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AUTHOR Hofmeister, A.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady increase in the number of paraprofessional personnel employed in special education, Title 1, and bilingual education programs. Currently, there are approximately 500,000 paraeducators working in the United States. Data indicates that 95 percent of paraeducators are women working for little more than minimum wage, that the role of paraeducators has shifted from clerical work to greater instructional involvement with special education students, and that job satisfaction is low among paraeducators. The availability of paraeducator training is important because of paraeducator's critical role as a member of the instructional team. The identification of 32 training programs for paraeducators across the United States revealed that 10 programs were specific to special education paraprofessionals and that only 1 program had been designed specifically for a rural setting. The most common topics covered by training programs were related to paraeducator roles and responsibilities; monitoring, assessment, and evaluation; teaming and collaboration; instruction; and behavior management. A survey of Utah special education teachers and special education paraeducators indicated the need for paraeducator training in behavior management and understanding special education students. This paper suggests that the increased use of paraeducators in rural education programs can offset limited resources in rural schools and that effective training is the key to using paraeducators in school programs. The appendix lists 32 paraeducator training programs, including date, author, and title of literature source, and contact person and address. (LP)

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Hofmeister, Ashbaker & Morgan
Utah State University
Logan, Utah

PARAEDUCATORS: CRITICAL MEMBERS OF THE RURAL EDUCATION TEAM

Introduction: An Overview of the issues

There are many issues which rural school and district administrators need to consider as they review services and provisions for special education students. Among these issues is the role of the paraeducator. Over the past 20 years across the United States, there has been a steady increase in the number of paraprofessional personnel employed in education, particularly special education, Title 1 and bilingual education programs. The most recent estimate of current numbers of paraeducators in the United States is 500,000 (Pickett, 1995). Research results (e.g. Blalock, 1991; Logue, 1993; Passaro, Pickett, Latham & HongBo, 1991; Pickett, 1991) offer the following insights into some of the characteristics of this group: 1. that the majority (approx. 95%) of paraprofessionals are women working for little more than minimum wage; 2. that there has been a substantive shift from clerical and other support duties to more instructional involvement with special education students (the most common roles centering around the delivery of guided and independent practice); 3. that the trend towards increased involvement of paraprofessionals is strong and continuing; and 4. that job satisfaction is not high. Pickett (1986) has described paraeducators as:

“the fastest-growing yet most under-recognized, under-prepared and therefore under-utilized category of personnel in the service delivery system.”

Another difficulty in the paraeducator situation is highlighted by data collected by Allred (1995). School Districts in Utah were asked (via personal communication) to state how many paraeducators they employed. Not only were there more than a dozen different titles under which they were employed, but they also came under the jurisdiction of several educational divisions, largely distinguished by funding, such as Title 1 or Special Education. The final estimate of the number of paraeducator positions in Utah was in the order of 8,000. This suggests that Pickett's (1995) national estimate of 500,000 paraeducators is very conservative. However, it also highlights the difficulties of clearly identifying and accounting for this group of employees, as any one paraeducator may cover more than one position, and therefore be employed by more than one branch of education. The number of different job titles further confuses the issue.

Should we invest in paraeducators?

Cohen, Kulik & Kulik (1982), in their synthesis of the research literature on tutoring, found a positive relationship between the level of paraprofessional training and student achievement outcomes. Hofmeister (1991) has suggested that the term 'instructional assistant' would now best describe the most common duties of the paraprofessional, and it has further been suggested (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1991) that up to 80% of a special education student's time may be spent with a paraeducator rather than a

certified teacher. This establishes the paraeducator firmly as a critical member of the instructional team. Latham (1996) has also noted that paraeducators are often the constant in rural schools, as they are generally members of the local community and less likely to change schools than the certified teachers with whom they work. However, in one survey of paraeducator attitudes, 16% of the sample were planning to resign. The stated reasons in order of frequency were (a) a lack of opportunity to advance, (b) poor salary, (c) lack of benefits, (d) lack of respect, and (e) lack of administrative support. High turnover has often been identified as a major management and training problem, as well as a considerable drain on resources.

Hofmeister (1991) discussed the need for investment in paraeducators. He suggested giving support to schools in the development of paraeducators, to make the most cost-effective contribution possible to quality education; and support to those paraeducators wishing to progressively improve their skills. With the massive increase of human resources which paraeducators represent, we suggest that an investment in paraeducators is a timely investment in improved instruction for students. Wong (1995) has also pointed out we show how much we value personnel, when we provide training for them.

