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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the impact on the instructional process of having paraprofessionals and adult volunteers, particularly parents and senior citizens, in the special education classroom. It discusses the duties they perform in the classroom and the reasons for low parental participation. The review of the literature suggests the following conclusions. Parent and senior citizen volunteers and paraprofessionals can be a valuable, reliable resource in the special education classroom, though there is confusion about their specific roles and their need for training. Volunteers need to be better informed regarding their responsibilities under the law and need to be better trained for this role. Teachers also need more training on how to use volunteers and paraprofessionals effectively and on techniques of parent counseling and conferring to ensure better communication. More cooperation is needed among educational agencies in providing sufficient training and employment opportunities for special education volunteers and paraprofessionals. References are included. (Author/JDD)

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MONOGRAPH NO. 8

ADULTS IN THE CLASSROOM: EFFECTS ON SPECIAL EDUCATION INSTRUCTION

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INSTRUCTIONAL ALTERNATIVES PROJECT

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Abstract

This is a review of the impact on the instructional process of having adult volunteers and paraprofessionals, particularly parents and senior citizens, in the special education classroom. Specifics are provided on the duties adults perform in the classroom and their overall impact on instruction. Also discussed are findings of low parental participation and possible reasons for them. It is concluded that: (1) Senior citizens are reliable and can be a valuable resource in the classroom; (2) Parents can also be very effective in the classroom, but they need to be better informed regarding thei· reponsibilities under the law and trained for this new role; (3) Teachers need more training on how to use volunteers and paraprofessionals effectively, and on techniques of parent counseling and conferring to ensure better communication; and (4) More cooperation is needed among educational agencies in providing sufficient training and employment opportunities for special education volunteers and paraprofessionals. Adults are being used with increasing frequency, and can prove to be a valuable resource for special education teachers.

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Adults in the Classroom: Effects on Special Education Instruction

Due to limited staff, resources, and funding, school personnel have had a difficult time meeting the needs of exceptional children. Increasingly, they are responding to this problem by having adults help teachers in the classroom, either as volunteers or as paid paraprofessionals. By 1980, an estimated 6 million volunteers were already assisting in schools (Cuninggim, 1980). Moreover, recent surveys of state departments of special education show that the number of paraprofessionals in public schools has risen from 27,000 in 1973 to 80,000 in 1980 (Boomer, 1981; Pickett, 1980). There is now a growing volume of literature on the use of volunteers and paraprofessionals in special education. The purpose of this paper is to consider how their presence in the classroom affects the instructional process. Volunteers and paraprofessionals in schools today include single adults, parents, grandparents, high school and college students, retirees and other elderly citizens, and business employees who get release time to serve in the classroom. Special emphasis is placed on the effects of parents and senior citizens, as well as the general population of trained adult paraprofessionals, in the classroom.

Volunteers can be very effective in the education of exceptional children. "Hedges (1972) found that 'with volunteer help, elementary school teachers transfer about 21 percent of their time from lowest to highest level functions and that pupils are given over three times the normal amount of attention' (p. 334)," (Platt & Platt, 1980, p. 31). In 1980 the National School Volunteer Program, Inc., a non-profit

membership organization, sponsored "workshops in 20 states to train teachers, volunteers, and coordinators to work together to meet the needs of mildly handicapped children" (Cuninggim, 1980, p. 109). Three programs sponsored were: (1) A kindergarten screening project in which volunteers were trained to screen children for conditions that could hinder their ability to learn, such as hearing and visual impairments, language problems, or gross or fine motor development problems; (2) A listener program in which children were provided with nonauthoritarian adult friends to talk with, thereby tending to their emotional needs; and (3) A program to build basic academic skills in which volunteers were trained in understanding how children learn and how to set up a good learning environment; this program listed specific activities to use with children that have specific learning problems. Cuninggim (1980) cited the following successful programs:

> In Houston, more than 1,500 volunteers are trained each September to screen that city's 15,000 kindergarten children to detect conditions that may hinder their ability to learn--hearing and visual impairment, problems with language, gross or fine motor development.
>
> In Miami, trained reading and math tutors work with students in grades two to six who are 1 or more years below national norms; children who have worked with volunteers gained significantly more in reading and math achievement than nontutored students.
>
> In Oakland, volunteers help primary children to perfect motor skills by giving them an extra hour each week to work on balance beams and mats, performing programmed exercises in gymnastics.
>
> In Canton and Zanesville, Ohio, vision volunteers record learning materials, transcribe books into Braille, and supply tactile materials to train fingertips to perceive and comprehend.

