

**Paraeducator's Profile in Inclusive Classrooms:
Analysis of National Survey Data and Follow-up Case Study Interviews in California¹**

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Abstract

The authors share the results of national study of the changing roles that paraeducators who work in inclusive classrooms. The purpose of the study was to add to the research with respect to paraeducators given that so few studies were published between 1999-2006.

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Description of the Survey Instrument

Based on a review of the literature, the researchers developed a draft of the survey instrument and field tested the survey with a group of paraeducators at the 26th annual NRCP conference in Albuquerque, NM. The final survey instrument was available on a secure web-site and disseminated widely through the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals website (once in the summer and again in the fall of 2007). In addition, co-principal investigators worked with local school employees in California and Florida to disseminate the survey to paraeducators known to work in inclusive classrooms.

The survey was comprised of five sections: definitions of terms (i.e., para-educator, inclusive classroom); demographics (items related to age, gender, ethnicity, linguistic diversity, preparation, prior experience in inclusive classrooms, prior employment or skills, classroom information on number of students with disabilities and socio-economic status of the neighborhood); items related to attitudes, beliefs, and actions to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale; a series of open ended questions; and a section to solicit volunteers to be interviewed which is handed in separately from the survey in order to protect anonymity of respondents.

Data Analysis of the Survey

Descriptive statistics of those who participate in the survey were analyzed according to frequencies and percentages. The survey items were rank-ordered from highest-rated to lowest-rated.

Results

The results are reported in two sections. First, the survey results are presented -- Job Titles, Characteristics, Settings, Preparation, Classroom Activities, Challenges and Issues, Advice, and Survey Feedback. In the second section, the results of the interviews with California paraeducators are presented

What are Paraeducators' Job Titles and Roles?

The survey respondents wrote the title of their positions, including paraprofessional, para-educator, instructional aide, Title 1 para, teacher assistant, and campus supervisor.

Many stated they worked with children and youth who needed behavioral support or social skills training. Others echoed the literature that shows paraeducators in inclusive classrooms working to deliver instruction in reading and math through various activities such as learning centers and cooperative learning techniques.

Paraeducators explained an emerging role related to their responsibilities for implementing or monitoring Response To Intervention (RtI). In the words of one participant from Michigan, "Our district uses RtI. We have used the 'six minute

solution' in reading that is very effective. We have resources that push in and pull out as needed." Another participant from Rhode Island wrote, "I have coached children in language arts under the supervision of a reading teacher." And a second participant from Michigan explained, "I document notes on each child seen daily to measure progress and give [the notes about] strategies [to the teacher]." Two paraeducators from Oregon used technical language such as, "I use DIBELS to monitor progress [of all the students]."

What are the Characteristics of the Paraeducators?

The majority of respondents were females between 29-38. Respondents came from diverse regions of the United States: the northeast (Connecticut), southeast (Florida, Louisiana), the northwest (Washington, Wyoming), the Midwest (Kansas, Wisconsin, South Dakota), the southwest (Arizona, New Mexico), and the west coast (California). Respondents were ethnically and linguistically diverse.

Although the majority of respondents reported their ethnicity as white (non-Hispanic), there were African Americans and American Indian/Native Alaskan (Dakota Sioux, Laguna, Navajo). Nearly 20 % reported they could speak a language other than English. The predominant language was Spanish, although others spoke German, Swahili, Creole, and Portuguese). The majority of respondents reported they had a friend or family member with a disability (one person specified her son).

Where do the Paraeducators Work?

The grade levels of the classrooms in which they work include special education, high school, and combined classrooms (e.g., special education and secondary classrooms, special education and elementary classrooms, and one person who worked in early childhood, elementary, and special education classrooms). Regarding the socio-economic status of the neighborhood in which schools were located where they worked, the majority of respondents reported they worked in low SES neighborhoods while fewer said they worked in middle SES neighborhoods or high SES neighborhoods.

When describing the classrooms in which they worked, paraeducators said they worked with one to twelve students with disabilities. Paraeducators who worked in secondary or elementary classroom where students with disabilities were present were more likely to be in classrooms with higher enrollments compared to those who work in special education resource or self-contained classrooms where enrollments tended to be low. Many respondents described their work with respect to the subject matter or content of instruction. Paraeducators help their students achieve a wide variety of subject matter including social and life skills, math, English, reading, health, writing. At the high school level, paraeducators help their students achieve in the sciences (e.g., biology, earth and space) and math (e.g., Algebra I, geometry). Other subject matter areas included culinary arts, lifeskills, art, and physical education.

Types of disabilities were also reported. Respondents articulated details about the types of disabilities or challenges their children faced. Types of disabilities included behavior disorders, mental retardation (e.g., Down Syndrome), physical disabilities (e.g., deaf, blind), neurological impairment (e.g., autism), traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities (e.g., ADD, ADHD, dyslexia).

How are Paraeducators Prepared?

Approximately half of the respondents answered this question in terms of how they prepared to work with the children every day. *“Reading subject myself and doing all worksheets given to students.”* Another respondent wrote, *“I read each student's goals and communicate with their primary teachers.”* Still another said, *“I do not have time to prepare. I find out what the curriculum is for that day and assist students on current tasks.”*

Approximately half of the respondents explained their training, e.g., *“Four years of College”* or *“2 years University and Autistic Training”* or *“115 credits at []Community College, towards obtaining an Associate of Arts and an Associate of Science degrees.”* One respondent explained, *“I have an A.A.S. in Early Childhood Ed & I taught pre-school for 7 yrs.”* Another wrote, *“[I have] 2 years of after high school education.”* Another respondent noted, *“I have a 2-year associate degree from a technical college: Instructional Assistant Program.”*

What Do Paraeducators DO?

Paraeducators help their students achieve a wide variety of subject matter including social and life skills, math, English, reading, health, writing. At the high school level, paraeducators help their students achieve in the sciences (e.g., biology, earth and space) and math (e.g., Algebra I, geometry). Other subject matter areas included culinary arts, lifeskills, art, and physical education. One very busy respondent wrote this amazing array of subject matter: *“5th grade mathematics, 6th-7th-8th grade social studies, 6th grade reading, 7th grade language arts, 7th grade reading, 7th grade science.”* Another wrote, *“As an aide [to a student with autism], my content areas mainly focus on social skills and behavior; I can work in any subject matter that the student needs help with.”*

Respondents rated instructional strategies that typically occur in inclusive classrooms according to the literature review (e.g., Choate, 2004; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007; Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2008). They circled a number from one to five which represented the extent to which they used that strategy during their work with students, where one indicated “not at all”, three indicated “somewhat”, and five indicated “a great deal.” Statistically, the most frequently used strategies included directing student behavior (68%), delivering individual instruction (59%) and teaching appropriate social skills (50%). The least frequently used strategies were supervising peer tutoring sessions (36%), coaching homework (26%), and supporting cooperative learning groups (14%).

