A continuum of paraeducator support for utilization in adapted physical education

Justin A. Haegele
Francis M. Kozub

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Francis M. Kozub

Abstract

This article describes three different ways of using paraeducators during adapted physical education. (1.) Having paraeducators read a portion of the lesson plan that describes the desired support towards lesson objectives. Paraeducators then assist all students when needed. (2.) Assigning specific modifications for paraeducators through the IEP process. These modifications maybe designed for a single child and listed in the lesson plan. The paraeducator then provides specific support for a particular child. (3.) Using video modeling to create media clips for paraeducators to view prior to assisting children during the lesson. The media clips include modeling of key lesson concepts aimed at helping paraeducators understand physical education activities that a child is expected to accomplish during the lesson. The physical educator is then free to attend to other learners with different needs during portions of the lesson. Recommendations for using video technology are provided.

Keywords
Technology, adapted physical education, video modeling, paraeducators

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Lauren is a first year adapted physical educator who has been assigned a class with six students with varied disabilities. She has the support of two paraeducators who know little about physical education and even less about how to assist in required stretching exercises for two of the children with unique motor needs. Lauren has received an exercise prescription from the physical therapist through the interdisciplinary team meetings. This includes some basic warm up stretches specifically designed to help avoid contractures in two children with cerebral palsy. Lauren finds it difficult to complete these warm-ups every class and still attend to three children with autism and one child with spina bifida in a wheelchair who are part of the same class. Lauren wonders what she can do to get class started and complete all the separate program requirements when the paraprofessionals seem unwilling or unable to help.

The above scenario in not uncommon in adapted physical education (APE) settings and can unfold in any curricular area where learners with unique needs are placed in the same setting. Lauren and other adapted physical educators provide services to children with varying degrees of need and paraeducators are supports that are assigned at the individualized education (IEP) meetings. When properly utilized, paraeducators are an important part of an educational program that targets goals tailored to each child's unique needs.

Background Information

Paraeducators work alongside professionals—a physical educator or any other teacher who educates a child with a disability requiring support. Even though paraeducators have been working in school systems for decades, their roles remain undefined by most school districts (French, 1999). What is known is that paraeducators spend more time with their students than anyone else in the school system, and have a wealth of knowledge pertaining to their specific child. Paraeducators are considered a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for students with disabilities in school systems. This includes transportation and other developmental, corrective, and supportive services required to assist a child with a disability receive benefit from their special education program (Winnick, 2005). Leaders in the field of APE have identified some key roles for paraeducators to support a child's educational program. According to Davis, Oliver, and Piletic (2007), paraeducator roles include the following:

- Assisting student's movements as needed.

"Paraeducators are considered a related service under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act for students with disabilities in school systems."

- Keeping students focused, on task, and quiet.
- Providing verbal cues or physical assistance if needed.
- Repeating instruction.
- Prompting students for transitions.
- Helping children with behavior plans adjust to integrated settings.

Utilization of Paraeducators

The purpose of this article is to offer APE as well as other direct service providers options for utilizing paraeducators in settings where learner diversity has the potential to draw the teacher in many directions and limit educational outcomes for all students in a class. Figure 1 provides a continuum of support for paraeducators. These support levels are depicted in a pyramid to demonstrate a key point in our recommendations for support. This point is that use of paraeducators should be based on learner needs. Not all levels of support are needed or appropriate for each child. These decisions about support are discussed at the IEP meeting and can range from "most" to "least" supportive (Figure 1). Most supportive refers to situations where the paraeducator engages more in the learning with a child and pre lesson planning is required to ensure that the child's needs are meet. Least supportive refers to minimal effort required by the educator and paraeducator to provide meaningful lesson options that target child goals. Below are detailed descriptions of paraeducator support found in Figure 1.