Training programs available in the US

Through a comprehensive review of the literature, and attendance at national conferences, Morgan, Hofmeister & Ashbaker (1995) identified 32 training programs for paraeducators across the United States. Ten of the programs (30%) were specific to special education paraprofessionals, although others offered training in skills which would be useful to paraeducators, whatever their designation/assignment. Only one program had been designed especially for rural settings. An analysis of the topics covered by these programs showed that while there was no topic common to all programs, the most common topic was roles and responsibilities (80%), followed by monitoring, assessment and evaluation (69%), teaming and collaboration, instruction, and management of behavior (64% each). Training topics were covered in similar proportions by the 10 special education programs .

In the research cited above, we also identified research papers which addressed paraeducator training, consisting largely of surveys of education personnel to identify suitable topics for paraeducator training. In some cases paraeducators were asked to list areas in which they felt they needed training. One Utah research survey (Likins, 1993) reported that 100% of special education paraeducators surveyed expressed the need for training in behavior management. In other cases, teachers were asked to recommend paraeducator training topics, in the light of the roles of their paraeducators and current skill levels. The most commonly occurring topics in this research were behavior management (88% of papers), followed by understanding special education students (66%).

While there was no absolute consensus on training topics appropriate for paraeducators -- understandable in the light of the wide variety of job descriptions which

that title encompasses -- the picture which emerges from the literature review is one of a growing trend towards providing training. Initiatives may have been taken on State or local levels, but the number of training programs is increasing, as is the range of topics covered. Interestingly, of the 18 states represented by the training programs identified, the majority are composed of largely rural areas, suggesting that the particular characteristics and needs of rural education have played a major role in the development of paraeducator training. (See Appendix for programs, together with contact names and addresses.)

Conclusions

Rural schools have limited resources - including personnel, money and time. The increased use of paraeducators in rural education programs can help to provide schools and students with valuable human resources. Implicit in the assignments of paraeducators to an instructional support role is the need for effective training. Many quality programs have already been developed, and the number is increasing. For those administrators wishing to make better use of human resources by offering paraeducator training programs, there is a wealth of available material. Administrators can meet many of their paraeducator training needs, and concomitantly their students' needs, by adopting and/or adapting programs already developed.

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Appendix

Training programmes for paraeducators: Contact names and addresses

Date	Author(s)	Title	Contact person/address
1980	Roberts et al.	Paraprofessionals in Vocational Education: A Handbook	Dr Don Roberts* Department of Education, Capitol Grounds. Little Rock, AK
1981	Glen & McCoy	Orientation to Handicapping Conditions	Sally Glen/Youlanda McCoy* North Carolina State University, Greensboro, NC 27401
1982	Los Angeles County	Developing a Partnership: A Resource Guide for Working with Paraprofessionals	Los Angeles County Office of Education,* 9300 East Imperial Highway, Downey, CA 90242-2890
1982	Stile & Gallegos	Article: "Senior Citizens as Paraprofessionals" <i>Lifelong Learning: The Adult Years</i> , March 1982	Stephen Stile/Ann Gallegos* New Mexico State University, Las Cruces
1984	Kilcrease	"Ready, Set, Go!" A Model Community Resource Plan for Rural Schools	Maxine Wallender Kilcrease* Western Oregon State College, ED110 345, N. Monmouth Avenue, Monmouth, OR 97361
1984	Gillis-Olion and Olion	Article: "Preparing Early Childhood Educators and Paraprofessionals to Work with Mainstreamed Handicapped Children" <i>Early Childhood Development & Care</i> 21 (4) 1985	Marion Gillis-Olion/Ladelle Olion.* Fayetteville State University, North Carolina
1985	Lenz	Paper: "Working with Cross-Cultural & English as a Second Language Populations: Employment of Paraprofessionals"	Diane Lenz* Institute for Human Development, Arizona
1985	Steucher et al	Article: "Training for Indian School Liaison and Support Personnel in Special Education" <i>Journal of American Indian Education</i> 24 (1) Jan 1985	Dr's Uwe Steucher/Eugene Grossman* University of Minnesota-Duluth, 2400 Oakland Avenue, Duluth, MN 55812
1985	Oklahoma	Guidelines for Special Education Paraprofessionals in Oklahoma	Oklahoma State Dept of Education.* Oklahoma City, OK
1989	Durant et al	Paraprofessional Strand courses in the Albuquerque Public Schools	Ginger Blalock, Dept of Special Education, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87112 or Omar Durant,* Albuquerque Public Schools, Employee Resource & Renewal Center, Albuquerque, NM 87110
1990	Pickett	A Training Program for Paraprofessionals working in Special Education and Related Services	Anna Lou Pickett, NRC for Paraprofessionals. CASE/CUNY, room 620, 25 West 43rd Street New York NY 10036