In general, their responses indicated that paraeducators are knowledgeable about evidenced based practices that they are using in their work in inclusive classrooms. Specific instructional techniques included “two-column note taking” and “Question-Answer

Relationship or QAR²” and question frames (techniques to increase listening and reading comprehension). They mentioned many instructional arrangements such as one-to-one instruction, small group instruction, peer teaching, and learning centers. They mentioned techniques such as direct instruction for reading and math, cooperative group learning, question-and-answer sessions, hands-on teaching, computer assisted instruction (or assistive technology) and educational games from internet websites, and community based instruction. They mentioned specific methods that increase generalization such as cognitive rehearsal as suggested by the paraeducator who wrote, “while we walk in the hall, I am drilling on vowels, consonants, nouns, verbs...” Paraeducators referred to curricula such as *Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-related Handicapped Children*³ (TEACCH, a curriculum for students with autism) and *Character Counts*⁴ (a framework based on basic values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship).

Listen to one paraeducator who wrote, “reinforce [the student’s] good behavior when on task; when off task, redirect the student back to working, be consistent.” Another wrote, “Keep trying different ways to present the topic.” This advice echoes throughout the responses which included “use visual materials” and “use oral instructions” and set up “kinesthetic active learning.” Another paraeducator explained, “use signed instructions, tactile sign language.”

Paraeducators rated their beliefs about the work they do and the children with whom they interact. All respondents rated the statements according to a five-point rating scale. A rating of one indicated their level of agreement was “not at all”, a rating of three indicated “somewhat”, and a rating of five indicated “a great deal.” Top rated beliefs included:

1. My ability to meet students’ diverse needs has improved because of my work in the inclusive classroom.
2. I know how to use flexible grouping in the inclusive classroom.
3. I think that a student with learning problems needs me to adjust my teaching strategies or curriculum.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the paraeducators can be considered resourceful as they bring a positive mental attitude towards their work with children and youth.

What Advice do Paraeducators Offer?

It is touching and revealing to read what respondents wrote about the most important

² International Reading Association. (2008). *Read-Write-Think*. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=227

³ Mesibov, G. B., Shea, V., & Schopler, E. (2004). *The TEACCH approach to autism spectrum disorders*. NY: Springer. See also *A parent’s guide to autism and pervasive developmental disorder*. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://www.autismweb.com/teacch.htm>

⁴ Josephson Institute. (2008). *About Character Counts*. Retrieved April 3, 2008, from <http://charactercounts.org/overview/about.html>

part of the work they do in inclusive classrooms. All respondents described their work in terms of helping children. In fact, the majority of respondents focused on helping their students learn. Listen to their voices as they explain the most important part of the work they do in inclusive classrooms:

The paraeducators were articulate (in their responses to Question 23) about the nature of the disabilities and needs of the children they teach in inclusive classrooms. The respondents mentioned that they teach students with: behavior disorders, mental retardation (e.g., Down Syndrome), physical disabilities (e.g., deaf, blind), neurological impairment (e.g., autism), traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy) and learning disabilities (e.g., ADD, ADHD, dyslexia). Only a few paraeducators said they were not allowed to know the nature of the disabilities. For example, one wrote, *“We are not given a chance to look at IEPs. [We are] given very brief run-downs on personalities and disabilities and rely on information teachers are allowed to share.”*

In responding to *Question #44 (What should other paraeducators know about inclusive classrooms?)*, the paraeducators believe that others should know that their job is to be available to the children and their teachers. They often referred to the “challenging” nature of their work with children and teachers, the creativity required to “accommodate to all needs”, and the belief that “all children can learn.” There were two major categories of responses.

Be Willing to Ask! The first category - *“Be Willing to Ask!”* - includes advice to ask questions, read books, collaborate and communicate with others in order to learn strategies to help the children. Some representative quotes include:

“Don’t be afraid to ask for help.”

“Listen!”

“[Ask how to] modify the work specific to each child.”

“Have good communication with the teacher ... “

“[ask for] feedback ... discuss routines.... “

“Refer to the teacher at all times... never forget you are an aide, not the certified teacher.”

“[Ask for] time to collaborate with the teacher.”

“If [more than one para works with one child], they should meet and discuss routines...”

Be Flexible! The second category - *“Be Flexible”* - includes advice that ranges from *“be prepared to be busy”* to *“be prepared to work with some people who may not know exactly what to do with you.”* Some representative quotes include:

“Know that you have to be a genie... to shift from one place to another instantly ... to know all areas [of the curriculum]...”

“Be alert, creative, and understanding with the children.”

“Employ different teaching styles that might not necessarily be the teaching styles that you have used prior to this.”

“Include the child... [help the child] with social skills .. [arrange for] help to come from a peer when possible...”

“Work yourself out of a job....don’t let the student become dependent on you!”

“Humor helps!”

“All the kids in the class will need your help...”

“All students benefit from additional instruction.”

The two themes that emerged from the analysis of responses to this question were also seen in two other questions on the national survey: Question #46: “To be successful as a paraeducator, you must...” and Question #47: “To be effective as a paraeducator, you must know about...” Moreover, these responses indicated that paraeducators understand the differences between dispositions (Q46) and skills or knowledge (Q47) which correlate well with the skills and dispositions recommended by the standards of the profession (e.g., Council for Exceptional Children, 2003)⁵. Being “*flexible, patient, and open to change*” were dispositions most frequently mentioned. The knowledge areas most frequently mentioned included knowing “your students’ backgrounds and disabilities and accommodations” and “the subject matter and teaching goals.” One respondent summarized the combination of dispositions, skills, and knowledge this way, “For me, I felt it necessary to take on the dual responsibility of paying attention as if I were the student and making sure the lesson is conveyed to the student either by listening to the teacher or by me trying to re-teach...”

“The most important part of the work I do...”