> In Fort Worth, volunteers work on a one to one basis with children in a Growth Center program that helps improve their confidence and their ability to achieve in academic tasks. (p. 108-109)

Cuninggim also proposed that primary classroom volunteers could reinforce word meanings, dance with a child to improve physical coordination, help a child learn to follow oral or written directions, prepare learning materials, take reading and math inventories, read to children, operate audiovisual equipment, etc. Secondary classroom volunteers could help older students develop reading comprehension, thinking skills, writing skills, and study skills.

These programs could greatly enhance a teacher's time and resources. The teacher would have an opportunity to plan better for each child, to know each child's limitations, and to spend less time tending to each child's emotional needs and more time teaching basic academic skills and managing the class as a whole. The teacher would, no doubt, feel more rewarded because each child would be getting more individual attention.

An organization called School Volunteers for New Haven, Inc., which began in 1969, had grown to include 500 volunteers and 44 schools by 1982 (Chapman, 1982). These volunteers came from a variety of sources in the New Haven, Connecticut, area. They included college students, housewives, and senior citizens. They worked with elementary students in basic reading and math: "In 1981, volunteers contributed over 10,000 hours of help for about 13,000 students and their teachers" (p. 108). Those students received services not otherwise available. Teachers noted academic and social gains in the

children who had the volunteer tutors. Chapman stated that there are similar programs operating in this country, most associated with the National School Volunteer Program, an umbrella organization that provides support and services for school volunteer programs.

Parents

It has been asserted (Cohen, 1982) that parent volunteers who have had the opportunity to observe and participate in the public school system can play an important role in improving children's performance as well as in improving citizens' attitudes toward the system. One report (Thomas, 1980) suggested that many teachers evaluate and reward students not only on the basis of their work, but also on the basis of their behavior: "Substantial evidence demonstrates that, when parents and other community members are intimately involved in the day-to-day learning of their children, schools do better at managing disciplinary problems" (p. 204). Thomas cited Miller Elementary School in Pittsburgh as a good example of a home/school liaison, where lower and working-class parents volunteered as tutors, teacher aides, and chaperones for trips. This report did not give specifics as to how the presence of the parents affected the actual instructional process; however, it did state that there was high morale among teachers, parents, and pupils, boasting almost no requests for teacher transfers and a pupil attendance rate of 96%.

In 1977 Kennison told of one school district, Laguna Salada, where reading specialists successfully used volunteer help to reinforce specific skills, listen to children read, and write down

children's original stories, thus providing each child with more personal attention. The services of parent volunteers were enlisted as standard operating procedure because of lack of funding. Parents did a variety of things from working in the library and cafeteria to helping teachers in instruction-related tasks. At one school parents supervised a listening center, guided visual-motor activities, and instructed small groups in pre-reading activities. Fathers taught carpentry skills to kindergartners. Parents taught skills in arts and crafts. At another school parents helped raise funds for and build a playground. At still another school parents were trained in phonics and writing techniques to be able to teach reading, math and science programs. They also were trained how to use drill and reinforcement techniques in teaching the children. "Teachers and parents alike have learned that parents can do instructional tasks in the classroom, and can do them well" (Kennison, 1977, p. 10). A bi-monthly communication from primary classes was published under the guidance of a paid parent coordinator, who was later replaced by two parent volunteers when funding disappeared. Parents developed, publicized and maintained a "Games Library" for children and parents to check out educational games. Parents also became involved in multicultural activities such as cooking ethnic dishes and teaching the children traditional national dances. Because parents were such a big part of this district, as of 1977, the Early Childhood Education program mandated that parents be included in curriculum, program planning, evaluation, and even budgets. This is an extreme case where parent volunteers

affected not only the instructional process but almost every facet of the school system in a positive way.

