don't think I probably would still be there if I didn't

have them.” She discussed what the school district could do to prepare one-on-one paraprofessionals:

When I first started [the school] just said here you go. This is what you have to do, this child is who you work with. I think they [the school staff] need to give a background. If they’re [paraprofessionals] with a one-on-one child, have a background on that child.

The paraprofessional felt prepared for her job duties now, but acknowledged that it would “be tough” for others to step in without job specific training. She made her point by discussing her observations of substitutes:

I’ve seen subs come in and they’ve never been there and I can see them being very uncomfortable especially if they had to do any sort of DTT. I mean it’s all written up but if they had to do anything like that I think that would be very uncomfortable and very scary.

Lisa felt continued professional development would be beneficial for paraprofessionals. She said it is always good to have refreshers because “there’s little things you forget.” She was undecided whether all trainings should be mandatory:

I think if...it would depend on the situation I think. If it’s someone who doesn’t know much or just started then I think it should be mandatory. I think if they’ve been there awhile then they should have the option.

Although she sees the benefit of attending both general and job specific training she understands why some paraprofessionals do not take advantage of training opportunities. She said:

The money – a lot of it. I mean we take our time out to take the classes and not get paid for it plus even after we’ve already taken it there’s still no recognition of it. I mean, it’s our own benefit, which is great, but to not have any recognition from your bosses...it’s hard to deal with.

Training opportunities were limited and sporadic for paraprofessionals in this

school district. Lisa was provided no preparatory training prior to beginning the one-on-one position. This prompted her to seek training “on my own” about autism in order to better understand the student she worked with. Continual professional development was considered beneficial but was not consistently available. Some paraprofessionals may not take advantage of training opportunities unless they were provided monetary compensation. An additional issue was the lack of a trained pool of substitute paraprofessionals.

Supervision: Limited contact when “we run into each other”

One of the most important findings of this study involved the lack of direct supervision provided the one-on-one paraprofessional. She was placed with a student with significant needs, yet worked independently to implement his educational programming and IEP goals. There was also no clear chain of command identified.

Lisa works one-on-one in an inclusive general education setting. As such, she works with several teachers but felt the homeroom general education teacher was her direct supervisor. She described the supervision as minimal:

The teacher in the classroom will be there and she pretty much just hands me the work and says this is what needs to be done and that’s how we go about it. I mean she’s in the room - that’s pretty much what it is.

Lisa works with a student entitled to special education services so she also interacts with a special needs teacher. According to Lisa that teacher “never comes into the general education room.” She’ll observe DTT occasionally, which is done in a separate room. When asked how she communicates with the special needs teacher the paraprofessional simply said, “Honestly, if we run into each other, we’ll talk.” She added,

“We have one meeting day a month. We just kind of go over the general things. I think it’s about an hour long and it’s once a month.”

Minimal contact had been the typical supervisory experience for this paraprofessional throughout her tenure with this school district. She said she liked the minimal interaction now and is “comfortable” with the level of supervision.

Lisa considers the general education teacher to be her supervisor, but she receives yearly evaluations from the principal. She found this ironic and when asked how he gets his information for her evaluation she replied, “I have no idea.”

Although the principal assigned Lisa to her current position and conducts her evaluations, she doesn’t believe the building principal or other administrators really understand her position. She blames this unfamiliarity on a lack of involvement by the administrators:

They’ll never understand... [they need] to come and watch...to see what we actually do. Cause now they’ll come in and watch five minutes and it could be a really, really good day or a really, really bad day. They need to see more.

Lisa has had to work with a “new” direct supervisor each year as she has moved with the student through grade levels. She said the district has done little to prepare teachers to work with paraprofessionals:

No, there isn’t any [training] that I know of to help the supervision of the para. I know [the district] tried lately within the past year or two to get... if a para and an autistic child or a child with special needs is going to be in [a teacher’s] room [the district] tries to get them to do an autism class.

She put communication as the most important part of a good supervisory

relationship:

There has to be a lot of open communication. I think that's the big key. You need to be able to talk to them and feel comfortable about giving your opinions or asking questions. It's kind of hard throughout the year if you're not comfortable with that person or can't ask them questions. It makes it kind of scary.

Although Lisa identified communication as the most important component of a good supervisory relationship that aspect was found to be lacking in the supervision she was provided by the special education teacher. They spoke when they "ran into each other." She has become used to this type of supervision and is comfortable working independently. Administrators, including her building principal, are also minimally involved. The principal rarely observes Lisa when working with her student even though she does Lisa's evaluation.

Barriers: Not enough "planning time"

Lisa was responsible for providing academic, behavioral and social supports for her assigned student. She considered certain aspects of her working environment as barriers that interfered with her ability to meet those responsibilities. She placed lack of planning time high on her list of barriers. This included minimal meeting time with teachers as well as personal planning time:

I honestly think...being what I have to do with this program and changing the program that I need planning time. When I have to change anything I have to do it after school and I have to ask for permission to get time.

She stated many times she does her planning after school and does not write down the amount of time spent. She said it can be difficult to receive compensation, "If I can show them what I've done or tell them what I'm doing. [The district will pay] up to one-half hour."

Another identified barrier reported by Lisa was how teachers felt about having this student in the room as well as the presence of another adult, “there’s some teachers that feel uncomfortable having him in there plus having another adult.” She felt the teachers’ feelings about the student stemmed from being “afraid” because they have not been given enough information about the student and how to react to any behavioral problems. She could understand why the teachers might have a harder time working with extra adults, “They’re [teachers] around kids all day...they don’t have to deal with an adult.” She explained how teachers’ demeanor would change toward her during the school year, “once they see how we work together, and what I have to do to get him to do things...that I’m actually doing something when I’m there... I think they feel a little better.”

Identified barriers that have the potential to interfere with Lisa’s assigned responsibilities included no scheduled planning time during school hours and negative feelings by general education teachers towards elements of inclusion. Lisa reported some teachers have been “uncomfortable” with another adult in the room and “afraid” of the student. This situation often contributed to a rocky start but eased throughout the school year.

Job Satisfaction: “I love the kids”

The best part of Lisa's day was working with her student and seeing other children interact with him. She said, "I love working with him and I love the kids. Watching the kids work with him and talk with him, it's just, it's awesome."

She gets tremendous personal satisfaction helping her student make academic and social gains. She enjoys the teaching aspects of her position, "I just love...with him I feel like I'm, I am the teacher. I don't really feel I need anything else right now." She described how "wonderful" she feels when he gets a concept she's teaching him or when he initiates an interaction with a peer.

Lisa thoroughly enjoys helping and being around children. The enjoyment she derives from "teaching" her student and forming relationships with other students creates enough personal job satisfaction to override the any negative aspects of her position.

Negatives: "Respect I think...just another body and taking up their air and their space"

The lack of respect afforded paraprofessionals by teachers and administrators in this school district was a very significant dynamic identified during this study. It was a negative counter balance to Lisa's love of the kids. She stated she is happy with her job and comfortable with what she does but, "I'm not happy with the way they deal with it I guess. They don't give me any recognition for what I do."

She feels there are divisions between staff members based on job description and background. This has created an unfriendly atmosphere, "A lot of is respect, I think. A lot of the people that are there, they don't look at you as one of their peers. They look at you kind of as down because you haven't had your college."

She had strong words to describe how she felt teachers and administrators view paraprofessionals in general:

I am the one that's teaching him how to do 2 X 4... [they should] not look at me like I'm just a body in your room...they [administrators] look at us like we're just another body and taking up their air and their space."

She reported that the administrators are trying to make some changes. At a recent meeting with all the district's paraprofessionals the superintendent asked for "input on things that we wanted to change. If we had ideas on what we wanted." The paraprofessionals brought up training. The administrators' responses led Lisa to believe nothing would happen soon, "they're trying to get classes and things but [it] probably wouldn't happen within the next two to three years."