Here is the heart of the paraeducators’ work. It is clear from their responses that they understand both the importance of their work for the children and the impact of the work. They used phrases such as, “*Help the student*” and “*Support the teacher*” and “*Giving the child confidence*” and “*make learning fun*” and “*adapting and modifying the work.*” One respondent wrote, “*I see the improvements and I love that. I love watching the children learning with materials that I have selected, and paid for...*” Another wrote, “*The most important part is to have students learn, not only academically but also life skills.*” Another paraeducator wrote, “*It is a joy to be in this work.*” One paraeducator wrote, “*We are so lucky to be in an inclusive classroom (^_^).*”

Summary of National Study

Nationally, of the 202 respondents, they were predominately White, English-speaking females who hailed from 34 of the 50 states in the USA. The average respondent had 7 years of experience, had a family member or friend with a disability, worked in a school within the \$25K to \$75K socio-economic range, and worked in an elementary

⁵ Council for Exceptional Children (2003). *What Every Special Educator Must Know: Ethics, Standards, and Guidelines for Special Educators* (5th ed.) Retrieved January 10, 2008 from http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/Red_book_5th_edition.pdf

education inclusion class with 20 students in small groups or 1:1. The average respondent did not meet regularly with the supervising teacher. In the next section, we discover how the paraeducators in eight school sites in San Diego County perceived their experiences.

The California Experience

Purpose of the California Study

The California research team developed a focus for their study to distinguish it from the national study. The two-fold purpose included (a) to develop action research skills of masters degree candidates in special education and (b) to develop partnerships between university and local school districts to create initial preparation and career ladder options for paraeducators.

The Interview Protocol

A semi-structured open-ended interview process (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) was implemented. Interview questions focused on eliciting the paraeducators' (a) belief system for inclusive education, (b) who they worked with, (c) experiences they enjoyed, (d) strategies and methods they used, (e) benefits and barriers, and (f) advice to other paraeducators.

The interviews were conducted by the action researchers (special education master's degree candidates) either at the school site or over the telephone. Interviews took approximately 15-20 minutes out of the paraeducators' busy days, and were taped and transcribed verbatim for data analysis.

Interview Data Analysis

Verbatim transcripts of the interviews were coded to protect the anonymity of the interviewees. The researchers individually reviewed the transcripts to code concepts and identify emerging themes, using the analytic induction approach (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). "The procedure of analytic induction is employed when developing a descriptive model that encompasses all cases of the phenomena" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 63). In other words, a structured and sequential procedure was used to cross-analyze the findings, leading to a generalization of themes regarding the role of the paraeducator in inclusive classroom. Then they compared their individual analyses and reiterated the process until they reached agreement on the themes. The researchers also searched for common themes between responses to the rating scales, responses to the open-ended survey questions, and the interview transcripts.

Who Were the Interviewees?

A total of 27 paraeducators were interviewed. All were women who had at least 5 years experience in the field and 1-5 hours of preparation and training. The majority had a friend or family member with a disability while 30% spoke a language other than English (compared to less than 20% nationally).

The 27 paraeducators worked at 5 school sites. There were 2 high school sites (1 was 51% ethnically diverse population (Hispanic, African American, Asian). There were 3 elementary schools (2 had predominantly ethnically and linguistically diverse populations)

California Themes

The themes that emerged from an analysis of the transcribed interviews were Responsibilities, Communication and Collaboration, and Training and Professional Development.

Responsibilities. Within the first theme, Responsibilities, there were 5 sub-themes. The first sub-theme, Individual Support, included transition, visual aids, facilitate playground interactions. The second sub-theme, Instruction, included small group instruction, scaffolding, pre-teaching vocabulary, re-teaching. The third sub-theme, Behavior Supports, included re-direction, arranging motivators like breaks, teaching social skills. The fourth theme, Data Collection, referred to obtaining work samples, fluency timing for individual or groups of students. The fifth sub-theme, Preparing, referred to collecting and making adaptive materials.

Communication and collaboration. Paraeducators referred most frequently to (a) lack of time, (b) lack of role clarification, (c) limited affirmation or recognition for their work, and (d) lack of respect. One paraeducator passionately related a story that illustrated her major advice: *Respect paras received from the students was related to respect paras received from teachers.*

Training and Professional Development. Echoing what was said by the respondents to the national survey, the California paraeducators were clear about the need for training and preparation. For example, one said, [what is needed is] *“a dose of positive attitude, along with a good sense of humor.”* Another explained, *“It’s important to be strict and consistent with discipline but also to have fun and a sense of humor.”* Another noted, *“There is a relational aspect to this role. To show I care, I have to know them inside and out, know when to back off, and when to move forward.”*

Nearly all of the paraeducators emphasized the need for continued professional development. A California paraeducator said, *“Every student is different in diagnosis, personality, and ability level.”* Still another paraeducator said, *“You must be adaptable and attentive to a teacher’s style....listen for their new instructional changes to replace old teaching ideas.”*

Benefits. The California paraeducators, like the national respondents, were quick to explain the benefits of the work they do. For example, one paraeducator said, *“All students have a better chance to receive the support they need.”* Another realized, *“Instruction is more responsive!”* Another respondent explained, *“When two teachers work there are two ways and better opportunities (for the children)—but they must work together to provide consistency in norms, discipline, and teaching philosophies.”*

Summary of the California Experience

Overall, the California paraeducators' experiences corroborate the results of the national survey. In addition, the special education graduate students reported they had gained a new level of respect and appreciation for what paraeducators actually do in inclusive classrooms. The action research team prepared a set of recommendations for the local district sites and the university. First, be sure to create career ladder options for paraeducators which includes options such as Associate degree programs, Bachelor degree programs, and Teacher credentialing programs. Second, create a structure of support which focuses on initial training of paraeducators. This will require the collection of adequate resources for ongoing professional development (e.g., grants) and should also include preparation and coaching in collaborative teaming process. There also should be ample time for planning

Discussion

National statistics on paraeducators in the classroom indicate more than 525,000 are currently employed in FTE positions nationwide (NCES, 2000). Of that number approximately 290,000 or 55% are employed in inclusive general and special education programs, self-contained and resource rooms, transition services and early childhood settings serving children and youth with disabilities. Approximately 130,000 (nearly 25%) are assigned to multi-lingual, Title I or other compensatory programs. The remaining 20% work in pre-school and elementary classrooms and other learning environments including libraries, media centers, and computer laboratories. In summary, the settings in which the paraeducators worked match the national statistics. The paraeducators who responded to the study worked in a variety of classroom settings, ranging from special education classrooms, to secondary classrooms, to creative combinations of classrooms, and even the hallways and the library.