1990	Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Center	Paraprofessionals in the Classroom: A Workshop Guide	Chapter 1 Technical Assistance Center. Denver. CO*
1991	Charter	Vista Paraprofessional Program	Patricia Flores Charter* Vista Unified School District. North San Diego County. California.
1991	Northwest Regional Education Laboratory	Paraprofessional Training Manual (Chapter 1)	Northwest Region Educational Lab. 101 S.W. Main Street. Suite 500 Portland OR 97204
1991	Gerlach et al	Strengthening the Partnership: Paraeducators and Teachers Working Together	Dr Kent Gerlach. Dept. of Special Education. Pacific Lutheran University. TACOMA, Wa 98447 Tel (206) 535-7277 FAX: (206) 535-7184
1992	Barresi et al	A Paraeducator Training Program and Mentoring System	Arlene Barresi. BOCES-1, Suffolk County. 15 Andrea Road, Holbrook, NY 11741
1994	Archer	The Instructional Roles of the Paraprofessional	Anita L. Archer/Joan Clair Puget Sound Educational Service 400 S. W. 152nd Street Burien WA 98166-2209
1994	California State University Long Beach (CSULB)	Transition Services Paraprofessional Certificate Program	University Extension Services, 1250 Bellflower Boulevard, Long Beach, CA 90840
1994	Hofmeister, Ashbaker & Morgan	The Effective Educator: A Video Training Package for Paraeducators	Alan Hofmeister/Betty Ashbaker/ Jill Morgan CPD-Technology Utah State University LOGAN Ut 84322-6800
1994	International Correspondence Schools (ICS)	Teacher Aide Course	International Correspondence Schools. Center for Degree Studies. 925 Oak Street. Scranton, PA 18540-9887
1994	Mueller, Marble & Peake	Certificate of Study Program for Paraeducators	Patricia Mueller. Center for Developmental Disabilities. 499C Waterman Building, Burlington, VT 05405
1994	Early Intervention Research Institute	Training in Activity-Based Interventions	Mark Innocenti, Early Intervention Research Institute, Utah State University, Logan UT 84322-6580
1994	Salt Lake Community College	Paraeducator Program	Kate McConaghy Salt Lake Community College. Redwood Campus. 4600 South Redwood Road, Salt Lake City UT 84123

1994	Salzberg et al	Enhancing Skills of Paraeducators: A Video-Assisted Program	Robert Morgan/Charles Salzberg Dept. of Special Education Utah State University. LOGAN Ut 84322-2865
1994	Vassiliou et al.	North Dakota Paraeducator Training Project	Demetrios Vassiliou Minot State University, Box 131 Minot, ND 58707
1994	KACC	KACC Paraprofessional Program	Christina Leighton.* KACC Paraprofessional Programs. 117 S.W. 7th Street. Topeka, KS 66603
1994	Front Range Community College	Paraprofessional Training Programs	Susan Stuska. Front Range Community College. 3645 West 112 Avenue. Westminster, CO 80030
1995	Yoakum	An Instructional Manual for Training Interpreter Paraprofessionals in the Assessment of Non- & Limited-English Speaking Students	Susie Yoakum Dept. of Communicative Disorders. Utah State University, LOGAN Ut 84322-1000
1994	Vasa & Steckelberg	Project PARA	Allen Steckelberg/Stanley Vasa. Dept. of Special Education University of Nebraska-Lincoln Lincoln NE 68583-0738
1994	Sobocinski & Anderson	Pre-Employment Training Program for Paraprofessionals	Thomas Sobocinski Direct Care Training Program. 474 School Street. East Hartford, CT 06108
1995	Hutchinson Willmar	Educational Assistant	Hutchinson-Willmar Technical College Two Century Ave. Hutchinson, MN 55350

* This address/direction has not been verified, but is the address indicated on the article or version of the training program to hand.