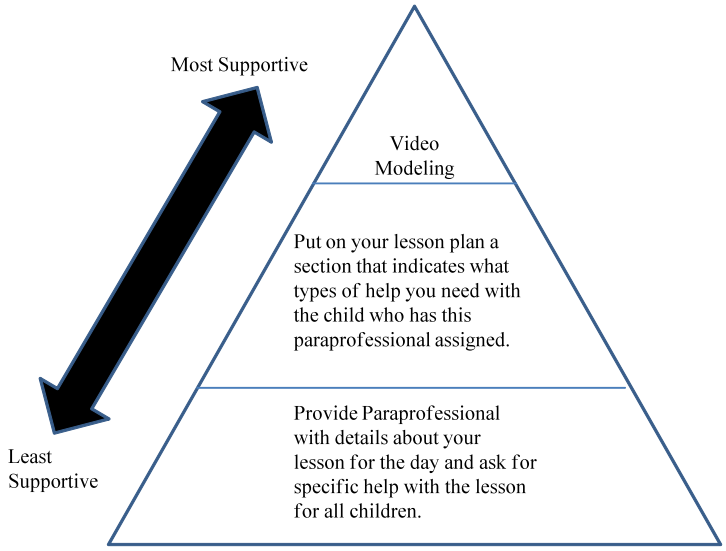

Figure 1. A continuum of support that is suggested for using paraeducators in adapted physical education classes.

Level 1

The most basic level of support by pareducators is facilitated by having the teacher provide a written lesson plan that has details about the lesson and specific instructions for related service providers to support the instruction for the day. Further, at this level, paraeducators stay within close proximity to ensure students with disabilities are receiving the support needed to be successful in classes. Paraprofessionals speak with classroom teachers prior to the lesson and are instructed on specific strategies used to assist all students. One note on the proximity of the paraprofessional is that at this level of support, care has to be taken to avoid too much help or even too much visibility for the child with a disability. Past research has determined negative socialization effects of close proximity paraprofessionals (Causton-Theoharis &

Malmgrens, 2005). An example would be if a paraeducator acts as a child's partner when this child with a disability should be working alongside peers without disabilities, there is a concern in the sense that students with disabilities risk loosing the opportunity to socialize with their peers. In many cases peer interaction is a valuable part of the lesson that is lost if the paraeducator takes the place of another child (Causton-Theoharis & Malmgrens). It is vital for paraeducators to understand their role in direct and indirect learning such as social skills for interacting with same age peers.

Level 2

Level 2 is similar to Level 1 with one major exception. In Level 2, the type of help (included on the written lesson plan) is specific to a child with a disability based on IEP goals. This is a higher level of support and can involve specific behavior management techniques or activity related assistance for a particular child. In situations where children have adapted equipment needs such as using a beeping ball instead of a regulation soccer ball, the paraeducator is assigned to make sure the child with a disability is using the equipment properly. It is important for the physical educator to give clear details about equipment use and teaching cues so the paraeducator becomes an extension of the teacher's lesson for that child.

"If a paraeducator works as a child's partner when the child with disabilities should be working alongside peers without disabilities, there is a concern in the sense that the students with disabilities risk of loosing the opportunity to work with their peers."

Level 2 supports include teachers describing in their lesson plan specific instructions for a child with a disability who may (for example) have a diminished capacity to understand games or skills. During this time, paraprofessionals will work closely with their student in practice situations and may actually serve as a partner if safety or success is an issue when the child participates with peers. It is also important for teachers to recognize that using this more supportive level does not prohibit the paraeducator from taking on additional roles at certain times in the lesson. For instance during lesson management time, a paraeducator can help hand out equipment, model activities for other learners, and generally support all children when the target child does not require assistance.

Level 3

Finally, the most supportive level of paraeducator help includes the use of assistive visual modeling (Morgan, Forbush, & Alvis, 2001). Video modeling is a research-based strategy for increasing skills in learners where the teacher utilizes media clips to help paraeducators understand specific aspects of a lesson for a child they are assigned to assist in physical education. In using this concept one teacher with paraeducators' support can work with many children in a more segregated adapted physical education setting as described in the vignette. Teachers who wish to utilize video modeling set up technology for paraeducators to view upon entering the classroom. This includes a video model of the specific activities such as

stretching or skill work to target unique needs for one or more learners within the larger class. In order to use video modeling, three steps are recommended and outlined below.

Separate your class according to learner needs and level of support required. In many special education classrooms, especially in urban environments, the student population may include students who vary in needs. In addition, classes may have students with severe disabilities who require intense and very specialized support. Often times, as is the case for specific stretching routines, the level of support requires educators to pay close attention to details about positioning that can be hard to describe on a daily basis. Further, as children progress in lessons the need for changes in technique or positioning is easily communicated with the use of video or visual pictures. The first step in utilizing video modeling is to determine learner needs and which, if any, children have similar needs or program requirements that fit the use of video technology. The vignette offers an example of a group of children who have varied needs that may be met using paraeducators and video modeling. In the vignette there are as many as three sub groups of learners including the children with cerebral palsy who need stretching, the children with autism who may require assistance with social understanding, and a child with spina bifida who may require activities that facilitate mobility. All three situations require different lesson activities or individual modifications on a daily basis.