Overall, the paraprofessionals who responded to the national survey and those who were interviewed seemed to characterize their responsibilities as helpers who arranged for more successful learning experiences for students. This is very similar to the goal of differentiated instruction (Hall, 2002; Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007) where lessons are carefully structured to tap into the varied strengths and knowledge bases of the participating teachers. Members of teaching teams who practice differentiated instruction structure multiple modes of access to the content of instruction, multiple ways to show what has been learned, multiple goals of instruction, and varied methods of assessing learning. The paraprofessionals in the national study seemed to be tuned in to differentiating their instructional strategies for helping their students understand the content or the directions for the assignments.

Many respondents reported experiences that resonate with other researchers in the field. For example, some paraeducators reported that they worked with other children. For the students with disabilities with whom they worked, they tried to make the students feel comfortable about what they were learning. This sentiment resonated with the study by Marks, et al. (1999) who found that many paraeducators were successful in avoiding the role of hovering over the child. Villa, Thousand and Nevin (2004) emphasized that this "Velcro

effect” should be avoided when paraprofessionals work with co-teachers. In fact, many experts agree that the paraprofessional role should more clearly focus on creating interdependence with the peers in the classroom and independence from adult supervision (Mueller & Murphy, 2001; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

A challenge that the respondents in the study raised relates to working with those who do not know what to do with another adult in the classroom. Although the survey was not designed to tease out factors related to more effective working relationships, the respondents were clear about the importance of having time and opportunity to collaborate with the teachers in the classrooms in which they work. This issue has been raised by others (e.g., Pickett & Gerlach, 1997) and has recently been the focus of an ethnographic study of teaching assistants and their co-working relationships with teachers (Devecchi & Rouse, 2007). In that study, Devecchi and Rouse used observation and interview techniques to identify five factors that enabled collaboration, namely (a) being approachable and respectful, (b) being professional and competent, (c) sharing knowledge/skills/resources, (d) being autonomous, (e) being flexible and simultaneously having clear roles and responsibilities. The respondents to the national survey, however, seemed to report only 2 of those factors, namely the importance of being approachable (as indicated by descriptions of when to talk to teachers about what was expected of them) and being autonomous (as indicated by the advice to “Ask Questions!”

Overall, the demographics of the respondents nationally and in California favorably compare to the national statistics with respect to (a) where paraeducators work and (b) types of students with whom they work. The results of the ratings on the issues and open ended questions resonate with the results from other researchers in the field. And the nature of the work they do (i.e., the instructional strategies and routine). The researchers believe that the voices of these paraeducators from all corners of the USA provide a powerful rationale for changes. First, more professional development regarding categories of disabilities, curriculum, methods are needed (including hands-on experiences in implementing differentiated instruction techniques). Second, more grow-your-own programs with local colleges and universities are needed in order to upgrade the skills of current paraprofessionals. This would involve enhances exiting teacher education programs to include competencies for collaboration and supervision of paraeducators so that new teachers (elementary, secondary, and special education teachers) can adequately and nurturatively collaborate with paraeducators.

The researchers believe that it is important to continue to acknowledge and collaborate with paraeducators. Many engage in their work without clear job descriptions so it is important to clearly define duties and responsibilities regarding instruction, management, and planning. Administrators and other personnel should build in time for paraeducators to meet with each other and with their cooperating teachers during the school day. This would facilitate paraeducators gaining an understanding of the goals for students, the classroom standards and rules of engagement, and each other.

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SURVEY

Paraeducator Survey

Directions: Please complete to the best of your ability. This is an anonymous survey. Unless you want to be interviewed, complete Section 5. There are no right or wrong answers. We are interested in your personal experiences and evaluation for your experiences in working with children in inclusive settings! - Thank You! The Research Team

Section 1. Definitions

Paraeducator: A school employee who provides instructional support services under the direct supervision of a qualified teacher.

Inclusive classroom: A classroom where 2 or more teachers have responsibility for teaching children with and without disabilities.

Section 2: Demographics

Directions: Tell us a little about yourself so we have a context to understand your experience.

Q1 In what state do you work:

Q2 In what age/grade level do you serve as paraeducator? [check all that apply]

- | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood | <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary (K-8/K-6) | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School (7-9); Middle School (6-8) | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-Contained |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resource Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Tutor | <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Title 1 | | |

Q3 If Other (please specify)

Q4 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Q5 What is your ethnicity? Check one:

- | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Native Alaskan | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Pacific Islander | <input type="checkbox"/> White (non-Hispanic) |

- African American
 Other
 Black (non-Hispanic)

Q6 If Other (specify)

Q7 Do you speak a language other than English?
 Yes
 No

Q8 If Yes, please specify:

Q9 Do you have a friend or family member with a disability?
 Yes
 No

Q10 Zip code of school where your classroom is located:

Q11 Socio-economic status of the neighborhood:
 Low (\$25,000 and below)
 Middle (\$25,000 - \$75,000)
 High (\$75,000 and above)

Tell us a little bit about the classroom in which you serve as paraeducator.

Q12 What is your preparation for working in inclusive classrooms?

Q13 What subject/content areas?

Q14 Effective instructional strategies:

Q15 Teaming skills:

Q16 Effective management of students:

Q17 Other specific content: RTI:

Q18 Prior experiences in inclusive education (e.g., classroom aide?)

Q19 Other (e.g., volunteer, tutor, etc.):

Q20 Total number of students in the classroom:

Q21 How many students do you work with at a time:

Q22 Total number of students with disabilities:

Q23 Types of disabilities:

Q24 Number of students who speak a language other than English:

Q25 Was any of the training including your supervising teacher?

Yes

No

Q26 How do you work with students?

1-1

Small group instruction

Tutoring small groups

Work with other paras in the room

Q27 How much time have you had in preparation:

1 - 5 hours 6 - 10 hours more than 10 hours**Q28** How many years of classroom experience:**Q29** Is there anything else you'd like us to know about your setting?**Section 3:**

Please check the number that represents the extent to which you have used the following strategies and structures during your work in the inclusive classroom.

Q30

	Not at all	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	Somewhat <i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	A great deal <i>e</i>
1. Running or supporting cooperative learning groups	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Delivering individual instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Delivering Individual tutoring	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Delivering small group instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Coaching homework	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Redirection of child's behavior	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Teaching appropriate social skills	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Give corrective feedback on assignment	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Supervising or supporting peer tutoring sessions.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

For the next items, check the number that represents your level of agreement with the statement.

Q31

	Not at all	<i>a</i>	<i>b</i>	Somewhat <i>c</i>	<i>d</i>	A great deal <i>e</i>
1. My ability to meet students' diverse needs has improved because of my work in the inclusive classroom.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I think that not all students must do the same activity the same way.	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I think that a student with learning problems needs me to	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

adjust my teaching strategies or curriculum.