Other negatives Lisa identified included not feeling part of the staff and isolation from other adults. She explained, "In my position I don't have any adult conversation really. I'm always with the kids...my only break during the day is lunch." She added it would be "wonderful" if administrators added a break to her day because working as a one-on-one paraprofessional is a "constant thing." This isolation prohibits the school from developing a cohesive staff. She noted:

There's a lot of times that I feel uncomfortable if I do get a chance to go into the lounge where everybody's at because they look at me like – who are you and why are you here. I think it would make a big difference if there were some way we could talk to everyone. Let them know we're not strangers, we're really supposed to be there.

Lisa reported there is a relatively high turnover in paraprofessional staff. Some one-on-one paraprofessionals could not deal with the physical nature of their positions:

in the lower elementary, in the preschool they have a lot of hands on. They're constantly on the floor. Some couldn't handle the roughness on their body. I mean

you get kicked, you get hit, you get spit on and everything else. There's still times when you have to change somebody's pants and they're nine years old... they couldn't do it.

Some one-on-one paraprofessionals she knew had difficulty working with multiple adults in the classroom. Personality clashes and differences of opinions led to turnover:

working in a room with three or four other adults [teachers and paraprofessionals]... that does make it hard. Everybody kind of had their own opinion on behaviors and how it should be dealt with and different teaching techniques, different ways to go about teaching...they couldn't agree on how things were dealt with.

In Lisa's opinion, the problem with multiple adults in a room was a lack of clear supervision, "When you have that many people in a room you really don't have a clue who is in charge. Having it more structured would probably help."

Lisa also felt the school district did not compensate paraprofessionals appropriately for the work they do. She thought paraprofessionals who do more work directly with students should be paid more. She compared her position with that of another:

She was a teacher's aide...most of the time cutting out stuff, putting papers on tables and things like that. I don't think that's fair that she actually makes more than I do and I am with a child all day. I teach him his reading, his math, I teach him everything and I don't get recognition for that.

The identified negatives surrounding the position of paraprofessional vastly outweighed reasons for job satisfaction. Lack of respect and recognition was the pervasive theme. It is remarkable paraprofessionals would remain in a situation where teachers and administrators viewed them as "taking up their air and their space."

Paraprofessionals were seen as outside the educational community even though they assisted students with significant needs.

Advice: "Talk to the teacher"

Lisa reported many concerns with the employment of paraprofessionals and observed that aspects of the job can seem overwhelming. She had some simple advice for incoming personnel:

Just enjoy the kids. Just try to get to know them. You have to be able to be their friend but then again also be their teacher. Let them know that this is what to do and if they do something wonderful...praise them for that.

A one-on-one paraprofessional will typically work with one or more teacher and is often placed in a general education classroom. In order to have a successful year Lisa strongly advised talking with the teacher:

if you work in a classroom ...talk to your teacher. Find out what responsibilities they want you to do. Do they want you to help out with student behaviors or whatever. I think that's a big thing, to talk to the teacher cause that will get any uncomfortableness out of the way.

She discussed the possibility of a mentoring program, "I think the benefits would be they could see what it's supposed to look like. They could get advice and not be nervous around kids. I think it'd be great." Although she definitely felt a mentoring program would be beneficial she said the only problem would be "figuring the time to do it."

Ultimately, she wanted paraprofessionals to know their job is important and not to feel inferior to others. She wants paraprofessionals to be proud of themselves and their work and said, "Don't let anyone give you crap. Take the advice but also have your own insights too."

Communicate with the teacher was the main piece of advice reported. Lisa recommended paraprofessionals should initiate conversations with teachers in order to clarify expectations. Communication can prevent misunderstandings and allow paraprofessionals to express their ideas and insights with teachers. Additionally, Lisa said paraprofessionals should just really enjoy being around kids.

Effects of a One-on-One Paraprofessional: "His teacher and his friend"

Lisa felt working with the same student for several years has helped her better understand and interpret his needs. She believes they have developed a secure relationship:

I think he probably sees me as his teacher and his friend. I mean he feels comfortable with me and he knows that I will help him when he needs help. In some instances he is becoming more independent [but] there is still a lot of times he will come to me and I will get things set up for him.

She understands her presence can have an effect on the other people in the room. General education teachers are not always comfortable having an adult in the room and the other students can be unsure how to act towards the paraprofessional or her student. She feels eventually her presence helps facilitate social interactions:

At first there's a little of what's that big person sitting in the room but after they get to know me I think that warms them up so if he doesn't answer them they'll ask me "can I tell him hi" or something. I think it [my presence] helps.

Teachers typically become more accepting as they observe her working with the student:

I think it takes awhile to get used to it. They don't know why I need to be with him all the time. Once they see how it works and how he needs everything repeated to him they understand why I'm there.

She said teachers often ask her questions about the student's capabilities especially at the beginning of the year.

Significant problems arose when Lisa was absent and a substitute paraprofessional filled in. Substitutes had no any prior interactions with the student or any training. She said, "it was a random sub which was awful because they're scared of him...it's hard to explain [everything/DTT] in five minutes." The student would typically show an increase in problem behaviors. She realized these effects and has prepared a notebook for substitutes:

He'll test his limits. At first he'll throw behaviors out to see how far he can push them. I have a write up in the back of the book which explains all the different ways that you can prompt him to get him out of the behavior and calm him down.

Lisa reported the school district had addressed this situation for her particular student in order to provide more consistency. This has proved beneficial for her student and there has been a marked decrease in behavior problems:

This year we've actually made it a lot better. This year, I think I'm the only one they've done that for, there is a lady who did summer school with him. She was hired at this school so when I'm gone she takes my position and they get a sub for her.

Lisa saw herself as her student's "teacher and friend" and felt she had a positive impact. She facilitated interactions between her student, teachers and classmates. Her student demonstrated transition difficulties when substitute paraprofessionals were needed but the district alleviated this problem by employing a person he was already familiar with.

Summary

Most of the information collected during this study echoed previous research. The one-on-one paraprofessional was unaware of how school personnel determined if a student required one-on-one assistance. Hiring of new personnel was done by administrators. Paraprofessionals were only required to have a high school diploma and training opportunities for paraprofessionals were limited. All training occurred after being hired. Roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined. The results exposed significant problems in the areas of supervision and the treatment of paraprofessionals. The one-on-one paraprofessional took primary responsibility for the student's academic, behavioral and social progress with very limited guidance from a supervising teacher. The school climate was described as unwelcoming and unsupportive to paraprofessionals. These particular findings regarding supervision and school climate may be specific to this school district however there are similar reports in the research literature.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are consistent with the existing literature that explores roles, responsibilities, supervision, training, qualifications and perceptions of paraprofessionals. Corroborating information was found for each theme that emerged throughout the analysis of the data.

Determination of Need

Paraprofessionals have an increased presence in schools assisting teachers with the education of students with disabilities (Giangreco et al., 1999). The services they provide are valuable and in some cases their support has been crucial for maintaining students with intensive needs in a general education environment. However, it can be challenging to determine when paraprofessional support is appropriate and necessary. This determination cannot be based on teacher expectations or parental wishes (Marks et al., 1999; Werts et al., 2004). When developing an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), the IEP team must consider whether the services of a paraprofessional are necessary to meet the educational needs of a student and whether the assistance of a paraprofessional will provide the student with academic or non-academic benefit (Giangreco et al., 1999; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Mueller & Murphy, 2001). The primary objective for IEP teams is to identify the reasons why paraprofessional supports may be necessary to address a student's needs.

The one-on-one paraprofessional interviewed had been with the same student for several years and was unaware of how the need for one-on-one support was first

determined or if any defined procedure was being used to evaluate the continued need for her services. She felt keeping the student engaged or “in” the class, both mentally and physically, was probably the main criterion for her position. She said areas to consider were student behaviors, whether the student had to be removed from the classroom for academic or behavioral reasons, and how the student learns.