However, other research has shown much lower levels of involvement of parents in their child's special education program. In a comparative study questioning 36 parents of LD students and 38 parents of average achievers, McKinney and Hocutt (1982) reported that "significantly, LD parents did not report more involvement in program planning activities" (p. 68), which included providing services and educational experiences for the children at school. Four parents (13%) said they had worked with their child in the resource room. Ninety-three percent indicated that they had worked with their child at home. Parents perceived their home situation or employment as barriers to getting involved more at school. The authors stated that professsional and parent training programs were being developed to achieve more productive parent participation in the future.

Recently, a rating system on parent participation (Parent/Family Involvement Index) was completed on 229 families by 65 special education teachers and aides from five school districts in three different states (Cone, Delawyer, & Wolfe; 1985). Results reported in 1985, though subjective, showed that mothers were more involved than fathers in nearly all areas; however, they appeared to become less involved as the grade level of their child increased. Parents with higher levels of education and income were seen as more involved. The highest levels of involvement for both mothers and fathers were participation in the special education process, contact with teacher,

and transportation. Lowest levels of involvement were in classroom volunteering, involvement in advocacy groups, and disseminating information. "Overall, parents were not seen by the teachers as highly involved in their child's program" (p. 422).

In another report, Leyser (1985) pointed out that "a strong research base has demonstrated that parents are instrumental in the teaching of academic, language, social, motor, and vocational skills to their child as well as in the managing of their child's behavior" (p. 38). Moreover, Public Law 94-142 requires that parents be actively involved in planning and making decisions about their child's special education program. Leyser stated that numerous sources have shown a relationship of conflict, tension, and disharmony between parents and professionals, and that parental participation in their child's special education program is more often quite limited.

Leyser designed a study to obtain data on the perceptions and thoughts of 325 parents of handicapped children from a mid-size midwestern community. A picture of low levels of involvement with the school emerged. It was shown that although parents were familiar with their child's problems, 30-40% did not know what an IEP was. One-fifth reported leaving conferences feeling uncertain and frustrated. Parents reported lack of time and babysitters, scheduling problems, language barriers, and transportation as major obstacles to getting more personally involved. A sizeable number suggested that written exchanges between school and home were preferred over having to be physically present at the school. Most parents, however, did express

satisfaction with the services the teachers and school provided. Leyser concluded that teachers needed more training in parent counseling and conferring techniques and parents needed more training to prepare them for their new responsibilities under the law. Until these problems are resolved, there is little chance of parents volunteering their services to the school.

Senior Citizens

Research on the use of senior citizens in the classroom is rather sparse. However, in 1980 Buffer asserted that "the special needs and interests of older adults, as viewed by society, frequently parallel those of special needs students" (Buffer, 1980, p. 113). First, physiological factors of aging sometimes cause deficits in vision, hearing, movement, or memory for the elderly. Except for the gifted child, the typical special education child experiences problems similar to these but at an earlier age, and sometimes with a greater degree of severity. Second, psychological factors of feeling isolated are something the elderly and exceptional children have in common. Both need to learn to cope with their feelings about themselves and be creative and expressive in their own way. These characteristics make senior citizens and exceptional children a good match. In addition, sociological factors generally allow elderly people more time to volunteer. They also usually have more interest in public affairs, and if highly motivated, would be good lobbyists for any legislative actions supporting special education.

The Retired Senior Volunteer program, which has over 700 projects

in the U.S. and Puerto Rico, matches volunteers to needs of various institutions (Buffer, 1980). First Ward Elementary School in Morgantown, West Virginia found senior volunteers through this program (Platt & Platt, 1980). Volunteers were provided with special methods and materials to use with students in a learning disabilities resource room. The resource room teacher was responsible for assisting the regular classroom teacher in meeting the needs of the mild to moderately handicapped children. With suggestions from the resource room teacher, one of the classroom teachers prepared a tutoring packet for a volunteer to use. This packet was used with very successful results. "The volunteer appreciated the structure and organization and the student benefited from lessons prepared on his (sic) level and geared to his (sic) specific needs" (p. 33). These volunteers were very helpful in enhancing and accelerating the mainstreaming process by functioning as a bridge between the two environments. The author concluded that a volunteer program "can provide assistance to exceptional children, their needs and the program necessary to meet these needs, as well as an understanding of the special educator's role and why this role is necessarily different from that of the regular classroom teacher" (Platt & Platt, 1980, p. 34).