4. I know how to use flexible grouping in the inclusive classroom.

5. I can use different classroom routines to help meet diverse needs of my learners.

Section 4

In this section, please share your thoughts about the following issues.

Q32 I have adequate time to plan with the teacher(s) that I work with.

Yes

No

Q33 The average time available for collaboration with each teacher PER WEEK:

0, no
time
per
week

Less
than 5
minutes
per
week

6-15
minutes
per
week

16-30
minutes
per
week

31-60
minutes
per
week

Greater
than 60
minutes
per
week

Q34 Comments:

Q35 I need more training in order to be more effective with children with disabilities.

Yes

No

Q36 Comments — If yes, what type of training would you like?

Q37 The teachers I work with ask my opinion about the children in the classroom.

Yes

No

Q38 **Comments:**

Q39 **When I work in inclusive classrooms, I receive supervision.**

Yes

No

Q40 **I receive supervision from:**

Special Education teacher

Other

General Education Teacher

Q41 **If Other (please specify)**

Q42 **Who do you ask for help or to answer your questions about curriculum, instruction, or behavior management? [Don't write the name of the person but please describe by role or title.]**

Q43 **The most important part of the work I do in inclusive classrooms is:**

Q44 **What are 3 things that I think other paraeducators should know about inclusive classrooms?**

Q45 **What are 3 things that I think other paraeducators should know about inclusive classrooms?**

Q46 **To be a successful paraeducator in an inclusive classroom, you must be:**

An empty rectangular text input box with a light beige background. It features a vertical scrollbar on the right side and a horizontal scrollbar at the bottom, both with small triangular arrowheads.

Q47 To be an effective paraeducator in an inclusive classroom, you should know about:

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INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Para-Educators in Inclusive Classrooms Interview
Draft Protocol

Comment [AN1]: Remember as the interviewer you can ask follow up or probing questions to get more information.

[Interviewers will thank the paraeducator, ask the paraeducator to sign the informed consent, ask permission to tape record the interview, and assure that anonymity will be provided in reporting interview results.]

1. Will you please tell a little about yourself and how you decided to become a paraeducator?
2. During your paraeducator experience this year, what assignments have you enjoyed the most?
3. What types of children with disabilities are in the inclusive classroom where you serve as paraeducator?
4. What strategies and methods have you found to be most helpful?
5. What does the concept 'inclusive education' mean to you?
6. In what ways do you practice inclusive education?
7. In your opinion, what facilitates you when you work with students with disabilities?
8. What are the major barriers that you face as a paraeducator?
9. What are the benefits that you have experienced as a paraeducator?
10. Is there anything else you want the research team to know?

Paraeducator Profile in Inclusive Classrooms:

Analysis of National Survey Data and Follow-Up Interviews in California

Ann Nevin,
Florida International University
Ida Malian,
Arizona State University
Andrea Liston,
Point Loma Nazarene University

Presented at NRC, April 18, 2008,
Hartford CT

Research Questions

- ▶ What are the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in inclusive classrooms?
- ▶ What types of training have been available for the changing role of the paraeducator in inclusive classrooms?

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Objectives

- ▶ To discover the experiences of paraeducators who work in inclusive classrooms
- ▶ To listen to their voices and seek advice
- ▶ To enhance the preparation of future teachers who will work with paraeducators

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Design

- ▶ A mixed methodology was used.
- ▶ Survey – rating scales and open ended questions
- ▶ Face-to-face interviews –allows for deriving case studies of each paraeducator while anchoring the cases in statistical analysis of the survey

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Definitions

- ▶ Paraeducator is defined as a teaching assistant, paraprofessional, instructional aide, or educational technician.

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Definitions

- ▶ Inclusive classroom is defined as a classroom where students with and without disabilities learn together and are taught by general educators with support from various other professionals (e.g. special educators, remedial reading teachers, speech/language therapists)

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The Survey

- ▶ Comprised of 5 sections:
 - Definition of terms
 - Respondent Demographics
 - Classroom Demographics
 - Responsibilities
 - Beliefs
 - Collaboration
 - Open-ended questions

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RESULTS

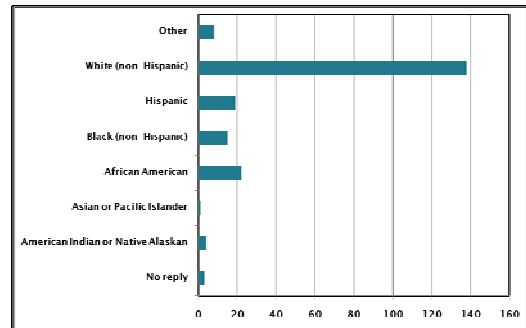
- ▶ Predominately White, English-speaking female, with 7 years of experience,
- ▶ who has a family member or friend with a disability,
- ▶ who works in an elementary education inclusion class with 20 students,
- ▶ who works in small groups or 1:1,
- ▶ who does not meet regularly with the supervising teacher,
- ▶ hails from 34 of the 50 states
- ▶ within the \$25K to \$75K socio-economic range.

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Respondents' Demographics

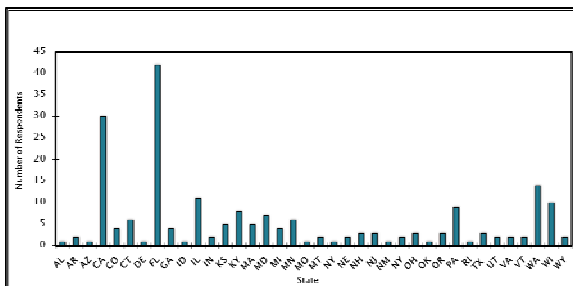
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What is your ethnicity?



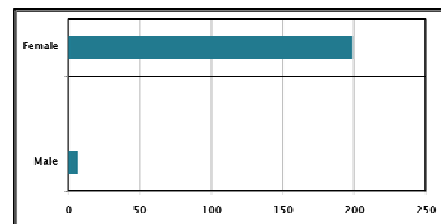
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In what state do you work?



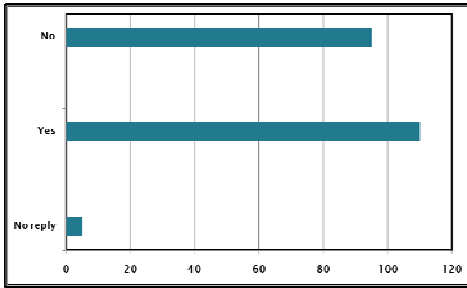
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What is your gender?