The IEP team should focus on needs, not student characteristics, to aid in locating a match between the student needs and the person(s) that should provide services to meet those needs (Mueller & Murphy, 2001). The student’s needs and goals ultimately drive the determination of the type of paraprofessional assistance necessary. Consideration must be given to the classroom environment when planning the where, when and how of paraprofessional support (Mueller & Murphy, 2001). It should be determined if the student requires assistance in all or some environments, whether this support needs to be one-on-one assistance, and if it is required frequently or intermittently throughout the day. The “how” of paraprofessional support is another important determination since the nature of the assistance may impact the student’s educational program.

The IEP team is required to discuss and consider a variety of supplemental aids and services to support a child’s education in the least restrictive environment (Greer v Rome City School District, 1992). In order to do this, the team must expand the discussion to include all aspects of the school environment. Giangreco et al. (1999) have offered criteria to guide an IEP team’s collaborative decision-making process that allow for the consideration of alternative methods of providing support. These criteria provide a framework school districts could use to ensure they examine multiple areas affecting the

student when addressing the possible need for supports. A 4-step approach to determine supplemental aids and services was offered by Etscheidt and Bartlett (1999), which revolved around several ecological dimensions. The team needs to gather data in the instructional (e.g., learning structures, assistive technology), physical (e.g., room arrangement, mobility plans), social-behavioral (e.g., peer support, class-wide approaches) and collaborative dimensions (e.g., co-teaching, teacher training). This information may shed light on other types of available services that could and should be tried before suggesting a need for a one-on-one paraprofessional. Requiring the IEP team to look closely at alternative supports to address the educational needs of students with disabilities will help ensure that many options, including paraprofessional support, are considered to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003).

Qualifications and Selection

Once the recommendation has been made for one-on-one paraprofessional support, districts must determine how best to fill that position. Judicial and administrative decisions suggest that if there are required credentials they should be specified on the IEP (Gerber Union Elementary School District, 1997; Sioux City Community School District & Western Hills Areas Education Agency, 2003). Districts, however, would have the discretion to assign personnel as they wish provided there is no negative impact on the child's welfare or interference with the child's ability to receive a FAPE (Bangor School Department, 2003; Los Angeles Unified School District, 1998).

This study's findings echo what has been reported in the literature regarding the selection process and required qualifications of paraprofessionals. The paraprofessional stated she only had to have a high school diploma and was asked about some minimal typing skills during her initial interview. Pickett et al. (2003) points out that the only common requirement for employment as a paraprofessional throughout the United States is a high school diploma or GED. Several states have existing certification or licensure programs; however these programs are not required for employment and are non-binding for individual local education agencies (LEA). This school district's administration has considered making prior certification a requirement of employment but since it is not required by their state Department of Education the school district has not implemented that change. The state does recommend that school districts encourage their paraprofessionals to work through the voluntary certification program offered through the Board of Educational Examiners (see Appendix C).

The IDEIA includes language that requires states to establish standards to ensure personnel are adequately prepared and trained to provide special education and related services [20 U.S.C. & 1413(a)(3)] but policy and practices are left up to the individual states. The decision to refrain from requiring paraprofessionals to meet qualifications similar to those stated in Title 1, (see Appendix D) is based on the concern that those restrictions have created difficulty for some LEAs in the recruitment and retainment of qualified service providers (Silverstein, 2005). Although cognizant of this difficulty, the conference report of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (Silverstein, 2005) includes wording urging state and local education agencies to consult with the disability

community and professional organizations to determine appropriate qualifications for service providers to ensure that students with disabilities receive services described in their IEPs.

The selection process described by this paraprofessional was not unusual. The employment of personnel falls under the scope of administrative functions and the building principal interviewed her when she was initially hired. The principal also made the decision to reassign her to the one-on-one position. The special education teacher did have some input prior to the reassignment. She provided her opinions after observing the paraprofessional working with other students. Special education teachers have reported they were not often included in the selection or hiring of paraprofessionals (French, 2001). Administrators make these decisions but teacher involvement may be a positive step in improving teacher supervision of paraprofessionals. Teacher involvement may aid in the process of defining student or classroom duties, clarifying responsibilities and guiding interaction between paraprofessionals and parents (Chopra & French, 2004). Although it is not a legal requirement to include teachers in the selection process, it would seem to make sense, as they will be the persons responsible for supervising the paraprofessionals (French, 2001).

The paraprofessional in this study felt including parents during selection could help parents feel more welcome to observe the classroom. She said parents really needed to see what went on in the classroom so they could experience the “perks” of watching their child gain skills as well as gain a greater understanding of the daily interactions between the child and the paraprofessional. Trautman (2004) also suggested that all team

members who will work with the paraprofessional, including the parents of the child, should be present during interviews. Involving parents in the selection process may enhance the quality of parent-professional interactions and school-home collaboration. The value of teacher-parent collaborations has been well-documented (Pugach & Johnson, 1995; Springate & Stegeline, 1999; Wheeler & Richey, 2005) and teacher-parent consensus on the selection of the paraprofessional may increase the effectiveness of the provided services.

Roles and Responsibilities

Paraprofessional roles have changed considerably over time. Originally involved primarily in clerical, monitoring (e.g. cafeteria, playground) and routine tasks (e.g. attendance, correcting papers) paraprofessionals are now typically involved in the provision of direct instruction to students with disabilities (Carroll, 2001; French, 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). This is true at the district in this study as well. The paraprofessional described how she and other paraprofessionals have much more student contact now compared to when her mother was a paraprofessional. Roles and responsibilities differ by position but all the paraprofessionals receive the same general job description regardless of differentiated expectations of the various positions. Riggs (2001) and Trautman (2004) both discuss how paraprofessionals are rarely provided clear and accurate job descriptions. This can cause confusion for the educational staff and also contribute to paraprofessionals being assigned to inappropriate duties.

The changes in role expectations have been in response to a variety of factors ranging from parental demands and impatience for local school districts to provide

students with a free and appropriate education (FAPE) (Marks et al., 1999) to combinations of increased services and teacher shortages (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Pickett et al., 2003). Decisions concerning which duties are provided by paraprofessionals need to be guided by legal and ethical standards in conjunction with the preferences of the student, parent, teacher and paraprofessional (Ashbaker & Morgan, 1999; French, 1999).

The paraprofessional described how she was solely responsible for making many decisions regarding academic instruction, making changes to the DTT program, assignment modifications and behavior management. Researchers have clarified that a paraprofessional's role is to support a student's educational program but not to assume full or independent responsibility for instructional decisions to meet the student's IEP (French, 1999; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Marks et al., 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Yet, even with these professional recommendations, reports of paraprofessionals assigned responsibilities such as making adaptations and/or modification to learning materials and then providing direct instruction have been documented (Downing et al., 2000; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Marks et al., 1999; Pickett et al., 2003; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Many times the paraprofessionals said they needed to make on-the-spot decisions to keep the class time moving smoothly and prevent disruptions for the student or teacher. Paraprofessionals stated that they felt they did what was needed to get through the school day and to help the student be as independent as possible (Downing et al., 2000; Marks et al., 1999).

The paraprofessional had been delegated major academic and behavioral management duties yet she did not report participating in IEP meetings. An IEP team may include individuals with knowledge or special expertise about a child if the parent or school feel it would be appropriate (Bartlett et al., 2002). This paraprofessional seems to fit that description. She did provide insights and recommendations to the special education teacher when the teacher was writing the student's IEP. This information would later be shared at IEP meetings. Other paraprofessionals have also reported contributing to IEP meetings by providing information to other IEP team members (Downing et al., 2000).

A support-only role has been affirmed by many professional organizations. For example, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1999) published a position paper specifically addressing the proper delegation of responsibilities for paraprofessionals that serve students with learning disabilities. The document clearly specified that the decision to assign duties to a paraprofessional may be made only by qualified professionals who have carefully examined options and determined that the quality of service provided the student would not be compromised. The legal and ethical responsibility for all services remained with the qualified teacher regardless of who actually provided the service. The position paper lists activities which may not be assigned to a paraprofessional including: 1) assuming sole responsibility for instruction or provision of services, 2) serving as a substitute for the qualified professional in meetings, documents, or communications 3) writing or modifying instructional plans, and 4) disclosing educational, clinical, or confidential information unless designated by the

qualified professional. Pickett et al. (2003) reviewed other professional guidelines and research and added the following to the list of duties reserved for qualified teachers: diagnosing the learner's needs, planning individualized/personalized programs, aligning curriculum with instructional strategies, planning lessons, and assessing learning outcomes.