"Children who are read to at an early age develop better reading habits and demonstrate significantly greater gains in vocabulary and reading comprehension than children who have not had this advantage" (Jones, 1986, p. 36). A grant from the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, provided funding for the Grandparent

Read to Me Project at Lakewood Preschool for learning disabled 3- to 5-year-old students in Lakewood, Ohio. Senior citizens were recruited as volunteers to read aloud to individual children on a weekly basis. Volunteers remained with the teachers after each session for 15 minutes of discussion. In these discussions the staff and volunteers shared information and gave feedback that would be helpful. The volunteers commented on children's individual skills and behaviors, which became a valuable tool for the teacher. It was found that children often shared with the volunteers their feelings "about their own needs and problems in home and school" (p. 37). As a result of the program, both parents and teachers felt that the children demonstrated a greater interest in books and a desire to have someone read to them: "They began to select books instead of toys during free play period" (p. 37). Jones stated that the senior volunteers were very reliable, dedicated, and had a positive effect on that school's instructional process.

Creekmore and Creekmore (1983) reviewed a study where 21 retired professional women volunteered to work at a developmental day care center for severely handicapped children. These volunteers were assessed as to their understanding and level of acceptance of the types of handicapped children served by the center. The volunteers were paired with children whose problems most appropriately matched their interests and abilities. They were trained to observe and record behavior relating to language/communication skills, socialization skills, mobility, pre-academic performance, eye contact,

self-help skills, group/isolate behaviors, curiosity, physical characteristics, maturity, severity of handicapping conditions, responsivity to instruction, and unique handling requirements They also were trained in skills such as self-feeding techniques, behavior control, and language and communication. The results of this study showed that senior citizens can effectively be used to increase direct teacher/child contacts, reduce the child/teacher ratio, and increase instruction time for each child, all in a cost-effective manner. This program provided 4,800 hours of additional teaching for children over 2 years, increasing direct contact time for each child from 132 to 400 hours yearly.

Trained Paraprofessionals

Birch, in his 1963 review entitled "The Nonprofessional Worker in Special Education and Rehabilitation," found that "the utilization of nonprofessional personnel in special education seems virtually unexplored" (p. 72). He recommended that rigorous study begin on the subject immediately. A few years later, Blessing (1967) summarized a 1957 demonstration project by Cruickshank and Haring where assistants were used with exceptional children in three types of special classrooms. Results of that project, though subjective, showed:

> Teachers who had total or shared responsibility for a teacher assistant reported that they were able to do more creative planning, provide more materials, give more individual attention to the children, and, in general, increase the quality of their instruction. The teachers reported that the parents unanimously felt their children had gained from the Teacher Assistant Plan. Also, all of the administrators of the school involved were receptive to the program and felt that their teachers had done a better job of teaching as a result of having had an assistant. (Blessing, 1967, p. 109)

However, the role of the assistant up to that time was thought only to include releasing the teacher from any activites that did not require professional training. The assistant usually undertook no activity that involved direct instruction. With that in mind, Blessing went on to cite Esbensen's 1966 "contention that 'a properly trained teacher-aide should be able to perform limited instructional tasks under the general supervision of the classroom teacher'," (Blessing, 1967, p. 111). Esbensen saw the teacher's role as that of manipulating the learning environment to maximize learning for each individual child. He believed that this included using an aide in any instructional tasks that would assist the teaching function. Blessing ended his review by discussing possibilities of using aides at different levels and in different areas of duties.

Savino, Kennedy, and Brody (1968) proposed that indigenous nonprofessionals from lower socioeconomic groups could be uniquely effective within their own subcultures where higher risk existed for mental retardation, by breaking through existing communication barriers and educating their own subcultures about the risks they faced and how to minimize them. Another point expressed by these authors was that many tasks requiring lower skill levels could be delegated to an aide under the supervision of a professional, thereby freeing the professional to do more skillful work. They cited a promising case in California where "retardates who have 'graduated' from public school special classes" served as aides in a developmental center for handicapped minors. "They have shown a surprising facility

to train the 'untrainables' and have even taught the professional staff members a thing or two about toilet training," (Savino et al., 1968, p. 8).