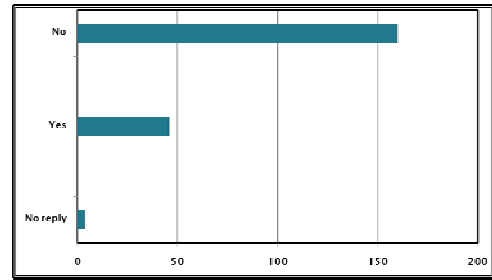
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Do you have a friend or family member with a disability?



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Do you speak a language other than English?

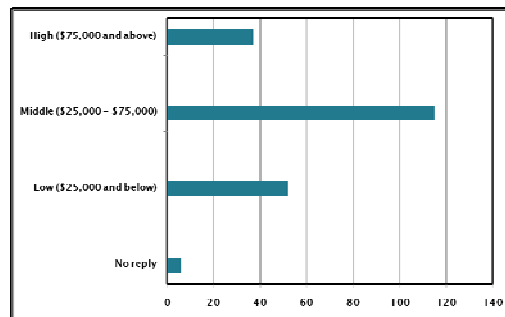


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Classroom Demographics

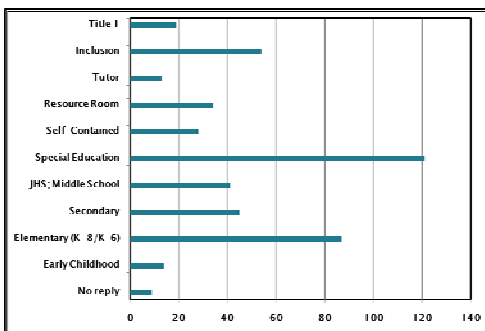
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Socio-economic status of the neighborhood:



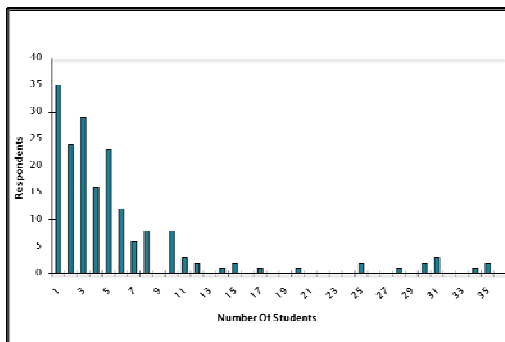
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In what age/grade level do you serve as paraeducator?



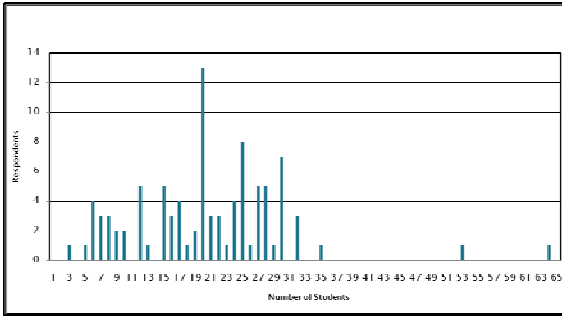
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How many students do you work with at a time?



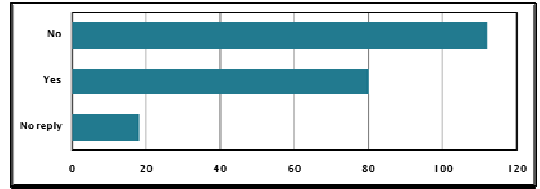
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Total number of students in the classroom



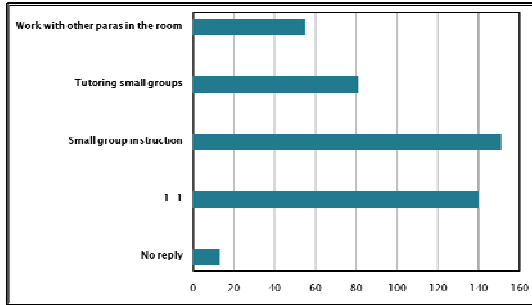
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Did any of the training include your supervising teacher?



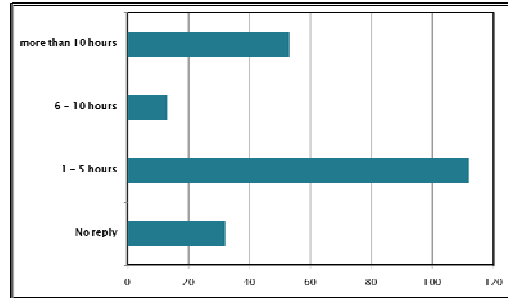
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How do you work with students?



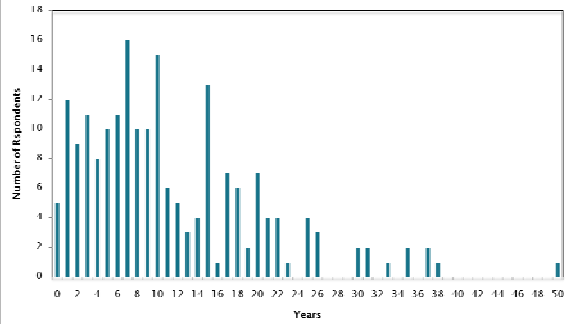
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How much time have you had in preparation?



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How many years of classroom experience?

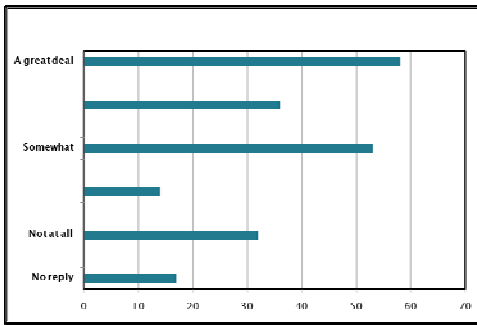


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Responsibilities

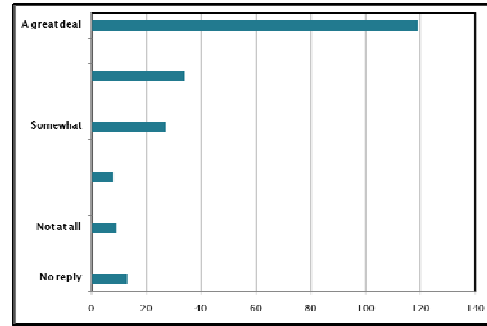
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Running or supporting cooperative learning groups



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Delivering individual instruction