Along with academic/instructional duties, paraprofessionals also reported they often assumed primary responsibility for providing behavioral support for assigned students in an inclusive general education setting (Marks et al., 1999). Paraprofessionals accepted this responsibility as they strove to provide a positive inclusion experience for both the student and general education teacher. In these situations, paraprofessionals reported an assumed responsibility to prevent classroom disruptions. They believed their job performance and capabilities would be judged by how successful they were at preventing disruptions. The statements of the one-on-one paraprofessional in this study echoed those in the study by Marks et al. (1999). She made it very clear that behavior management was her primary role and that the school staff expected her to keep the child under control. She did this on her own. Seldom, if ever, did another adult assist her and in many ways she preferred it that way. She stated other staff did not understand or know how to help the student and sometimes made things worse.

This study corroborates past research concerning proper roles and responsibilities for paraprofessionals and clearly demonstrates that this one-on-one paraprofessional engages in duties considered outside the scope of the position. She stated having the primary responsibility for her student's educational program in both academic and

behavioral domains. She provided direct teaching for new concepts and interpreted the student's needs for the teacher and peers. This situation directly ties with concerns regarding teacher involvement and student dependence when a one-on-one paraprofessional is involved. At issue is whether the student is receiving a quality education and if the school district is requiring too much of the paraprofessionals. Questions concerning the ethics of assigning unqualified paraprofessionals certain responsibilities have been raised (French, 1999) as well as questions concerning the quality of education students with special needs are receiving (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Giangreco et al. (1999) warns that the inappropriate assignment of paraprofessionals to responsibilities normally reserved for certified teachers "may perpetuate a double standard whereby students without disabilities are taught by certified teachers and students with significant disabilities are taught by paraprofessionals" (p.283).

Supervision

The one-on-one paraprofessional in this study operated with a great deal of autonomy as she fulfilled her day-to-day responsibilities described under roles and responsibilities. She rarely met with the special education teacher or was observed by administrators. She claimed her immediate supervisor was the student's general education teacher yet this teacher did not seem to be in charge of the student's educational program. The special education teacher was responsible for implementing the student's IEP but according to the data she had minimal involvement. This situation is not uncommon according to past research.

There have been many instances where paraprofessionals reported making individual decisions concerning the educational programs of student's with severe to moderate disabilities (Downing et al. 2000; Marks et al., 1999). The paraprofessionals expressed reservations about being responsible for decisions in areas normally reserved for certified, qualified teachers. Part of the problem can be attributed to the absence of teacher training or teacher experience in supervising a paraprofessional (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 1999; French, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). This lack of training, combined with teacher reports of feeling uncomfortable telling adults what to do, may result in a reluctance to supervise paraprofessionals (French, 1999). Special education teachers indicated they expected to supervise paraprofessionals but were not provided pre-service training at either the university or college level or by their individual school districts (French, 2001; Wallace Shin, Bartholomay & Stahl, 2001). This study found that the one-on-one paraprofessional was unaware of any supervisory training available for teachers in her school district.

Possibly the largest barrier to the proper supervision of paraprofessionals is time constraints. The one-on-one paraprofessional stated she met with the special education teacher once a month for a scheduled meeting but otherwise they would talk only if they happened to see each other in the hallway. This situation is representative of previous findings. Paraprofessionals and teachers have reported that direct planning time is often a matter of creating time whenever possible, often accomplished in 10-15 minutes increments before or after school, over lunch or they touch base as best they can throughout the day (Downing et al. 2000; French, 2001). Teachers and paraprofessionals

were found to be uncomfortable with this lack of direct supervision (French, 2001; Giangreco et al, 2001; Riggs, 2001; Trautman, 2004). Typically school schedules do not have built-in planning or meeting times for teachers and paraprofessionals and school districts' existing policies and procedures may discourage or prevent paraprofessionals from staying outside their assigned hours (French, 2001; Riggs, 2001). In a survey of teacher supervision practice, French (2001) found the majority of teachers did not plan for the paraprofessional. Those that did relayed their plans orally. The plans did not include student goals, purpose of activities or specifications on procedures to document student progress. The author concluded these practices would be limiting in ensuring a student's academic welfare.

Working with multiple teachers yet being evaluated by an administrator is another theme common to previous research. Paraprofessionals often work with multiple teachers, both general and special education, and are typically evaluated by a building or district administrator. This paraprofessional was not clear how the principal was able to evaluate her because of a paucity of classroom observation time by the principal. She felt the general education teacher was her direct supervisor and that she should actually do the evaluation. This lack of clarity surrounding the proper administrative chain of command for paraprofessionals (Riggs & Mueller, 2001) could reduce the efficacy of paraprofessional supervision. Some paraprofessionals have reported being unclear as to whom they are ultimately accountable (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Downing et al. (2000) found that some paraprofessionals have even received conflicting directives from general

and special education teachers, causing confusion and tension. Clearly, delineating the chain of command would help to alleviate confusion over supervisory roles.

Training

Paraprofessionals have frequently expressed the need for training, yet the primary training method in most states is on-the-job (Carroll, 2001). Those working in inclusive settings reported spending the majority of their time providing direct instruction to students without adequate training themselves (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). The opinions of this one-on-one paraprofessional regarding training needs and opportunities fall right in step with what has been reported by previous researchers. The fact that she was provided no pre-service training parallels research by Riggs & Mueller (2001). This paraprofessional has sought training to provide information specific to her student's disability as well as general training including behavior management. Paraprofessionals have identified high need areas for training including, knowledge of specific disabilities, behavior management, communication, learning styles and issues in inclusion (Riggs, 2001). Those working in early intervention and early childhood special education also listed child development, family involvement and best service delivery practices (Killoran, Templeman, Peters & Udell, 2001).

Training opportunities have not reflected the fact that paraprofessional roles have changed and that they have become more directly involved with a student's education. Legislation has spoken to the need for state and local districts to provide on-going opportunities for paraprofessional training. For example, Goals 2000, the Educate America Act (1994), the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary

Education Act (ESEA) which expanded Title 1, the Bilingual Education Act and the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) each address paraprofessional training (Likens, 2003; Pickett et al., 2003; Wallace et al., 2001). IDEA was the first legislation to proactively recognize the need to prepare paraeducators to effectively provide special education services as well as prepare teachers for supervisory roles (Drecktrah, 2000; Likins, 2003; Trautman, 2004; Wallace et al. 2001). The No Child Left Behind Act (2001) specifically addressed training and qualifications required for paraprofessionals involved with Title 1 programs but did not extend this to all paraprofessionals assigned to work with students with disabilities (Likins, 2003; Pickett et al., 2003). Pickett et al. (2003) expressed concern that training programs would be too general and would not include those paraprofessionals exempt from the federal guidelines.

Additional areas requiring training will surely develop in tandem with innovations and changes in education. If an IEP team determines a student requires the support of a one-on-one paraprofessional that person may need very specific training. One example is the increased use of assistive technology (Zabala, Blunt, Carl, Davis et. al., 2000).

Paraprofessionals will need training for assistive devices such as voice synthesizers and touch-sensitive keyboards (Wadsworth & Knight, 1996). School districts will need to address any child-specific training need regarding health procedures (e.g. colostomy/ileostomy care) to assure quality of care (Lehr & Green, 2002). Parents are often considered the “experts” in their child’s health care and are the sole trainers of

school personnel. However, medical personnel “competent in training others” should be involved in all training and monitoring processes (Lehr & Green, 2002).