Create media for part or entire lessons that target child needs. This step may seem the most daunting for some teachers who are frustrated with the time demands of working with many learners who have different needs. Having one more thing to do or even knowing where to start is a teacher frustration issue found in many APE settings (Kozub, 2008). However, by having clear goals for learners and a willingness to utilize innovations in technology a little bit of out of class time can lead to meaningful learning for all children in class. Video technology is an available resource found in many schools today through media classes. Educators in many schools today have access to equipment as well as people who understand how to video tape and stream images to create clips that can be shown on any computer or television monitor hooked up to a DVD player. Finding others in the district who are willing to help create media clips is as easy as contacting a colleague who teaches a class on media productions. The creation of video clips then becomes a class project for a group of media production students. However, when creating video aimed at helping paraeducators understand lesson activities, it is important to make sure that ideal camera angels show clear demonstrations of skills and techniques. Video modeling is only useful if media clips provide adequate visual prompts for an activity. Quality of sound and details provided by the model in the video enhances the use of video modeling.

Technology needed for creating video modeling clips include a digital video camera, tripod, and access to a computer that allows for video streaming and the creation of DVDs. The entire process with appropriate equipment can take up to 30 minutes for a 60 second video clip. Further, teachers are encouraged to create a bank of video clips that have different content such as skill work, stretching techniques, and even game strategies for children. One additional thought on creating videos is that a teacher with limited time

can have someone record activities actually being done in class. These can later be used in other classes where paraeducators are utilizing video modeling to support physical education instruction. Over time a bank of activities may exist for use in lessons where level 3 supports are needed for utilizing paraeducators. One additional point about video recording students is to make sure that parents of children in video clips have signed consent forms allowing their child's images to be used for video modeling.

Training paraeducators to use video modeling. Creating clips and having a vision of how to improve instruction using technology and paraeducators are innovative ideas that require "buy in" by support staff. It would be unfair to paraeducators to ask them to use video modeling without some training. Training serves many purposes. First, it will help the APE teacher understand the level of knowledge that paraeducators have about technology and physical education. Second, it will help "iron out" any system problems with technology, and afford "practice runs" where paraeducators get a chance to view videos and replicate techniques found in the clips. At first, many paraeducators may question this technique and wonder why video modeling is necessary. Questions such as these are best addressed when children are not around. This leads to a need to train paraeducators, while also allowing their input on what types of learning requires video modeling. Physical educators in particular can share important points about levels of support and educational goals at this training session. Further, role issues addressing how related service providers support daily instruction are best addressed by open communication between the adapted physical educator and paraeducator. These types of role issues are discussed in French (1999) and require attention so that paraeducators feel like an important part of the programming.

Starting small with a limited number of clips is recommended. A video on basic stretching is an example of a small video modeling project that would help get the lesson going in the opening vignette. This minimal effort to create a warm-up lesson media clip will pay off if the physical educator is afforded time at the beginning of the lesson to get the other children started while the paraeducator stretches the children with cerebral palsy or any child who requires basic stretching activities during the lesson. This type of video support is useful particularly at the beginning of a school year and eventually the paraeducators may not even need the video to facilitate appropriate stretching. Further, as the physical educator gains confidence in the assistance of paraeducators in the lesson, additional video modeling can be used to help with more specific skill work for children.

Benefits of Video Modeling

Educators will not feel torn in so many directions on a daily basis if they feel supported by others. Paraeducators who have a specific task in given lessons are better utilized and part of the lesson. In the end the children in the class potentially receive more individualized attention aimed at specific goals. Video modeling has many advantages in helping facilitate meaningful APE instruction. These include the following:

1. All students are receiving simultaneous structured activity time.
2. Students with video modeling work at pace congruent with their learning rate.

3. Paraprofessionals take ownership of lessons but are still receiving guidance and information from the physical educator.
4. Students can work on different activities designed for their specific learning needs.