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Strategies

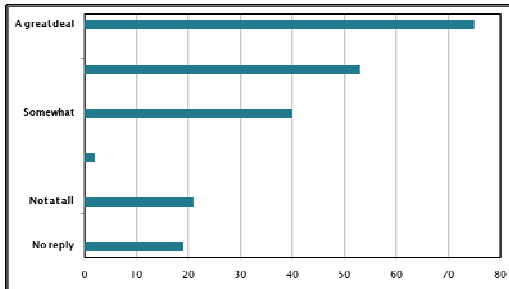
- ▶ Most Frequently Used
 - 68% Direction of student behavior
 - 59% Delivering individual instruction
 - 50% Teaching appropriate social skills
-
- ▶ Least Frequently Used
 - 36% Supervising peer tutoring sessions
 - 26% Coaching homework
 - 14% Supporting cooperative learning groups

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Beliefs

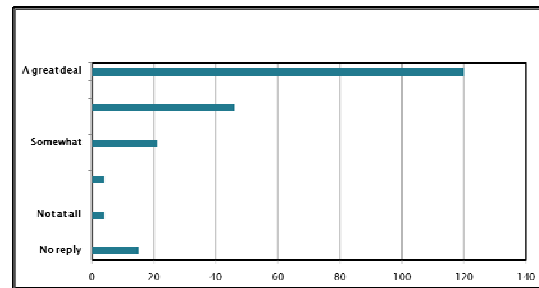
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My ability to meet students' diverse needs has improved because of my work in the inclusive classroom.

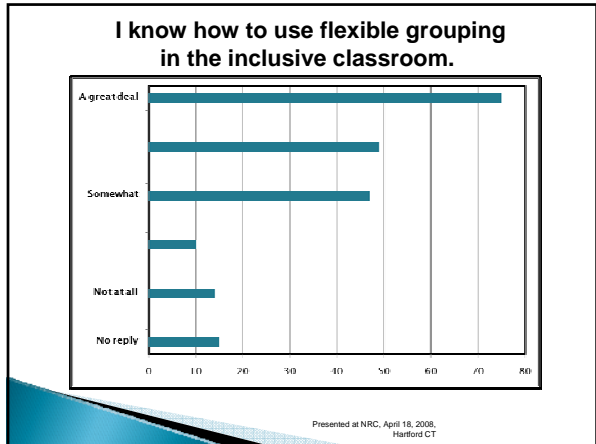


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I think that a student with learning problems needs me to adjust my teaching strategies or curriculum.

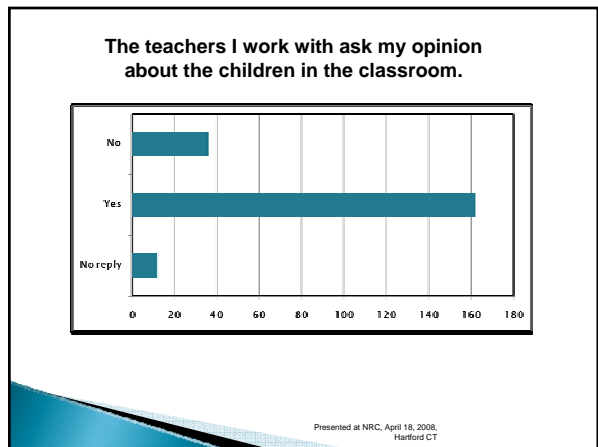
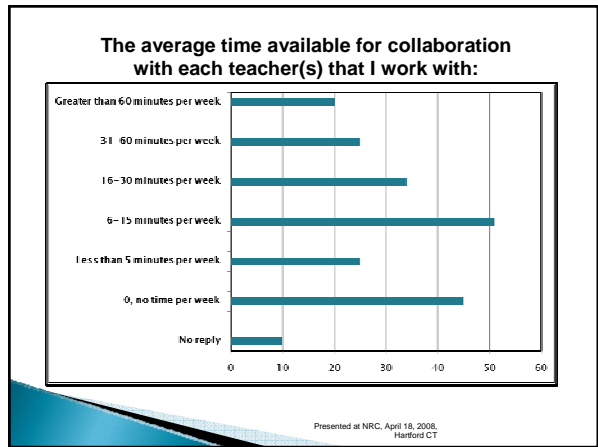
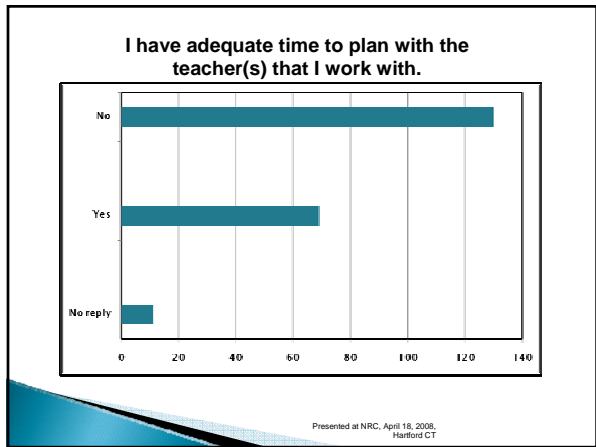


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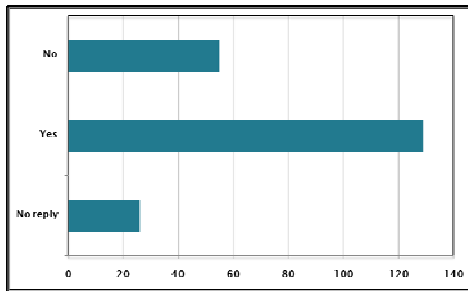


Collaboration and Training

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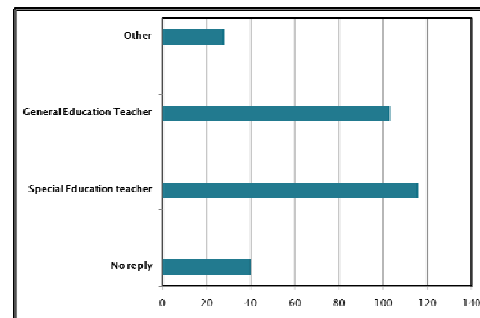


When I work in inclusive classrooms, I receive supervision.



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I receive supervision from:



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Paraeducators' Voices

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What Should Other Paraeducators Know About Inclusive Classrooms?

Know about your student's category of disability -
behavior disorders,
mental retardation (e.g., Down Syndrome),
physical disabilities (e.g., deaf, blind),
neurological impairment (e.g., autism),
traumatic brain injury,
cerebral palsy, and
learning disabilities (e.g., ADD, ADHD, dyslexia)

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Paraeducators' Voices--continued

- ▶ know that the job is to *be available* to the children and their teachers,
- ▶ the "*challenging*" nature of their work with children and teachers
- ▶ the creativity required to "*accommodate to all needs*", and
- ▶ believe that "*all children can learn.*"

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"Be Willing to Ask!"