This study corroborates and adds to the previous research regarding training opportunities for paraprofessionals. The one-on-one paraprofessional was initially hired with no additional training that would help her work in an educational setting with students with disabilities. She initially sought some training on her own that was specific to the student’s disability. Her school district has provided some general training for all paraprofessionals but does not do this on a continuing basis so new paraprofessionals do not necessarily have the same training as others. Some of the training has been provided through the AEA that provides support to this school. The spotty nature of her training added to the other concerns of supervision, proper roles and responsibility and qualifications continue to raise questions concerning what school districts should do to ensure students with special needs are receiving FAPE.

Barriers and Negatives

Although the paraprofessional identified several negative aspects of working in her school district she did not feel any of them prevented her from fulfilling her job duties. One barrier was having no designated planning time for the one-on-one paraprofessional to prepare for each day. She felt having some planning time would definitely make her job go smoother. Schools do not typically include planning time for paraprofessionals (French 2001; Riggs, 2001). This was the case at this school district. The one-on-one paraprofessional was not encouraged to stay past her normal hours and if she could prove the need for the extra time, compensation was limited to one-half hour.

A second potential barrier consisted of negative feelings from some general education teachers towards the student and/or having another adult in the room. The paraprofessional explained the negativity of teachers seemed to stem from lack of information about the nature of the student's disability, misconceptions about the student, and/or being unsure of what to expect from the student or the one-on-one paraprofessional. Previous studies have also reported negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion (Downing et al., 2000; Marks et al., 1999). Paraprofessionals in the study by Marks et al. (1999) reported problems when teachers based opinions on a student's reputation rather than personal experience. Students that exhibit negative, disruptive behaviors become high profile and produce feelings of unease in teachers.

Negative feelings towards the presence of another adult also stems from a lack of preparation. Although general education teachers typically welcome the help they also report being unprepared to work with and supervise a paraprofessional (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 1999; Giangreco, 2003; Wallace et al., 2001). Although not a problem for the one-on-one paraprofessional interviewed for this study, she described a situation in her school district where there were multiple adults in one room and no clearly defined supervisor or role definitions. This led to conflicts between the adults and ultimately some of the paraprofessionals left the job because they claimed the situation was too stressful. The presence of multiple adults magnifies any problems of communication or supervision. Carroll (2001) reported both teachers and paraprofessionals should have or learn skills important to aid in teaming including effective communication skills and conflict management. Wallace et al. (2001) suggested general education teachers should

receive supervisory training as it would increase their understanding of how the teacher/paraprofessional relationship should work.

The major complaint from this paraprofessional was the lack of respect given her by teachers and administrators. Paraprofessionals take pride in their work with students and in other capacities within the school. They feel they deserve respect from teachers and administrators yet lack of respect is the most common complaint found in the research literature (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Giangreco et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). Some paraprofessionals have reported being told that anyone off the street could do their jobs (Wallace et al., 2001). The paraprofessional felt teachers looked down on her and other paraprofessionals because they had not gone to college. She felt teachers did not consider the paraprofessionals as peers primarily because of these educational differences. A paraprofessional in the Riggs and Mueller (2001) study reported a similar situation and equated the teachers' attitude to "intellectual snobbery" (p. 59).

The paraprofessional in this study described an unwelcoming atmosphere at her school for paraprofessionals. She was uncomfortable in the teachers lounge and felt many teachers did not even know who the paraprofessionals were. She always felt a need to explain who she was and justify her presence. Riggs & Mueller (2001) also found paraprofessionals did not feel a part of their school's educational community. Teachers considered paraprofessionals as second class, they were not involved in school meetings, and they were not provided break time. The paraprofessional in this study said she had no breaks except lunch and felt isolated because she had no adult conversations during the

day. Other paraprofessionals have described similar situations of isolation and loneliness and stated the importance of communication to remedy this (Marks et al. 1999).

As job expectations have changed so have paraprofessional's opinions about adequate monetary compensation. Many paraprofessionals feel they do teachers work. However, pay scales remain low. Giangreco et al. (2001) raised questions regarding the fairness of assigning paraprofessionals to duties normally reserved for teachers while paying them less than a livable wage. Compensation is not an easy topic as there is much more than fairness at stake. School boards have to balance many factors such as building maintenance costs and improving educational quality while responding to pressures to keep costs in check (Giangreco et al., 2001). They reported that some schools use a differentiated pay scale with those paraprofessionals who provide personal care for students receiving higher pay than entry level paraprofessionals. Differential pay was a concern for this study's paraprofessional. She felt one-on-one paraprofessionals deserved higher pay because they do so much teaching. Her school district has been considering a tiered pay scale to allow higher pay for those that choose to go through the certification process.

There are many other ways to show appreciation to an employee as a sign of respect for a job well done. Giangreco et al., (2001) reported administrators and teachers frequently offer positive comments and memos to show appreciation of their work. Paraprofessionals had mixed feelings about this. They felt messages were only meaningful if they came from someone who was knowledgeable about their work. In terms of this study, the one-on-one paraprofessional primarily had contact with the

general education teacher. The principal rarely observed which, in the paraprofessional's opinion, diminished the value of her evaluation. She was unsure how the principal could say anything about the work she did. Paraprofessionals, including the one in this study, hope a wider range of staff and other stakeholders (school board, parents) will eventually understand and value their contributions within the educational system. (Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

Job Satisfaction

This one-on-one paraprofessional definitely felt the best aspects of her job were the relationships she had with her student and other children. She also took pride in the teaching she did and great satisfaction from her student's successes. The nature of a one-on-one position lends itself to the development of close relationships with students. These relationships lead paraprofessionals to feel deeply rewarded as the students they work with gain skills (Marks et al. 1999). Positive relationships with students and staff were the main reasons paraprofessionals in previous studies stayed on the job (Giangreco et al., 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Giangreco et al. (2001) reported the paraprofessionals also had to have other sources of income, such as spousal income, in order to remain.

Effects of a One-on-One Paraprofessional

The one-on-one paraprofessional said she is with the student all day and had been with him for five years. She described their relationship as "comfortable." The paraprofessional described how teachers and students come to her with questions about the student and often speak to her before addressing him. She has most of the

responsibility of teaching the student and managing his behavior. This close relationship has resulted in problems when substitutes have had to fill in for her.

Several studies have shown that one-on-one assistance can result in less teacher initiated interactions and reduced teacher engagement compared to program-based paraprofessional delivery (Freschi, 1999; Giangreco et al., 2001; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Marks et al., 1999). Many, if not most, general educators welcome the assistance of a paraprofessional and view the provided support as essential for the student's success (Marks et al., 1999). However, teachers often assume the paraprofessional knows the student best and is the expert concerning the student's needs. This allows one-on-one paraprofessionals to take primary responsibility to meet a child's educational needs. It becomes important for the paraprofessional to minimize or prevent any disruptions the student may create in the classroom. This over-reliance on the paraprofessional can cause a reduction in teacher engagement and contribute to other problems such as separation from classmates, limited peer interactions and create an over-dependence on adults (Giangreco et al. 1997).

In another study, Giangreco et al. (1999) provided indicators to determine when paraprofessionals have been delegated too much responsibility such as the teacher is less familiar with the student than the paraprofessional, the teacher defers to the paraprofessional for instructional, curricular and management decisions, the paraprofessional may have a better developed relationship with the student's parents than the teacher, and the absence of the paraprofessional creates a crisis since other personnel are unfamiliar and unable to assist the student. This last indicator speaks directly to the

problems the student has when required to work with a substitute paraprofessional. The school district addressed this problem by hiring a person who worked with the student in the summers. If the one-on-one paraprofessional for the student is absent, this new paraprofessional takes her place and a substitute hired for her.

IEP teams should address roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals to ensure alignment between the paraprofessional's skills, the needs of the student and the roles of the team members (Giangreco et al., 2001). The position of a one-on-one paraprofessional should be considered as temporary while supporting a student towards a goal of independence (Freschi, 1999). Freschi suggests several guidelines that could help minimize some of the potentially negative aspects of providing one-on-on paraprofessional support. These include providing appropriate training in the skill or skill areas the paraprofessional will need to assist in, having the paraprofessional work with other students which could help with fading the paraprofessional support, and having the teacher and paraprofessional switch roles on occasion. This could increase teacher engagement with the student and allow the teacher to better design instructional strategies as well as reduce the student's dependence on the one-on-one paraprofessional. Good communication, supervision and clarity in role definitions and expectations can also result in increased teacher engagement with students and a reduced risk of a breach in legal or ethical conduct regarding program delivery (French, 1999; French, 2001; National Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1999).