Positive results were reported in a 1971 review of a two-year research project in which two former psychiatric aides served as language developmentalists for small groups of institutionalized severely retarded children (Guess, Smith, & Ensminger; 1971). These aides were trained for one month before they started teaching children. The aides met daily to discuss any problems with the project director, who was a trained speech and language specialist. The project director observed the classes and offered feedback to the aides concerning their teaching techniques. When compared to a control group, "results showed significantly greater language scores made by the language training group. IQ score increases were equivocal, but again favored those children attending language classes" (p. 447). "Results from the study demonstrated that these nonprofessional persons could be trained to develop and enhance the speech and language skills of low functioning mentally retarded children" (pp. 452-453).

A double-blind study was conducted in 1974 by Frelow, Charry, and Freilich on a project in Greenburgh, New York, Central School District, where teaching assistants were introduced to classrooms to help low-achieving first, second, and third graders. This study investigated academic and behavioral gains made by second and third grade students who had been scoring in the lowest quartile. Though

specifics were not given as to what tasks the assistants performed, test results before and after the introduction of teaching assistants showed that the students profited academically from the teaching assistant program. Second and third graders made significant progress in reading and math, above what was expected. In addition, children who had exhibited behavior problems showed a trend of changing behavior in a positive direction.

The December 1974 issue of Focus on Exceptional Children dealt with the topic of role expectations of paraprofessional staff in special education (Reid & Reid, 1974). The authors talked about the training levels and duties of paraprofessionals. They reported that a more clearly defined and differentiated job description should be developed for paraprofessionals. Information presented in the literature up to that point indicated the existence of a wide difference among roles, expectations, titles, and expected levels of training for paraprofessionals. A special education teacher aide training program called Career Associate in Special Education (CASE) at Santa Fe Community College in Gainesville, Florida, was cited as a successful way to recruit paraprofessionals for working with handicapped children. This training program included a strong foundations curriculum, as well as an internship where students were assigned to a classroom along with senior year student teachers from the Department of Special Education at the University of Florida.

Students also could be under the supervision of doctoral students in special education from the University of Florida. Surveys of

teachers showed that these aides participated in the areas of language arts, mathematics, and reading on a daily basis. Responses also indicated that "most paraprofessionals are used for academic purposes, psychomotor-developmental tasks, helping to develop social life skills, and in instruction designed to facilitate the acquisition of functional life skills. A preference was noted for a demonstration of audio-visual skills rather than expertise in the use of instructional materials" (p. 9). Reid and Reid (1974) noted that the benefits of having a training program like this at a Community College include an open-door admissions policy, low tuition, an extensive counseling program, a learning skills laboratory, abundant financial aid, and job placement services. Community colleges are quick to respond to the needs of their areas and would be in an excellent position to provide trained staff to assist in the educational processes of exceptional children. The authors hoped that a cooperative working partnership between community colleges and universities might some day provide smooth functioning, highly efficient teams in the classroom.

A survey of administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals from the Kansas paraprofessional training program in 1978 (Kelly & Havlicek, 1982) showed that over 90% agreed that paraprofessionals play an important role in education. Respondents indicated that the most common duties performed, also considered to be of the greatest educational importance, were "'assisting with group educational activities,' 'educating individual children,' and 'preparation of classroom materials'" (pp. 535-536). The authors recommended that

local, regional, and statewide workshops organized around the education team concept should be available for teachers and paraprofessionals.

In 1980, Pickett stated that the most recent survey of roles of paraprofessionals in schools showed that very few states had plans of providing inservice training for paraprofessionals or for reimbursing local school districts to train them. She added that the Bureau of Education for Handicapped had increased its funding for training programs, but that there was little collaboration between state and local educational agencies in furnishing training for paraprofessionals in educating handicapped children. At that time, teachers and administrators were not being provided with training on how to use paraprofessionals and very few states were moving toward certification procedures for aides in special education. Pickett did state, however, that the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped had "awarded a grant to the New Careers Training Laboratory to establish the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Special Education" (Pickett, 1980, p. 7). This center's goals are to increase the use of paraprofessionals in special education, improve their training, and encourage cooperation between educational agencies to develop inservice training models for paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1980).