- ▶ "*Don't be afraid to ask for help.*"
- ▶ "*[Ask how to] modify the work specific to each child.*"
- ▶ "*Refer to the teacher at all times... never forget you are an aide, not the certified teacher.*"
- ▶ "*If [more than one para works with one child], they should meet and discuss routines...*"

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"Be Flexible"

- ▶ *"Be prepared to work with some people who may not know exactly what to do with you."*
- ▶ *"Know that you have to be a genie... to shift from one place to another instantly... to know all areas [of the curriculum]..."*
- ▶ *"Include the child... [help the child] with social skills .. [arrange for] help to come from a peer when possible..."*
- ▶ *"Work yourself out of a job....don't let the student become dependent on you!"*

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Paraeducators' Voices – Connections to Competencies

Dispositions most frequently mentioned –

- ▶ *"be flexible,*
- ▶ *patient, and*
- ▶ *open to change"*

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Paraeducators' Voices – Connections to Skills & Knowledge

- ▶ know *"your students' backgrounds and disabilities and accommodations"*
- ▶ *"the subject matter and teaching goals."*
- ▶ One respondent summarized the combination of dispositions, skills, and knowledge this way, *"For me, I felt it necessary to take on the dual responsibility of paying attention as if I were the student and making sure the lesson is conveyed to the student either by listening to the teacher or by me trying to re-teach..."*

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Paraeducators' Voices -- Evidence-based practices

- ▶ *direct instruction*
- ▶ *cooperative group learning*
- ▶ *hands-on teaching*
- ▶ *community based instruction*
- ▶ *two-column note taking*
- ▶ *Question-Answer Relationship or QAR*
- ▶ *question frames (techniques to increase listening and reading comprehension)*

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ParaEducators' Voices -- Curriculum

- ▶ *Treatment and Education of Autistic and Communication-related Handicapped Children (TEACCH, a curriculum for students with autism)*
- ▶ *Character Counts (a framework based on basic values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship).*

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ParaEducators' Voices -- Strategies

- ▶ *"reinforce [the student's] good behavior when on task; when off task, redirect the student back to working.. be consistent."*
- ▶ *"Keep trying different ways to present the topic."*
- ▶ *"use... visual ... oral ... kinesthetic instructions"*

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Paraeducators' Voices— Advice


"Making sure that the student with a disability does not stand out."

"Make it possible for the student to feel successful."

"Some kids have good days and some have bad days – hopefully not at the same time"

"Never hover over one child..."

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"The most important part of the work I do..."  heart of the paraeducators' work

- ▶ *"Help the student"*
- ▶ *"Support the teacher"*
- ▶ *"Giving the child confidence"*
- ▶ *"make learning fun"*
- ▶ *"adapting and modifying the work."*
- ▶ *"The most important part is to have students learn, not only academically but also life skills."*

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Implications

- ▶ For paraeducators--Clearly define duties and responsibilities regarding instruction, management and planning.
- ▶ For administrators--Build in time to meet, share goals for students, class and each other.
- ▶ For teacher educators—Include competencies for collaboration and supervision of paraeducators

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The California Experience

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PURPOSE

- ▶ Develop action research skills of masters degree candidates in special education
- ▶ Develop partnerships between university and local school districts to create initial preparation and career ladder options for paraeducators

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INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

- ▶ Belief system for inclusive education
- ▶ Who they worked with, experiences they enjoyed, strategies and methods they used
- ▶ Benefits and barriers
- ▶ Advice to other paraeducators

- ▶ Interviews-- 15-20 minutes, taped, and transcribed verbatim

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SUMMARY DEMOGRAPHICS

- ▶ 27 interviewees
- ▶ All women
- ▶ All had at least 5 years experience in the field
- ▶ All had 1–5 hours of preparation & training
- ▶ The majority had a friend or family member with a disability
- ▶ 30% spoke a language other than English (compared to less than 20% nationally)

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School Sites (5)

- ▶ 2 high school sites (1 was 51% ethnically diverse population (Hispanic, African American, Asian))
- ▶ 3 elementary schools (2 had predominantly ethnically and linguistically diverse populations)

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California Themes

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Responsibilities --5 categories

- ▶ Individual Support (e.g., transition, visual aids, facilitate playground interactions*)
- ▶ Instruction (e.g., small group instruction*, scaffolding, pre-teaching vocabulary*, re-teaching)
- ▶ Behavior Supports (e.g., re-direction*, arranging motivators like breaks, teaching social skills)
- ▶ Data Collection (e.g., work samples, fluency timing*)
- ▶ Preparing (e.g., collecting & making adaptive materials*)

*=matched to open ended responses from national survey

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Challenges in Communication and Collaboration

- ▶ Time
- ▶ Role clarification
- ▶ Affirmation for their work
- ▶ Respect--*Respect paras received from the students was related to respect paras received from teachers.*

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California Paraeducators' Voices

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Dispositions and Beliefs

- ▶ *"A dose of positive attitude, along with a good sense of humor"*
- ▶ *"It's important to be strict and consistent with discipline but also to have fun and a sense of humor."*
- ▶ *"There is a relational aspect to this role. To show I care, I have to know them inside and out, know when to back off, and when to move forward."*

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Benefits

- ▶ *"All students have a better chance to receive the support they need."*
- ▶ *"Instruction is more responsive!"*
- ▶ *"When two teachers work there are two ways and better opportunities (for the children)—but they must work together to provide consistency in norms, discipline, and teaching philosophies."*

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Professional Development

- ▶ *"Every student is different in diagnosis, personality, and ability level."*
- ▶ *"You must be adaptable and attentive to a teacher's style....listen for their new instructional changes to replace old teaching ideas."*

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CONCLUSIONS

- ▶ California experience corroborates the results of the national survey.
- ▶ Action Research Team members reported they had a new level of respect and appreciation for what paraeducators actually do in inclusive classrooms.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

- ▶ Create career ladder options for paraeducators
 - Associate degree programs
 - Bachelor degree programs
 - Teacher credentialing programs
- ▶ Create a structure of support
 - For initial training of paraeducators
 - Collect adequate resources for ongoing professional development (e.g., grants)
 - Include preparation and coaching in collaborative teaming process
 - Set up ample time for planning

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QUESTIONS
&
COMMENTS

Thank You!

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