Advice

The first thing this paraprofessional advised was to get to know and enjoy the children. This is the best part of the job and makes it a lot of fun. This advice was tied to the same areas she cited for achieving job satisfaction.

Communicating with teachers in order to determine their expectations was another important part of the advice this paraprofessional gave others. She felt this was key to having a successful year. Good communication was discussed previously as a means to prevent or solve other problems arising from areas such as training, supervision, and roles and responsibilities (Carroll, 2001; Drecktrah, 2000; French, 1999; Wallace et al., 2001).

She also wanted other paraprofessionals to stand up for themselves and realize their insights and input are important. This was especially important to her as a response to the lack of respect shown to paraprofessionals by teachers and administrators in her school district. Multiple researchers have discussed the importance of paraprofessional input regarding the students they work with (Carroll, 2001; Downing et al., 2000; French, 2001; Marks et al., 1999; Wadsworth & Knight, 1996). They do work closely with these students and should be considered part of the collaborative team working in a student's best interests (Downing et al., 2000; Giangreco et al., 2001; Wadsworth & Knight, 1996).

She also repeated her recommendation that administrators become more involved in the classrooms. She felt that until the administrators conducted more observations they would not really understand what a one-on-one paraprofessional does on a day to day basis.

Summary

All eleven themes identified in this study were supported by existing empirical literature. Many of the concerns discussed by previous researchers surrounding roles and responsibilities, effects of one-on-one paraprofessionals, supervision, training, job satisfaction and issues of respect were echoed in the comments of the paraprofessional during the interviews. Data indicated few suggestions by previous researchers have been taken under consideration and/or put into place at this school district.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study indicate that the issues surrounding the employment of one-on-one paraprofessionals are still in a state of flux. Currently, research literature acknowledges the valuable support paraprofessionals provide but raises many concerns regarding issues surrounding their employment (Chopra & French, 2004; French, 1999; Freschi, 1999; Giangreco et al., 1999; Mueller & Murphy, 2001; Trautman, 2004; Wallace et al., 2001). Studies addressing determination of the need for a paraprofessional, selection and training, qualifications, roles and responsibilities and supervision have shown there are no consistent methods or policies between states or school districts. Surveys of paraprofessionals and teachers have shown that both groups request more guidelines and training in order to reduce confusion and to better meet student needs.

The situation described at this school district indicates some students with special needs are being taught by paraprofessionals. Even though they are given this huge responsibility they are not regarded with respect from teachers and administrators. Supervision is minimal and training opportunities sporadic. This was the opinion of one paraprofessional, but she had several years experience with this district. Her description of job responsibilities and working conditions do not mesh with researchers' recommendations for best practice. It would appear the quality of education received by students with disabilities could be at risk in this school district.

Recommendations for Practice

1. School districts should adopt a method of systematically examining whether a student needs supplemental aids and services including one-on-one paraprofessional support. Data should be collected in several areas including instructional, physical, social-behavioral and collaborative (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999). The process may shed light on existing or alternative supports available and will help ensure that paraprofessional assignment is one of several options considered to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. This process should include clearly defining the roles, responsibilities and expectations of the paraprofessional as well as all the service providers that will be engaged with the child. Benefits of this process would include a clearer sense of when one-on-one paraprofessional supports are truly required and a reduction in incidences of assigning a one-on-one paraprofessional duties that are legally or ethically questionable.

2. Administrators should consider a team approach to the selection of a one-on-one paraprofessional. The team should include the principal, special education teacher responsible for the student's IEP, the general education teacher, especially if the student is fully included in this person's classroom, and the parent(s) of the child. Although it is not a legal requirement to include teachers in the selection process they will be the persons responsible for day-to-day supervision of the paraprofessional. Involving them in the process may aid in defining job expectations prior to the initial hire. Also, the team would be able to clarify supervisory duties for each member of the team and establish the proper chain of command for the paraprofessional. Parental involvement may enhance

the quality of parent-teacher interactions. This could have beneficial effects on service delivery and improve home-school communication and collaboration.

3. Accurate, descriptive, and specific job descriptions should be created and provided to all paraprofessionals. There should not be one general description for all since there is so much differentiation between positions. This is not to say each individual's job description will be different from everyone else's. Descriptions could be developed according to area of assignments such as media, health, general education, special education. One-on-one paraprofessionals should be provided a description that will be specific to their position and student.

4. School districts should consider professional development for general and/or special education teachers who will be supervising paraprofessionals. This would increase their understanding of how the teacher/paraprofessional relationship should work. Targeted skill areas should include teaming, collaboration and communication skills, modeling for paraprofessionals, planning and scheduling, evaluation skills, and methodology for teaching behavior management skills. In-house staff or AEA personnel should be able to provide materials and conduct any in-services. This training could be provided on a group or individual basis.

5. Provide inservices for teachers and paraprofessionals together to clarify appropriate roles and responsibilities. This would allow for discussion and would help to ensure all staff understand what they legally can and cannot do. Including the paraprofessionals could also promote a measure of team building and promote membership in the educational community of the school.

6. School districts are strongly encouraged to provide paraprofessionals' continuing professional development opportunities. This will allow paraprofessionals to gain skills and feel more included as staff members. Ideally, one-on-one paraprofessionals should have some pre-service training specific to the needs of the student they will be working with. This need for preservice training was clearly expressed by the responses of the one-on-one paraprofessional and has been consistently discussed in research literature. Another good practice would be to hire a substitute for the special education teacher for at least one day and have the paraprofessional shadow the teacher to observe how the teacher interacts with the student. The teacher could model how she expects the paraprofessional to support the student and would be able to answer many questions the paraprofessional may have. This practice could also promote a team atmosphere for the teacher and paraprofessional.

7. This school district should review the schedule and identify daily meeting times for each one-on-one paraprofessional and their supervising teacher. The special education teacher is ultimately responsible for a student's educational program and increasing the amount of supervision would ensure IEP goals and other services are properly implemented. This would also allow paraprofessionals to express concerns or ask questions. This communication could encourage more of a team mindset and help the paraprofessionals feel like an active partner in helping to meet a student's educational needs.

8. Administrators attitudes also affect the working conditions of paraprofessionals. If they see paraprofessionals as important staff members they could

influence others to feel the same. They could work to improve staff cohesion and camaraderie and promote better supervision and teamwork. Perhaps administrators should also be required to take some sort of training to remind them of the importance of all the positions within a school system.

Recommendations for Future Research

This was one small case study involving the opinions of a single one-on-one paraprofessional. Although her experiences are corroborated by past research more information specific to one-on-one paraprofessionals would be useful. Possible avenues to explore include:

1. Interview one-on-one paraprofessionals who work in other settings. This paraprofessional worked in elementary. Compare her experiences with those in middle and/or high school. She also has had several years experience. It would be interesting to talk with a first year one-on-one paraprofessional.
2. Include several school districts in order to compare school policies and practices regarding one-on-one paraprofessionals. Perhaps compare different types of districts; large, small, urban, rural.
3. Conduct research to determine parental views and opinions about the paraprofessionals that work with their children. It could explore the amount and type of parental input sought by IEP teams when determining the need for and the selection of a one-on-one paraprofessional.
4. Research specific to the school district in this study could involve having someone conduct a climate assessment to determine teacher and administrator attitudes

towards paraprofessionals. The situation presented during this study was unwelcoming and disrespectful. The paraprofessional clearly stated there were respect problems from teacher and administrators. For this reason it seems important to have someone outside the school district examine this issue.

5. Return to this school district in a few years for a comparison study to see if there have been any changes regarding the employment and treatment of the paraprofessionals. It would be interesting to see if the highly qualified teacher requirements of NCLB have any effects of the roles and responsibilities assigned to the paraprofessionals.