One additional thought about the benefit of using video modeling is that parents of students with disabilities may also wish to support instruction at home by using clips outside of school. Video clips are easily uploaded onto a compact disk or storage device which can transfer to home computers. Adapted physical educators can utilize web sites with media clips to help parents interested in working at home. Utilizing simple passwords and limited assess links, parents can log on to a section of the APE web site that is specific to their child or a group of children. Parents may face difficulty understanding what types of physical activities are beneficial to their child. This may limit a parent's willingness to facilitate physical activity at home. However, with the use of technology, parents can have access to appropriate home activities which their child is already accustomed to from school based programming. This becomes a valuable resource at home. In this case, activities recommended by the APE teacher which generalize to the broader community are shared with parents at home. Further, parents benefit by knowing what type of instruction their child is receiving at school and are then able to offer suggestions and feedback at the IEP meeting. This offers another rationale for taking time to create video clips of activities so that parents can support instruction at home.

Recommendations for Using a Continuum of Supports

Using any of the levels of support found in Figure 1 are progressive ideas that require some work by teachers. Communication through lesson plans and facilitating support by paraeducators for all students requires some foresight by the physical educator. Further, it is suggested that interested educators follow some basic recommendations before trying to get involved with these levels of supports and specifically video modeling.

- Get involved in the I.E.P. meeting to make sure the paraeducators is going to be part of the child's program in your class. If you need help in physical education, it is important to insure that special areas are not seen as breaks for paraeducators.
- Start small with the use of video supports and when appropriate work to less supportive options.
- Utilize media classes at the middle school and high school levels to assist in making video clips.
- Make sure that your video modeling clips are easy to follow and do not exceed 60 seconds.
- Monitor early to ensure that paraeducators understands and are comfortable with the requested help either on the lesson plan or found in the video modeling.
- Be thoughtful and utilize the IEP meeting to discuss confidentiality issues when creating media clips and sharing clips with others when children are involved. Creating media clips and deciding who has access to these files requires writ-

ten permission by parents of all children who are identified in the videos.

- Speak with a loud, clear voice and make large body movements while recording your videos.
- When available, use existing media such as sports video and clips found on the internet (Columna, Arndt, Lieberman, & Yang, 2009).
- Media clips may be looped or played continuously to help paraeducators during the lesson.

Solutions for Lauren

In the opening story, Lauren is faced with the task of teaching a physical education class which includes children with spina bifida, autism, and cerebral palsy. Lauren has received stretching exercise for her students with cerebral palsy from the physical therapist and is having difficulty completing the program while still attending to the other students in the class. In order to solve this problem, Lauren turns to the video modeling idea described earlier. Along with the media club at her school, Lauren and the school physical therapist work together to record video which shows each of the stretches prescribed for her students with cerebral palsy. Each video clip includes large body motions and instructions that are easily heard by students and paraeducators.

Lauren goes to her building administrator and asks for time during the next teacher in-service day to train paraeducators on her idea of using video modeling. At the beginning of Lauren's next class, she explains to paraeducators assigned to students with cerebral palsy that they are going to assist her by facilitating stretching while using the video she created for this class. She tells paraprofessionals that they will assist students by leading the students through the stretches using the video which is projected on the gym wall. While this is going on, Lauren begins activities with the other students in the classroom. As a matter of class routine, paraeducators start out each lesson by using video modeling clips for students while Lauren leads warm-up activities for the other children. As the class is ending, one of the Paraprofessionals approaches Lauren. He indicates how much he enjoyed using the video modeling and feels that he now understands how to help with the stretching routine. He agrees with Lauren that using video modeling was a good idea, and that he looks forward to helping her in the future.

Summary

The strategies described in this article are suggestions for educators who are charged with teaching students who range in ability and needs. The use of paraeducators is a valuable tool to help APE teachers provide services to many students during a physical education class. Curricular areas such as physical education, music, art, and science (to name a few) may require "hands on" support for children with disabilities. This support is appropriately provided by properly informed paraeducators. Paraeducators may lack the experience with the lesson content and require more than simple directions to understand how to assist a child. Using video modeling to help paraeducators understand how the activity "looks" and their role in the lesson requires some initial work by the educator. However, over time utilizing the different levels of support found in this article can help make teaching classes easier and more beneficial for students. In order to use the suggestions found in this article, resources such as a video camera,

projector, willing paraeducators, and extra time must be available to teachers. Teachers who feel time constraints and pressure to produce outcomes have to plan ahead and utilize paraeducators and technology to assist learners with disabilities in settings where student needs are many.

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About the Authors:

Justin A. Haegele, MS ed, CAPE, is an adapted physical education teacher at P.S.Q255 in the New York City Department of Education and is the co-director of Camp Abilities Alaska in Anchorage.

Francis M. Kozub is an associate professor in the department of Kinesiology, Sport Studies, and Physical Education at the College at Brockport, State University of New York.