Boomer (1982) delineated the role of the teacher as that "of primary designer, developer, and evaluator of the instructional program" (p. 194). He saw the teacher's role as that of the program

manager of the instructional team and the paraprofessional's role as that of a supportive resource for the teacher. The paraprofessional can observe and record information that will be helpful in designing a program for each child that will tend to his/her specific needs; supervise group activities, giving the regular teacher time to work individually with a handicapped child; work to reinforce specific skills on a daily basis with a child; act as a helpful communication liaison between the teacher and the child's parents; help the teacher manage the instructional day by preparing daily written schedules for each child; help arrange the physical environment in the most productive way; or help children complete assignments. Boomer concluded that the paraprofessional is a valuable resource and "helps ensure that every student has opportunities for success" (p. 197).

In discussing use of paraprofessionals in the resource room, McKenzie and Houk (1986) stated that there is concern about the manner in which paraprofessionals are trained and used. They cited the aforementioned lack of coordination between educational agencies and institutions as a large contributor to this. They also hypothesized that paraprofessionals are probably not being assigned tasks that use their actual level of competence or potential to make a meaningful contribution. They noted that responses to a national survey in 1982 showed that 97% of the respondents felt that teachers should be trained in the proper use of aides and volunteers in the classroom. With this in mind, the authors designed a study to find out the extent to which paraprofessionals are assigned tasks which are highly

characteristic of special education instruction, what kinds of changes resources teachers would like to see in the use of paraprofessionals, and whether resource teachers felt they had sufficient input into the selection and training of aides. Twenty-three resource teachers from 12 school districts in Kentucky were sent questionnaires. Results showed that "the amount of time during which the teachers in this study reported having a paraprofessional at their disposal was high" (p. 43). However, the teachers desired an expansion of the role of the paraprofessional in many ways. Supportive instruction and assignment correction tasks were already being performed by many aides. "The four areas which reflected the largest increment of desired changes were those least often performed by paraprofessionals in reality. Of these areas, three incorporated principles and skills directly related to teaching handicapped children, i.e., "assessing, recording behavior, and modifying written materials" (p. 44). In addition, "The resource teachers expressed a strong desire to be more involved in the process of selecting and assigning aides" (p. 44). They expressed dissatisfaction with the way aides were hired and assigned. They felt aides should be required to have previous experience. McKenzie and Houk (1986) concluded that:

> Paraprofessionals are in an excellent position to informally assess and chart student progress. By becoming familiar with the detection of error patterns and by learning to use observation-based records such as anecdotal, frequency, and duration (among others), paraprofessionals may gather important academic and behavioral data on a daily basis. The provision of such information would significantly reduce the time expended by resource teachers for noninstructional duties as well as improve the efficiency of their daily planning and data maintenance. (p. 44)

They recommended that researchers examine school districts that have outstanding aides and volunteers in order to identify good methods of recruitment, orientation, and placement, as well as specific tasks paraprofessionals could perform at a variety of grade levels. They also suggested focusing on identifying particularly skillful paraprofessionals as role models for future work in special education.

In summary, it is generally agreed that volunteers and paraprofessionals can be a valuable resource in the special education classroom. However, there is considerable confusion about what specific role they should play and what kind of training they should receive. There seems to be a need for teachers to be better trained in the use of volunteers and paraprofessionals, parent counseling and conferring techniques. Parents need to be informed as to their responsibilities for their child's special education program and trained for this new role. Also, there must be cooperation among educational agencies in developing adequate training programs for special education volunteers and paraprofessionals in the future.

Adults in the classroom can have a significant impact on the instructional process. They can help screen children for conditions that could hinder their ability to learn, help children work on building specific skills, provide children with a nonauthoritarian friend with whom they can talk, and lead groups of children in special activities. Parents can be instrumental in teaching their children and managing their behavior in the classroom. Senior citizens can bring a special empathy and wealth of life experience into the

classroom. They have proven to be reliable, dedicated workers at helping children progress. The use of adults in the classroom frees the teacher to manage the total instructional environment for the benefit of all the children, including allowing the teacher more time to spend with individual children who need special help. Volunteers and paraprofessionals in the classroom contribute to giving each child more special attention, thereby giving the child more opportunities to reach full potential. That is, in essence, the ultimate goal of special education.

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