6. The difficulty in recruiting research participants for this study appeared to be tied to the school climate. The research subject reported other paraprofessionals were wary of the assurances of confidentiality and concerned of negative repercussions in the workplace. This seemed to indicate the paraprofessionals were not secure in their positions and lacked a supportive working environment. Future researchers of paraprofessional issues will need to be sensitive to paraprofessional perceptions of school climate and their desire for confidentiality. Recruitment methods may have to be adapted to each individual school district in order to secure a larger number of participants.

Summary

This study indicates there is still a long way to go before consistent guidelines are put in place to govern the employment of one-on-one paraprofessionals. This will affect how students with special needs are supported and educated. This school district could better serve its students with special needs if they systematically determine when one-on-

one paraprofessional supports are needed and follow this with appropriate training and support for both the paraprofessionals and supervising teachers. Clearly defining expectations of a student's educational team would be beneficial for all involved. The goal of future research should be to discover if schools are responding to researcher recommendations for proper employment and utilization of paraprofessionals and how they are implementing the changes.

CHAPTER 6

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

This was an interesting study for me personally because I was employed as a special education paraprofessional for nine years. Throughout that time my responsibilities included assisting in the special and general education classrooms, supervising the in-school-suspension room and occasionally I would be required to function as a one-on-one paraprofessional. I also served on the district's Continuous School Improvement Committee and Curriculum Coordinating Committee. Additionally I was a member of the Area Education Agency's Paraeducator Advisory Committee and helped to develop portions of the AEA's paraprofessional certification program.

It is my opinion that being a one-on-one paraprofessional can be a very difficult position. Those I worked with were placed in their positions with no training and placed with children with significant problems, physically, mentally and behaviorally. For the most part I was not surprised by Lisa's responses during the interviews and could identify with much of what she said either from my personal experience or from coworkers. However, her comments regarding supervision and school climate struck me as problematic. I feel these areas really need to be addressed and changes implemented.

I was surprised with the lack of supervision this paraprofessional had. I know from experience the inherent difficulties in finding times to meet with teachers, but none of the paraprofessionals I have worked with operated with the degree of autonomy Lisa had. She clearly liked being the student's "teacher" and the freedom she had to fulfill her daily responsibilities. She was not overly concerned with a lack of supervision or

guidance. In some respects I can understand her position. I learned many things throughout my tenure as a paraprofessional and felt capable of making decisions on my own. I operated with a high comfort level and felt secure in my position. The difference is I knew the boundaries of my position and had an involved supervising teacher. I would not have taken it upon myself to make modifications in assignments without speaking to either the general or special education teacher. I realize it was easier for me to discuss issues with the special education teacher since I was in her room at least part of the day. She also supervised one-on-one paraprofessionals and I know she made a point to meet with them daily. Along with the face-to-face meetings she implemented a notebook system. The notebook was in her school mailbox for the one-on-one paraprofessional to write questions and forward concerns. This seemed to work very well to enhance the communication between the teacher and the paraprofessional. I think something like this could be a good start to promoting better supervision and communication between Lisa and her supervising special education teacher.

I was really taken aback when Lisa described the school climate and seemingly pervasive lack of respect provided paraprofessionals from both teachers and administrators. Her comment about “taking up their air and space” was a little shocking and very sad. If indeed that is the experience of all the paraprofessionals in her district than I would think it would be difficult to retain quality paraprofessionals. I have found that teachers are generally appreciative of the work paraprofessionals do. Paraprofessionals with whom I worked rarely complained about a teacher being unsupportive or disrespectful. There were climate differences between the buildings,

(elementary, middle and high school), that were due to the attitudes of the building principals. I personally worked under three different principals over the course of my employment and I witnessed how an administrator can affect the school climate. I did not work long with the principal who hired me but I know he was generally well liked and was always approachable. The next principal was a strong supporter of all staff in the middle school. He personally met with each staff member the summer before he started. He promoted an atmosphere of teamwork, respect and was always ready to listen to concerns. He would occasionally take an idea and try to put it into practice before really considering all the implications which contributed to some teacher stress and negative feelings. At times he was overeager but I believe he always meant well. He was an advocate for paraprofessionals. He supported my work with the AEA Para-Advisory committee and worked with me to survey the district's paraprofessionals to determine training priorities and then implement several inservices. During his tenure I know paraprofessionals from the other buildings expressed a little jealousy of the support the middle school paraprofessionals had. This changed dramatically within two years after he left. The new principal was an ineffective leader. He was at the middle school for three years and in that time the entire atmosphere in the middle school changed. Teachers and paraprofessionals felt unsupported. He was frequently unavailable and seemed to find numerous excuses to be out of the building. Staff, parents and students did not respect him and people did not enjoy coming to work. Luckily, relationships between teachers and paraprofessionals remained strong and supportive. It was during this time I was considering returning to graduate school. The deterioration of administrative

paraprofessional support definitely helped me reach my decision. Since that principal left there have been two more. I have been told by former coworkers that the new principal is wonderful and supportive of all staff. I could tell from my visits to the school that the climate has vastly improved and the staff appears very happy. Research literature discusses the need for teachers to have some sort of training to supervise and work with paraprofessionals. As I stated in the implications chapter, perhaps administrators should also undergo some sort of training to remind them of the importance of everyone's position in a school.

I believe this study simply reinforces past research findings that indicate more attention needs to be directed toward the employment of paraprofessionals regardless of whether they have entire classroom or one-on-one duties. Paraprofessionals are thrown into situations with little or no training. This certainly was my experience. When initially hired I was told the special education teacher was going on maternity leave so I had three weeks to learn the students' schedules, IEP goals, and anything else necessary to keep the special education room running smoothly. What a daunting task! I was fortunate to work with a teacher willing to take the time to teach me. I learned most things on-the-job primarily by observing the teachers I worked with. Even with the most supportive principal, training opportunities for paraprofessionals were limited, sporadic and seemed to center on behavior management. I gained most of my training on my own just like Lisa did. An example of this involved my preparation for duties as a behavior interventionist. The principal and I met prior to his assigning this duty to me. He assured me I would be provided training. A few days later he told me to search the AEA professional library for

appropriate training materials, check them out and read or watch them. He said he would be happy to answer any questions after that. I did this but technically I do not think it was the right thing to do. Unfortunately, I know none of the other paraprofessionals at my school received preservice training either. My supervising teacher did take time to accompany her one-on-one paraprofessionals off and on for several days when they started. This allowed her to model what she wanted, field questions and get the paraprofessional off to a good start. I would definitely recommend this practice to other teachers and IEP teams.

Like Lisa, I had no real idea how the need for paraprofessional positions was determined when I was first hired. I learned that there was a ratio component of 18:1 used to determine if a classroom special education paraprofessional was warranted. I suppose a number needed to be set somewhere but, in my opinion, one teacher with eighteen special education students is spread rather thin. This rule was not considered set in stone where I worked but it played a part in my being assigned as a behavior interventionist. There were only twelve students in the room I was assigned to so it was assumed I had less to do and could assume more duties. I still do not know exactly how IEP teams in my home district determine the need for one-on-one paraprofessionals. I know they collect data but have never been involved with that process. I do not know if it is really important for the applicants for one-on-one paraprofessionals to understand the process prior to being hired. They should know they will be working with a student that has been found to have significant needs. It will be necessary for them to understand what data is collected to

determine the continued need for the position because they very well may be collecting some of that data.

I was hired by the principal of the middle school. He was the only one who interviewed me and I know that is still how paraprofessionals are hired in this district today. I had worked as a substitute paraprofessional in both general and special education classrooms. The principal told me he had observed me at work and spoke with some of the teachers I had assisted. This helped him decide I would be a good candidate for the position. That particular principal gathered input from other sources to help with his decisions. I do not know if the other principals did that but it certainly makes sense to gather teacher input especially, as in my situation, someone has been working in the building. Also, including the supervising teacher on the interview team could be helpful in selecting the person who will work well with that teacher. I know of two situations involving one-on-one paraprofessionals where the parents were very involved in the selection of the paraprofessional. In one case the parents sat in on the interviews and asked questions. In the other case the parent requested the one-on-one paraprofessional assigned to her child continue with the student as he moved through school. At one point the school district wanted to change the assignment and the parent demanded that the paraprofessional remain with her child. The school district complied with the parent's wishes and there was no move towards due process or any other mediation. The paraprofessional and student are together today. Parental involvement when selecting one-on-one paraprofessionals seems like a good idea but I think it will remain a case by case decision. Good communication during the IEP process could provide parents the

opportunity to discuss what they would look for in a one-on-one paraprofessional and the expectations of that person. I do not know if the details of such a position are routinely discussed with parents prior to assignment but I think most parents would appreciate understanding the role of the one-on-one paraprofessional.

Similar to the finding of this and other studies I was provided a very general job description. The school district had two prepared written job descriptions, one for general education paraprofessionals and the other for those working in special education. There was not much difference between the two. General education paraprofessionals tended to be assigned more than one recess and lunchroom duty each day. Special education paraprofessionals spent more time assisting students and teachers in classrooms. I assisted the special education teacher, provided behavioral and academic support for students in classrooms and the in-school-suspension room, and assisted at one lunch duty. I would have to say my primary role was to provide academic support for students. I really enjoyed this role and was very satisfied in my position. I liked not having the responsibilities of the teachers such as designing lesson plans but I loved helping students learn. I can identify with Lisa's comments about being a teacher. Paraprofessionals do teach. Mainly I reinforced what the teachers first taught the students but there were times I did some direct teaching. I found myself in positions similar to that reported in other research where decisions had to be made and there was no one to discuss it with first. I would do the best I could and then be sure to talk it over with my supervising teacher after the fact. I believe this is where I differed from Lisa. I can understand how paraprofessionals can "take over" some teaching responsibilities as they build experience.

People learn on the job and a paraprofessional can become quite skilled in teaching techniques. For this reason, it is crucial to promote supervisory time for teachers and paraprofessionals and define appropriate roles and responsibilities.

As a classroom paraprofessional I did not experience the same barriers as Lisa. She lacked personal planning time and coordinated meeting time with teachers. I never had a problem with that. The largest barrier I confronted was a reduction in paraprofessional staff the last few years I worked due to financial constraints in the district. Sometimes the district would not hire substitutes if a general education paraprofessional was absent. The paraprofessionals were stretched thin and it became difficult to cover all the duties as well as the normal day's assignments. This was especially true for me if there was a student assigned to in-school-suspension. I shared this duty with one other paraprofessional; we each spent half the day in the ISS room and filled in for each other during breaks. There were days I did not get anything I had originally planned to do accomplished. It was better if I had advance notice of an in-school-suspension but this was not always the case. Of course, just like teachers, I found there were often not enough hours in the school day to do all I would have liked.

I truly loved my job and if it had not been for the changes in climate and working conditions I very likely would still be there. I had wonderful relationships with the teachers and other paraprofessionals I worked with. My supervising teacher respected and requested my input. She considered us a team from the first day I was hired and we remain good friends. I felt rewarded as I helped students make academic, behavioral or social gains. I liked providing support without the additional responsibilities of the

teachers. We did not have a teacher's lounge, it was the staff lounge and everyone socialized there. Some of the special education paraprofessionals at this district did not have as good an experience. There were a few who worked with teachers that were not as open about sharing information and did not form a team relationship. Some of these paraprofessionals transferred to different positions or left the school. I know there were differences of opinions regarding how much information to share with paraprofessionals about the students. I maintain that it is difficult to help a special education student if you do not have an understanding of a student's disability or the goals you are trying to achieve. I think this goes back to preparing teachers to work with paraprofessionals. On top of my duties with students I enjoyed working on the various committees, especially the AEA Para-Advisory Committee. I learned a lot about issues concerning paraprofessionals, including those addressed with this study. I would like to continue working to improve conditions for paraprofessionals and encourage districts to include them in a true team approach to help increase achievement for all students.

My job satisfaction ties in with the advice I would give paraprofessionals. The first thing I would tell someone is not to feel inferior to any of your coworkers. I was proud of what I did and saw myself as a peer with the other adults in the building. Everyone's role is important. The only thing that separates school employees is the level of training they've had but a college degree does not make someone inherently superior to others. Secondly, never be afraid to ask questions. Paraprofessionals should be willing to learn and take an active role in that learning. Since training opportunities are limited, paraprofessionals may need to look for information themselves. Lastly, I agree totally

with Lisa about the importance of communication. It is the key to successfully fulfilling the duties of a paraprofessional as well as preventing any misunderstandings. I feel if paraprofessionals take pride in themselves and their work, communicate effectively, and show a willingness to learn they will gain the respect the educational community.

School districts would be hard pressed to deliver the services they do now without paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals are expected to manage individual student behaviors as well as large groups (e.g. cafeteria, recess). Those that prove capable are frequently asked and expected to go beyond the scope of appropriate duties. Many are quite willing to go above and beyond because they truly want to make a difference for children. There are many, many dedicated paraprofessionals trying their best to work within a flawed system that often provides little training, support or recognition. I believe the pressures put on schools recently by NCLB legislation tends to overshadow paraprofessionals' concerns. NCLB and IDEIA do include training requirements for paraprofessionals but it is only mandatory for those working in Title 1 programs and paid with Title 1 funds (see Appendix D). It will be interesting to see if the push for highly qualified teachers will eventually trickle down to all paraprofessionals. I wonder if someday educational paraprofessional or paraeducator will become a recognized profession as are paralegal and paramedic. I believe trained paraprofessionals can play an important role in improving student achievement which is why I became involved with the Para-Advisory Committee and promoted certification opportunities for paraprofessionals.

I can envision more separation of duties within a school district if this occurs.

Paraeducators would work directly with children and require training whereas there could

still be a place for what is generally considered a teacher's aide that does more clerical, copying or other paperwork and possibly playground supervision. I sincerely hope if this does happen all members of the educational community will recognize the role each type of position plays in the smooth operation of a school and show respect to the individuals fulfilling those roles.

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How did the school identify the need for your services?
2. Who was involved in the selection process?
3. What qualifications were you required to have at the time of employment?
4. Tell me about the roles and responsibilities you have been assigned? Describe how these match your job description.(Ask interviewee to provide examples if appropriate)
5. Tell me about any training you received before or during your assignment? Was a training manual/handbook used?
6. Who supervises your work? Describe the nature of this supervision. Describe any advantages/disadvantages of the supervisory situation.

APPENDIX B

CATEGORIES IDENTIFIED DURING DATA ANALYSIS

Categories Identified Following Interview One

Determination of Need	Selection	Qualifications	Roles/Responsibilities	Training

Supervision	Barriers	Job Satisfaction	Negatives	Advice

Final Category Identified Following Interview Two

Effects of 1:1 Paraprofessional				

APPENDIX C

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NCLB PARAPROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR IOWA SCHOOLS

Recommendation:

All LEAs should encourage their paraprofessionals to go through the voluntary certification course offered through the Board of Educational Examiners, even those who have already been approved using an assessment. Federal funds, including Title I funds, can be used to assist paraprofessionals complete this coursework.

APPENDIX D

IOWA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NCLB PARAPROFESSIONAL REQUIREMENTS FOR IOWA SCHOOLS

1. Definition of paraprofessional

For the purposes of Title I, Part A, a paraprofessional is an employee who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds.

This includes paraprofessionals who (1) provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher [Title I, section 1119(g)(2)].

Individuals who work in food services, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, non-instructional computer assistance, and similar positions are not considered paraprofessionals under Title I.

2. Requirements

Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must have (1) completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; or (2) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous

standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness); or (4) obtain a voluntary certification course offered through the Board of Educational Examiners.

All Title I paraprofessionals must have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. This includes paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities.